

COOKING UP AN OMELETTE:
ELENA KATS-CHERNIN'S *MR. BARBECUE* AS AN
EXAMPLE OF HER COMPOSITIONAL APPROACH

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I declare that the research presented here is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

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Abstract

Elena Kats-Chernin's *Mr. Barbecue* (2002), was composed as a staged, cabaret song-cycle. The work contains a fascinating array of musical influences, references and styles. I demonstrate how this work can be seen as a typical example of the composer's eclectic approach. This thesis considers how and why such disparate elements are brought together.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Kats-Chernin’s aesthetic is comprised of a multitude of disparate references that are seemingly ‘thrown together’ to create a new work — a propensity no doubt influenced by her experience as a composer of theatre music, a genre proliferated by *clichés* employed for the purpose of communicating meaning to an audience.”¹

This thesis examines a number of musical influences, references and styles that are present in one of Elena Kats-Chernin’s more recent works for the theatre: *Mr. Barbecue* (2002),² a staged cabaret/song-cycle. I will demonstrate how this work can be seen as an example of the composer’s approach as outlined by Jane Stanley in the quotation cited above. Clearly some means is necessary of creating a coherent work from such disparate materials, and this study will include consideration of such methods.

Mr. Barbecue may seem an odd choice of work to examine, given that the composer doesn’t rate the work as significant in her overall oeuvre. The composer has stated that “I don’t value it so highly...I don’t want to necessarily be remembered for *Mr. Barbecue*. I’m absolutely not embarrassed, it’s just not my best piece.”³ However, I argue that the work is nevertheless a convincing example of Kats-Chernin’s compositional approach that uses multiple musical genres, in combination with other musical references and ‘found objects’. The latter term is one for which, according to Jane Stanley, the composer has expressed a particular fondness.⁴

While the use of *clichés* and musical quotations communicate meaning to the audience by referring to other music, in Kats-Chernin’s music I argue that there is certain spirit of fun in the way these are executed. While she may be making a parody

¹ Jane Stanley, “*Bricolage in Iphis*”, (MMus Thesis, University of Sydney, 2000), 22.

² The spelling of the work’s title appears inconsistently within the score and the literature (*Mr. Barbecue*/*Mr. Barbeque*/*Mr. BBQ*) so a decision has been made to adopt a single spelling here: *Mr. Barbecue*.

³ David Griffin “My Interview with the Composer” (Appendix 1), 77.

⁴ Stanley, 26.

of another work, this is not necessarily done with negative intent. In an article entitled “It’s *got* to be fun,”⁵ journalist Susan Shineberg notes that “the word ‘fun’ seems to crop up a lot”⁶ when talking to the composer about her music. This paper will also consider the ‘fun’, humorous, and playful elements in Kats-Chernin’s music.

Jane Stanley notes that Kats-Chernin’s propensity for throwing together disparate musical references, even in non-theatrical works, is influenced by her experience as a composer for the theatre. Examining *Mr. Barbecue* provides an opportunity to focus on one of her works of musical theatre.

The text of the final song of *Mr. Barbecue* has a construction which may be compared with the kind of musical compilation that one finds in much of Kats-Chernin’s music. Here, librettist Janis Balodis takes commonly known catch-phrases and mixes them around:

“What’s good for the goose, is another man’s poison...
Kissing won’t last: cookery do, ask the old granny who lived in a shoe...
Revenge is a dish best eaten from a pig’s ear...
Don’t count you chickens before the cookie crumbles...
Men cannot live by walking on egg shells...”

The title of this song is ‘Wrecked Eggs’. In the process of reconstituting the text in order for it to be consumed by the audience, the ‘wrecked eggs’ could be considered to have become an omelette. It is this analogy that I have adopted in my title, in reference to Kats-Chernin’s musical approach.

The available scholarly literature on Elena Kats-Chernin is relatively scarce. A growing number of interviews with the composer are available in print and online, as well as several articles linked with the performance of her works. The composer has had six commercial CDs dedicated to her music, and her pieces have been included on many other CDs. The booklets from these recordings are a valuable source of

⁵ Susan Shineberg, “It’s *got* to be fun.” *24 Hours* (November 1997): 28-31.

⁶ Shineberg, 29.

information on the composer and her music. I also interviewed the composer prior to writing this thesis. All of these sources will be drawn upon in the course of my discussion. However, the most substantial works on the composer's music are three theses.

The most recent of these is Helen Rusak's doctoral thesis,⁷ which examines three theatre works by the Kats-Chernin: *Iphis* (1997), *Matricide the Musical* (1998), and *Mr. Barbecue*. Substantially more weight is given to the analysis of the first two of these works. Rusak's paper focuses on an examination of feminist aesthetics and, in her own words, the purpose of the chapter on *Mr. Barbecue* is "to consider the musical aesthetic solution Kats-Chernin provides to a musical theatre-work with a primarily masculine narrative."⁸ Rusak concedes that in this work, "Kats-Chernin has not been given the artistic space to express her femininity or build upon her experience of the feminist ideology."⁹ While I acknowledge the issues that Rusak raises, gender aesthetics in music are not the central concern of my paper.

Rusak's thesis was completed during the writing of this present paper, and only made available to me shortly before this paper's completion. Therefore much of my initial musical analysis of *Mr. Barbecue* was achieved quite independently. While Rusak acknowledges that in *Mr. Barbecue*, Kats-Chernin "marshals a wide variety of musical idioms with her characteristic postmodern musical eclecticism," she only identifies some, but not all of these musical references. This type of examination is not the focus of her analysis; rather, she concentrates on the search for evidence of a feministic aesthetic. Where possible, Rusak's observations will be referred to during my own analysis of the work.

The two other theses on Kats-Chernin's music were both written in the year 2000. These two scholarly works discuss issues that are strongly related to the aims of the current paper and for this reason, a more detailed discussion of these theses is warranted.

⁷ Helen Kathryn Rusak, "Simply Divine: feminist aesthetics in three music theatre works of Elena Kats-Chernin" (Ph.D. diss., University of Adelaide, 2005).

⁸ Rusak, *Simply Divine*, 178.

⁹ Rusak, *Simply Divine*, 205.

Jane Stanley's "*Bricolage in Iphis*" examines Elena Kats-Chernin's first opera, which was composed and produced in 1997. In Stanley's thesis, the music of the opera is discussed in terms of '*bricolage*,' a term which is described as pertaining "to the adoption and re-use of elements drawn from one's immediate surroundings."¹⁰ Stanley refers to an article on postmodernism in Luciano Berio's music,¹¹ when she describes how a form of musical *bricolage* may involve musical references to pre-existing works. Stanley states:

"constructing new music out of an assortment of pre-existing fragments, *bricolage*, is most certainly a hallmark of postmodernism. The musical *bricoleur* collects fragments from a multitude of traditions...when a piece is composed, there is a tendency to combine a plurality of seemingly unrelated musical 'found objects'."¹²

Here, Stanley refers to 'found objects' from the musical past which can be appropriated by a composer. By using these 'found objects' in a different context with other objects, something new is created. It is also pointed out that the original meaning of the object is "subverted," but that the pre-existing meaning is not erased. She also notes that this process of subversion may be entirely subconscious on the part of the *bricoleur*.

Stanley seeks to differentiate the term '*bricolage*' from several other terms that have similar meanings. One such term is 'collage,' which Stanley differentiates by referring to a non-musical anecdote of her own childhood:

"I remember being assigned the task of representing the Virgin Mary with small paper squares cut from magazine pages...I first sorted my little squares by colour and shade...I used predominantly yellow clippings for Mary's halo, blue for her gown, brown for her hair and so on. This illustrates...the

¹⁰ Stanley, ii.

¹¹ Gavin Thomas, "Musica e musica...," *The Musical Times*, 137, no. 1835 (1996): 12-16.

¹² Stanley, 15-16.

proclivity of the *bricoleur* to collect objects and to rearrange them to make something new, with apparently no regard for the pre-existing contexts of those pieces. My teacher described this activity as collage, but...generally speaking, collage is less about integrating old materials to form something new and more about spontaneous improvisation with materials that are immediately available.”¹³

Stanley also suggests that there may be a “significant overlap” between the term *montage* as used in film, and “*bricolage* in music.”¹⁴ The term ‘pastiche,’ is also discussed by Stanley, being described as pertaining to “the more faithful replication of a pre-existing work or style.”¹⁵ Stanley observes that to meet the definition of *bricolage*, there must be an “integration of disparate elements into a new whole.”¹⁶

The term ‘parody’ is described by Stanley as being manifest either with a serious or humorous tone. For the serious type, she cites as an example, Igor Stravinsky’s reverent appropriation of Pergolesi’s music in his *Pulcinella* ballet. Béla Bartók’s supposedly mocking quotation of Shostakovich’s *Seventh Symphony* is cited as an example of a humorous or satirical parody,¹⁷ while it is admitted that the distinction between reverent and irreverent parody can be blurred.¹⁸ In order to differentiate parody from *bricolage*, Stanley observes that satirical parody tends to not permeate an entire work, and that reverential parody doesn’t necessarily subvert the original integrity of the material. For Stanley however, parody, pastiche and *bricolage* are not mutually exclusive terms.¹⁹ She also uses the term “re-fabrication” to embrace all three.

Stanley also quotes Kats-Chernin, from her own interview with the composer, as stating: “I do recycle, I must say, I mean I recycle not my own, but a lot of other

¹³ Stanley, 14.

¹⁴ Stanley, 14.

¹⁵ Stanley, 21.

¹⁶ Stanley, 25.

¹⁷ Stanley, 18.

¹⁸ Stanley, 22.

¹⁹ Stanley, 22.

people's (little laugh)."²⁰ Stanley's analysis of *Iphis* will be referred to in more detail later in this paper.

The second thesis about Elena Kats-Chernin to which I refer is Serena Armstrong's "Understanding Influence: Intertextuality in Music: A New Approach to Old Issues." Armstrong defines 'Intertextuality' as the notion that "all texts are constructed from the intersection of other texts. It considers how every text is affected by, and affects past texts, and this is seen as reflective of our social and political experiences."²¹ Armstrong recognises that this concept has been embraced by theorists in the field of literary and film criticism. She explains that prior to her thesis, the term had only been applied to music in terms of a relationship between music and words.

Armstrong also seeks to differentiate 'the theory of intertextuality' from Harold Bloom's theory of poetic influence²², where a poet is burdened by the past, and is required to fully-integrate the work of her or his poetic forerunners in order to create something that is regarded as original. Bloom's theory has been transferred to music with varying accuracy. In any case, Armstrong dismisses this 'theory of influence' as too limiting, and inappropriate for a discussion of the music of Elena Kats-Chernin. One reason is because this composer does not exist simply in the canon of one tradition, but is influenced by many. Bloom's theory also emphasises that an artist's influence from precursors needs to be 'wrestled to death,' though as a composer, Kats-Chernin deliberately seeks to evoke and explore her musical past and surroundings. Armstrong notes that for this reason, Bloom's theory would consider her "unworthy of study, a value judgement that does not need to be made if we use theory of intertextuality."²³

Serena Armstrong uses Kats-Chernin's music as an example of intertextuality, identifying the intersection of different texts in the one new 'text'. She specifically examines her composition for electronics and 14 instrumentals, *Clocks* (1994).

²⁰ Stanley, 26.

²¹ Serena Armstrong "Understanding Influence: Intertextuality in Music: A New Approach to Old Issues" (BCA (Honours) Degree Thesis, University of Wollongong, 2000), 7.

²² Harold Bloom. *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

²³ Armstrong, 32.

Armstrong's examination of intertextuality holds a strong similarity to Stanley's concept of *bricolage*, in that both recognise and explore the notion that Kats-Chernin's music can be viewed as bringing together different traditions or 'found objects.' It is interesting to note that both of these theses were presented independently of each other, in the same year at two different universities.

This current study does not deliberately seek to favour one term over another in relation to Kats-Chernin's music. The terms need not be exclusive. Theories of intertextuality, *bricolage*, pastiche, parody and satire could all arguably be applied to Kats-Chernin's music. What can be seen however is that Kats-Chernin's music makes reference to many other 'texts' apart from her own, utilising a number of musical traditions, and 'found objects,' in her musical works. Before examining *Mr. Barbecue*'s context within Kats-Chernin's oeuvre, it is first necessary to examine the broad stylistic trends of the composer's output over her career. As my discussion progresses on the use of musical references and 'found-objects', I am searching for the 'why?' — what is Kats-Chernin's motivation to compose in such a manner, particularly in *Mr. Barbecue*? And how do these disparate influences come together to form a coherent whole?

Elena Kats-Chernin has a mixed musical heritage. Born 'Elena Kats', in 1957, in the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan, she lived in the republic capital of Tashkent till the age of four. At that time her family moved into Russia, to Yaroslavl, on the Volga River, 360 kilometres from Moscow. At age 14, she left by herself to study at the Gnesin Musical College in Moscow. After three years of intensive study, she and her family were granted permission from the Soviet authorities to leave for Australia. Kats enrolled in the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, studying composition with Richard Toop, and piano with Gordon Watson. Completing a diploma, Kats was then awarded a DAAD Scholarship to study with Helmut Lachenmann in Hanover (then in West Germany). Kats-Chernin was to live and work in Germany from 1981 until her return to Australia, in January 1994. Now a resident of the Sydney suburb of Coogee, she continues to travel widely.

Her experience of living for extended periods in three different countries gives cause to consider the wide ranging musical influences in her works. When asked how these different settings influenced her, she stated:

“If forced to generalise about the influences on my music I’d say that my Russian background provided the strong rhythmic features, the strange mixture of light-heartedness and heavy melancholy, the bright orchestra colours, a sense of contrast and a tendency towards high energy. The early years of my initial stay in Australia (1975-80), fresh out of Moscow, added the excitement of new experimental sounds and much freedom in the structuring of the pieces. Then the years of study and work in Germany focused me upon the serious nature of the psychology of music, specifically in the theatre. Upon my return to Sydney in 1994 a lot of the above merged into a language.”²⁴

She currently states that her biggest influences are “Rachmaninov, Shostakovitch, Prokofiev, Ravel, Stockhausen, Boulez, Berio, Globokar, Xenakis, Ligeti, Lutoslawski, Bach, Tom Waits, Garbage, David Bowie, Ennio Morricone”, but goes on to add that this is constantly changing.²⁵ She also has a well-known fascination with the ‘ragtime’ genre. As she says herself, “everyone knows I write rags in my spare time.”²⁶

In considering extra-musical elements, one can also find certain ‘Australian’ plot ideas, or inspirations that recur over the course of her recent work, including *Mr. Barbecue*. While this might not be an essential part of Kats-Chernin’s musical approach, in the diverse set of influences found in her music, these are instances of an Australian presence in her work.

²⁴ Boosey and Hawkes, “Elena- Kats Chernin: Interview with a cosmopolitan composer,” http://www.boosey.com/pages/cr/news/further_info.asp?NewsID=11504 (accessed 6 March, 2008).

²⁵ Elena Kats-Chernin and Boosey and Hawkes, “Elena Kats-Chernin” *MySpace*, <http://www.myspace.com/elenakatschernin> (accessed 6 March, 2008).

²⁶ Griffin, 74.

In musical terms, a distinctly 'Russian' influence emerged in some of Kats-Chernin's work from the mid-1990s. This has been pointed out by several commentators, and explicitly by the composer herself.²⁷ And while *Mr. Barbecue* does not display obvious Russian influences, such a background must nonetheless be considered as part of this analysis. The clear presence of tonality aligns *Mr. Barbecue* stylistically with the Russian-influenced works.

