

Pavarotti and Me 2020

By Daniel Somerville

Key: **Light** **Sound** read on stage

*Pre-set: DSR table & chair (with a **mic** and stand) on the table, a laptop and some papers.*

*DSL a music stand, another **microphone** and stand, a jester's mask.*

*There is a battery-operated **practical light** – a music stand light, attached to the music stand*

(There is also a CD and booklet on the music stand and more papers – these are not visible to the audience)

There is a clothes rack USR

The curtains are not pulled all around, the scene dock is open – the mechanics of the theatre are visible

As the audience enter:

House lights are on and the stage is lit with colours of the Italian flag – bright colourful, exciting, showy.

Music plays – Daniel is setting up the space and welcoming people

01 High note compilation

As the music nears the end (on yet another high C) Daniel rolls a football onto the stage from SR to SL

(Track 01 ends)

House lights fade out, colours of the flag are replaced with a warm general wash

Act 1, Scene 1:

02 Orchestra tuning up

Daniel enters dressed in a white shirt, bow tie.

He begins to look for something around backstage.

He finds a bent nail.

(Fade out orchestra once Daniel finds the nail)

Daniel: "I go to die!"

That is what Pavarotti would say before each performance. Every show was an opportunity to fail. He was highly superstitious. I once heard that stage managers would hide bent nails all around back-stage so that he would be guaranteed to find one. I heard that he would even refuse to go on if he hadn't found one.

Daniel shuts to scene dock door

Daniel: I know Pavarotti mostly from recordings, but I have heard him perform three times. The first was in 1990. He was performing at Covent Garden for the farewell performance of Joan Sutherland. They were guests at the party in *Die Fledermaus* on New Year's Eve. They sang 'Parigi o cara' from *La traviata*. He was at the height of his fame, his voice full and rich, his technique flawless. Her voice was frail and cracking. The next time I saw him was also at Covent Garden, in a full production of *Un ballo in Maschera*.

Daniel indicates to the mask at the foot of the music stand

Daniel: It was 1995. Such was his ego and enormous power that during a duet with Deborah Voigt he walked off stage (presumably to have sit down or a glass of water) leaving

her singing there to empty space. He returned to the stage when it was his turn to sing.

The last time I saw him was in 2005 at rugby stadium in Pretoria, South Africa. He sang all the hits, Neapolitan songs, plenty of high notes – they called him the King of the High C's – you've heard some already as you came in – and of course, he sang 'Nessun Dorma'.

But I never felt closer to Pavarotti than this occasion.

Daniel turns SL

General wash fades out – side light from SL illuminates Daniel as if he is facing an auditorium off-SL

Daniel as Announcer:

“Ladies and gentlemen, it is with great regret that I have to inform you that this evening's performance of *La traviata* is dedicated to the memory of Luciano Pavarotti who died yesterday. There is not a singer among us who does not owe some debt of gratitude to Pavarotti, such was his enormous influence on the world of opera. In this country we remember him for his philanthropic efforts with refugees from the Angolan crisis. There will be a minute's silence before the overture begins.”

After a short pause of silence

03 Overture – La Traviata **SL lights fade, general wash returns**

Daniel: That was the announcement I heard on 7th September 2007. I had co-directed a production of *La traviata* for the National Theatre of Namibia in Windhoek. It was already a special occasion.

It was the first full performance of an opera since independence in 1990. The auditorium was filled with politicians, local celebrities and dignitaries. Pavarotti's death made it seem all the more special. He seemed to enter all of the performers. It was a spectacular occasion.

(Track ends at some point while Daniel is speaking)

Scene 2:

Daniel goes to the music stand DSL

He reads Appendix one

Appendix One: What is *Pavarotti and Me* (this show) about?

One: Pavarotti

One point five: And therefore, opera

Daniel shows the audience a CD cover of Pavarotti in a tuxedo

Daniel: Not least because he gave us this image of the opera singer. The rotund tuxedoed tenor, arms outstretched. It has become a surrogate for "opera". Think of all his imitators on BGT and X-Factor, not to mention the GoCompare.com adverts.

Two: Me ... And therefore, it is autobiographical

It has layers, multiple narratives

It asked questions, it is research

There are things I need to tell you before we get started, things that might frame the way you view it

This performance happens now, here in this space, but it also happens in times and spaces before here and now – and some

of those are imagined spaces and times – perhaps there is also some time in the future. This performance might happen in the future and the past and now, here.

