

Pavarotti and Me: A practice research project with multiple performance outputs

Pavarotti and Me is a practice research project with a number of performance outputs dating from 2015 to 2020. This, the final output, *Pavarotti and Me 2020*, is a performance that sums up and concludes the project, reflecting on previous iterations while addressing the research questions and findings. *Pavarotti and Me* is developed from research findings presented in *Admiring La Stupenda*, extending research concerning 'the operatic' into the area of anecdote and autobiography, which emerged as influential within the methodology in the latter part of the *Admiring La Stupenda* research.

The research questions specific to *Pavarotti and Me* concern firstly, the relationship of anecdote and autobiography to our understanding of opera and the operatic. The performances centralise the identity of the opera queen as a vehicle to explore these questions. Secondly the project playfully asks "what happens when an opera queen has a thing for a tenor?" as a way to problematise and further explore Queer Theory that underpinned this and the research captured in *Admiring La Stupenda*. Thirdly, the project tests artist Joshua Sofaer's claim (*Opera Helps* and *St Matthew Passion*) that opera has reparative and transformational potential. The timeline of the project runs parallel to the researcher's relationship breakdown and divorce proceedings. Revisiting the material over time, returning repeatedly to recordings of Pavarotti allowed for an incremental understanding of how the creative practice of 'opera queening' participated in the processing of personal and emotional upheaval, leading to the revelation of its roots in childhood trauma.

Use of the researcher's movement practice, Body Opera, based on techniques derived from Butoh, enabled embodied understanding and non-verbal communication to participate in the reflective and inductive methodology.

Making and remaking *Pavarotti and Me* became not only a methodological tool for exploring the research questions but also placed the piece, and its process of making, in dialogue with public engagement activities concerning queer performance in rural settings. The researcher was involved in mentoring and programming queer performance in Worcester at the time of its making. *Pavarotti and Me 2020* therefore includes commentary on queer performance in rural settings, while also opening a space for the piece to directly address the identity of the opera queen within the queer community. Additionally, the inductive methodology and reference to Joshua Sofaer's work allowed space for *Pavarotti and Me 2020* to highlight and begin to define the creative and academic territory between opera and Live Art, identifying other practitioners who work in that field. The style of *Pavarotti and Me 2020* therefore departs from the more theatrical presentation of its former iterations (and *Admiring La Stupenda*) and begins to inhabit the space between opera and Live Art, employing techniques from both, resulting in a Performance Lecture style of presentation.

Public iterations of the project's outputs include: performances at the Impermanent Festival (ImpFest) London (2015); a practice research performance addressing the participation of dance in salvaging meaning in literature, called *Dancing 'Nessun dorma'*, Wolverhampton (2016); a theatrical version at University of Worcester Drama studio (2018); a performance to camera (2019) and *Pavarotti and Me 2020*, Worcester (2020).

Key words: Pavarotti, opera, operatic, performance, Opera queen, anecdote, autobiography, childhood trauma, domestic abuse, performance lecture, live art, body opera, queer, queer theory, lgbt, lgbtq, Foucault, queer performance, Italia90, addiction, sex addiction, homophobia