The composer relates that the most formative years of her life were in Moscow, where she moved to study when she was fourteen: they "were only three years, but they were living away from home, studying really hard all the musical background stuff, harmony, music history, analysis, great teachers, great aural training, fantastic, you know, really hard...old school, round the clock really, never got enough sleep, because we worked so hard."²⁸ Kats-Chernin says that her favourite composer at the time was Rachmaninov: "It's embarrassing to say so, but I was really taken by the *Second Piano Concerto*, and his *Vocalise*. All of his concertos I know by heart."²⁹

Kats-Chernin describes the prevalent popular music style in Russia at the time as "Socialist-Pop....which was a mixture between classical chords and folk music...very straight-forward, un-threatening music, with a very simple message of love or...Russian/Soviet/Proletariat stuff...a lot of heroic stuff...you heard a lot of army singing...I must say, fantastic stuff."³⁰ The composer also recalls that on the state-owned radio there was also a lot of classical music, particularly of Russian composers, such as Rachmaninov. "I must say," the composer explains, "in that way we weren't rubbished with a lot of pop music at that point, the brain was still kind of pure, plus we only had one channel on the radio, there was nothing like here [Sydney]."³¹ Her knowledge of western popular culture at the time was very limited. Recordings of western pop music were a novelty and an underground item, only available when someone brought the item back from an overseas visit. The composer recalls an occasion when she was able to listen to a reel-to-reel tape of Andrew Lloyd

²⁷ Robert Davidson, "Basically it's like cooking" *Topology Music*, <http://www.topologymusic.com/articles/chernin.htm> (accessed 6 March, 2008), 1.

²⁸ Griffin, 66.

²⁹ Davidson, 1.

³⁰ Griffin, 70.

³¹ Griffin, 70.

Webber's *Jesus Christ-Superstar*, even though the machine broke down half-way through and she didn't hear the end. Other pop music that she was able to hear snippets of included music by bands such as The Beatles, Blood Sweat and Tears, Led Zeppelin, and Pink Floyd.³²

Arriving in Australia for the first time, Kats-Chernin's says she "immediately went to second hand shops and started buying everything, records, you know, all, Black Sabbath, everything, everything I had heard about."³³ She found Australia to be "a melting pot of cultures — I basically brought with me my Russian culture and what I was brought up on: lots of Russian music... Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky, ingrained in my brain."³⁴

As a music student now enrolled at the Sydney Conservatorium, she was able to study in-depth the composers of the Second Viennese School, whose music was considered 'anti-socialist' in her native Russia. Kats-Chernin was "really hungry for that information."³⁵ The composer also recalls her experience in discovering the West's post-war developments:

"I had great teachers like Richard Toop, telling me all these things which are in the world, Stockhausen, Boulez, Berio, amazing stuff, which for me was just an eye opener and I was really interested in that. I was interested in doing slightly outrageous things, against the norm, whatever that was. He basically was the one who showed me the music of Lachenmann's, to whom I then went to study.... I wanted to study with this incredibly radical composer who used the instruments in a very unusual way and whose thinking was very, very non-conventional, very strict, very uncompromising, (and an) incredibly good teacher."³⁶

³² Griffin, 70-71.

³³ Griffin, 71.

³⁴ Griffin, 66.

³⁵ Griffin, 67.

³⁶ Griffin, 67.

Elena Kats-Chernin's first commission came in 1982, while she was studying with the German composer, Helmut Lachenmann. The work was *In Tension*, composed for flute, clarinet, percussion, piano, violin and cello. Kats-Chernin once described an example of how this piece was influenced by her then mentor. Lachenmann had recently composed a work for piano which used "just rhythm with the highest notes of the piano and pedal...you just hear those notes together, never just one or the other, and in the end, you just hear wood more than pitch...In one part of *In Tension* I just get stuck into these two notes at the top of the piano, plus xylophone, so I'd go a bit further and do other things with it, but that's inspired by Lachenmann's piece [*Ein Kinderspiel* (1980)]."³⁷ This compositional interest in taking a very small central idea, and almost becoming infatuated with it, was to become a recurring characteristic of her music. Some prominent examples of this will be discussed later.

From 1985-1993, mostly during Kats-Chernin's time in Germany, the composer stopped writing music for the concert hall. She explains:

"I stopped...because I was really fed up, because I thought it was dead...I thought everyone was writing really boring music. For about five years it was just not going anywhere... (though) some people were quite amazing and standing in their own right. Like Zimmerman. I'm just talking about the German situation because that's where I lived. Some of it was interesting but if it was so interesting, it was so personal that you couldn't really write anything that was similar to it. I mean it is very difficult and not advisable to imitate somebody anyway, but if you are at a loss and you want to look for models: well, I just didn't have any."³⁸

Her former mentor, Richard Toop, also suggests that it was Lachenmann's hard and demanding attitude that led the composer into this period of self-doubt.³⁹ These feelings of the composer led to a significant drought of concert works during

³⁷ Davidson, 1.

³⁸ Armstrong, 78.

³⁹ Richard Toop, liner notes to Elena Kats-Chernin, *Clocks*, Sydney Alpha Ensemble, et al. (ABC Classics 456 468-2, 1997).

this period, where she wrote music for dance and incidental music for drama. She was commissioned for theatres in Vienna, Hamburg and Hanover, among others.

“And what I found in the theatre, especially working with dance, was firstly ‘less is more’ and sometimes just one sound clicking away was enough to push the whole group of thirteen dances: just one little flute blowing sound would totally push them along. When I did a lot of very thick and dense music, it just wouldn’t do anything. I found a lot of those psychological functions of music which opened my eyes and ears...So the more I did this work the more I found the music I wanted to write was much more earthed...much more archaic..”⁴⁰

Concerning the time she was working for theatre alone, the composer remarked: “I kind of learnt that I didn’t want to write abstract music at all anymore.”⁴¹ The only concert works written during this time were *Totchki* for clarinet and oboe and *Tast-en* for solo piano, both from 1991.⁴²

In 1993, Elena Kats-Chernin reached a critical point, and began to write for the concert hall again. Firstly she wrote the orchestral works, *Retonica*, a joint commission from Sounds Australian and The Stockholm Royal Philharmonic, and *Stairs* for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. These works were shortly followed by a commission to write a work for Ensemble Modern. She responded with her now famous work, *Clocks*.

The composer describes *Clocks* as “the piece that started, or kind of re-started my career. It was a total turning point.”⁴³ The composer has also described the work as “the merging of two styles, theatre and concert.”⁴⁴ Ideas that she had used separately in concert and theatre came together. For example, the work uses electronics, which Kats-Chernin had used before many times in the theatre though

⁴⁰ Armstrong, 78.

⁴¹ Armstrong, 78.

⁴² Armstrong, 78.

⁴³ Armstrong, 78.

⁴⁴ Davidson, 1.

never before in a concert work. The composer also had hours of sampled instrument sounds on tape from her work in the theatre, and she drew on this source, using sampled sounds from a double bass as the basis of *Clocks*. These were an integral part of the 'tick-tock' samples that permeate the work. Along with the various other sampled sounds added was a live instrumental ensemble of twenty musicians that interact with the music on the tape. *Clocks* is seen by Armstrong to provide the audience with the "tick-tock sound, a sound or 'intertext' which is recognisably clock-like."⁴⁵ Robert Davidson observes that this single metronomic pulse throughout was similar to the idea of the single pitch-class that her piano piece *Tast-en* was based on.

The notion of developing a very basic single idea can be found in other instrumental works that soon followed, such as *Retonica* (1993) which takes as its basis a C-minor chord. Other works include *Chamber of Horrors* (1995) for harp, and another work for piano entitled, *Variations in a Serious Black Dress* (1995), both of which use an identical chord progression as their basis.⁴⁶ It was works such as these that led Richard Toop to say that in some works of this period:

"there is a fascination with pushing things to extremes, which might be a matter of saying, 'How many times can I repeat this cluster and get away with it?', but might equally well involve asking, in lighter pieces, 'How outrageously kitschy can I be here?'"⁴⁷

This notion points to a 'fun' and playful mentality in the composer's use of her musical material.

In 1992, the composer stated that the music of Lachenmann, Brahms and Schoenberg influenced her the most.⁴⁸ I asked Kats-Chernin about her interest in Brahms. Her response is interesting in acquiring some sense of how she views her compositional material, and its development within a piece:

⁴⁵ Armstrong, 48.

⁴⁶ Davidson, 1.

⁴⁷ Toop, *Clocks*.

⁴⁸ Elena Kats-Chernin "An Emotional Geography" *Sounds Australian* no.34 (1992): 26-8, 27.

“Brahms broke a lot of rules you know. In how the concerto should be, how the structure should be, he sometimes used in concerto form, he used the concerto instrument as an orchestral instrument, that’s what was interesting for me, just the way he broke the rules and the way he built his pieces, not necessarily the melody that he uses, or the material in itself. I am always more interested in the way the material gets used rather than what material it is. And maybe that’s why later I went to Ravel, you know, as my hero, and then, recently there was again another composer, but again I can’t remember, it’s just that it constantly switches.”⁴⁹

When writing *Cadences, Deviations and Scarlatti* (1995), Kats-Chernin drew on her memories of an old favourite keyboard sonata of Domenico Scarlatti. The composer had one day popped into the Tall Poppies office to visit her friend, Belinda Webster, the founder of the recording label. Webster had just been supervising a recording of some Scarlatti harpsichord sonatas, and discussion soon turned to one of Kats-Chernin’s favourites, the D minor K.141, which had been among those recorded. As they listened to the recording, the composer began remarking on what she would have done differently, had she been the composer. Webster suggested that she should then compose the piece the way she would have done. Kats-Chernin then proceeded to write her work, however she chose not to revisit Scarlatti’s actual score, but relied on her memory and recollections of the piece.⁵⁰

Serena Armstrong notes these intuitive origins of *Cadences, Deviations and Scarlatti* as well. On the basis of her own interview with the composer, Armstrong also states that: “Kats Chernin....frequently draws upon her musical memory and intuition to write. She says she has to know it all intuitively; in order to be a professional composer the application of her musical knowledge must be automatic. She does not have time to plan and research everything or to stop and think about form or rules.”⁵¹ While Armstrong uses Kats-Chernin’s instrumental works as her

⁴⁹ Griffin, 68.

⁵⁰ Toop, *Clocks*.

⁵¹ Armstrong, 40.

examples, this intuitive approach to her musical memory may be later observed in the composer's works for the theatre, particularly in *Mr. Barbecue*.

One of the composer's first works that had a direct connection to Australian culture was her *Fantasy on an Anthem*, although the piece is now withdrawn from performance. This work was composed for a CD featuring a variety of Australian artists who were asked to compose a version of the Australian National Anthem, *Advance Australia Fair*, in their own individual style. Kats-Chernin recalls that she was asked, "don't write an arrangement, write a piece in your style, but base it on Advance Australia Fair — that's why I called it *Fantasy on an Anthem*...I said it would have been so much easier to write an arrangement...in a couple of days you know, writing really a piece based around it but not quite that...it took me forever...if you listen hard, you can hear it [the original anthem]."⁵² *Fantasy on an Anthem* is scored for a full orchestra, featuring a prominent part for the piano. The composer describes that the work is the only "way-out" piece on the CD, and although she wrote true to her commission, she says that she always had a feeling that she somehow "stuffed up." She adds that it is "definitely the piece that won't be played before a football game or something."⁵³

However, not that many years were to pass before she was asked to write a piece for the football. Following her commission to write *Deep Sea Dreaming* for the Sydney Olympic Games Opening Ceremony in 2000, Kats-Chernin was also commissioned to compose music for another Sydney event: the 2003 Rugby World Cup Opening Ceremony, for which she wrote *Lotus/Water* and *Fire*. In 2007 she was commissioned to write a work for the 75th Anniversary of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Kats-Chernin herself recalls being "awestruck" by the sight of bridge when she first arrived in Sydney as a seventeen-year-old⁵⁴, and her orchestral work for the anniversary, *Our Bridge Overture*, was recorded and played over loudspeakers as celebrating citizens walked over the bridge en masse on March 18, 2007. These

⁵² Griffin, 69.

⁵³ Griffin, 70.

⁵⁴ Emily Dunn, "Forget the abridged version: coathanger's ode to be an all-day overture" *Sydney Morning Herald* (8 February, 2007) <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/forget-the-abridged-version-coathangers-ode-to-be-an-all-day-overture/2007/02/07/1170524164282.html> (accessed 6 March, 2008).

commissions for Australian events indicate a recurring relationship between Kats-Chernin's music and extra-musical ideas with an Australian theme.

The mid to late 1990s had seen a gradual shift into what one might call Kats-Chernin's 'Russian' period. The composer in recent years has also spoken of her renewed interest in those composers whom she loved before she studied more avant-garde music. The composer has stated that her favourite composer used to be Rachmaninoff, though many other Russian composers have been mentioned as well. The composer explains:

“...recently I've started coming back to these old roots – you know Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, all this Russian music history. Suddenly it's coming up again. I don't listen very much; it's just in my memory, stuck in there, and I can feel it's coming up in my pieces....basically it's like cooking – you put all the Russian composers into one pot, and they're all in there in my music somewhere.”⁵⁵

This last quote affirms a sense that Kats-Chernin's influences don't operate on an entirely conscious level, although not on a strictly unconscious level either. *Purple Prelude* (1996), originally for piano, was one of the first pieces to emphatically display Kats-Chernin's affection for her Russian heritage. The melody of the work was born during a conversation with pianist, Tamara Anna Cislowska. The two ladies were on a plane, coming back from the recording of *Fantasy on an Anthem*. They were discussing their “shared enthusiasm for Rachmaninov when a sinuous, distinctly Russian melody...started to implant itself in Kats-Chernin's head.”⁵⁶ *Purple Prelude* was also arranged for the Sydney Alpha Ensemble, and the melody then became the basis for the *Piano Concerto No.2* (2001). Other pieces that are strongly influenced by her Russian ancestry include *Zoom and Zip*, and *The Maiden and the Spirit* (2004).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Davidson, 1.

⁵⁶ Toop, *Clocks*.

⁵⁷ Griffin, 72-73.

The composer has spoken of her method she usually takes when starting to write a piece. She states: "I usually just start off with three intervals or two intervals, so my pieces just have three notes, if you look closely...usually just major second and minor second, so making up a minor third, that's basically what is most of my pieces, [for example] you look at *Cadences... Purple Prelude*".⁵⁸

Kats-Chernin's approach to composing works for the theatre is somewhat different. She states that:

"there I'm just really open...there are basically no set rules, there you just have basically the words and directions, let's say: a person walks into a room...is it anticipation? Is it a kind of brooding atmosphere? Is there love in the air, or is it a lullaby, because somebody is asleep?...maybe there is rumbling of a thunderstorm somewhere, or you are hearing a party next door.. is there a murder going to happen in that room right now?...you prepare the audience...and then the words are of course the ones that prepare the actual style... that's why I was always so eclectic...because I never know, what comes up in my head when I hear words, you know something comes up, some kind of rhythm, it may remind me of something, it may not."⁵⁹

The composer's first opera, *Iphis*, was composed in 1997. Richard Toop wrote the libretto based on the book *Metamorphis* by Ovid. The opera tells the tale of Iphis, a girl who is brought up believing she is a boy to protect her from her father who has vowed to kill any female offspring. At thirteen, Iphis is betrothed to another girl. The pair fall in love and the mother of Iphis pleads to the gods for a sex-change for her daughter, so that the young couple may be married. Unlike in the original story by Ovid however, Iphis elects to remain a woman.

In *Iphis*, Jane Stanley observes that Kats-Chernin constructs her leitmotifs for the characters and events, by using appropriate pre-existing styles and genres, and

⁵⁸ Griffin, 81.