You may have to keep up, work out when we are

Pay attention to tenses

Most of it is true, all of it is subjective

It's about me claiming space, here

It's about acknowledging my privilege, here, on stage

The privilege of being a white middle-aged cis-gender man with a full-time job in academia where I get to talk about opera

Pavarotti and Me was about my research into the operatic and its relationship to anecdote and autobiography

It arises from a dialogue between practice research and public engagement. I make and programme queer performance and I mentor artists; I also, learn from them

I want to say something about queer art

One of the things I learned is that queer performance in urban cities is different from queer performance in rural cities like Worcester

It often involves autobiography

Queer art in queer venues in urban environments has access to larger, queer audiences. It can speak to a knowing audience, uses queerness as a lens to interrogate different subjects: a queer perspective of the apocalypse, or fatness; a queering of the canon, queers speaking to queers, owning space and time, it says "I am here"

In a rural environment you are more likely to encounter queer art that needs still to claim space and time, and it addresses

itself more often to the straight world; work that says “I am here too”

Pavarotti and Me looks both ways – I am here, now. But also “I am here too” – but I address the “here too” not just to straight audiences but queer ones also.

I’m from a small town

I live in a small city

I have lived in huge cities

Pavarotti and Me is a way of presenting, extending and problematising the theory that underpinned my doctoral research

It is a way of centralising the identity of the opera queen in our understanding of opera

One storyline of *Pavarotti and Me* concerns the events surrounding the writing of my PhD thesis

One storyline concerns the breakdown of my 18-year relationship

One possible ultimate outcome, it turns out, of “doing” a PhD

In this performance I try to mention artists who work in the little explored area between opera and Live Art – because that is what and where I am, now, here – in the area between opera and Live Art

Pavarotti and Me, this time, is also about my coping strategies

And it is a reflection on those parts of my past that might have led me to need them

It is about addiction

It is a listening party

It is a performance lecture

It is a show that explores opera's reparative qualities

Right now, it is a show about a show

Scene 3:

Daniel moves to centre stage

Daniel: I did a lot of thinking over the first lockdown. I've been thinking about how to remake this show again.

Before the lockdown I was invited by the Live Art Development Agency to do a small performance at a book launch. I had written a chapter in the book. I wanted the performance to reflect my practice – autobiography and opera – but also to reference some of the work I had written about, which included the idea that opera was cathartic; that it had reparative or transformative, if not therapeutic, potential.

I'd like to recreate that small performance for you now, but to do so I need to get changed. So meanwhile I'm going to play you another track. This is 'celeste Aida' from *Aida*.

04 Celeste Aida

The Egyptian general Radames sings of his love for the slave, Aida.

Daniel goes to clothes rack USR to change into a dress, he is talking loudly over the music as he changes

I used this track in one version of the show to demonstrate Pavarotti's amazing vocal and breath control, the diminuendo at the end requires a constant

flow of breath even as the note diminishes in volume. And I also spoke about Pavarotti's movement, which was quite minimal. Which he did in order to protect his instrument. He's what's known as a 'park and bark' singer... (etc.)

(Track ends)

Daniel: The book launch performance in February 2020 began with a series of statements.

Daniel sits at the table and reads Appendix two into the microphone:

Daniel reads the statements and drops each page to the floor

I am an opera queen

I'm fifty two

I recently wrote a chapter in a book on Live Artist, Joshua Sofaer's opera-related work

I'm not usually very good at concision

I am dyslexic – the really bad kind – cue cards are a reasonable adjustment

I love dogs – but I don't have dog

Like many dancers my age, I have arthritis in both hips

I once got so tired of programmers and funders not understanding what I meant when I said that I was a movement artist who works in Live Art that I began describing myself as a dancer

I have overcome four major addictions in my life

Four years ago I was diagnosed with ME – not the really bad kind but I do struggle some days

It took me four years to fully embrace my identity as an artist

The length of time I have spent trying to get my head around being a 'disabled' artist now exceeds the time I spent embracing my identity as an artist

I wonder what an unreasonable adjustment would be?

With a few notable exceptions, I think the art world has a prejudice against opera

Whenever I perform, I think it's the last time I will ever perform

Opera saved my life ... and helped me give up smoking

Gardening helped me overcome my sex addiction

I use an app to help me stay sober from alcohol

When my 18 year relationship ended, my dog, Peanut was my most important source of emotional support. She prevented me from relapsing. When I moved out of London and knew nobody, she was my sole companion, my favourite mammal

My first experience of BDSM happened after I met a man in the amphitheatre of the Royal Opera House during a performance of Massenet's *Manon*

I think academia has a prejudice against opera

While I was performing in Edinburgh last year a respected performance artist and theatre maker, tweeted disparagingly about straight white men who make autobiographical work about how their dog died

I'm not straight

Daniel: Bryony Kimmings is an interesting autobiographical artist who recently made an opera with and about single mums

