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## Confronting Opera in the 1960s: Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*

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### Abstract

Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy* arrived at a crucial moment for new opera. It premiered in 1968, at the Aldeburgh Festival, the home of a vision of British opera that *Punch and Judy* seemed actively to confront. As this paper will show, though, *Punch and Judy* also engaged closely with operatic traditions and institutions. And while its Aldeburgh premiere is remembered as a scandalous provocation, a closer look at this event suggests that the opera was welcomed as a subtle intervention into the British operatic scene rather than a repudiation of it. The opera itself, moreover, performs a similar sense of revolt as inseparable from tradition, of individuality as inseparable from institutions and audiences, and of the supports for artistic production as necessarily also constraints.

When Harrison Birtwistle's opera *Punch and Judy* premiered at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1968, it introduced something of the anarchic, revolutionary energy so strongly associated with that summer. In the same month, Pierre Boulez's famous diatribe 'Opera Houses—Blow them up!' was published for the first time in English translation in *Opera* magazine. (The composer himself was scheduled to appear shortly at Covent Garden, conducting *Pelléas et Mélisande*.) Thanks in part to its incendiary headline, Boulez's interview has often been seen as emblematic of the avant-garde's opposition to opera and the opera house—or even theatre music generally—as irredeemable expressions of bourgeois complacency, to be resisted or even destroyed. Even at the time, the interview was seen as a 'passing of the death sentence' on opera.<sup>1</sup> A more specific target emerges in Boulez's interview, though: a

kind of middlebrow modern opera, exemplified by a string of commissions by the Hamburg Staatsoper; for Boulez, these operas epitomised ‘bourgeois average taste’ in modern music.<sup>2</sup>

Boulez’s comments found some resonance in Britain, where new operas proliferated and composers were experimenting with other forms of music theatre. *Opera*’s introduction to the interview suggested that however outrageous Boulez’s remarks, they deserved ‘wider discussion, especially in this country’, and obliquely posed the question of where new British opera might fit into Boulez’s scheme.<sup>3</sup> What of Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett, or Richard Rodney Bennett, who happened to be Boulez’s former student? After all, the operatic situation in Britain seemed closely related to that at the Hamburg Staatsoper. Indeed, the two opera scenes overlapped more than the magazine acknowledged: Alexander Goehr’s *Arden Must Die* had premiered at the Staatsoper a few months before Boulez’s interview was originally published, Humphrey Searle’s *Hamlet* premiered there in 1968, and when *Punch and Judy* went on to the Edinburgh Festival after Aldeburgh, the Hamburg Staatsoper presented three operas there as well.<sup>4</sup> In this context of cross-Channel exchange, *Punch and Judy* seemed to answer Boulez’s call for a more avant-garde, less middlebrow opera. Certainly, it was a long way from Hamburg’s other new opera in 1968, Gian-Carlo Menotti’s *Hilfe, hilf, die Globolinks!*, which featured music-hating aliens (represented by electronic music) defeated by a school orchestra, in a thinly veiled attack on the avant-garde. *Punch and Judy*, by contrast, followed many of Boulez’s prescriptions: it rejected the trend for opera based on literary texts, and its libretto, by the pianist Stephen Pruslin, was inseparable from music—full of nonsense sounds and musical images—just as Boulez suggested.<sup>5</sup>

In this sense, *Punch and Judy* might be said to embody the same sense of revolt against ‘bourgeois’ modern opera that Boulez expressed in a more violent way.

What's more, this idea of revolt is explored in the opera itself; the violent Punch attacks everyone he encounters, beginning by throwing his baby onto a fire and stabbing his wife. Roughly following the plot set out by John Payne Collier in 1828, the opera continues with the murders of the Doctor and Lawyer, then the narrator Choregos, the one major addition to the traditional plot. It ends with the final trick on the hangman and Devil, combined here into one figure, as Punch evades punishment for his actions and finally overturns death itself.<sup>6</sup> In short, Punch revolts against all the social constraints around him in a series of ritualised attacks, destroying them in a quest for his ideal, Pretty Polly. If Punch assaults all constraints, the opera also seems an assault on music itself, with a marked emphasis on noise: in the unpitched, *fortississimo* scream that opens the opera, the high nasal laugh that marks Punch's entry, the heavy use of percussion, and the section for toy instruments, with its grotesque parody of conventional orchestral sounds.