⁵⁹ Griffin, 81-83.

also by paraphrasing extant works by other composers.⁶⁰ An example of such a genre is the waltz, which is heard during the courtship of Iphis and Ianthe. The waltz “has a long history of being associated with romance,” with the ballroom functioning as a “site of flirtation and seduction,” as well as the dance itself entailing “an important element of social intercourse, generally requiring a partnership...of a male and female.”⁶¹ An example of a specific extant work can be found in Kats-Chernin’s allusion to the famous “Montagues and Capulets” from Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Stanley identifies the use of the identical key, accompaniment style, performance instruction and melodic shape of Prokofiev’s original work. The allusion is appropriate, for “like Romeo and Juliet, Ianthe and Iphis’s love is forbidden.”⁶² Stanley emphasises how effective the reference is, due to the fact that a “single bar of reference to the accompaniment figure alone is evocative of the entire movement [of Prokofiev’s]”.⁶³

Kats-Chernin’s second opera, *Matricide, the Musical* (1998) also contains a multitude of references to other genres and composers. The story of this work is gruesome, and is based on the true story of two fifteen-year old girls, Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker, of Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1954. The girls conspired together and murdered Pauline’s mother. Helen Rusak states that, “*Matricide* purports to be a musical written by the two fifteen-year-old protagonists.”⁶⁴ The librettist, Kathleen Fallon, told the composer that “because the idea is that the opera has been written by two crazy teenagers...is it their idea of what opera, theatre etc is or should be. They are ransacking culture (including music) to maintain their anger, rather than becoming depressed and passive, so it is very serious game. This opens possibilities for pastiche, ironic, playful, humour ‘mock’ opera, theatre.”⁶⁵ Rusak recognises that this is of course already part of the composer’s aesthetic in any case. Kats-Chernin’s music for *Matricide* includes references to medieval dance, swing, tango, bossa nova, punk and pop, and well as to rap, although the instance of this last genre was cut from the final production. Rusak notes that contemporary pop styles were relatively new to

⁶⁰ Stanley, 42.

⁶¹ Stanley, 34.

⁶² Stanley, 43.

⁶³ Stanley, 43.

⁶⁴ Helen Rusak, ‘Matricide and the female divine’ *Australasian Drama Studies* 45 (2004, 43-71): 45.

⁶⁵ Rusak *Matricide*, 54.

the Kats-Chernin's compositional palate.⁶⁶ These were to be used again in *Mr. Barbecue*. This expanded palette may be partially attributed to her return to Australia. Asked how living in Australia affected her music, the composer replied that:

"I've become incredibly free. There is an admirable tolerance here for all ranges of music. Everybody writes very different things, and nobody really cares if you write...I mean in Germany, it's not possible I'm telling you. In Germany you couldn't...you become placed into a school."⁶⁷

Composed after *Mr. Barbecue*, the action of Kats-Chernin's opera *Undertow* (2004), takes place on an Australian beach. ABC correspondent Nance Huston reported after interviewing Kats-Chernin, that "the beach provided her with plenty of inspiration for the operatic score, drawing on a range of musical styles to reflect the great variety of people who flock to the sand and surf."⁶⁸

Undertow was a commission from the State Opera of South Australia and Finnish National Opera. The librettist for the project was Andrea Rieniets. The director was Juha Vanharkanto, who played a major part in the creation of the opera. It was he who originally came up with the concept for this opera. He says:

"The original idea came actually from Germany as when I was living in Germany and the Berlin wall came down and suddenly our people became very friendly with the eastern Germans, but soon after that people started building invisible walls so it was more psychological, and that's what happens a lot. People have these intimacy borders and privacy borders all over the world and the Australian beach was just very interesting as a public space where the private emotions are flushed out and the public and private mix."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Rusak *Matricide*, 55-6.

⁶⁷ Davidson, 1.

⁶⁸ Nancy Haxton "New opera deals with beach culture" *The World Today Archive* (1 March, 2004) <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2004/s1056393.htm> (accessed 1 May 2005).

⁶⁹ Haxton, 1.

The cast of *Undertow* includes the iconic Australian images of two lifesavers, along with a cast of beach visitors: a newly wed couple, an anonymous lady simply known as Miss X, a touring German couple, and a Conservationist who is dressed in a Koala suit (another distinctly Australian character). Dance and movement are an integral part of the production, as is video, which introduces the characters visually before the onstage action begins.

Kats-Chernin's score evokes a number of musical genres to represent each of the characters and their specific life situations. For example, the Koala conservationist is introduced on stage singing to modal melodies with drawn-out melismas, sometimes using Latin words. These recall the style of medieval chant.

Ex.1 Koala's vocal line in *Undertow*: Sc.2.1, mm.3-8

ad lib over the accompaniment - can be free rhythmically

Koala

Ha - bi - tat ha - bi - tus

Koala

Ha - bi - tus

Using a technique also found in *Iphis* to signify courtship, a waltz is used to represent the married couple and their perfect image of their wedding day.

Ex.2 Wedding Couple's bridal waltz in *Undertow*: Sc 3.1, mm.12-17

The musical score is arranged in a system with seven staves. The top two staves are for the vocalists, Wife and Husband, both in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. They sing the lyrics: "cap - tured the mo - ment, they cap - tured your gaze. They cap - tured you per - fect - ly". The piano accompaniment consists of a keyboard (Kbd) with a right-hand melody of eighth notes and a left-hand accompaniment of eighth notes with a dotted quarter note. An accordion (Accord.) part enters in the fifth measure with a melodic line marked *mp*. The violin (Vln.) part is marked *arco* and *mp*, playing a melodic line. The viola (Vc.) part is marked *pizz.* and *mp*, playing a bass line. The double bass (Db.) part is silent throughout the excerpt.

One of the composer's most recent projects was to contribute music for the ballet *Amalgamate*.⁷⁰ The work premiered in Melbourne in 2006. The work was conceived as a cultural exchange between a composer of the classical tradition (Kats-Chernin) and one of the Aboriginal Tradition (David Page). The composer explains that she "wrote it together with David Page, which is important thing to remember, that I wasn't the composer by myself...it is very different, you can't sort of say it's my music, because it's not *just* me."⁷¹ The music of *Amalgamate* takes a single Aboriginal melody as a starting point.

In making this type of collaboration with an Aboriginal artist, as well as using Aboriginal music, Kats-Chernin joins a long list of Australian composers who have sought to engage with the music of the native inhabitants of Australia. To name but a few, these composers have included John Antill, Peter Sculthorpe, Margaret Sutherland, Anne Boyd and George Dreyfus.

In my interview of the composer, Kats-Chernin outlined for me the legal implications of using an Aboriginal song, and how that affected how the piece was composed:

"I was very careful with the Aboriginal melody because I didn't want to just use it, you know there are rights involved, you can't just sort of do it, I didn't want to get a lawyer and do it...those sort of issues take forever. They may take a year...we were already writing and I had to do the score by certain date. So I said to David, you know, let's just analyse the music and let's just see what's in it that we can hear, so that's what we're going to use, the idea of how the notes comes together, which intervals, and we just used that, but not the actual melody of that special fresh water/salt water song...when the actual traditional artist, Grant (Nundhirribala), came on board, he took one of *his* songs, and sort of appropriated it to that, David

⁷⁰ These observations are based on a performance that I attended on April 8th, 2006, Sydney Opera House.

⁷¹ Griffin, 79-80.

worked with him, and between them they worked it out, but already on top of the orchestral score.”⁷²

The text of the song itself concerns what happens when fresh water and salt water come together. The subject of the song also mirrors the collaborative creative process between the composers. The dance and choreography of the production was also the result of collaboration between the Australian Ballet and the Bangarra Dance Theatre.

Amalgamate constituted only the first half of a dance program entitled *Gathering*. The second half of *Gathering* revived the earlier production of *Rites*, using the complete score of Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*. *Amalgamate*, written for a small orchestra, is not as overtly primal as its famous partner piece. It was conceived as a counter weight, with a much more straight forward harmonic approach. Rhythmically it is also conceived in less complex terms, though its strongly defined rhythmic passages do bring momentum to the work. A didgeridoo is used and some of the orchestral textures imitate the techniques of the instrument. The orchestra is also used to percussive effect evoking the spirit of traditional Aboriginal dance.

While the work’s tonal idiom is typical of the composer’s more recent style, the composer also points to David Page’s pop-music background as influencing the style of the work: “it’s sort of pop-orientated because that’s what David likes, very much, he sings, and he was a child-star, when he was 12, he was actually the young Michael Jackson of Australia.”⁷³

When Kats-Chernin was asked what type of story or libretto attracts her to write a work, she replied that:

“it has to be a colourful story... you know opera has to have a bit more beyond the normal, it has to be weird and strange and sometimes: ‘eh, what’s happening? That’s a bit weird! How could that happen?’ It just happens because that’s opera, it’s not a normal

⁷² Griffin, 79-80.

⁷³ Griffin, 80.

world, and *Matricide* was...a weird story, the two girls who kill the mother, and *Undertow* was weird because all these really strange people come together, on the beach, and that's always interesting because you always find interesting people descend upon some place and they want their space, that's very normal...I like things that kind-of are outside the norm, yet at the same time, people identify themselves with."⁷⁴

This is a characteristic which Kats-Chernin's music shares: a combination of the strange and the familiar.

⁷⁴ Griffin, 86.

Chapter 2: *Mr. Barbecue*

This chapter examines the stylistic variety found in the songs of *Mr. Barbecue*, demonstrating Kats-Chernin's typical eclecticism, and investigates what unifying forces there are which bind the work together as a whole. Consideration is also given to how the more distinctly 'Australian' elements of the text and subject are portrayed, and how the composer's notion of 'fun' is achieved.

Mr. Barbecue is a staged cabaret piece for solo male voice (tenor) and a small instrumental ensemble consisting of a piano, violin, double bass, percussionist, clarinet (doubling on bass clarinet and alto saxophone), and a bassoon. The action takes place in a typical suburban backyard. There is only one character, and no continuous binding plot; rather, the work is a cycle of cabaret songs in which the tenor is cast as a stereotypical Australian male, reflecting on the nature of his life, and on the psyche of the modern man. The action takes place in a typical suburban backyard around the central icon of the barbecue. Kats-Chernin describes the action of this cabaret song-cycle as "a barbecue that goes wrong...which is very often the case."⁷⁵ The name of the central character is never known, apart from the reference to *Mr. Barbecue* in the title, although at two points in the score there is the hint of a nickname of 'Siegfried,' for reasons that will be explained.

The work is highly dramatic, and this is often deliberately overplayed to humorous effect. Kats-Chernin's music achieves this in some cases by making reference to some of the most dramatic works of musical theatre, including Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, and to more contemporary works, such as Mitch Leigh's *Man of La Mancha*.

Mr. Barbecue makes use of these musical references and other 'found objects,' in an approach which is similar to that observed in other theatre works by Kats-Chernin. Again these are used to communicate ideas found in the text and plot. While Kats-Chernin states that *Mr. Barbecue* is "not really amazing," she concedes

⁷⁵ Griffin, 84.

that “it’s fun, and that’s okay.”⁷⁶ Part of that ‘fun’ element no doubt comes from the choice of text, particularly in its references to the experiences of barbecue culture. There is a certain humorous incongruity, for example, in making a musical setting of the details of preparing sausages:

“Aussie fundraiser snag
Left over pink stuff in a bag
There is no meat in it
Ready in a minute
Eaten with Tomato Sauce
On (buttered) white bread of course.”⁷⁷

Many of the songs of *Mr. Barbecue* operate with a double meaning in the text, and sometimes it can be found that the musical setting of the text highlights the alternative meaning. Some of the double entendres are also sexual in nature, which may have led the composer to describe the show as “a bit rude and vulgar.”⁷⁸ The relationship between text and music is an essential part of my discussion. It must therefore be made clear that the text was not written by Elena Kats-Chernin, but by her librettist, Janis Balodis. The composer has stated that although her working method is extremely collaborative, her influence upon the text only extended as far as suggesting a particular atmosphere, style or genre for a given number.⁷⁹ This is important to know, as it means that Kats-Chernin’s music isn’t necessarily simply a reaction to the text but that the text and music were developed together.

A sound recording of *Mr. Barbecue* was also used in studying the work and will be referred to in the analysis.⁸⁰ The composer plays the piano in the ensemble and it is made evident in the recording that the score does not always represent the final performance decisions. Small changes to the text are made, as well as other minor musical modifications such as instances of bars repeated in introductions, or vamp-

⁷⁶ Griffin, 78.

⁷⁷ Elena Kats-Chernin, *Mr. Barbecue* (Sydney: Australian Music Centre, 2002), “The Sausage Song”.

⁷⁸ Griffin, 77.

⁷⁹ Griffin, 83.

⁸⁰ Elena Kats-Chernin and Janis Balodis, *Mr. BBQ*, Lyndon Terracini, Northern Rivers Performing Arts (Australian Music Centre CD 1128, no date given).

style sections. The piano part is also modified in places, with the composer choosing not to double certain solo lines, or sometimes simply providing a simpler chordal accompaniment. Where such deviations from the score are relevant, reference will be made to the recording.

The central icon of the barbecue in this work could be considered to be an 'Australian' presence in the work, much like other icons and ideas that have previously been identified in other works. A recent series of television commercials that aired during the lead-up to Australia Day celebrations, offer evidence of the link between the barbecue and notions of Australianness. In the 2006 commercial, for example, former AFL-player Sam Kekovich states that cooking lamb at a barbecue is the most 'Australian' activity that Australians celebrating Australia Day could participate in. Kekovich mocks recent bad behaviour by prominent Australians, stating that the problems were due to one thing: "Not enough Lamb... In fact, to be as Australian as I am, don your apron...whack some nice juicy lamb chops on the barbie, invite everyone over...celebrate living in the best bloody country on Earth. So don't be un-Australian, serve lamb on Australia day."⁸¹ Activities that make up many Australian's lifestyles, such as drinking beer, or wearing iconic 'budgie-smuggler' swimwear, are downplayed in favour of the ultimate patriotic act of cooking meat on the barbecue.

While the commercial is produced by Meat and Livestock Australia, who obviously have a financial interest in the perpetuation of barbecue culture, the image presented is far more indicative of this being a pre-existing tradition, rather than an attempt to create one. It is indeed this established tradition that is being sent up. The advertiser's choice of Sam Kekovich, a prominent ex-AFL footballer to speak in this commercial, promotes a 'macho'-image associated with cooking at the barbecue.

⁸¹ Christie, Benjamin, "Australia Day Commercial with Sam Kekovich by MLA"
<http://www.benjaminchristie.com/article/194/> (accessed 10 June, 2006).

A recent article by Michael Lallo also states that the barbecue holds "an important place in our national psyche."⁸² Lallo observes that:

"filmmakers use it to illustrate the Australianness of their characters (think Darryl Kerrigan in *The Castle*, holding up a charred lump of meat and asking, "Who ordered medium rare?"). Politicians use it to cultivate a man-or woman-of the people persona."⁸³

Lallo also refers to a book written by Mark Thomson, entitled *Meat, Metal & Fire*, which is described as a "homage to the great Aussie barbecue."⁸⁴ As Helen Rusak observes, the title of the first song in *Mr. Barbecue* is probably inspired by that of Thomson's book. This is where I will begin the musical analysis of Kats-Chernin's work, with each song considered in turn.

⁸² Michael Lallo "Get in the barbie queue" *The Sydney Morning Herald: Good Living* (19 February, 2008: 8-9), 8.

⁸³ Lallo, 8-9.

⁸⁴ Lallo, 8. The text referred to is Mark Thomson, *Meat, Metal & Fire* (Pymble, N.S.W.: Harper Collins, 1999).

“Meat, Metal, Fire”

In the opening number, the tenor sings of the transforming nature that barbecuing meat has. The spirit of the song can be summed up in a stanza found towards the end of the song:

“When fire becomes heat,
when earth becomes metal,
when flesh becomes meat:
the man becomes human,
except for Vegetarians!”

The text describes cooking at the barbecue as a type of ritual, or rite of passage that brings about an evolution into a higher state of being. That the character exists in a primitive state prior to the cooking of the barbecue is also suggested in the action of the production, where according to the composer, the hero is seen jumping up and down on the outdoor furniture to the repeated musical motive being played as the work opens.⁸⁵

The transformative effect of barbecuing meat is described in the commercials referred to earlier that promoted the eating of lamb on Australia Day. Sam Kevovich states: “Australian models holidaying in Asia, would get into a lot less trouble if they carried a couple of lamb chops in their handbags; Lamb could have prevented the boofheads perpetrating violence on our beaches – it’s bloody hard to bash someone with a cutlet; and we might not have lost the ashes if our cricketers picked up lamb chops, instead of mobile phones.”⁸⁶ While these claims are obviously exaggerated, the almost mythical power of the Australian barbecue culture is clearly evoked.