Like many poorly qualified working and lower-middle class gay men my age, options were limited when I left home at 18, so I worked in fast food and became a sex worker

Unlike many gay men my age, I don't find trans, queer and non-binary identity difficult to understand

Daniel looks at the dress he is wearing

I thank opera for that

Unlike many former sex workers my age – I am alive

I think it's homophobic when people see a gay man in a dress dancing to opera and assume that it has something to do with parody

I once met Joshua Sofaer in a yakatori bar in Dalston in fashionable east London to interview him. We sized each other up using a ritual known only to opera lovers and luckily, we got on

Writing about his work gave me hope

I've been thinking about how the launch of an object is also a farewell, a goodbye, a letting go

While I was making this piece, my dog died

In 'Adieu notre petite table' from Massenet's opera *Manon*, she bids farewell to the table at which she and her lover once fondly sat

05 Adieu notre petit table

Daniel dances – addressing the table, a man's face, and a dog

(Track ends)

Scene 4:

Daniel goes back to music stand

He reads Appendix three:

Appendix three

The movement practice I have just demonstrated is what I call Body Opera

It was one of the outputs of my doctoral research

It is derived from observing and sketching singers and then translating their movement qualities into Butoh-fu, allowing me to create a bridge between the position of the spectator and the position of the performer

I recognise it as something that opera queens experience as they identify with their favourite divas.

I described it in detail and employed it in a performance called *Admiring La Stupenda*

The *Pavarotti and Me* project was a way to extend that research and further test some of my findings

As I alluded to, when discussing *Aida*, Pavarotti didn't move much – but there was quite a bit going on in his face. So when I dance to his voice, it is not only me mimicking his movement and lip-syncing, (though it can be that) rather it is often a way to translate the flow of the music and his characterisation into my own body

Our stories mingle

My associations, his voice, the narrative of the opera, his career, the characters onstage and in the auditorium are all refracted through my body

Pause

What is *Pavarotti and Me*?

It was once about the feeling of handling CDs and sharing stories

Nostalgia

Memory

I performed it as a scratch performance at a festival in Crouch End in 2015

Performance artist, Brian Lobel, creator of a work called *24 Italian songs and arias* came to see it

It is difficult working on the cusp of opera and Live Art, there are so few of us

He didn't give me any notes or feedback – perhaps it wasn't very good

I sat in a chair, told stories and played CDs

I was processing my recent break-up

It was not revenge art

Between the lines, I may have been punishing myself

Between the lines, I may have been blaming myself

Scene 5:

Daniel takes the chair and a CD and sits centre stage

Daniel: One of the stories I told was this one...

You may think that the life of an opera queen is a lonely experience but on the contrary, I made many friendships based on a mutual love of opera. My friend Mike and I have this short cut code for when a performance is going well. It is the 'shining breastplate moment'.

Mike was my only support when, in my twenties, I had found myself in an intense relationship that was characterised by domestic abuse. Our trips to the opera were my only escape.

Mike and I were at a performance of *I puritani* and as Arturo crossed a giant descending draw bridge, the light caught his breastplate and shone into our eyes. It was all the elements of opera coming together: the light, the music, the poetry and architecture of the auditorium and scenography. Gesamtkunstwerk. It was here at the junction of all the elements that the 'operatic' emerged. I'll try and recreate that for you.

06 I puritani

Daniel shines light from the CD into the eyes of the audience

Before the end of the music, Daniel goes to the music stand SL

He reads Appendix four

It was at this point in a previous performance of *Pavarotti and Me* that I talked about how the qualities of Pavarotti's voice and his persona as an artist aligned with what I consider to be good qualities in a partner

He is strong, consistent and reliable

He also plays well with others and is a generous and considerate collaborator

(Fade out track)

I then told the story of how I realised that I was in love

As an opera queen I remember moments from opera as a kind of emotional catalogue

I was living in Johannesburg, South Africa

We met online

It was pretty casual at first

He was more keen than I was

He got fed up waiting and decided to move to London to be with his brother

The day he was leaving I stood in the driveway and realised that he wanted me to ask him to stay

As he began to pull away I ran to the car and declared my love

I said that I would visit him in London and then when he came back we could be together

And that is how it was, and we were very happy for a very long time

But telling the story doesn't have the emotional weight I would like it to have.

I need the operatic to help me out

Daniel goes back to the chair centre stage

07 boheme duet

Daniel: The moment that Rudolfo and Mimi fall in love.

Two strangers meet in a Parisian garret, her candle has blown out, she has dropped her key and as he reaches to pick it up, their hands meet and he sings 'your tiny hand is frozen' Rudolfo tells Mimi about his life as a poet and he gets quite excited. In the next section she tells him about how she is a seamstress. Then comes the climax ... they will go to the party together ... here ... this is me standing in the drive way and this is me running to the car! 'Yes I do love you!'