This Punch is a traditional figure of anarchic revolt, drawn from a world of disruptive urban entertainment, but he also doubles as a figure of the avant-garde artist in clownish guise, assaulting audiences, traditions and institutions ('bomb the opera houses!').<sup>7</sup> This resonance is drawn out at several points, for the opera's Punch is an artist more than a simple brute: an inveterate riddle-maker, a singer of serenades and of prayers, a man on a quest for the ideal. In this sense, he merges with the more traditional figure of the artist, Pierrot—hence Pruslin's observation that the distinctive feature of the opera's Punch was the addition of 'an idealistic and vulnerable side... diametrically opposed to his originally uniform aggressiveness'.<sup>8</sup> Pierrot was arguably a site of ambivalence for modernists, suggesting anxiety about art's display of interiority and its relationship with commercial entertainment: in short, about the artist as entertainer. The idea of combining him with the brutal, crafty Pulcinella—the origins of Punch—seems a telling commentary on how these anxieties had shifted by

1968, when John Cage and Charlotte Moorman could appear on television game shows, and Stockhausen could be found on the cover of a Beatles album: the artist was a vehicle of assault, but also a clownish figure of fun.<sup>9</sup>

Critics have tended to subtly distance Birtwistle and the rest of the ‘Manchester Group’ from opera, or at least emphasise their ambivalence; this works to align them with an avant-garde seen as hostile to the genre, and relatedly to foreground the ways in which their music challenged tradition and authority.<sup>10</sup> I want to instead focus squarely on Birtwistle’s engagement with opera through a kind of micro-history of *Punch and Judy*, looking at the English Opera Group’s efforts to stage and promote the work (as recorded in the archives held at the Britten-Pears Library); the large body of notes, reviews and reactions that sought to position it; the spectrum of largely forgotten operatic activity in which it was understood; and the opera’s own reflections on the problems of tradition and authority. This material suggests, firstly, that the 60s avant-garde was less hostile to opera than it seems.<sup>11</sup> Boulez himself was more engaged with operatic institutions than his statements suggest, even helping the Paris Opera with an ambitious programme of reform in 1968.<sup>12</sup> Like Boulez, Birtwistle and his champions were invested in opera in the 1960s, and specifically in reclaiming it from the middlebrow. Secondly, this attempt to re-stake opera’s claims was part of a larger process of defining areas within the spectrum of new musical production in 1960s London, with its rather fluid divisions between the more traditional, the avant-garde and the experimental. Finally, what is at issue in *Punch and Judy*—in both the opera and the process of its production and reception—is not so much revolt itself as the tension between individual acts of freedom and the authority of tradition and institutions.<sup>13</sup> In other words, *Punch and Judy* allows us to examine—with specificity and at the ground-level of artistic practice—some of the tensions Pierre Bourdieu outlined theoretically at around the

same time: between the ‘personal authority called for by the creator and the institutional authority favoured by the teacher’ and the ‘curators of culture’.<sup>14</sup> But if for Bourdieu these confrontations played out in a struggle for cultural legitimacy, I do not aim simply to trace ‘mechanisms of legitimation’, or, more broadly, networks or ‘ecologies’ of operatic activity.<sup>15</sup> *Punch and Judy* reveals an avant-garde well aware of its own contradictions and their fundamental irresolvability. Indeed, opera became a way of reflecting on the contingency and possible futility of artist’s declarations of freedom and revolt in 1968. In other words, this study traces the melancholy experience of an impasse.

### **Mapping new music in 1960s Britain**

This sense of modernism as fundamentally compromised might seem especially acute in the British context. The late 1950s and 60s has long been seen as a high point in public support for new music in Britain: a moment when audiences and composers were newly exposed to the music of both pre-war European modernism and the postwar avant-garde, thanks in part to the efforts of William Glock at the BBC.<sup>16</sup> As a result, 1960s British modernism can appear somewhat blunted by official approval, as well as its ties to an already established modernist tradition.<sup>17</sup> Oppositional stances tend to be reserved for an ‘underground’ experimentalism, or even more prominently for popular music, while the British composers most closely aligned with the Continental avant-garde were described as ‘dull young things’ in the 1950s, or more recently as ambitious ‘grammar schoolboys’, writing ‘radical but reactionary’ music.<sup>18</sup> To some extent this suspicion is part of a larger set of doubts about the radicalism of the postwar avant-garde in general.<sup>19</sup> After all, British music (as well as visual arts and theatre) was not alone in being closely tied to the ‘bourgeois’ or Establishment institutions that modernists often claimed to attack, although it was,