⁸⁵ Griffin, 85.

⁸⁶ Kevovich refers to three contemporary events: 1) Model Michelle Leslie being arrested in Indonesia, with illegal drugs in her purse; 2) The racially-motivated tensions and riots surrounding the assault of a lifeguard at Cronulla Beach (Sydney) during late 2005 and early 2006; 3) The Australian cricket team’s series loss to England in 2005 (the first time in 18 years), during which the prominent Australian cricketer Shane Warne was accused of harassing an English woman using text messages.

Kats-Chernin's musical setting of this 'transformation' features strong musical allusions to parts of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*. Predominantly these musical allusions refer to the 'Forging Scene,' found in *Siegfried*, Act I, Scene 3, where the young hero Siegfried rebuilds the shattered sword 'Notung' which belonged to his slain father, Siegmund. Both Wagner's and Kats-Chernin's scenes take place around a central fire of some sort—a furnace and a barbecue respectively—and both characters sing of the transformation that occurs during their songs, invoking the imagery of metal and fire. Siegfried sings:

“Blase, Balg! Blase die Glut!
Des Baumes Kohle, wie brennt sie kühn;
Wie glüht sie hell und hehr!
In springenden Funken sprühet sie auf...
...zerschmilzt mir des Stahles Spreu.”

(“Blow, bellows! Blow on the blaze!
How bravely burns the charcoal from the tree,
how bright and brilliant it glows!
It spits out showers of sparks:...
...and smelts the splinters of my steel.”)⁸⁷

In Wagner's work, Siegfried's reforging of the sword is the first in a series of heroic achievements: he breaks away from his surrogate father Mime, slays the dragon Fafner, then wakes the sleeping beauty Brünnhilde. Ultimately his actions are seen as fulfilling a destiny that leads to the redemption of love and the end of the reign of the Gods. Therefore, this act of reforging the sword has a particularly solemn sense of importance associated with it. It is this sense of solemnity and ritual that Kats-Chernin comically applies to the backyard rite of passage of cooking meat on the barbecue, by way of musical reference.

⁸⁷ Richard Wagner, *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Siegfried* Sir Georg Solti, Wiener Philharmoniker (Decca 455 555-2), 94.

Wagner's repetitive metallic strikes of Siegfried's hammer and anvil find their musical equivalent in Kats-Chernin's repetitive rhythmic figures played on corrugated iron with a metal bar. The choice of corrugated iron is appropriate, given the backyard setting.

The other instruments in Kats-Chernin's ensemble play rhythmically distinctive and repetitive motifs, underscoring the stage action. Here both Kats-Chernin's and Wagner's music is driven by a repeated rhythmic motif, while the harmony remains static for several bars at a time.

Ex.3 Repeated motif in "Meat, Metal, Fire," mm.1-2

(Strong, "metallic")

Piano

ff

The image shows a musical score for piano, measures 1-2. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The music is characterized by a strong, repetitive rhythmic motif. The upper staff features a series of chords with a strong, metallic quality, indicated by the instruction "(Strong, 'metallic')". The lower staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The dynamic marking is *ff* (fortissimo).

Ex.4 Repeated motif in *Siegfried* Act 1, Sc.3⁸⁸

Schwer und kräftig.

Viol. *ff*

Br. *ff*

SIEGF. *ff*

(Während des Schmiedens.)

Alle! Ho

Schmiedehammer.

Vc. *ff*

CB. *ff*

The image shows a musical score for Siegfried Act 1, Sc.3, measures 1-3. It features multiple staves for different instruments: Violin (Viol.), Trombone (Br.), Siegfried (SIEGF.), Horn (Ho), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (CB.). The music is characterized by a heavy and powerful repeated motif, indicated by the instruction "Schwer und kräftig." and the dynamic marking *ff* (fortissimo). The score includes the text "(Während des Schmiedens.)" and "Alle! Schmiedehammer.".

⁸⁸ Richard Wagner *Siegfried* (New York: Dover Publications, 1983), 142

The Valkyrie motif is arguably the most famous melody in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. In its original context, the Valkyrie motif is not associated with the heroics of the character Siegfried, but rather of Brünnhilde, the other Valkyries and their horses.⁹² The Valkyrie characters are portrayed as heroic, soldier-like maidens whose task is to collect the souls of fallen heroes for a place in the afterlife, in defence of the God's fortress, Valhalla.

At the point that the motif appears in *Mr. Barbecue*, Kats-Chernin writes in the score: "Heroically!" Underneath, she also writes in the score "Siegfried." Although the motif was originally applied to different characters in Wagner's original work, the inclusion of the Valkyrie motif in *Mr. Barbecue* serves as a reference to the heroic atmosphere of *Der Ring* in more general terms. This reference is successful due to the motif being well known, both from its original use by Wagner, and its frequent use in other popular culture.

The Valkyrie motif could be considered to be now a part of popular culture, for it has frequently appeared in films and on television. The Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia, though not a scholarly publication, is useful at least as an indicator of popular perception. It states that the Valkyrie motif is often used in popular culture "to represent stereotypical Grand Opera."⁹³ Wikipedia also indicates that the motif has been used in films including *Apocalypse Now*, *The Blues Brothers*, and the famous Bugs Bunny cartoon short *What's Opera Doc?*, as well as in numerous television commercials. The motif is used to slightly different affect in each of the above examples. In *Apocalypse Now*, the Valkyrie motif is heard on a loudspeaker aboard a fleet of American military helicopters in flight, and in battle, over Vietnam. The motif's use here suggests flight, military heroics, and the coming of death. In *What's Opera Doc?*, the motif is used to represent a more comical portrayal of Grand Opera as well as the associated themes of heroics and death as the cartoon character Elmer Fudd sings along to the Valkyrie motif with the words: "Kill the Wabbit! Kill the Wabbit! Kill the Wabbit!" As with Kats-Chernin's use of the motif, the comical intent

⁹² Monelle, 41-80.

⁹³ Wikipedia, "Ride of the Valkyries," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ride_of_the_valkyries (Accessed 26 July 2006).

is obvious here.⁹⁴

Kats-Chernin's quotation does not use the dotted rhythm of Wagner's original. They are replaced with syncopations that recall the style of ragtime, particularly in the piano part. As noted earlier, Kats-Chernin is well-known for her compositions in ragtime style, so this adaptation is a markedly personal one.

Ex.6 Syncopated 'Valkyrie motif' in "Meat, Metal, Fire" mm.47-50

47 **H** (Heroically!)

Bass Cl. *ff*
(“Siegfried”)

Vln. *ff*

V.

Pno. *loco*
(8th)

Bsn.

D.B.

Perc. **Timpani**

⁹⁴ In her thesis, Helen Rusak makes a passing comment on the musical significance of the inclusion of the Valkyrie motif. She states that

“...the word ‘Siegfried’ appears above the violin part where the instrumental section plays out a modified Wagner leitmotiv... the reference to Siegfried becomes significant later in the piece. Here it appears as allusion to the heroicism of the particular character from Wagner’s *Ring*, but it is also a reference to a leitmotiv that has become a modern day musical cliché for the heroic.” (*Simply Divine*, 181-182)

My own outline of the characters and their relevant musical motifs in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* makes clear that the motif is not a representation of the “particular character” of Siegfried, but rather it represents the heroic atmosphere of *The Ring* in general. Rusak’s thesis also does not include discussion of the other Wagnerian elements in the song.

“Alphabet Cuisine”

The second song in *Mr. Barbecue* combines a sense of child-like innocence with a child-like appreciation of ridiculousness. In the text, each letter of the alphabet is considered in order, naming at least one thing that can be cooked on the barbecue which begins with that particular letter. This type of structural device is much like a children’s game, whether it be an educative lyric or simply a song that displays a fascination with a newly discovered array of letters of the alphabet. For this number, it was the composer who requested that the lyrics be “like something of a prayer...because we wanted contrasting pieces.”⁹⁵ Especially in the light of this comment, the song brings to mind the Christian tradition of saying ‘Grace’ before eating a meal.

The word ‘choral’ is found in the score at the fifth bar. Not only does this relate to the chorale-style texture of the passage, but perhaps this is also suggesting that an atmosphere of reverence should be evoked by the performers. The orchestration also conveys this: crotales and a bell-like piano figure feature prominently in the four-bar introduction, adding to a sense of ceremony. These instruments simply outline a harmonic progression that proceeds as follows:

E-flat Major — A-flat Major — C-flat Major — E-flat Major.

The triads are all major and are thus one of the simplest constructs of Western music. This choice of harmony creates a very calm, undisturbed atmosphere. However, the C-flat Major chord in the progression avoids the blandness of absolute diatonicism.

⁹⁵ Griffin, 83.

Ex.7 “Alphabet Cuisine” mm.1-4

Clarinet $\text{♩} = 144-152$
mp
 Violin *mp*
 Voice
 Piano *p*
 Bassoon *mp*
 Double Bass *pizz.*
 Percussion *pp* Crotales

Although all these factors create a prayer-like atmosphere, the actual words chosen for each letter of the alphabet are quite irreverent, using puns and references to contemporary Australian language. This creates a sense of playful irony. For example: “B is for beef steak, done not so well.” Several Australian native animals are targeted, most of which are not usually consumed by humans: ‘J is for Joey jumping around the paddock, K for Koala stuffed with smoked haddock.’ Other items are of course just simply ridiculous: “E is for eating everything on the planet.” C is “for charred cat, on a hot tin roof” which refers to the title of a play written by Tennessee Williams. Nor is man’s best friend spared, when the protagonist exclaims that “D is for Dolphin and a dish that goes ‘woof woof.’”

The musical atmosphere that is initially established is gradually broken down as the alphabet proceeds. At figure C in the score, the composer writes “Child’s Song (faster, playful),” as the prayerful and solemn aspects of the piece give way to something more light-hearted. Apart from the faster tempo indication, the more playful atmosphere is also achieved with a rhythmically more active melody and there is a busier accompaniment, with violin, clarinet and later marimba providing obbligato lines.

Ex.8 Obbligato textures in “Alphabet Cuisine” mm.56-7

The image shows a musical score for measures 56 and 57. The score includes parts for Clarinet (Cl.), Violin (Vln.), Voice (Voc.), Piano (Pno), Bassoon (Bsn.), Double Bass (D.B.), and Percussion (Perc.).

Measure 56 features a vocal line with the lyrics: "Ssslow - ly bake snake for the tend' - rest cuisinne". The piano accompaniment includes a D#(b5)M7 chord. The clarinet and violin parts have complex rhythmic patterns, with the violin featuring a triplet in measure 57. The bassoon and double bass parts provide a steady accompaniment.

“Vegetarian Lover”

In this number, the protagonist sings of a counterpart that is his exact opposite—one that is both a woman, and a vegetarian. Opposites attract in this case, as the singer seems quite taken with the figure he sings of and who is only ever referred to as ‘Vegetarian Lover’. He describes this mystery figure as “Neat and petite, she smells so sweet” and “so nice to eat, my tasty treat.” Again using the imagery of food, she is also stated to be as “hot as cayenne”, referring to the hot red pepper of the same name.

The words ‘Vegetarian Lover’ are used repeatedly, as in the popular love song, “Maria” from Bernstein and Sondheim’s *West Side Story*, where the word ‘Maria’ is exclaimed some twenty-nine times in the song’s two and a half minute duration.⁹⁶ Kats-Chernin, as part of the collaborative process, suggested to her librettist that “maybe ‘Vegetarian Lover’ should be like an Italian serenade.”⁹⁷ That effect is played out in the music, though perhaps with more ‘Latin-American’ effect than ‘Italian.’ The violin is given an expressively written introduction to the number, a melody that is supported an octave below in the piano part. The percussionist is later instructed to play a “Bossa.” The Bossa-Nova style was developed in Brazil in the 1950’s and was quickly exported to the US and beyond. The typical lyrics of this style have been described as “playful, poetic and even surrealistic...the number one subject of the bossa nova was love.”⁹⁸ By this measure, the lyrics of the Kats-Chernin/Balodis collaboration authentically recreate the Bossa-Nova aesthetic.

Ex.9 ‘Vegetarian Lover’ Opening Violin Melody mm.1-5

Violin

molto vibrato, espressivo
f (“solistically”)

⁹⁶ Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim, *West Side Story* (London: Chappell, 1958).

⁹⁷ Griffin, 83.

⁹⁸ Claus Schreiner, *Musica Brasileira* (New York, London, : M. Boyars, 2002), 139-140.

“Men are like Cars”

The libretto of the fourth number makes direct comparison between men and their beloved cars:

“Treating your man like a car
‘s’ what wise women understand
Just service him regular
To have him eat out of your hand.”

The text alludes to car maintenance, but some of the imagery can be interpreted in several ways, including some lines that have sexual connotations.

The song uses elements of the ‘Swing’ genre throughout. Rusak states that here Kats-Chernin uses “a simulation of raunchy music generally associated with striptease.”⁹⁹ While no evidence is presented for this association, swing music has been associated with the striptease in numerous musicals and films such as the song and dance number “Take Back Your Mink” from Frank Loesser’s *Guys and Dolls*.¹⁰⁰ This musical striptease link is consistent with the potential for drawing sexual connotations from some of the lyrics in the Kats-Chernin. Rusak also observes that parts of the song could be described as “boogie-woogie.”¹⁰¹ The rhythmic drive of the characteristic boogie-woogie rhythms is certainly appropriate given the subject matter of cars. The clarinet is featured prominently throughout, including the fifteen-bar introduction. Rusak describes this opening clarinet passage as a “klezmer-style...tune.”¹⁰² Klezmer is of course a Jewish musical tradition, and its historical cross-influence with jazz music, including swing styles has been documented in the literature.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Rusak, *Simply Divine*, 187.

¹⁰⁰ Frank Loesser, *Guys and Dolls* (Winona, Minn. USA: Frank Music Corp, 1981).

¹⁰¹ Rusak, *Simply Divine*, 187.

¹⁰² Rusak, *Simply Divine*, 187.

¹⁰³ See, for example, Gary Giddins, *Visions of Jazz: The First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 646-650.

Ex.10 Swinging clarinet melody in "Men are like cars" mm.1-4



The swinging style is maintained throughout, and the instrumental break contains the most obvious use of boogie-woogie. In the recording, a reprise of the opening stanza is sung in the falsetto register. There is a sharp edge to the humour here, suggesting a certain male vulnerability by having the protagonist singing in falsetto, negating the authority of the bass-baritone voice.

“Tofu Song”

The text of this number sarcastically expounds the benefits of cooking with tofu, with the protagonist mocking this popular substitute for meat, especially at barbecues. Since the opening number of the cabaret show, the protagonist has been established as a full-blooded carnivore, and any seeming words of praise he sings are countered with irony:

“Sculpt a side of non-lamb
or a roasting non-chook
From a block
of rock hard tofu”

and

“Made from the very same magical goo as tofu
There is a non mango sauce easy to do
With orange food colouring, just mix it through.”

Turning abruptly from the boogie-woogie to supposed Asian mysticism, the musical setting here plays a strong part in creating the atmosphere of sarcasm. The piece begins with the soft strike of a gong, a Pentatonic scale (C Sharp—E—F Sharp—G SHARP—B) is used in a repetitive introductory melody, and this melody is harmonised in parallel fifths. All of these factors impart what could be described as an oriental feeling to the piece, achieved in an obviously clichéd fashion. The marimba and piano parts play the pentatonic melody in a high register, and the particular percussive colour of these instruments adds to the oriental effect. The irregular rhythm and mixed metres of the piece also suggest a non-western context. An air of ceremony and solemnity is created which is completely inappropriate to the text, despite the Asian origins of tofu.