As they leave the stage their voices rise and mingle and fuse, male and female almost indistinguishable.

Daniel goes off upstage centre, behind a curtain, then changes out of the dress at the clothes rack as the music ends

Act 2

Scene 6:

After changing out of the dress Daniel returns to the stage carrying a green cloak, an oriental reed hat and a towel. He goes to the music stand.

08 Nessun dorma with fade

He reads Appendix five

Pavarotti and Me was once about the restoration of meaning to 'Nessun Dorma'

Daniel puts on the cloak and hat, drapes the towel on the music stand

I performed it at a comparative literature conference in Wolverhampton

It was dance acting as a salvaging agent for literature

Body Opera salvaging meaning

Meaning residing in the body

It was a way to understand displacement

Through discussing the narrative of the opera

Through contextualising *Turandot* within Puccini's works

Through considering the orientalism of the work

Through considering the context of it being based on a
Commedia dell'arte play

Through imagining a middle-aged white man dressed as a
mythical Chinese prince pretending to be a pauper

It was a way to return the aria to *Turandot*

It was a way to hope for love

Daniel turns SL as if looking out at an auditorium SL

*General wash fades – side light SL illuminates Daniel as if he is facing
an auditorium off-SL again, miming to 'Nessun dorma'*

(Track ends)

SL lights fade, general wash returns

09 Pavarotti Nessun dorma (Lincoln centre)

Daniel places the green cloth and hat next to the table SR.

He replaces the chair by the table. He is wearing a white shirt.

Daniel puts on a bow tie on – holds the towel

Daniel mimes to the song, takes off the shirt to reveal an Italia'90 T-shirt. He puts the towel around his neck. He dribbles the football to centre stage. Picks up the football.

(Track ends)

Daniel: *Turandot* is the story of a Chinese princess. It's a pretty Eurocentric view of an ancient mythical Peking. She doesn't like men much. When suitors come to woo her she sets them three riddles and if they don't get them right she cuts their heads off. Calaf is a prince, dressed as a pauper. Quite to everyone's surprise he gets the riddles right but says to Turandot that she doesn't have to marry

him if, by morning, she has discovered his name. She then says that no one shall sleep – ‘Nessun dorma’. Calaf must keep his secret to save his life and sings about the victory of love. It has nothing to do with football.

Daniel drops the ball over his shoulder

Scene 7:

Daniel goes to the music stand SL – hangs the towel on it

He reads Appendix six

Appendix six: What is Pavarotti and Me?

I remade it as a piece of theatre

I remade it as a performance to camera

The day we recorded it was also the day my divorce went through

In that version I spoke about how we had ended the relationship while on a cruise. I spoke about his bad timing

I had had a cancer scare

On the cruise I heard from my doctor that it wasn't cancer

That was the day he ended it

And no one ever wished they had cancer

I included a scene where I spoke about the end of *La boheme* and the end of *La traviata*. The respective heroines are dying and their lovers return to them

I held onto that hope of redemptive return

“Rudolfo / Alfredo, you're back”

What I didn't do in that version was explain why we split up

I skirted over it with some statements about us both doing 'bad' things

Generic break up story

I spoke about 'dark' times using this moment from *La sonnambula*

10 La sonnambula

Daniel reads from booklet as music plays

"All is ended: nevermore,
Nevermore shall I find consolation.
My heart is dead for ever
To happiness and love."

(Track ends)

Daniel: And here the lights faded to blackout

Lights fade to blackout – only the practical on the music stand is visible

Scene 8:

Daniel is at the music stand. It is dark. Only the practical light illuminates his face.

11 Pearlfishers duet (starts part way through TBC)

He reads Appendix seven

While reading he takes off his trousers, in the dark, and wraps the towel around his waist

I'm not afraid of the dark

The music you are hearing is from *The Pearl Fishers*

Two male friends sing of their loyalty to each other

I told my friend Julia that one day, when I get to make my cast of thousands production, I will use this music

Imagine, there will be dozens of oily muscle boys, in pairs, side lit, doing contact improvisation

I'm not afraid of the dark

I have been in many dark places

Not just metaphorically

In dark woods

In dark rooms at the back of bars and sex clubs

Operating in the dark is like a super-power that gay men my age have evolved

When there were no other options for meeting people we sought the dark

Imagine a wood, here in the dark

I can go into a strange wood, walk its perimeter and traverse its paths in total darkness

I can create a mental map in minutes, with all the escape routes in case the police come, or queer bashers