perhaps, unusually open—and openly anxious—about these ties, especially in the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> For instance, when in 1968 the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) moved to Nash House, on the ceremonial Mall near Buckingham Palace, it displayed some discomfort with its distinctly elite location, launching a defense of experimentalism coming out of what it called ‘mainstream’ institutions such as the Royal Shakespeare Company, and positioning itself as a ‘centre of questioning and confrontation, placed at the geographical focus of our inherited system of government’.<sup>21</sup>

The most obvious effect of public support, especially in opera, was to encourage a middle road. Andrew Porter wrote in 1965, ‘the interaction of public welcome and private vision has produced, from a new generation of British composers, an extraordinarily healthy and vital corpus of ‘central’ music, neither reactionary nor avant-garde...’.<sup>22</sup> As Porter noted, young composers were especially active in the production of opera, ‘the form that most openly bids for public acceptance’.<sup>23</sup> Bennett, whose opera *The Mines of Sulphur* had just premiered, wrote in 1965 about this sense of ‘public welcome’ in London. In Paris, he said,

Whether you get played depends on who your friends are and if you go to bed with the right people. New York’s frightful, too. You’re played there if you’re wildly avant-garde or if you’re an institution with 10 symphonies behind you. There’s no hope in between, which is where I am, along with most other English composers.<sup>24</sup>

But this dominance of the ‘central’ and the ‘in-between’ can also be overstated. By the later 1960s, even the most experimental composers drew on public support and used established classical music venues, and the line between an ‘underground’ and mainstream institutions could be hard to draw: this is a moment when Michael Nyman could hear Cornelius Cardew’s *The Great Learning* at Wigmore Hall (‘of all places’, he adds), and then review it positively in *The Spectator*.<sup>25</sup> If, as Benjamin Piekut

observes, an ‘experimental music’ venture like Victor Schonfield’s Music Now organised events in an ‘anarchic’ range of venues, from the Purcell Room to the ICA and the Roundhouse, such a range was representative of the new music scene in London more generally, and involved significant tensions between official institutions and the social and aesthetic goals of the individuals they supported. And if, as he also observes, Michael Nyman’s 1974 book *Experimental Music* created boundaries between improvised and indeterminate experimental music that were much fuzzier in practice, Nyman’s book more fundamentally created barriers between experimentalism in general and other areas of new music activity, barriers which have increasingly hardened in recent historiography.<sup>26</sup> It was a moment when such categories were under debate—when venue and institution signaled little about content—and opera was being actively repositioned.

Birtwistle himself clearly aimed to avoid the ‘in-between’ status Bennett described. His defenders tended to associate him with the Continental avant-garde, in opposition to the older generation of British composers, still seen as a dominant force. And Birtwistle distanced himself somewhat from the British scene by spending 1966-67 in the United States, exploring integral serialism and Schenkerian analysis.<sup>27</sup> In 1968, Nyman (who wrote the libretto for Birtwistle’s next theatre piece, *Down by the Greenwood Side*) referred to Birtwistle as a representative of “‘progressive’ English music’, as opposed to Walton and Britten.<sup>28</sup> And in *Experimental Music*, he listed Birtwistle alongside Boulez, Xenakis, Kagel, Stockhausen, Berio and Bussoti as representative ‘avant-garde’ composers (as opposed to the ‘experimental’ ones on which the book focuses).<sup>29</sup> As Philip Rupprecht has recently argued, such attempts to align postwar British modernism with an international avant-garde have tended to elide some of its central concerns, including its significant engagement with national traditions, an engagement that seems especially strong in the case of Birtwistle.<sup>30</sup>



They also elide its engagement with opera. By restoring that sense of engagement, I do not simply want to realign Birtwistle with a more ‘central’ tradition of British music, but rather to complicate the avant-garde’s relationship with opera and indeed with the ‘bourgeois’ audiences, institutions and traditions with which it was associated.