Ex.11 Pentatonicism in "Tofu Song" mm.1-2

$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 92$

Clarinet in B \flat

Violin

Voice
(sing on repeat)
1.) To - fu ah to - fu What can't you do with to - fu?

Piano

Bassoon

Double Bass

Marimba

Percussion

“Waiting for Wood”

The text of this number explores the frustrations of the protagonist as he attempts to reignite his barbecue, due to a lack of wood to burn as fuel for the fire. He sings to his barbecue that he is “Waiting for Wood,” and “Can’t light your fire, though I ache with desire.” Our protagonist sings relatively low in his register, perhaps an indication of his depressed, ‘blue’ state, and this reflects how low his fire is at the moment.

The scores indicates that the tempo should be a ‘Slow Blues.’ The double bass plays a soft introductory melody in E minor, which contains a repeated descending figure. There a chordal accompaniment on piano. Interestingly, the chord progression proceeds: E minor — F-sharp-half-diminished—B7 (third inversion).

The melody comes to a rest on an F-sharp half-diminished chord, which is the same sonority as the famous ‘Tristan’ chord. A signifier of ‘desire’ ever since its use in Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, it is also a common jazz chord, which is appropriate in this ‘blues’ number.

Ex.12 Opening phrase of *Waiting for Wood*, mm.1-2, featuring a half-diminished chord.

The musical score consists of three staves. The top two staves are for the Piano, with a brace on the left. The Piano part begins with a melody in the right hand and a chordal accompaniment in the left hand. The melody starts on a half note E4, followed by quarter notes F4, G4, A4, B4, and C5. The accompaniment starts with a half note chord of E4, G4, B3, and D4. The second measure features a half note chord of F#4, A4, B4, and C5, which is a half-diminished chord. The bottom staff is for the Double Bass, with the instruction 'arco' above the first measure. It plays a descending eighth-note melody: E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3. A triplet of eighth notes (F3, E3, D3) is marked with a '3' below it.

Using brushes, the percussionist accompanies this number from bar 8 in a standard blues style, and the bassoon, violin and clarinet again add obbligato lines. At letter E, a rising motif is also used to represent the desire for the flames to rise higher, with the words:

“If you want to fly higher and higher,
On wings of desire, higher and higher
And everyone would if they could
You should have good wood.”

The tempo picks up also as the desire for wood and fire increases. An alternate meaning is suggested musically by the use of the ‘blues’ genre. Jane Stanley notes in her thesis how the genre of the ‘blues’ may sometimes be associated with “‘low-life’ and sex.”¹⁰⁴ There are easy-to-find sexual connotations in the text of this number. One could easily equate a lack of ‘wood’ with a man’s erectile difficulties in the context of the other words. His inability to “light your fire,” perhaps then alludes to his subsequent difficulties in sexual relations.

At letter F in the score, the blues genre subsides during an instrumental interlude. The piano contains the main musical interest in the section, with the double bass and crotales in a supporting role. In the fourth and final bar of this section¹⁰⁵, an expressive chromatic figure is found in the piano part. The rising chromatic figure the suspension from E-natural to E-flat over chromatic harmony together create an expressive moment that recalls the sound world of nineteenth-century romantic composers. It could even be considered as a back-to-front ‘Desire’ motif, from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*:

¹⁰⁴ Stanley, 26.

¹⁰⁵ In the recording, the first two bars are repeated, making a total of six bars.

Ex.13 Piano solo in *Waiting for Wood* mm.40 (top), compared with *Tristan und Isolde* mm.1-3 (bottom).¹⁰⁶

The image shows a comparison of two piano solo passages. The top passage is from *Waiting for Wood*, measures 40-43, featuring a chromatic melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand. The bottom passage is from *Tristan und Isolde*, measures 1-3, marked 'Langsam und schmachtend' (slow and languorous). It features a similar chromatic melodic line in the right hand and a bass line with a prominent bass note. A bracket above the top passage and a box around the bottom passage indicate the comparison. Lines connect the two passages, showing the similarity in their chromatic movement. The bottom passage includes dynamic markings like *pp* and *p*, and fingering numbers like 2, 4, and 5.

At this chromatic event, the protagonist’s wait for wood has clearly come to an end, for directly after this the blues start up again with the words: “What’s that I feel baby, touch me your touch, oh, that’s unreal, thanks ever so much. Now we got wood baby, I’ll light fire.” Both the vocal and instrumental lines use rising figures again to represent the rising of the ‘fire’ and the piece concludes with the line: “I am on fire.”

In this song, the ‘blues’ genre is used to convey the double meaning of the text. Remarkably, allusions to Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* are made to the similar effect. Moreover, both the use of contemporary styles and the allusions to Wagner link this song to others in the work that contain similar musical references.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* ed. Karl Klindworth trans. Frederick Jameson (Mainz : B.Schott's Söhne, 1906), 5

“Sausage Song”

The text concerns the protagonist’s love of sausages and their apparent unhealthiness. Musically, the scherzando character of the opening contrasts with the previous ‘blues’ number. There is also another bossa nova section, as well as a tango section, which will be discussed below.

The composer has noted that the opening melody of the song sounds like a famous section from Franz Liszt’s *Hungarian Rhapsody No.2*.¹⁰⁷ The opening lines, “The Sausage Song, will not take long, ‘cos there’s no meat in it,” obviously allude to the fact that sausages do not take long to cook on the barbecue, and also to the commonly known fact that some commercial sausages contain filler ingredients other than meat. One might note Rusak’s interpretation: “the idea here being that a quick, lively interlude that promises not to take long, the stereotyped Australian male’s sexual performance being equated with the cooking of a sausage.”¹⁰⁸ However I feel that while this piece comes straight after a number with sexual double entendres, much of the text in this number may be read in a more literal way.

Other references are made in the text to which many Australians would be able to relate to, given the popularity of the sausage as a food item at social gatherings. For example, the libretto includes a guide as to how to cook sausages: “Those who know don’t prick them first, cook them slow - so they don’t burst, those who know, often turn them....” Also included are serving instructions: “Eaten with tomato sauce, on buttered white bread of course.” While one could draw a connection between the scherzando character of the Liszt quotation and the character of the libretto, the very notion of setting these particular words to a melody from the canon of classical music only adds to the ridiculousness of the song. The protagonist’s love of sausages, and its surreal depiction in a sung text, is highlighted again musically when the music turns again to a bossa nova (the composer writes ‘Bossa nova’ in the score at letter C). The use again of this style links this song to the earlier “Vegetarian Lover” number. In both songs the protagonist is singing of a type of love.

¹⁰⁷ Griffin, 84.

¹⁰⁸ Rusak, *Simply Divine*, 191-192.

The musical genre of the tango is evoked when the libretto turns to any possible adverse health affects of sausages:

“You’ll pay twice
Once with your wallet
And once with your heart”

Jane Stanley has observed elements of the tango genre in Kats-Chernin’s *Iphis*. Stanley states that the composer’s tango reference is manifest in the form “of a rhythmic chordal accompaniment, a characteristic of the style.”¹⁰⁹ The characteristic rhythm of the tango can be identified here also. Stanley also observed how the tango was used in *Iphis* to evoke sexual passion, stating that the history of the genre as one that is danced-to with evocative choreography. In “The Sausage Song,” the tango genre is used humorously to convey the meaning that the protagonist’s love of sausages has become a dangerous obsession. These words in “The Sausage Song” might just as well have been applied to a dangerous romantic situation where one could be hurt both financially and emotionally – paying with both ‘your wallet’ and ‘your heart.’

The composer herself has identified a musical relationship between the “Sausage Song” and the “Habanera” of Georges Bizet’s *Carmen*.¹¹⁰ Stanley has also noted the musical and historical relationship between the habanera and the tango. Although not marked in the score, in the recording of the tango section one can also hear the castanets being played to a tango-like rhythm. Castanets of course have an instantly recognisable ‘Spanish’ sound, which provides another link to the opera *Carmen*. Bizet’s “Habanera” features that opera’s title character singing a discourse on the dangers of love. Kats-Chernin’s tango in the “Sausage Song” likewise features a discourse on the dangers of love, but this time the dangers concern a love of eating sausages.¹¹¹

109 Stanley, 85.

110 Griffin, 84.

111 Georges Bizet, *Carmen* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2002).

Ex.14 'Tango section' of "Sausage Song" mm.49-53

49 **E** Tango feel

The musical score consists of seven staves. From top to bottom: B♭ Clarinet (B♭ Cl.), Violin (Vln.), Voice (Vce.), Piano (Pno.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Double Bass (D.B.), and Percussion (Perc.). The key signature is one flat (B♭ major/E minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes lyrics for the voice part: "twice Once with your wa-llet and once with your heart. You pay heart." There are first and second endings marked "1." and "2." in the voice and piano parts. The piano part includes a "Drm" (drum) section with a "pizz." (pizzicato) marking. The percussion part is labeled "Drum Set (tango)".

Kats-Chernin in this one song alludes to three distinct musical genres and to two specific pre-existing compositions. These 'found objects' have been drawn together in a spirit of playfulness to interpret the text and to enhance the theatrical effect.

“Barbecue Rag (Siegfried in his Backyard)”

This number is the only purely instrumental work in the show. Kats-Chernin’s signature ragtime style is used throughout. The use of ragtime links this movement with the boogie-woogie character of “Men are like Cars,” and the ragtime version of the Valkyrie motif in “Meat, Metal, Fire.” The subtitle of this interlude again refers to the protagonist as ‘Siegfried’. The score gives no indication of Siegfried’s on-stage activities, but in the recording one can hear the roar of a lawnmower being operated and the singer breathing heavily at the end of the number. This is a fast ‘Rag’ (minim equals 112-116), with rapid quavers and showy virtuosic lines for both the clarinet and violin. At this tempo, the opening quavers of the piece strike a resemblance with one of the ‘Fire’ motifs from Wagner’s *Ring*. Among many occurrences, this motif is used in the ‘Forging Scene’ from the opera *Siegfried*, which has already been shown to be associated with the opening song of *Mr. Barbecue*.

This quotation of Wagner’s Fire motif has obvious relevance to the barbecue. In the recording of *Mr. Barbecue*, Kats-Chernin’s version of the motif is repeated at the beginning of the number, suggesting a vamp style. Given the dramatic and serious origins of this motif, its use as a vamp figure is decidedly irreverent. Some of the other melodic contours and harmonic content of this movement appear to be derived from the introduction, though do not quote the Fire motif directly.

Ex.15 'Fire' motif in *Siegfried* Act 1, Sc.3¹¹²



Ex.16 "Barbecue Rag" Opening, mm.1-3

¹¹² Wagner, *Siegfried*, 91.

“Dogs know how to live”

This song pays homage to ‘man’s best friend’, his faithful dog.¹¹³ Several observations about a dog’s lifestyle and attitude to life are made. These are compared to various situations in the protagonist’s own past. Some are mentioned as grievances against women, with the suggestion that dogs are easier to get along with. The words contain a sense of the dramatic as he sings “Dogs never lie about love, Dogs always forgive” and “Dogs never harbour regrets.”

The humour of these statements is heightened in the musical setting, and Kats-Chernin again utilises ‘found objects’ to convey this sense of theatre. The repeated quavers of the piano accompaniment recall a ballad style found in popular music in the 1960s or 70s. The composer observes that the song sounds like ‘The Impossible Dream’ from the musical, *The Man of La Mancha*¹¹⁴ written in 1965.

Ex.17 “Dog’s know how to live” mm.1-6

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system includes a Voice line and a Piano accompaniment. The Voice line is in bass clef with a 12/8 time signature. The lyrics are "Dogs ne-ver lie a-bout". The Piano accompaniment has a right hand with repeated eighth-note chords and a left hand with a bass line. A chord of Ab is indicated above the first measure. The second system includes a Voice line and a Piano accompaniment. The Voice line continues with the lyrics "love. Dogs al-ways for-give". The Piano accompaniment continues with the same pattern. Chords of Bb and Ab are indicated above the piano part.

¹¹³ The dog’s inclusion as an item to be barbecued in the second number notwithstanding!

¹¹⁴ Griffin, 83.

Ex. 18 "The Impossible Dream"¹¹⁵ mm. 1-4

1. To dream the im - pos - si - ble dream, to
 (2. To) right the un - right - a - ble wrong, to

fight the un - beat - a - ble foe, To
 love pure and chaste from a - far, To

The ballad-style accompaniment subsides only during a brief middle section, which is marked as a 'Waltz.' It is notated in 12/8 time and the accompanying inner beats (the 'pah-pah' of oom-pah-pah), are marked 'woof woof' in the score, which emphasises the lighter style. The harmony is also largely static on the tonic chord, with scale degrees 1-5-1-5 heard repeated in the bass line. At this point the libretto has also become more light-hearted:

"A dog's gotta do, what a dog's gotta do,
 lifting his leg on the neighbour's lawn."¹¹⁶

This mood contrasts with that of the dramatic opening section. In this song, Kats-Chernin has balanced two types of playfulness: the parody of the dramatic, and the trivial waltz character of the middle section.

¹¹⁵ Mitch Leigh, "The Impossible Dream," *Man of La Mancha* (New York: Sam Fox Publishing Company, 1965), 2.

¹¹⁶ The second line here is meant to be spoken in the score, but in the recording of the live performance the vocalist is silent — one hears only the laughter of the audience. Presumably at this point the protagonist is visually conveying the text of this last line.

“Impossible Men”

While the text of this number recalls some of the stereotypical grievances against men,¹¹⁷ it also alludes to some of the more serious psychological issues of the modern man. The first stanza proclaims:

“In this age of uncertainty
There’s a lot of wringing of hands
About the impossibility
For a man to be a real man.”

The lines of this stanza allude to a crisis of modern male identity, a notion that has been recognised in Steve Biddulph’s psychology text, *Manhood*. Biddulph suggests a number of causes that may have contributed to the modern state of masculine identity and notes that some have felt that the feminist movement over the course of the twentieth-century has had an adverse effect. Biddulph quotes the famous Australian comedian and interviewer Andrew Denton as remarking: “Women were repressed by men for thousands of year. Finally men are getting a little repression – big deal! It’s the ‘repression we had to have!’”¹¹⁸ Biddulph also points to the more long standing and cumulative cultural expectations of men, and the “dehumanisation” of men and their role in families “that grew worse with the advent of the industrial era,” where a man’s role in the immediate family became peripheral.¹¹⁹

The opening line, “Impossible Men,” is set with an angular melody, marked in the score with the word “Mantra.” This becomes a repeated motif throughout the song. Helen Rusak’s thesis makes some pertinent points concerning the function of this melody in her analysis of this song. She observes that:

“A mantra is a musical chant that in Hindu and Buddhist worship acts as the basis for a meditation. It is generally a short melody with

¹¹⁷ Such as those found in Linda Stasi’s *A Field Guide to Impossible Men* (Edmond OK, USA: St Martins Pr, 1987).

¹¹⁸ Steve Biddulph, *Manhood: An Action plan for changing men’s lives* (Sydney: Finch Publishing, 2002), p. 11.

¹¹⁹ Biddulph, 30.

limited pitch range. The chant...in the Mr. Barbecue song cycle is, however, anything but meditative. Certainly Mr. Barbecue is going through some kind of meditation on the idea that men are impossible, more as a contemplation of external ideas and a therapeutic reflection on these ideas. However his meditation is tinged with anger and the shape of the mantra melody mirrors this.”¹²⁰

Ex.19 Angular repeated melody in “Impossible Men” mm.1-2



Rusak also states that this melody is used as a “vehicle for Mr. Barbecue to gain clarity of thought and enlightenment regarding his true purpose. Paradoxically, his kind of enlightenment is almost in direct opposition to the nirvana that Buddhist and Hindus seek through their meditations, just as the theme of his mantra is in complete contrast to the simple mantras that generally accompany meditation.”¹²¹

Stylistically, the music makes allusions to quasi-bebop jazz style. The “Mantra” motif is supported at all times by instruments playing in unison (or at the octave) with the protagonist. The longer stanzas of the song are accompanied with swung figures on the drumkit, the left hand on piano playing a steady walking bass-line, with the other instruments play obligato figures that melodically come together at times. At bar 49, the music in fact recalls the swing style of “Men are like Cars.”