I can, in total silence, meet strangers and negotiate sex, sexual positions and proclivities

I can, in silence and darkness, with no words, navigate safer sex tools and procedures

I can dress, undress, tie my shoelaces

Know who is near

Who is a threat

Be intimate

Meet partners

Never have my pockets picked

I can welcome some and reject others

I can lead a man to another part of the dark - or out of the park

We can be hidden and yet able to run at a moment's notice

I understand sightlines

I can disappear

You may wish you had this power one day

I might be useful in the apocalypse

The dark is not a place I fear

I am at home in the dark

I know the dark

Scene 9:

Daniel walks to the table

A small amount of light rises on the laptop

Daniel sits and opens the laptop

He reads Appendix eight

Doing a PhD takes a lot of work

It is very stressful

I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy

They warned me that lots of people experience changes in their life, breakups are quite common

You become so tied up in your research

It is with you all the time

You are thinking constantly. It overtakes your life

But I did try to have some healthy ways to escape

I listened to Pavarotti

I dreamt of the works of art that I would make once I was free

I dreamt of the oily boys and *Pearl Fishers*

I dreamt of a work where, to the finale of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* – it is a moment where the philandering Count begs for and receives forgiveness from the Countess – I would be beaten and fisted live on stage

But Ragnar Kjartansson has already used up the finale to *Marriage of Figaro* in his work "Bliss" where the three-minute section was repeated for 12 hours non-stop

I started choreographing a Dance of Love, I will end with it today, using a recording of Pavarotti singing Handel in the 1970s

He takes his breath right to the edge, he takes risks

It was going to be for my longsuffering partner

A way to say thank you – but I never got to perform it for him

But mostly my routes to escapism were not so lofty

If you are, like me, someone with self-harming coping strategies, then you find yourself in strange situations:

On the rowing machine at the gym hating your body and thinking about Nietzsche

On the train drinking your third ready-made pina colada,
grappling with Clement's feminist critique of opera

Your research topic is everywhere. As hard as you try to escape

The general wash slowly fades in

I'm in the coffee bar of a sex on premises men only sauna
typing

I've just had a threesome with a well-known performance artist

He seemed interested in my work

I'm re-reading what I have typed...

12 Tristan und Isolde

"If music is characterised as feminine and text as masculine, as has been the formulation for Wagner, Nietzsche and Clement, then the struggle for the dominance of text or music which forms the discourse on opera can be viewed as a negotiation of male and female."

Daniel: Let me expand

He goes to the centre stage and explains

So, if this music stand represents the feminine, music, emotional, and this desk and laptop represent the masculine, the words, the drama, intellect... these are the two components of opera authorship. The score and libretto.

If we look at the history of opera, we see that early on, in early baroque music, the drama dominates. Opera is a masculine form. But even towards the end of Monteverdi's life we see the emergence of arias and duets, musical highlights. By the time we reach the high baroque period the music totally dominates. Singers are

superstars, they can even insert their own arias into the operas they are singing whether it makes dramatic sense or not. Opera, the feminine.

Gluck reforms opera – returns to classical subject matters, the drama dominates – the masculine. Mozart does a pretty good job of balancing these two but can't resist writing challenging vocal music as crowd and diva pleasers. We are returned to the feminine. Bel canto (literally translates as beautiful singing) opera. Here again, it is all about the music. Dramatic structures are dominated by musical structure.

Wagner is the next reformer, and Verdi agrees. Now Wagner tries to find the perfect balance between drama and music and adds to this the need for architecture/scenography and dance/movement to create the four pillars of Gesamtkunstwerk. Poetry, music, architecture and dance.

So if we were to attempt to gender opera, we would struggle to find a fixed point, its gender fluctuates across its history and when union is achieved with Wagner, it is not the union of two genders but rather a kind of gender fluid, non-binary gender.

Returning to the desk...

He loses interest in my art shortly after I tell him that I don't want to have sex again

I'm re-reading what I have typed...

"However, the very notion of conflict between text and music arises from a binary perspective, and blocks the possibility of a true union of text and music to create a single form, opera. A completely equal union of male (text) and female (music) in

one body (opera) is not a marriage but a single intersex body. In heteronormative binary terms, we might therefore regard the struggle for supremacy of text and music throughout the history of opera as a desire to avoid disruptive intersexuality or queerness.

“Nietzsche however advocated for precisely that union, praising Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* as perfection through its balance of text and music, which he regarded as the restoration of tragedy.”

Hang on, yes... *Tristan und Isolde* is the great monument to heterosexual love – despite the fact that when King Marke sings of his loss it is not the loss of his bride Isolde that he mourns but the loss of his homosocial bond with Tristan.