### **‘Music Theatre’ and Opera in the 1960s**

The story of *Punch and Judy*’s scandalous premiere at Aldeburgh has done much to associate it with a provocative avant-garde, while distancing it from both opera and a British ‘centrism’:

The premiere of Harrison Birtwistle's first opera, *Punch and Judy*, at Aldeburgh in 1968 has become part of festival legend. The story is hard to substantiate, but it seems Benjamin Britten was so unimpressed by the score's raucousness that he left at the interval.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that there was no interval at that performance is perhaps just the first clue that this story is precisely myth, significant in its own way but obscuring a more complicated reality. Nonetheless, this account has made its way into the opera’s Wikipedia entry, less carefully hedged, and we also find the story recounted with more skeptical distance in recent scholarship on Birtwistle’s operas.<sup>32</sup> The story has gained support from another recent development in Britten’s public antagonism towards *Punch and Judy*, in the 2008 edition of Britten’s collected writings. Here, we find Britten in an interview dating from 1969, criticising a ‘young composer’ for failing to use Mozart as a ‘road-map’ for his new opera; in the editorial footnotes, this composer is identified as Birtwistle, making the target opera *Punch and Judy*.<sup>33</sup> This rather inapt criticism suggests an insurmountable distance between Birtwistle and Britten’s operatic ideals, which would appear to be hopelessly out of touch. In an

earlier publication of this interview, however, the young composer is unidentified; even if Britten was talking about Birtwistle—and one can imagine other more suitable objects of his reproach—he did not make that public.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, one searches in vain for printed references to Britten’s ostentatious exit in early criticism of Birtwistle’s opera, and Birtwistle himself claimed it never happened.<sup>35</sup>

If *Punch and Judy* has been seen to confront Britten, it has also been seen to challenge opera in some ways. There are good reasons for this, with Birtwistle himself claiming recently that it ‘was more Music Theatre than opera’.<sup>36</sup> The work features an on-stage wind band (in addition to a pit orchestra), as well as elements of mime and dance (there are five silent roles for dancers) and highly ritualised action, detailed in extensive production notes that emphasise the work’s departures from ‘realistic theatre’ and ‘naturalistic movement’.<sup>37</sup> Its use of popular theatrical traditions has also been connected with Peter Brook’s idea of ‘rough theatre’, which Brook himself described in 1968 as a theatre of revolt: ‘Lightheartedness and gaiety feeds it, but so does the same energy that produces rebellion and opposition. This is a militant energy: it is the energy of anger, sometimes the energy of hate’.<sup>38</sup>

Birtwistle, Peter Maxwell Davies and Alexander Goehr are all strongly associated with a move towards experimental music theatre in the late 60s. In different ways, they produced works that were ritualistic or stylised and removed from the opera house, relying instead on new groups: the Pierrot Players, which Birtwistle founded with his *Punch and Judy* librettist Stephen Pruslin and the clarinetist Alan Hacker in 1967; Goehr’s Music Theatre Ensemble, from the same year; and the London Sinfonietta, from 1968. New works for these groups included Davies’ *Revelation and Fall* (1968) and *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969), Goehr’s *Naboth’s Vineyard* (1968), John Tavener’s ‘dramatic cantata’ *The Whale* (1968), and Birtwistle’s ‘dramatic pastoral’ *Down by the Greenwood Side* (1969) for the Music

Theatre Ensemble, as well as the withdrawn *Monodrama* (1967) and *Cantata* (1968) for the Pierrot Players.<sup>39</sup> The search for alternative types of music theatre extended well beyond these composers. Even Britten largely abandoned mainstream opera in the 1960s, producing only *Midsummer Nights' Dream* (1960)—a smaller-scale opera that premiered in Aldeburgh's Jubilee Hall rather than an opera house—and the three Parables for Church Performance, highly ritualised and stylised works for the English Opera Group.