¹²⁰ Rusak, *Simply Divine*, 198.

¹²¹ Rusak, *Simply Divine*, 199.

Ex.20 "Men are Like Cars" mm.14-15

14

B until ready
(every 2nd time) **C**

B♭ Cl.

Vln. until ready

Vce. until ready

Pno. until ready
dim.

(8th)

Ex.21 "Impossible Men" Letter 'F' mm.49-52

49 **F**

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vce.

Pno.

3 3 3

8th 8th

“My Father’s Eyes”

In this number, the protagonist reflects on his aging self, and how he increasingly resembles his own father. For example, he sings of his daily shaving ritual where: “Every morning while I’m shaving, seeing through my disguise, looking back at me, are my father’s eyes.” He tells of how he talks to his own son “in my father’s voice” and describes it as a “nightmare” when he begins to recognise more than a physical likeness to his father: “I’m my father, behind my father’s eyes.”

That the protagonist has this ‘nightmare’ image of sharing anything in common with his father is not surprising. To refer again to the Biddulph’s *Manhood*, he states that many men are ‘at war’ with their fathers: his research asserts that thirty-percent of adult males do not speak to their fathers, another thirty-percent have a ‘prickly’ relationship with the fathers, and only ten percent see their relationship with their father as ‘deep and sustaining.’¹²² He also asserts that a man’s sense of masculinity is unconsciously based on their own father’s masculinity. Biddulph writes: “Most men realise (with alarm) that their’s father’s mannerisms, stances and even words are deeply a part of them, and likely to emerge at any time. If you are at war with him (your father) in your head, (then) you are at war with masculinity itself...you are hopelessly divided against yourself.”¹²³ It is this ‘nightmare’ that this song in *Mr. Barbecue* alludes to. As the song proceeds, the protagonist finally laments the death of his father, but also takes comfort from his observation that “my son has my father’s eyes,” as he realises that his father lives on in his son.

The text is very introspective on a topic that is of a very personal nature. The instrumentation found in the score features only a piano, and the choice of a solo instrument only contributes to the intimacy of this song. In the recording, the violin is used in the last nine bars, adding an instrumental colour which lends an air of sentimentality, especially as it enters when the protagonist sings of how his own offspring will continue his father’s family line¹²⁴.

¹²² Biddulph, 33.

¹²³ Biddulph, 34.

¹²⁴ A clarinet entry is referred to in the score at Figure C, but it is not heard in the recording of the production.

Beginning in F Major, the harmony is tonal throughout. The movement could be described as being in a soft and sentimental ballad style. The accompanying figures of the piano are in quavers that predominantly outline arpeggios, although there is some neighbour-note movement.

Ex.22 Solo piano accompaniment in “My Father’s Eyes” mm.1-3

♩ = ca. 84

Voice

1.)Tur-ning thi - rty (the) mor - ning
2.)mor - ning while I'm

Piano

The reduced instrumentation of this song is unique in the cabaret work. This song is also the only song that doesn't appear to use musical devices or found objects to humorous or ironic effect. The text can be taken literally and Kats-Chernin writes to create a genuinely intimate atmosphere.

“Barbecue Zen”

This number was composed as the final song of the work.¹²⁵ The text suggests that if a man loses his direction in life, then he should try to return to the spirituality and ethos of the barbecue: ‘Barbecue Zen.’ The hero lists many things that could be going wrong in a man’s life, and I will quote just a few examples:

“When your whole life is going up in flames....when ev’rything you do ends up the same, ratshit and pearshaped...when love’s a comedy and you are the joke...when you’re not as rich or clever, handsome as the other bloke...”

If this is the case, the protagonist suggests one should “Try Barbecue Zen...what men do when they need to get back to just being men, Barbecue Zen is men chasing dreams, ev’-ry man has that fire lighting gene...Barbecue Zen is...lighting fires again.” This recalls the notion found in the first song, “Meat, Metal, Fire” that cooking at the barbecue is considered to be a transformative ritual. The final number suggests that continuing to cook at the barbecue is an essential part of a fulfilling existence.

This song is the only number to feature the (alto) saxophone, and the number opens with a solo on this instrument. This solo is immediately followed by the entry of the vocalist, whose melody is related in shape to the saxophone melody.

Ex.23 Opening Alto saxophone in “Barbecue Zen” mm.1-3

Alto Saxophone

Ex.24 Solo vocal line in “Barbecue Zen” mm.5-8

Vce

When your whole life is go - ing up in flames when ev' - ry - thing you do ends up the same

This vocal line also bears a strong similarity to the opening melody of “Tofu Song”, both in its melodic shape and its pitch content; the same pitch classes of the earlier number’s pentatonic scale are used here in the finale. This pentatonic scale once again refers to the ‘Orient,’ and this is entirely appropriate, considering that the Eastern origins of true Zen philosophy are widely known.

The tempo of this number picks up, and Kats-Chernin calls for the percussionist to play a ‘disco’ rhythm, as the piece takes on a steadier pulse with simpler harmony. The continued use of the alto saxophone contributes to the associations with popular music.

In bar 58, the percussion is instructed to play a “Bossa” rhythm again. While this song is unique in the show in evoking the ‘disco’ genre, a link can be drawn to both “Vegetarian Lover” and the “Sausage Song”, which also utilise ‘Bossa’ characteristics.

Encore: "Wrecked Eggs"

This song was not always heard in performances of *Mr. Barbecue*, and it is not present on the available recording. The composer comments that "it was just a bit silly, it was very silly," and indicates that the preferred encore piece of the ensemble was in fact "Sausage Song."¹²⁶ Perhaps in this song, the composer overstepped her own limits of what she considers 'fun,' leading to her conclusion that it was simply "very silly."

The text of this song is itself a *bricolage* in the truest sense. It combines fragments of different proverbs and popular phrases to create new sentences, for example: "What's good for the goose, is another man's poison." True to the occasion of the barbecue, all of the proverbs or phrases are in some way related to food. The resulting phrases do not all necessarily make perfect sense. They are however, generally combined with a sense of wit, and often their full meaning could only be understood with prior knowledge of the complete phrase. Take for example, the opening line of the song: "Kissing won't last: cookery do, ask the old granny who lived in a shoe."

The first part of this phrase takes a famous quotation from George Meredith's 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel': "Kissing don't last: cookery do!"¹²⁷ The second refers to the popularly known nursery rhyme where the "old woman in shoe" feeds her children broth (without bread), and seems to lack much more affection than whipping them all, before sending them to bed. The notion that food is more essential than anything can be traced throughout the whole of *Mr. Barbecue*: cooking and eating have been the central activities of the protagonist from first number onwards.

Other phrases that are combined in *bricolage* include "Revenge is a dish best eaten from a pig's ear," "Don't count your chickens before the cookie crumbles," and of course the combined phrase from which the title of the song is derived: "Men cannot live by walking on egg shells."

¹²⁶ Griffin, 84.

¹²⁷ George Meredith *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (New York: Modern Library, 1927): Chapter 28.

The title of the song is indicative of the fractured nature of the original phrases, and appropriately these fragments give birth to a new construction, in a process that I have alluded to previously as being analogous to cooking an omelette.

Ironically, the musical setting of this encore number is actually far less of a *bricolage* than the text. Most of the music is composed in a vaudeville style, with a chordal 'oom-pah' style throughout. The harmony is appropriately tonal, beginning in the key of A Major, although no key signature is given.

Ex.25 'Oom-pah vaudeville-style' in *Wrecked Eggs* mm.5-8

5 **A** *suddenly fast tempo!* ♩ = 144

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vce.
Kis - sing won't last but coo - ke - ry do Ask the old gran - nie who lives in the shoe

Pno.
pizz.

Bsn.

D.B.

Perc.

The piece modulates up by semitone to B-flat major, before then modulating to B Major. A technique commonly found in musicals, the practice of modulating through keys by semitone can be observed, for example, in the famous vaudeville song, "Gee, Officer Krupke" from *West Side Story*, where each verse is sung a semitone higher than the previous one.¹²⁸ Kats-Chernin's stylistic consistency here gives an overall artistic unity to the many disparate references in the text.

Conclusion

Consideration must be given to answering two questions posed earlier: 1) What are Kats-Chernin's motivations to compose with such musically disparate 'found objects?; and 2) How do these disparate influences come together to form a coherent whole?

As the composer herself acknowledges, Kats-Chernin's music reflects the range of cultures in which she has lived and worked. From the outset, I have suggested that Kats-Chernin's use of diverse musical styles and references to extant compositions communicate ideas associated with the original context of these musical 'found objects.' In cases such as Wagner's 'Valkyrie' motif, the meaning is derived not only from its original context, but also from its use in popular culture. Genres from popular culture are also employed, carrying with them certain associations through which the composer communicates. These genres include tango, waltz, disco, bossa nova, boogie-woogie, ragtime and bebop, and extend to the evocation of oriental musical clichés. Kats-Chernin sometimes uses these to support the drama or humour of the text, and sometimes to elucidate double meanings. Sometimes the humour is created by musically overplaying the drama. As observed throughout this paper, a sense of playfulness or 'fun' is a recurring characteristic of the composer's musical approach.

The subject matter of the Australian barbecue and the continuity provided by the use of single character lends an extra-musical unity to the work. Musically, certain

¹²⁸ Bernstein, *West Side Story*.

unifying elements have been observed in the work. Many related 'found objects' recur at appropriate times throughout the work. Allusions to specific works of the classical canon include several references to Wagner, and also to Liszt and Bizet. The "Habanera" becomes a tango, while two of Wagner's leitmotifs are transformed into ragtime. While removed from their original context, the recurring allusions to these works help to unify the piece. The ragtime genre in turn is closely related to the styles of boogie-woogie, swing and bebop. The use of these closely related jazz genres over the course of the show has a unifying effect. Another popular music style that recurs is the Bossa Nova, which can be heard in songs that express surreal notions of love. While the concluding number features the more recent 'Disco' genre, its 'Bossa' section alludes to earlier movements. In a similar manner, its oriental musical devices link the movement with the earlier "Tofu Song". Given that the work is a series of cabaret songs, these links should not be overstated, but nonetheless point to a consistency of musical thought. *Mr. Barbecue* is a work that is eclectic, yet whole; strange, yet familiar; and dramatic, yet 'fun,' and serves as an excellent and informative example of Kats-Chernin's approach to musical composition.

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Discography

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APPENDIX 1: My Interview with the Composer

David Griffin's Interview with Elena Kats-Chernin, 15th May, 2006,
Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney.

DG: One of the things that motivated me in coming to my thesis topic was the amount of time that you've spent in different cultures, you were born in Uzbekistan, then moved to Moscow, then spent some time in Sydney, then a dozen or so years in Germany and a dozen at least in Australia. The average person can get a snapshot of different cultures from holidaying and touring, and other forms of research, but you've spent a considerable amount of time in each of those very different places, and I was wondering if you saw that as a big part of the eclecticism in your music, generally?

EKC: Possibly correct, I mean, probably the least time I spent in a place was in Tashkent, where I was born, I was four, and then we moved, so my memory's just like a blur, I remember, a little bit of a house, a little bit of people that were there and one dog that bit my sister that which looked like a horse to me, because I was so small and the dog was so big, and I'll never forget that moment. But that was when I was four, so you know that was the biggest memory I have and we moved to a place called Yaroslavl, it's on the Volga River and it's four hours away, 360 kilometres from Moscow, and I spent my childhood there from four till fourteen, till I went to Moscow. I went to Moscow when I was fourteen, to study. So, I stayed there for 3 years, and then we came to Australia. I think the most formative years were in Moscow really, even though there were only three years, but they were living away from home, studying really hard, all the musical background stuff: harmony, music history, analysis, great teachers, great aural training, fantastic, you know, really hard, the old school, round the clock really, never got enough sleep because we worked so hard, and then I got here (Sydney). That was different again, because Australia was a melting pot of cultures, I basically brought with me my Russian culture and what I was brought up on: lots of Russian music, lots of Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky, ingrained in my brain. And then I was learning a lot of modern music, I was really interested about that, because it was kind of not known in Russia, it was almost forbidden to learn, even Schoenberg, Webern and Berg was very anti-socialist, so we really didn't get the chance to learn that music much...a little bit, but not very

much, and so I was really hungry for that information. That's what I get really when I get to Australia, I had great teachers like Richard Toop telling me all these things, which are in the world, Stockhausen, Boulez, Berio, amazing stuff, which for me was just an eye opener and I was really interested in that. I was interested in doing slightly outrageous things, against the norm, whatever that was.

DG: In some ways you would have been very lucky to have *him* there.

EKC: Very lucky. Absolutely. He was the one who showed me the music of Lachenmann's, to whom I then went to study. See, that was the reason I went away because I wanted to study with this incredibly radical composer who used the instruments in a very unusual way, and whose thinking was very, very non-conventional, very strict, very uncompromising, incredibly good teacher, Richard made sure I went to someone who wasn't just a good composer, interesting composer, but also a very good teacher and Lachenmann was, still is, a good teacher.

My German experience happened after that, that was in Germany, in Hannover, and I sort of got stuck there, because of my family.

DG: So I'm wondering about composers like Brahms, who you've said in the past that you have some influence from or admiration. Was Brahms something that you learnt in Russia?

EKC: Mmmm. It must have been a very old quote, because I haven't mentioned Brahms in probably the last ten years.

DG: For sure, it was an old quote.

EKC: It's funny, because I have completely forgotten that, because I am no longer at all.... inspired....

DG: I think it was Brahms through Schoenberg, when you said it.

EKC: That's right, no, you see I love Brahms. I'm constantly changing, so I really can't tell, it's really hard to remember what I'm inspired by. Brahms broke a lot of rules you know. In how the concerto should be, how the structure should be, he sometimes used in concerto form, he used the concerto instrument as an orchestral instrument, that's what was interesting for me, just the way he broke the rules and the way he built his pieces, not necessarily the melody that he uses, or the material in itself. I am always more interested in the way the material gets used rather than what material it is. And maybe that's why later I went to Ravel, you know, as my hero, and then, recently there was again another composer, but again I can't remember it's just that it constantly switches, that's why it could be Bach, then I get disappointed in some pieces and I say, oh, you ramble on and on and on, and then I change my mind.

There's a vast information, there's so much music. The problem is with the person who writes a lot, you know I do too, write every single day, there is probably a lot of rubbish in that. A lot of material you write...not all of it can be good, obviously. A lot of it I throw away anyway, but some of it gets through my filter, and then I say 'oh, how can I ever let that slip!' and that's horrible, and you know, I'm sure even composers in the past have done that. Funnily enough I withdrew a piece of mine, only to find that two weeks later that it had just been performed somewhere. That is apparently like a superstitious ritual, that somebody, even my publishers, that if you withdraw the piece, immediately people get interested in it. But it wasn't even that, the chamber group, "Perihelion," which no longer exists, didn't even know I withdrew it— it was suddenly it was on CD, they performed it and recorded it, and it was on the CD, it's a piece called *Langsam*. But I withdrew it immediately after it didn't get performed, because somebody got sick, and thought 'okay, that piece does not have a good future.' I just felt that, maybe it's a bad piece, maybe it should never get performed, but then it did, and now it exists on the CD and it's really quite good! But I get so un-confident sometimes.

DG: That reminds me of a piece of yours that I found in the Australian Music Centre Library, the *Advance Australia Fair* variation.

