The Centre for Research in Opera and Music Theatre, University of Sussex, presents “Astonished and Terrified”: opera and the transformation of the world by technology - a two day programme of discussion, performance-in-progress, exhibition, demonstrations of new principles, and song, reflecting on uses of digital media in relation to opera, marking the end of Tim Hopkins' ARHC Fellowship in the Creative and Performing Arts with CROMT 2pm Friday June 22nd to 5pm Saturday June 23rd

(“Astonished and somewhat terrified” - Sir Arthur Sullivan’s recorded response to a demonstration of the new Edison phonograph in 1888).

Digital technology is now widely incorporated into the creative practice of many artists working in contemporary performance.

In the case of opera this has multiple manifestations and implications:

- changes in modes of presentation within the traditional technological environment of the stage, such as unprecedented amounts of moving image and discreet / overt sound design
- changes in who makes the work and how, where the processes of assembly have moved away from the artefact of the commissioned composers' score / libretto, towards mobilisation by other elements traditionally at work in opera's 400 year history (such as concept, dramaturgy, scenography)
- uses of digital media to export opera's constituents beyond collective experiences in theatres, such as uses of pervasive, locative media and live streaming to relocate / reconfigure relationships between music, narrative, audience, etc
- new understandings of concepts such as “live” and “mediated”, etc
- works that may use no contemporary technology devices, but thematise their presence

Full Programme
Friday 22nd June

13.45 Welcome

14.00 Nicholas Till, CROMT, artist, Director of CROMT, Artistic Director of Post-operative. Introduction

14.15 Tim Hopkins - artist, UK - an account of recent research projects - 1/3. The Lost Chord, TV Opera, Give Me Your Blessing For I Go To A Foreign Land, Music Walk or Hunting for Mushrooms - performance pieces thematically concerned with technological transformation, and a
personal artistic interest in sensations of threshold between one world and another. Each occupies a diversity of contexts and collaborations - performance in theatres and elsewhere, printed image and text, moving image, and online. They imagine particular cultural environments / historic registers / physical locations as places of transition: the late Victorian creative imagination and the moment of the electro-mechanical; Russian folk / ritual song and its recreation in opera, as an image of migration; Opera on TV - loss and gain in translation between media; contemporary interventions in the landscape using mobile media systems.

1/3: Give Me Your Blessing…

15.00 Claudia Molitor - composer, UK - will present work-in-progress on 'Remember Me…,' "- a desk-based opera that re-imagines the dramatic extravaganza of the large - scale operatic production in an intimate form, as an instance of a consciously 'post-disciplinary' approach , where the artistic practice can be explored with any relevant media, from pencil to digital camera, where digital media is not "in addition to" the opera, but an integral and quite natural aspect of the work."

15.30 Jorge Balça - performer, director - University of Portsmouth, UK - "throughout history, opera has tracked theatrical developments. However, …in the 20th Century, while the work of Meyerhold, Copeau and, later, Lecoq led theatre practitioners increasingly to value the body as a dramatic tool, these developments failed to find resonance in opera, which thus remained a predominantly aural experience. This moment of rupture with theatre history coincides with …sound recording. This paper examines how, … the recordings of opera helped to cement its music-centrism. Considering the impact opera recordings had on production styles, production practices, concepts of authorship and performance training, this paper argues that a paradigm shift took place centred on these recordings’ ontological mutation from representing opera to being opera. Further pursuing the analysis of technology's power to change the nature of an art form, the paper concludes by asking: if vinyl and CDs contributed to the disembodiment of opera performers, might they now find the way back to their dramatic bodies through the power of DVDs and Blu-Ray?"

15.50 Break

16.10 Simon Katan - composer, UK - a live experiment with digital co-dependent score and performance, with Catherine May, soprano.

16.45 Caroline Wilkins - composer, UK - links to project - video 1, video 2 - biog - The theatrical use of the digital voice and hyper-instruments in a sound-led interdisciplinary performance work by Caroline Wilkins and Oded Ben-Tal Zaum: Beyond Mind: (for voice, instruments, interactive electronics, film, choreography, lighting ) A consideration of how technology becomes a
fundamental element in this genre - creating virtual sound characters, determining augmented perceptions of time-space, extending aural and visual parameters of stage events.

17.15 Discussion

17.30 (approx) Break

19.00 Tim Hopkins – 2/3: The Lost Chord

20.00 Dinner - see registration page. This will be held at the conference venue, and will be a chance to continue debate informally, or just relax! Menu is still being finalised (mindful of limited budgets.) Please contact Tim (T.Hopkins@sussex.ac.uk) if you think you may wish to attend.

Saturday 23rd June

10.00 Craig Vear - composer, UK - ‘A Sentimental Journey’, is an attempt by an experimental composer to articulate through praxis a growing interest in defining what a ‘digital opera’ might be. Using examples from the performances of this work, Vear will illustrate certain principles he developed through the compositional processes - dimensionality, remote audience, liminal performance space, computer generated visual scores, autonomous computer soundscapes and an attempt at a ‘total’ compositional approach. He will also stream a version of the complete composition as a performance. (Delegates wishing to experience this please bring headphones and mobile internet device - smartphone or laptop.)

11.15 Christopher Morris - School of Music and Theatre, University College Cork, Ireland. "I want to take Sullivan's words as a springboard for a discussion of the impact of digital technology on spectatorship. More specifically, I want to consider how we, as spectators, respond to the new operatic media and how we communicate and mediate that response through language. What, to put it another way, is the role and value of words about media experience? And what are the potentials and limitations of media theory in addressing these questions?"

11.40 Break

12.00 Andreas Breitscheid - composer, Germany, former Artistic Director of Forum Neues Musiktheater, Stuttgart Staatsoper. What challenges for Opera and Lyric Theatre are proposed by the invention / production conditions
of today's media forms. How does opera / lyric theatre specify itself in relation to other media theatre, for example in terms of the phenomenon of singing, and the function of space? How does the composer as a key creator of opera navigate aspects of an altered technological situation?

12.30 Jelena Novak, theorist and dramaturge - ASCA, University of Amsterdam; CESEM, Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Body and Voice, Divided: Singing Corporeality in the Age of Media - A consideration of how the mutual relationship between body and voice is reinvented in recent opera practice. The reinvention in question assumes the changes that came as the result of the impact of new media and technology, a de-synchronization between image and sound, or a redefinition of sex-gender-voice relationships in postopera.

13.00 Lunch

14.00 Rolf Wallin - composer, UK/Norway - thoughts around an opera commission-in-progress, involving a science fictional imagining of the future.

14.20 Tansy Davies - composer, UK - reflection on her artistic practice

14.40 Alexis Kirke - composer, creative technologist, Interdisciplinary Centre for Computer Music Research, University of Plymouth UK - Open Outcry - systems on the edge of control - a work in progress which places singers in a real time money market, translating their musical expression into data that drives electronic trading.

15.10 Daniel Somerville - dance artist, University of Wolverhampton, UK - a consideration of how we might formulate a notion of technology as essentially 'operatic' - drawing on Heidegger's concept of techne, Dr R Adjani's image of the Japanese Tea Ceremony as a model for contemporary immersive multimedia/live art, a kinship between Gesamtkunstwerk as non-anthropocentric art and Buddhist thinking around 'dependent origination', and the 'operatic' in relation to the dynamics of gender performativity.

15.40 Tea

16.00 Tim Hopkins - 3/3: TV Opera and Music Walk

16.45 Close. Hopkins/Till
17.00 End.

In the event you experience difficulties accessing conference information via these links, please do contact Tim (T.Hopkins@sussex.ac.uk).

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