Heterosexuality is queered in *Tristan und Isolde*

Nikki Sullivan says this, and she may as well be describing the love duet in Tristan: “Heterosexual sexual pleasure involves the transgression of the supposed boundaries between self and other, subject and object, inside and outside, active and passive, power and powerless. As Lynne Segal puts it ‘in consensual sex when bodies meet, the epiphany of that meeting – its threat and excitement – is surely that all the great dichotomies slip away.’”

I want some of that...

I’m going back into the steam room

13 PNL Naha https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOwom_Gp_Q

Daniel walks upstage. He goes upstage to reveal the sauna. Then changes out of the shirt behind the curtain and enters the sauna

Smoke machine provide a few puffs of 'steam'

(Fade track out once Daniel is sitting down)

Upstage area of the sauna is dimly lit

Daniel: Aren't you um, I know we are not supposed to talk in here really but ... did anyone ever say ... you know you look like... Are you Michel Foucault?

Foucault: Mais oui

Daniel: But you're dead

Foucault: C'est la vie

Daniel: So, what are you doing here, in a sauna in Birmingham?

Foucault: I am here because you want me to be here

Daniel: OK

Foucault: So, do you have any questions?

Daniel: I suppose I am a bit worried. Is it OK that I'm having lots of sex and then in a sauna I sat down and wrote some of my PhD?

Foucault: Of course it is OK. You know who I am right? You know I'm gay? You know I'm kinky? I think a lot about philosophy and I think about sex. I think about sex when I am philosophising and I think about philosophy when I am having sex. Why couldn't you do that?

Daniel: Yea, I dunno

Foucault: It is very queer no? It is very queer to disrupt the academic system by fucking and writing at the same time. You are following your desire. You are letting your body find and define and defy the law and the state. You are

disrupting heteronormativity. And this is a good place for that, no? In a gay sauna.

Daniel: Yea

Foucault: So, why have you called me here?

Daniel: I think I'm having doubts. I think that queer theory... maybe I am using sex as a really bad coping mechanism.

Foucault: This is normal. But we must not blame sex for everything. We must not feel like sex is the problem. The problem is the State and the way it control you. You are resisting it with your body and through the sex you have.

Daniel: I don't know if that is what is happening. I agree with you. The state has controlled me, it controls sexuality. Ive lived through the pathologizing and the criminalising. I agree with you – I see it with my own eyes. But the practice of having sex all the time, has completely overtaken my life. I don't see my friends or family. I've been neglecting my partner. I lie. I lie all the time. I go to work and pretend that Im ok. Like the clown in *I pagliacci* – tears of a clown – I work but inside I am crying. This can't be what you were talking about. I am living queerly but ... it's not working. It's like a drug you know. I'm in that cycle of addiction. And I think maybe you were in that cycle of addiction

Foucault: This is very possible. But it is also true that you can be addicted and still be very intelligent and you can philosophise. You can be addicted and still write a thesis.

Daniel: I know, I am doing that. But if there's only writing and sex. If that is all there is. If there is no balance. Everything else is suffering. I'm fucked.

Foucault: Yes, you are fucked. ... I believe you are fucked ... What do you need right now?

Daniel: I need to go. I need to go home. Be with my partner and stay there.

Foucault: This is a very nice thought. And what will you do?

Daniel: I know that in a moment someone will walk in that door and you are going to disappear and I am going to have a man in front of me who is alive, and not a postmodern philosopher, I'm going to try to get rid of everything in my brain. So that I stop worrying and I stop thinking and I'll just become a sexual being, lost in flesh, and your words will whir around me and I will reach a point where I see the abyss and everything will melt away and I will be free.

Foucault: I am a believer in examining the past in order to better know the present. You need to ask yourself why you need to be free and what are you trying to be free from. Why are you addicted. Why can't you form a normal relationship with sex and love. But also think about the future. What is it you fear you will become?

Daniel: I really don't want to become one of those fat middle aged men that hangs around in saunas.

General wash returns

14 | Pagliacci

Daniel changes into a clown and dances

(Track ends)

Scene 10

Daniel takes off the clown ruffle and picks up the football

Daniel: Nothing strikes fear into me more than the site of a football rolling towards me. It happens quite a lot – I work in a place where I have to pass a football pitch. A chill shudders through me at the sound of ‘Oi mate can you kick our ball back’.

I was the kid at school who found any excuse to skip football. I hated football. I just didn’t relate. Macho nonsense. And the humiliation of having to change in front of other boys. I hated my body but was strangely attracted to theirs – though you should never be seen to look.