EKC: Oh my God! That nobody knows! It's just on one CD, which was sold out immediately and was gone, and nobody ever heard of it since. One of the weirdest

collections, I remember that was a big thing for me, because you know, these things come full circle, they told me, don't write an arrangement, write a piece in your style but base it on *Advance Australia Fair*, that's why I called it *Fantasy on an Anthem*, I did not call it *Advance Australia Fair*, that I wouldn't have done that, but I said it would have been so much easier to write an arrangement, you can write in a couple of days you know. Writing really a piece based around it, but not quite that, it was a two and half, three minutes orchestral piece, it took me forever, honestly it took me three weeks or so, just a really big thing. Of course nobody can actually hear the *Advance Australia Fair*. Although, if you listen hard you can hear it.

DG: Oh I did. I played it for my mum and told her to guess what the tune was.

EKC: And she knew?

DG: She struggled, and then I said this bit, listen to this bit, and then she said 'oh yeah' and then she hummed that little fragment, and then said 'oh, but what IS it?' She could recognise it, and eventually I told her and she said, 'Oh, that's very good'.

EKC: Oh, well you mum is very understanding. Not everyone would be so understanding. That is so funny. It's the only 'way-out' piece on that CD, they didn't tell me, they told me to be myself— at that point I was writing like that, that was my style, that's when I was writing *Cadences* and *Concertino*, I was writing things were things always kind of just a bit, just beside something you expect, but not quite that. And now I write more exactly what it is, but in those days I escaped from the real thing, but tried to make a piece a little bit like the real thing, but not quite. And that was a really hard experience for me, but funnily enough last week I wrote a new arrangement of this piece, but for String Quartet, and a voice, but I've stuck to the real chords, the real thing and the only thing took as a challenge was virtuosic violin writing, (demonstrates vocally), double stops and stuff like that, so I've just made it a bit flashy, but I've always felt that I kind of stuffed up when writing *Fantasy on an Anthem*. It's interesting you bring up that piece, because that piece is so...old, it's '96 I think. You know why I know that? Because I remember exactly where I sent it from, I sent it from Newcastle, I'd just got a prize for a piano piece, *Charleston Noir*, But I was in Newcastle receiving that prize in a ceremony there, and I was just finishing it

up in the hotel, and sending it off from there and it got lost in the mail, and I remember I thought 'Oh god, I hope I've got a copy somewhere' but I did have a copy somewhere, but it was a really annoying thing, you know in those days the post didn't work so well, it works better now, because people don't send so much stuff, in those days post was everything people had, now a lot of people don't send, so there's not that much going around. I *think*. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong, anyway. That is enough of that piece! That's definitely the piece that won't be played before a football game or something.

DG: Maybe not, I don't know, but if they put me in charge, I might do it.

EKC: Sweet, that's very sweet, that's so fun.

DG: What popular music did you know in Russia, and in those formative years, if you had a chance?

EKC: Well, In Russia we didn't have much. We had Socialist-Pop. Which was a mixture between classical chords and folklore, you know, Russian folklore, folk music, so kind of the Socialist Pop music was very straight music and you can't really compare to any of today, probably 'Schlager' in Germany, you would compare it to, very straight-forward, un-threatening music, it's the kind, let's say, it's the kind that probably Anthony Callea would be singing, that sort, very unthreatening, easy for the masses, but usually just a very simple message of love or whatever, or about Russian/Soviet/Proletariat stuff. Five-year plan, you know. A lot of heroic stuff. You heard a lot of army singing.

DG: Red Choir?

EKC: Yeah. They were very good, I must say, fantastic stuff...on the radio there was a lot of classical music, a lot of Rachmaninoff, it was, I must say, in that way we weren't rubbished with a lot of pop music at that point, the brain was still kind of pure, plus we only had one channel on the radio, there was nothing like here. I knew that *Jesus Christ Superstar* had just happened, and some way we got a thing of reel to reel tape and we had the machine, and somehow one day I did hear a bit of it, but

somehow it broke in the middle and I remember we only heard the beginning, and that was it, just a little bit of it, and then we heard bands like The Beatles, and sometimes, Blood Sweat and Tears, and that's it from my knowledge of pop music, let's say, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, we heard a bit of that, but it was very underground, only when people went overseas and brought something back, a record.

DG: So it was a novelty.

EKC: Very much a novelty. You wouldn't get it, it was black market stuff. Maybe it was the things I didn't know that was so interesting when I got here (Sydney), when I started closing the gaps of what I didn't know, that's what I was immediately after,

DG: So when you came to Sydney, along with Schoenberg and Webern and whatever, Berio....

EKC: I immediately went to second hand shops and started buying everything, records, you know, all, Black Sabbath, everything, everything I had heard about, but that never got, and then when I listened to them, I actually started sending them to my friends in Russia because it's Christmas, I mean they could sell it and then live off it for a year. It was that sort of market at the time. I felt good sending stuff over, to my poor school mates. But first I listened to this. And then I realised there was this cassette recorder you could buy in Australia, then you could actually copy, I mean for the first time in my life I saw a copy machine. We used to copy everything by hand and if you needed another copy, you need to write it again. So when I saw that you put 10 cents in and you get a copy, I couldn't believe it, I thought it was a miracle, a miracle happened. There were a lot of things that we take for granted. You take email for granted. For me, I had to learn it, but the copy machine for me was just, was unbelievable, that was the biggest thing.... that saved so much time...and trouble.

DG: Is there anything you can think of specifically from your origins, any connection from Uzbekistan, as separate from Russia.

EKC: Yeah, not really.

DG: You were four.

EKC: It's very hard. Do you remember anything from when you were four?

DG: Not much. No.

EKC: You are formed in that time, but you don't remember, your parents remember, but you don't. It's hard.

DG: I guess I wasn't asking so much from your memories of four, but if you feel any connection to Uzbekistan?

EKC: No, I have no connection to Uzbekistan, at all. Not really, because the language spoken was Russian, it was very much part of Russia, part of the Soviet Union, it was very Russialised, Russified, whatever you call it, and then 'un-Russified' you know, when stuff happened with, transparency, Perestroika, and so I remember of course all the Russian stuff which is ingrained after we left Tashkent. That's very hard to explain though. Very subconscious. And I feel I am getting old, because it's coming out more and more. And I think it's because when you get older— *you* don't know yet (laughing), but you will, the old memories starting to come up, you know, the really old. Things you've forgotten. And don't think about and suddenly they are just up there. You get brought back by music, by something. It's nostalgia really.

DG: I also had a question about the Russian influences, to what extent do you think, there was a period where, they came back to you, where you started thinking more about Rachmaninoff or Tchaikovsky, *Second Piano Concerto*, or...

EKC: I know! (Laughing) It's embarrassing actually....

DG: I mean even before that, *Purple Prelude* and *Russian Rag*, and those types of things, but I wondering, what's the state of that at the moment?

EKC: For me the most Russian piece after from *Purple Prelude*, and of the course the *Second Piano Concerto*, which was based on *Purple Prelude* anyway, was actually

Zoom and Zip. It's not existing on CD. It's only existing on my kind of CD, my recording, but that has the most Russian material on it. Recently, two years ago I wrote a piece called the *Maiden and the Spirit*, it's based on Russian fairy story, on the motifs of Russian fairy story, which I made up and then it's also, one movement, based on a Russian sort of, urban song which I appropriated from Yaroslavl, which in this case I called Chastooshki, Patter-Songs so I actually used real folklore, you know, in that piece, and that's extremely harmonious and tonal, and romantic kind of, probably most I've ever done, because I didn't think this piece would ever get a big airing, ok well it will just get performed eight times by a piano trio, and it was a very conservative audience I was writing for, but also I never thought the piece would have a long life, but now everyone wants to play it, it's a bit embarrassing (laughing), that's what I was worried out, I said 'El, you just want to write for one occasion' and suddenly, it's out there and I said 'oh my god, I don't want to write like this forever', it's just one-off, you know, I just wanted to write, one-off remote, like a dance piece, almost. Strangely, it's a little bit like Arensky, who is a Russian composer, which is one of my favourite piano trios actually, and I didn't even try to think like him but you know you draw on your memories, and the memories are kind of made up of stuff, sometimes I just like to not think that much when I write. But when I look back I think, "Oh 'that' sounds a bit like 'that', I don't know if I should leave that", but I'm writing at the moment a lot of pieces for flute, piano, cello, for recorder, harpsichord and cello. It's all sort of very harmonious, almost popular pieces, in style, a mixture of film music, popular music, sort of.... certainly not modern music, I mean not contemporary sounding, dissonant, edgy, innovative, would you say, intellectual stuff. Sometimes, I do stuff like this and it's fun, I've kind of, I guess I sort of went very much into this sort of popular direction, if you could say that. I'm sure I'm speaking very bad English right now, but it's just very hard to define. I guess I just decided to break from this really 'head music', you know. In the last few years I started to use more of my intuition and I always think I still have some years in me left, and one day I'll just come back to this other concept, you know, more challenging stuff, but at the moment, everybody who commissions me wants my music how I write it now. And I like to do what people ask me, I mean, people pay me money to write and I just have to do what they ask me to do, even though if I really hated it, I wouldn't do it. I can only write what I really want to write, I'm pretty strong actually.

DG: But you kind of say you are embarrassed a bit?

EKC: A little bit. Let's pretend, if my piece gets performed together with a piece of Stockhausen, a piece by Liza Lim, a piece by Brett Dean. Well, I wouldn't be embarrassed if it were together with a piece by Nancarrow and Arvo Part, no, I wouldn't. Let's say it's a mixture of hard modernists and soft modernists, then it would be fine, but if it's all pretty hard edge stuff and then a piece of mine, unless it's a rag because rags have a life of their own, if it's a rag, no problem, because everyone knows I write rags in my spare time, but when I start writing for concert and it's still sort of in that style, that's when it's a bit tricky, because 'composers are supposed to change the world', which is of course, not possible,

DG: You wouldn't want to be seen to be going soft or something?

EKC: Yeah, no, you don't want to, but at the same time, I'm not setting out to change anything I'm just doing what I want to do. I'm just a small composer, there are lots of other composers who do all this wonderful challenging stuff. There's a lot of people doing that, it's great and they do really good work, but I can never write like Liza or like Brett Dean, ever, but I used to write a bit more that way, but I'm not interested so much, because I know they are doing it very well, and I can't do it as well, I really can't.

DG: Really?

EKC: I don't know so, it's too hard, it's actually harder, for me, it's harder than writing...maybe it's because I always wanted to write for film, and I imagine kind of a film going, at the same time I'm writing a piece, and I always thought I would really like that to become a film, so it's there all round, writing for film. But if someone writes in the review that it sounds like film music, then it's a really bad, bad, nasty thing to say, yeah, but for me, it's great, and I mean, why not, I love film music, if it's good, if it's really good, if it's fantastic it can be better than concert music.

DG: So what film music do you like then?

EKC: All very corny of course, Thomas Newman is great, I like everything of his, there's lot of rubbish music for music out there, but good films have really good music, can't tell you names, because I don't always watch for the names, but Thomas Newman, of course has revolutionised some of it, can't think, names not my forte you know. There is a fantastic film *The Player* for example, it's great music I just can't remember who the composer was, it was great, it was just great because it was so subtle, so subtle that you could almost not see it, hear it, notice it, but it was like something was constantly in the air, and was always just bubbling under, and it was always, there was a bell, and percussion, very soft, poetic, it was just great, you've never seen the film?

DG: I haven't seen it.

EKC: For me it was one of the best film music's ever, but people will probably come out and say 'where was the music' — you couldn't hear it much, but it was just great.

DG: Many composers have strong opinions of what music should and shouldn't be, but I think this is particularly noticeable in composers who have written for the theatre. You're obviously very open-minded, but I was wondering if you have a conscious set of ideals that you aim to achieve or fulfil in your music. Or how those ideas develop, we were just talking about that really, but obviously you just want it to come from you and flow a little bit more rather than set anything.

EKC: It's always about really serving the purpose, it's never about, I believe the music in the theatre is a completely different thing to the concert music, it's just, you got to, you can not just be whatever you like to be, you have to convey some kind of a message, or convey a non-message, or a neutral one, you've got to respond to what you see on stage, and sometimes what happens you respond to that and somebody responds to what you do in the music, and I'm talking about drama in theatre, that's music to that, and that's one thing. Of course, writing music to an opera is a different thing altogether. Then you have libretto and you have to deal with the libretto that's given to you. There are limitations there. Sometimes you have words that you think, 'Oh my God, how could that be sung, ever,' and then you sort of work with it, and, you know, you make it work, you sort of keep speaking it, and keep speaking it in

different metre, and different, you know, it's just in some ways it's greater because you've got material to work with, in some ways it's less abstract, so it's actually easier. Even though you have to please other people. See, when I write a concert piece, I want to write to please performers and audience, here I have to please the librettist, the opera singers, director, lots more people involved, you know, because by setting the music to words it's half a direction already, if I make music fast, director already has the ground to work with, I could have made the same scene slower for example, or completely different, it very much depends very much on how you set the words, every sentence has millions of ways that can be set, you can repeat words, you can stretch them out (demonstrates melisma) you know that one where you sing a single syllable, you can stretch into whole page...

DG: Or just fly by the whole and be out of there....

EKC: you could just go: (demonstrates fast semiquaver-like passage), like do it as a real fast rap, or something, everything is possible, so depending with whom I work, I change my tactics, I'm a very flexible person, and I adapt to the way people are. But not everybody is like that. Not every composer is like that, a lot of composers just say this is the way I want it and there is no way we are going to change that. See, I change things. But not everybody likes that, maybe I am too soft, I don't know. I don't know, but I like it the way I do.

DG: When I was asking that I suppose I thinking of other composers, just one example, Wagner, who would have his whole idea of what music theatre should be and goes out controlling every element.

EKC: Different. When you're larger than life, it's different. That's what I never set out to do, also I don't write words, he wrote his own librettos, I wouldn't do that, he would want to stage it, I never, ever want to stage anything, I don't want a realisation, hate organising things, hate getting everyone together and finding a place and ways to put something on, absolutely can't stand that, so that sets me apart from all those other composers who really like to be in charge of everything. I really don't. (Laughs)

DG: Great. Concerning theatre music again, you've written for a variety of genres. Do you make a philosophical distinction between genres, for example is *Mr. Barbecue* a low-brow work next to *Iphis*?

EKC: Yes, I do make that distinction. True. Yeah. You're absolutely right. I find *Mr. Barbecue* is a real kind of entertainment. Also musically, very light weight; whereas *Iphis*, it's actually quite challenging music, *Iphis* has definitely not potential to make a 'hit.' Whereas '*Barbecue* could, you know, it has all kinds of hit songs, you could sing, and could remember, and they are funny, and, some of them you know, the show was a bit rude and vulgar and low key, and *Iphis* is much more complex. Way more complex. There's the story and it's a real opera, whereas *Mr. Barbecue* was never an opera, it was musical theatre. But considering they are both about the same length, *Iphis* has much more, you know, depth, and story and relationships, and it does consist of songs, it consists of lots and lots and lots of different scenes and interludes and music in every way, where as *Mr. Barbecue* was just twelve numbers, really. So almost no comparison, and too it took much less time to write *Mr. Barbecue*.

DG: What do you think about the messages and the themes, apart from the music, that those two works deal with?

EKC: Have you actually seen it or heard it?

DG: I've heard, yeah.

EKC: 'Cause I don't have a recording, that's one thing I don't have,

DG: Oh, You don't have a recording; maybe I could get you one.

EKC: No, that's alright, I'm not desperate you know, it's not like I...to tell you the truth, I don't value it so highly, you know, so I don't have to have it, like, I don't need to, I mean it's okay, but let's say if I'm dead tomorrow, I don't want to necessarily be remembered for *Mr. Barbecue*, you know, it's okay, I'm absolutely not embarrassed, it's just not my best piece you know or it's not...

DG: It's not very Russian.