Despite this turn to music theatre, though, Birtwistle, Davies and Goehr were also closely engaged with opera and operatic institutions in the 1960s, especially in the middle years of the decade. As David Beard and Michael Hall have shown, opera was a central theme in 1964 at the first Wardour Castle Summer School, an event Birtwistle organised at the girls' school, Cranborne Chase, where he then taught.<sup>40</sup> In a session called 'Opera Today', Birtwistle, Goehr, Davies and Tippett all discussed their operas in progress, as well as the first of Britten's church parables, the recent *Curlew River* (1964).<sup>41</sup> According to Hall, the idea of 'music theatre' came up already in this discussion, as the composer Anthony Gilbert 'attacked the whole concept of traditional opera', suggesting that composers should focus on more politically and social engaged types of 'Music Theatre'.<sup>42</sup> The composers on the panel, though, were writing operas in every sense: engaged with the operatic tradition, and produced by established companies. At the time, Tippett was working on *The Knot Garden*, commissioned by the Royal Opera House and performed there, like both his previous operas, in 1970. Davies was at work on *Taverner*, which would premiere at the Royal Opera House in 1972. And Goehr was writing *Arden Must Die*, commissioned by the Hamburg Staatsoper and performed there in 1967. As for Birtwistle, he may have already started planning *Punch and Judy*. It was commissioned by the English Opera Group (then under the auspices of the Royal Opera House) in 1965, in response to a

synopsis submitted by Birtwistle and Pruslin, and the libretto was completed by the end of 1965.<sup>43</sup> Hall has recently suggested that the project probably derived from a mime play, *The Green Man*, set in a Punch and Judy booth, which Birtwistle had prepared for the girls of Cranborne Chase in 1961.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps we could see these opera projects, all with long gestations, as essentially predating the turn to music theatre in the last years of the 1960s, and to some extent displaced by it.<sup>45</sup> This is what Hall seems to suggest when he writes that, despite Birtwistle's work with the English Opera Group, he 'felt that the established companies were too cumbersome for experimental activity in music theatre'.<sup>46</sup> But Birtwistle, for one, did not abandon the genre after *Punch and Judy*, planning another opera about a pair of Elizabethan alchemists already in 1965, and accepting another commission in 1969 from the Royal Opera House, for the long-delayed *Mask of Orpheus*.<sup>47</sup> These projects, then, speak to a closer relationship with the operatic establishment than we might expect, and conversely, suggest a British operatic scene in search of experimentation.

At the very least, British companies and festivals were actively in search of new operas, building on the success of Britten and Tippett and responding to a perceived growing international appreciation of contemporary British opera, thanks in part to touring by Sadler's Wells and the EOG.<sup>48</sup> The 60s and early 70s produced a huge number of commissions (see Table 1). Sadler's Wells premiered operas by Malcolm Williamson, Richard Rodney Bennett and Gordon Crosse. Some of these were supported by a new grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation, introduced in 1965 (quoting the official wording) to 'help encourage young composers and librettists to devote their talents to the composition of operas, which, it is hoped, will eventually be heard at Sadler's Wells'.<sup>49</sup> The English Opera Group also premiered a series of one-act operas in the 1960s. Between the opera companies and various festivals, the

- Humphrey Searle, *The Diary of a Madman* (UK premiere: New Opera Company at Sadler's Wells, 1960; premiered Berlin Festival 1958)

- Benjamin Britten, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (AF 1960)
- Richard Rodney Bennett, *The Ledge* (SW 1961)
- Michael Tippett, *King Priam* (ROH/Coventry Festival, 1962)
- Malcolm Williamson, *Our Man in Havana* (SW 1963)
- Nicholas Maw, *One Man Show* (London Philomusica, 1964)
- Britten, *Curlew River* (AF 1964)
- Williamson, *English Eccentrics* (AF 1964)
- Bennett, *The Mines of Sulphur* (SW 1965)
- Britten, *Burning Fiery Furnace* (AF 1966)
- Williamson, *The Violins of St Jacques* (SW 1966)
- Grace Williams, *The Parlour* (Welsh National Opera, 1966)
- Gordon Crosse, *Purgatory* (Cheltenham Festival, 1966)
- Bennett, *A Penny for a Song* (SW 1967)
- William Walton, *The Bear* (AF 1967)
- Lennox Berkeley, *Castaway* (AF 1967)
- Thea Musgrave, *The Decision* (SW 1967)
- Cornelius Cardew, *Schoolltime Compositions* (Focus Opera Group, International Students House, 1967)
- Harrison Birtwistle, *Punch and Judy* (AF 1968)
- Britten, *The Prodigal Son* (AF 1968)
- Williamson, *The Growing Castle* (Dynevore Centre, 1968)
- Crosse, *The Grace of Todd* (AF 1969), with *Purgatory* (1966)
- Williamson, *Lucky Peter's Journey* (SW 1969)
- Searle, *Hamlet* (ROH 1969, prem. Hamburg 1968)
- Bennett, *Victory* (ROH 1970)
- Tippett, *The Knot Garden* (ROH 1970)
- Peter Maxwell Davies, *Taverner* (ROH 1970)
- Maw, *The Rising of the Moon* (Glyndebourne, 1970)