Daniel goes to the table

Daniel: There’s an aria in *L’elisir d’Amore* (The elixir of love) which Pavarotti sings so well. It’s called ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ (furtive tears)

15 Una furtiva lagrima

He reads from the laptop – speaking into the mic

He reads Appendix nine

As a child in the 1970s football was dominated by hooliganism and violence. More often than I can count, I let my guard slip and I looked at older boys in the street. I revealed some truth about myself when I should have kept it secret and the response was... a punch in the face. And then I’d have to go home and hide what had happened. Tell no one. I’d quirkily wear swimming goggles or sunglasses while watching TV so that my parents couldn’t see my tears or bruises.

And we'd sit there – my Dad lusting after Pan's People and the greatest comics of the day telling poof jokes.

Football and footballers were something to fear and yet I found myself attracted to that kind of masculinity. In 2009 I would make a work about that, called *Oh! England*

I was 12 in 1979 when Pavarotti sang that version of Nessun dorma at the Lincoln Centre that we heard earlier, and Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. My teenage life coincided with one of the most homophobic periods in modern British politics. It just wasn't possible to develop a healthy relationship to sex. There were no role models on TV or at school, there was no internet. The only place to explore my burgeoning sexuality was away from school and away from family. I went on long walks and visited public toilets. I read messages scribbled on the walls and looked through holes. It was terrifying. Sex and terror. The only way to explore my sexuality then was with paedophiles. Six years later, I came out, I left home at 18. My Dad gave me £10 for the train. Options were limited. I lived in a bedsit, and then a squat, with a drag queen and a prostitute. The squat was in Bayswater, I remember because it was 1987, I was 19, and they bombed Libya. Bayswater is where the Libyan community in London lived.

I had moved to London and found opera. But it was also then that Aids happened – sex and terror continued. I lost friends.

The opera house was my refuge. I found a home among the opera queens. There, I could live out my emotional life through opera. I had an emotional life through my affinity and identification with the female artists and their characters - and a sexual life with the men I met in the auditorium.

In 1990 the Italia90 World Cup happened and Pavarotti was popularising opera through a set of associations surrounding Italian-ness and victory, while displacing the meaning of 'Nessun dorma'. I was living in Edinburgh by then.

I learned two things that year: That a lot of Scottish people support Cameroon, and that my perception of gender binaries were being challenged.

You see, I was getting my hair cut and my hairdresser was talking about the football. Some football fans passed by singing opera.

Football, full of fear and violence and toxic masculinity

Opera, full of love and inextricably linked to my gay identity

The hairdresser – gay – The Fans – straight

The world was changing

In 1990 Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble* (a book that would revolutionise thinking about binary gender and which would ultimately lead to the discourse on queer identity that we see today) but Pavarotti had already smashed the binaries for me.

(Track ends)

Scene 11:

Daniel goes to the music stand

He reads Appendix ten

What is *Pavarotti and Me* ?

I needed to tell you about opera so that you can understand me better

I needed to tell you about me so that you can understand opera better

My doctoral research revealed that opera singers move in a particular way. They have a quality of movement that is 'operatic'

It is not taught to them

Often they are discouraged from moving too 'operatically' by directors more familiar with text based theatre

The masculine

The strange and beautiful way of moving. The artificiality. It spoke to me always of a reality. Those opera divas of my young life were as separate from the mundane as I was from football and the quotidian violence

I identified and described the operatic and how it emerges

I identified that singers learned to move this way through a process of kinaesthetic empathy. Seeing other singers move this way allowed for a simulated embodiment

I wonder what other embodied simulation I had unwittingly experienced?

When I was young

With no teacher to lead me in the gay life

Through my practice of being an opera queen and researching opera queens I realised that we too could access the operatic simulated embodiment that singers experience

Ah, another super-power.

We experienced it in ways that singers do, and we allowed it to sit with us and burst forth as we listened and fantasised and identified and dressed in operatic gowns improvised from bedding and curtains

It is an art

We bring our own tragedies to spectatorship... and to listening

By showing you how I am moved... by sharing with you my associations and stories... by immersing you in the operatic, you are invited in

So, in answer to the first question, the question of the post-doctoral research, here in *Pavarotti and Me*; the question of whether anecdote and autobiography contributes to our understanding of opera... I could say, 'you tell me'... but let me, in answer, apply a poetic turn

Seek you out an opera queen

If you want to know about the power of opera to heal, to transform, to restore...

Seek you out an opera queen

Those stories of opera, accused so often of convolution, of being nonsensical, artificial, emotions way beyond the range of humans; events so dramatic we call them operatic...