EKC: No, but it's also not really that relevant much, you know it's not really, not really amazing, it's fun, and that's okay, and I think it was extremely fun to work with Lyndon, I mean, he's very funny and great guy, he's really great, and I had a great band. So we had a great time, and I was playing piano, so you know, I was in my element, I loved it, but when it was over, I never thought of it ever, it was something that you don't think about after it was finished, it's finished. Whereas with *Iphis*, you could still think about how can I make it better, should I change some things, constantly, and I've changed a lot of it, for a performance in Germany, two years ago, (I mean) one year ago, yeah it was typeset and I did it much better, clearer you know, moved some stuff, changed some bits and so forth.

DG: I just bought the other one.

EKC: Well the other one is not updated anyway, since the performance, because no-one ever wants to pay for an update until it gets performed again. Even though the music, I only made it a bit easier, I didn't make it very different, so it's not like you've got the different version, it's the same piece, I just made it a bit clearer with some textures changed at some sections...and also there was a lot of change in the manuscript, you'll see there's lots of cutting outs and scribbles, and when we were typesetting at least they were put in properly. That's all, basically, what was happening. Just to keep up exactly, you know I have to clean up every score I have, you keep doing it, and there's just, there's always a new piece that gets in the way.

DG: How do you see your music fitting into the overall artwork, in relation to the choreography, if it's a ballet, or scenery, acting etc, obviously it's different from production to production, but generally how do you feel about that. You've said you don't want to be in charge of that,

EKC: No.

DG: But obviously your music would influence...

EKC: Well, you know, I am kind of strong with my opinions, and I feel what's right, or not, I feel what can be good for that movement, or if I see the rehearsal, that's why I like to be part of rehearsal, before I even start writing, to workshop, because I like to improvise when I see something, because it inspires me, when I see dancers move beautifully, or even not beautifully, it will inspire me to write something, or just play, or from there something else happens, it's kind of fun. So it's very much collaborative, and I love collaboration, because first of all you share responsibility, and so you're not getting blamed by yourself, but also you get inspired by other people. And when at home I just get inspired by myself, it's a bit boring – (laughing) I'm not always an interesting person, 'oh today I'm really boring, oh my god, not really exciting music I come up with', so just one of those things, terrible. Richard Toop always said you have to have killer instinct, to be a composer, you've got to say, "me, me, me"... well not that I'm like that, but I do, you've got to completely survive, to have survival instinct, it's a world in which there are few composers out there and if you look around they are all pretty good, to survive in this country you've got to be very good, you've got to be distinctive, otherwise no one will ask you to write a piece, everyone looks for a certain thing, the hardest thing is they ask you to write a piece and they expect the same you wrote before, but you have to write a new piece, sometimes you come up with something different and they don't like it! (Laughing) So it's always a risk for everybody you know, anyway, that's how it is.

DG: You've written a lot of instrumental music that takes a single chord or phrase as a germinating seed for a piece, sometimes in variation form or sometimes in a more complex way, to what extent have you worked or think that can work in a theatre context, for example I know in the music of *Amalgamate* originated with an Aboriginal melody, but to what extent did the whole score grow from there.

EKC: First of all I wrote it together with David Page which is important thing to remember, that I wasn't the composer by myself in this. I was very careful with the Aboriginal melody because I didn't want to just use it, you know there are rights involved, you can't just do it, I didn't want to get a lawyer and do it, I wasn't interested in, you know when you write music you just want to get on with it, I don't want to start getting on the phone...and things like this, those sort of issues take forever. They may take a year, I mean we were already writing, and I had to do the

score by certain date. So I said to David, you know, let's just analyse the music and let's just see what's in it that we can hear, so that's what we're going to use, the idea of how the notes comes together, which intervals, and we just used that, but not the actually melody of that special fresh water/salt water song, and that's what we did. When the actual traditional artist, Grant, came on board, he took one of *his* songs, and sort of appropriated it to that, David worked with him, and between them they worked it out, but already on top of the orchestral score, so for eg. the 'Healing' the slow bit, we composed together the music, but Grant sang something that he and David worked out, using words, using traditional words, but in some ways it's not even a traditional song really, just sort of in the style of.

DG: So that melody that Grant was singing, wasn't the original melody?

EKC: No, at the very end of that that's a song, there are many different songs, and I think it's just a combination of many different ones and David and him worked it out, I actually don't know if it's a song or just something that fits the music of the ballet, because the score was there already, you see, he was working with Grant and I wasn't around, I wasn't in that week, they sometimes sort of switched us around, because I worked very hard on the score, it's huge, and writing it down, so when the time came to work with Grant, David took over, took the midi file, and Grant and him just improvised on top of that, they used the song, but they still changed it to fit the chords, because in a way you don't sing with chords, a lot of aboriginal music you sing with didgeridoo, so there's not real harmony, so obviously to have harmony there, that's unusual, so already that's different. That probably doesn't answer your question very well, I would say the real song was used at the very, very end, But (demonstrating) it's very much repeated notes, and very much following chords, and we had the rights for that, in the end we had the rights for that particular song anyway, actually, I shouldn't have worried, but anyway, it's hard though, I'm very cautious, I always think I don't want anybody to come sue me! There are rights, there are certain rules on how you're supposed to go about it. But I'm glad you went to see that, it is very different, you can't sort of say it's my music, because it's not just me — and it's sort of pop-orientated because that's what David likes, very much, he sings, and he was a child-star, when he was 12, he was actually the young Michael Jackson of Australia, was really famous Little Davie, another story really, he's talking about it in

his show, 'Page 8', a show he does around the world now, he's actually now in UK doing it. So David is a performer as well as a composer, and as lots of things, he's beautiful, we've got on really, really well, it was just fantastic, and I loved Bangarra Dance Company, amazing, and Stephen Page, choreographer pretty amazing, he just...he had no choice, he basically had that midi file of the orchestral score and he had to use what he had, no other chance for me to change the music. You know having composed how hard it is to change orchestral score, let's say two weeks before premiere, plus you want to get to rehearse orchestra a week before, for the first time I heard the score properly, just a week before the premiere, so by that time, you can't suddenly start changing all the parts and everything, and they've all got it bound, it's not that easy, so few little things, dynamics, fix here and there. It was hard work. But Stephen just dealt with it, and did it, the way he did it. Which was great: 'okay I'll take it the way it is'. He was very gracious.

DG: So working from a single idea in other theatre concepts is that something you've thought about doing, or do, because in the theatre works that I know of yours that there is a lot of variety, but I mean it holds together as well, but is there a hidden germ, a musical one, or is it more born of different ideas?

EKC: Yeah, you know, I usually just start off with three intervals or two intervals, so my pieces just have three notes, if you look closely, you know, usually just major second and minor second, so making up a minor third, that's basically what is most of my pieces, you look at *Cadences*, you look at *Purple Prelude*?

DG: Theatre works?

EKC: Theatre works....there I'm just really open, sometimes I come up with let's say again, you are probably taking about opera or dance, right? You're not talking about drama?

DG: Well, yeah, mostly opera and dance.

EKC: There, there are basically no set rules, there you just have basically the words, and directions, let's say: a person walks into a room, let's say that, so I will say, okay,

is it anticipation, is it a kind of brooding atmosphere, is there love in the air, or is it a lullaby, because somebody is asleep I mean, I don't know, or maybe there is rumbling of a thunderstorm somewhere, or you are hearing a party next door. There's all sorts of things that, is there a murder going to happen in that room right now, so when you open that door, you don't know what's going to happen, you don't know what sort of music is needed.....you prepare the audience., and then the words are of course the ones that prepare the actual style, it really varies, that's why I was always so eclectic, so-called, it's not always a positive word, because I never know, what comes up in my head when I hear words, you know something comes up, you know, some kind of rhythm, it may remind me of something, it may not. Maybe even something from Baroque. In the ballet, you know, that wasn't words, but in the wild swans ballet, there was this part, the end of the piece, yes I remember, there was this one piece when I was writing the whole ballet, I said 'Meryl, there is this piece I've written and I really like it, but I don't know, it doesn't fit anything we have. Absolutely no place for it, but I've got this piece', and she said, 'you know, it could be really good for the little match girl.' And that's what we did. The end of *Wild Swans*, she's got different characters from different fairy stories, from Hans Christian Anderson, now on the CD I renamed it into *Mute Princess*, because I had to keep it all into Wild Swans, but I kept that piece of music, it's very baroque sort of style, that's why it didn't quite fit the whole ballet, completely outside the whole stylistic genre. It's slow, it goes (demonstrates), and it's very slow, so very sad, there were a few pieces like this that I didn't mean to be in the ballet, they just happened like the *Green leaf prelude*, the beginning, we never wanted to start haunting and quiet and soft, we wanted to start (demonstrates galloping rhythm) you know big and flashy like a ballet. There were a lot of pieces, that I never meant to be in the piece, but they suddenly turned out right. That's why we worked together, she said 'you know that piece, maybe you should start with that because it's just so good, and it would just be great', and the starting was just perfect, and we did not have an overture till the end, and I always said 'we need an overture' you kind of do the overture after everything else. I've done that with *Iphis* as well, you don't start with an overture, because you don't know your themes, and so I said, I don't know what to do, but she said, here, that piece's perfect, just perfect.

DG: In *Mr. Barbecue*, How much input did you have into the text did you have, into the words of that piece?

EKC: Not much, but I did suggest a few things, I did say I would like something of a prayer for example, like the *Alphabet Song*, it's a bit like a chorale (demonstrates). Because we wanted contrasting pieces.

DG: They certainly are.

EKC: But also we got together a few times over the period of writing it, I mean, some were very easy, in some ways it did take a few starts, start-ups, and we got together with Janis Balodis and Lyndon together and we worked on them, together and I played them suggestions, and they said that's bad, do it this way. Or this way, maybe *Vegetarian Lover* should be like an Italian serenade you know, alright and the 'Men are like Dogs' was a bit like *Man from La Mancha*, you know (vocally demonstrates chords at beginning of 'Dogs Know How to Live') how does it go? I've forgotten... *The Man from La Mancha* goes: (Demonstrates at piano *Man of La Mancha's, Impossible Dream*) and it's very simple: (demonstrates now at the piano), oh, I don't remember which was which any longer...

DG: Dogs never lie about love?

EKC: Yes that's right, exactly, *not* 'men are like cars', I mix them up, but yep, the other one was men are like cars, supposed to be the funny swing, that's a different one again, the dogs ...say it again?

DG: Dogs never lie about love.

EKC: See, the thing is, you remember words better than I do, I was never good with words, so you can say it, and I can immediately forget them....but that's a good thing, at least my brain is really pure.

DG: Well you did say you completely forgot about it after it happened.

EKC: It's true, but now I'm trying to...

DG: You've got the next piece to write, I *hope* you can forget about it.

EKC: Exactly. But it was really fun, especially when he sang falsetto in the *Men are like cars*. (demonstrates vocally) it was great, Lyndon is very funny I think when we met once for an in-between session, while piece was in development, we needed a sort of ending, and that's when "Barbecue Zen" came in. Yanis needed a couple more songs, we were missing some songs, there was one song we cut, we left out in a couple of performances, it's one more that's no longer there, the eggs (demonstrates vocally), it was just a bit silly, it was very silly. Probably that was an encore piece or something, and our favourite was always the sausage song, (demonstrates vocally) and it was obviously a bit of a *Carmen* in there musically, oh, a bit of Liszt,

DG: Oh Liszt, Hungarian....

EKC: *Hungarian Rhapsody*, but also...why did I think of *Carmen*, (singing *Habanera* melody) maybe.... and then we've got Siegfried and his backyard garden, because we've got the: (sings Valkyrie-motif)....

DG: That was my next question! If the opening had been an allusion to the sword-forging scene?

EKC: Well in some ways, (but) because also in one of the rehearsals Lyndon put this incredible metal thing on his head, looking like Siegfried. We never saw the show because we were all kind of behind the fence, I actually don't know quite what he wears, we had glimpses of what he does, but not quite, and so I feel that's how the idea came, with Valkyries and Siegfried, but in the beginning it was the metal, fire, it was just sort of elements, and sort of 'macho', kind of... it's a barbecue that goes wrong, that's the whole story....which is very often the case.

DG: That's what really got me hooked was that first one... (EKC is singing Valkyrie motif...).

EKC: Very big. (continues singing...)

DG: It was like was an Australian male thinking he's a big hero...

EKC: You should have seen him, in his shorts and string was looking out...it was very funny. Did you ever see the pictures of it?

DG: I saw a couple pictures.

EKC: He was jumping on the barbecue, he was actually jumping and actually once ripped his muscle, actually one of the first performances I think he said he stuffed his muscle. He was jumping on this huge Barbecue thing. That was the first thing he was doing to that music, and the fence was going up, but we still couldn't see him, because that's where our heads were (demonstrates with hands) that's why I never actually saw it. But I knew about it.

DG: One of the reasons I asked you about the text was about fire ...transforming... doing all this, this is in *Siegfried*...

EKC: They wanted something big to start with, Janis Balodis, big, manly, meaty start it was funny, I actually asked Lyndon: 'Why did you choose me as a composer?', I mean it's a man, it's a man's piece, very much a man's piece, but it was nice because we had girls in the band, some girls, and it was great, we had great fun.

DG: I was wondering if you'd ever been surprised by a verbal interpretation or something that was said about your works or the creative process and being totally wrong.

EKC: I mean, the thing is, when they are really bad reviews, I just throw them out, so I don't remember them that well. I remember the '*Clocks* performance, one of the reviews said he 'wished the clock would stop' the whole time in the concert, he can't understand how the composer just won a prize, he couldn't quite get it, he went with the curiosity because I'd just won the prize with *Cadences*, I'd just won a prize, a very important prize, Sounds Australian Award for best piece by an Australian composer,

and he said he couldn't quite grasp it, and he really wanted the clocks to stop all the way, I mean, especially the ticking, and anyway, that was (laughs)... pretty viscous review.

DG: What have you found generally attracts you to a particular synopsis or libretto?

EKC: Interesting... well it has to be a colourful story, whatever it has to be colourful and have to see the theatre in it immediately. *Iphis* — I actually heard the story, I read a book the 'Metamorphis' of Ovid, and I read the story and I was talking to Richard Toop, and I said I'd really like to write an opera on that story, and that's when I asked him if he was interested in writing a libretto and that is when he said he would not mind-trying, and it was his first and last, and he said never again, but at that point...and so that was great, that story interested me because it was strange, it was weird, and it had to do with...I like minorities you know, I like issues with minorities — I just do — I like things that are a bit outside the norm: I wouldn't write a story about a mother, father and a child. I would never write a story like this, it would just not be interesting, but nobody else would either, you know opera has to have a bit more beyond the normal, it has to be weird and strange and sometimes: 'eh, what's happening? That's a bit weird! How could that happen?' It just happens because that's opera, it's not a normal world, and *Matricide* was also a weird story, the two girls who kill the mother, and *Undertow* was weird because all these really strange people come together, on the beach, and that's always interesting because you always find interesting people descend upon some place and they want their space, that's very normal. I see that everywhere, everyday, in every little patch of place. I like things that kind-of are outside the norm, yet at the same time, people identify themselves with. So it's both. And also they have enough theatre in them that I can feel I can actually compose something. I like to write really weird extreme stuff. Because I used to take part in these shows with transvestites and drag queens and I really love colour on stage and things that are a bit outrageous, that's kind of goes back to eighties, end of seventies actually, it was a very colourful part in Sydney at that time, there was a lot of that sort of performance, and it was real fun, and for me it was like my rebellious part. My teenage, my late teenage time, and sort of, part of my growing up, so I have fond memories for that. So anything to do with that sort of thing interests me. Sometimes you just see the stories and say 'yes, that's what I want to do.'

DG: I mean something like *Wild Swans* though is more...

EKC: ...purely for almost kids, it's just a fairy story that I've always liked, just because again it has all the...

DG: It is a bit weird...

EKC: it is weird, it has the good and the bad, and knitting with nettle and not saying a word...why! It's weird, yeah. But I like that. Things are not as explained really, but that's ok. One could go further and say 'why is that?' That's because being silent is pretty hard. Really hard. I like those sorts of things. But, anyway, I'm always on the look out for new kinds of stories.