That is not how opera queens see it. To us those emotions seem real, like our own; those situations and dramatic turns seem totally akin to our lives as outsiders in a world that pretends we don't exist, that says we should disappear

Be invisible

Seek you out an opera queen

If you want to know how colourful and tragical and emotional the world is

Seek you out an opera queen if you want to know about opera and life and the magical camp portal of those dual realities that opens up in the opera house auditorium

But dressing as divas, identifying with the women, another question arose

What happens when an opera queen has a thing for the tenor?

I have a thing for Pavarotti

At the end of *Turandot*, am I the icy princess, suspicious of men?

Am I the virile tenor who would risk his life for love?

I am both

Turandot says: I know the name of the stranger

His name is LOVE

Love. It has eluded...

A contingent love

When identification in opera spectatorship casts me as the lovelorn heterosexual man, what do I discover?

I discover the operatic is still at play. I discover a new masculinity that emerges. A masculinity free from terror, shame, fear. When an opera queen has a thing for the tenor and the tenor's voice rises into the female register – here, yes, gender is melting away, sexual orientation is melting away, binaries are melting away, sex is melting away, lust, addiction,

dependency, all are melting away. That inaccessible queer utopia, that safe home, is there, here fleetingly

And what of the third and last question that arose. The opportunity to explore the Sofaer's artistic claim that opera can be reparative

I have tested that claim and found it true. By listening over and over again, by making and remaking this show, by going deeper and deeper rigorously into the associations and anecdotes. I have mined the territory and finally found a way to ... to see that by looking at the past, we can understand the present. By listening deeply with the operatic, I have grappled with guilt and I have found a way to forgive myself.

Thank you Countess

Daniel bows

16 marriage of figaro finale

I address myself to the straight community

I did do bad things. I was neglectful of my relationship. Through unchecked addiction, I did lose everything

But now I know why

And it was not my fault

I was a child

I was not afforded the privilege of heterosexuality and the world that protects it

I know the position of the outsider, of the marginalised

I lost out. I'm in my fifties and I'm still renting, an incomplete pension, I don't drive. Some of the problems of the young but none of the time

Where is my reparation?

Where is my consolation?

My compensation?

I was denied the opportunity to express, to exist safely, to develop a healthy relationship to sex and love. And it did fuck me up

That reality doesn't go away just because you changed some laws

I address myself to the queer community

Pavarotti and Me remember, we look both ways – I am here, now. But also “I am here too” – but I address the “here too” not just to straight audiences but queer ones also.

The voice of the queer community today, the LGBTQ+ community, seems dominated by young urban voices, amplified by social media, voices demanding space, promoting diversity – a proliferation of flags. But sometimes middle-aged white cis-gender gay men are cast as the normative, the privileged, even as traitors. And to be fair, there are some like that – some even vote Tory. I am privileged, here and now, in some ways, but I wasn't always. If *all* you see is a white middle-aged cis-gender gay man, then you misjudge me, you forget me. Yes, we older gays are acknowledged sometimes for the fight, the rights we had to gain, but less is said about the scars of death, seeing so much death in the other pandemic we endured while everyone carried on, no lockdown for us, no furlough, still no vaccine. The toll to our mental health, the disadvantage, the jobs we weren't interviewed for, the homes we couldn't rent, the life insurance we couldn't ask for, the spaces we couldn't safely occupy, the impossibility of healthy development in a world

that insisted we exist in the shadows. The patterns of self-harming behaviour and the vulnerability to exploitation and domestic abuse. We are forgotten

I haven't forgotten though what it's like to be on periphery, I stand with all the queers now, all the outsiders, whether they see me or not, but sometimes I am judged, left out for being too old, not urban enough, not adept enough at technology. I am looking both ways though, asking for space with you and for us

I have an identity you haven't met yet, that doesn't have a flag
I am here now

I see myself more clearly than ever, thanks to making a show called *Pavarotti and Me*

I will finish in a moment with the promised 'Dance of Love' set to 'Care Selve' from Handel's *Atalanta*. I can no longer dance it as it was intended, but I invite you to listen and imagine a dance. And I invite you to imagine a wood again, but this time with light streaming through the canopy

I am an opera queen

I am dyslexic

I have ME and arthritis in both hips

I sometimes suffer from bouts of depression and anxiety

I sometimes exhibit an unhealthy need to be liked, to prove myself worthy

I comfort eat

I have aged

I have put on weight

But...

I don't smoke tobacco

I don't use mephedrone

I was sober from alcohol for almost a year and now have a stable relationship to alcohol

I have been in a monogamous relationship for over four years

I have a new dog

And, uncharacteristically, I bought a football... for a show I'm making

Opera has saved my life

17 Care selve

The words are:

"Beloved woods, blessed shadows,

I come in search of my love!"

Daniel picks up all the papers, glances back, exits

(Track ends) Fade to blackout

END