TABLE 1. UK Premieres of New British Operas, 1960-1970. Aldeburgh Festival (AF), Royal Opera House Covent Garden (ROH), Sadler's Wells Opera Company (SW).<sup>50</sup>

prolific Williamson managed to premiere ten operas (including children's operas and a 'choral operetta') between 1963 and 1972. One of Nicholas Maw's two operas, *The Rising of the Moon*, had a successful premiere at Glyndebourne in 1970. Bennett produced six operas between 1961 and 1970, including the well-received *Mines of Sulphur*, commissioned for Sadler's Wells. On the other end of the spectrum, Focus Opera, a small company that had presented chamber operas since 1963, decided to shift to more experimental works in 1968, commissioning an 'opera' from Cardew (*Schoolltime Compositions*) and performing it alongside Kagel's *Sur scène* and Ligeti's *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures*, in a programme advertised as 'three

avant-garde operas'.<sup>51</sup> Most of these 1960s commissions were more conservative—musically and theatrically—than *Punch and Judy*. But the case of Birtwistle's work reveals institutions willing to take some risks, committed to supporting new opera, and more flexible than one might expect.

### **Creating space for *Punch and Judy***

Both this flexibility and the institutional challenges *Punch and Judy* presented can be seen in the work's complicated genesis. What the EOG had commissioned in 1965 was a short one-act chamber opera. It was first slated (rather optimistically) for 1966, and then as part of a double-bill with Walton's *The Bear*, commissioned by the Koussevitsky Foundation, in 1967.<sup>52</sup> When the opera was finally performed in 1968, it had grown into a stand-alone event, on a much larger scale. The EOG adapted to the substantial changes from the original commission and the delays to completion, which involved securing and then dismissing singers at various stages.<sup>53</sup> When the opera was finally ready, the company put considerable resources into its production and performance. Complicated two-level sets, suggesting a puppet theatre with others nested inside, were created by Peter Rice, and were widely praised by critics (see Figure 1). Anthony Besch, an established director who specialised in new opera, was put in charge. *Punch and Judy* premiered in the featured spot for new operas at Aldeburgh, on the first night of the Festival, thus displacing Britten's own premiere at the same Festival, *The Prodigal Son*.<sup>54</sup> While the performance was not immediately broadcast by the BBC, to some critics' displeasure, it was eventually heard on the Third Programme, the following January.<sup>55</sup> And from Aldeburgh, it went on to the Edinburgh Festival, and then to the EOG's Sadler's Wells season in 1969.

[FIGURE 1]

Despite *Punch and Judy*'s critical success, it suffered significant financial losses at Edinburgh, and there was much debate about whether to present it again at Sadler's Wells in 1969, particularly after a planned performance in Milan fell through.<sup>56</sup> But the English Opera Group continued to support the opera, however reluctantly. The decision to go ahead was due in part to Britten. He was no fan of *Punch and Judy*, to be sure, and his future relations with Birtwistle were cold. (When Birtwistle wrote to Britten in 1970 asking him to sign a letter expressing the need for more English investment in electronic music, for instance, Britten refused, addressing the younger composer formally as 'Mr Birtwistle'.<sup>57</sup>) Nonetheless, he never made that distaste public—even in private, he was far more critical of Bennett's *The Mines of Sulphur*—and he advocated for the opera's performance in 1969, partly in the hopes that it would then quietly disappear, and partly as a public gesture of support for new music.<sup>58</sup> He wrote to the Chairman of EOG's Board of Directors, Anthony Gishford:

There has been a bit of delay in talking to all the powers about the Birtwistle. But that is done now, & I do think we have...reached a composite opinion about it, which I like to think isn't far from your own. Money and stage requirements being 'equal', we feel that it would be depressing for younger composers if we don't take a commissioned work to the next convenient London season. We feel your suggested delay of 2 years would be difficult to explain, difficult to get the performers together again, & also (perhaps) commit us to yet further embarrassing performances. Let us get it over & done with, & (pianissimo) perhaps bury it!<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile Besch, the director, continued to advocate strongly for the opera. Ideas of pairing it with another work (Walton's *Façade*) were aired and then dismissed. Besch secured extra rehearsals and wrote a new programme note, recognising the barrier presented by Pruslin's original and working to make the opera more comprehensible

to audiences.<sup>60</sup> And despite the difficulties posed by the opera, *Punch and Judy* was followed quickly by the much larger commission from the Royal Opera House, then the EOG's umbrella organisation, suggesting its continuing support.

### **Mainstream experimentalism**

When *Punch and Judy* finally did make it to Aldeburgh, the premiere certainly had all the makings of an avant-garde scandal. It took place on the first night of the Festival, and audiences, having perhaps heard Britten conduct Haydn's *The Seasons* already that afternoon, would have been ill prepared for its violence and noisy aggression.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the enigmatic programme note, by the librettist Stephen Pruslin, seemed designed to confound listeners rather than to help them. If the action was shocking and the musical language difficult, any sense of discomfort was exacerbated by the performance circumstances. The premiere began quite late, at 9pm, and the one-act opera was staged without an interval, despite being nearly two hours long.<sup>62</sup> Its venue was the tiny Jubilee Hall, rendering the opera especially noisy. Even the most positive reviews complained of an exhausting combination of uncomfortable seats and harsh acoustics, exaggerating the violence and aggression of the opera, as well as its difficulty. Indeed, the premiere exhibited a typically avant-garde unconcern with audience and performance circumstances, palpably flouting the values Britten had articulated not so long before, in the Aspen Award speech of 1962.<sup>63</sup>

Nonetheless, the opera was for the most part well received. A few audience members did leave conspicuously, it seems—Britten himself seems merely to have left very quickly afterwards—but most critics blamed this on sound quality and physical discomfort.<sup>64</sup> 'Some people could not bear to stay until the end', William Mann wrote in *The Times*, 'but clumped out noisily. I suppose that the sheer noise of the music drove them away'.<sup>65</sup> Other critics seemed more impressed by the audience's



tolerance: ‘How the traditional Aldeburgh audience survived this I do not know. Only a very few stumbled out’.<sup>66</sup> And another similarly unconvinced reviewer noted little in the way of response: ‘Towards the end of the opera there come the words: “The tale is told, the damage done”’. They provoked a slight titter, the only sign of audience reaction I had noticed throughout the evening’.<sup>67</sup>

Overall, reviews were remarkably generous, and seem striking in their sheer quantity and range. The premiere was reviewed by everything from the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mirror* to the *Financial Times* and the *Observer*, from the *Glasgow Herald* to the *International Herald Tribune*. The wide coverage was perhaps due in part to the premiere of Britten’s *Prodigal Son* at the same festival, but Birtwistle was also quickly establishing a presence on the British musical scene in the summer of 1968. His *Tragoedia* (1965) had garnered critical attention a few years earlier, and it was recorded in 1967; some *Punch and Judy* critics mention having listened to this recording in preparation.<sup>68</sup> He also had another big premiere coming up in the summer of 1968, *Nomos* at the Proms. Perhaps in part because of these other signs of success, most critics were willing to give *Punch and Judy* the benefit of the doubt: much of the criticism of *Punch and Judy* was reserved for the libretto and the inscrutable programme note, while the sets and performance were widely praised. Still, a few critics were frankly baffled, and some quite negative. For Desmond Shawe-Taylor, ‘the point of it all escaped me’, although he appreciated the design and some musical moments.<sup>69</sup> *The Birmingham Post* was largely critical, casting Birtwistle as ‘the enfant-terrible of Aldeburgh this year’.<sup>70</sup> *The Scotsman* denounced the self-indulgence of the ‘young Yorkshire [sic] composer’ while admitting that the opera was ‘generally well put-over’.<sup>71</sup> But even negative reviews were at least grudgingly mixed, and *The Daily Express* was fairly representative in calling the opera ‘both fascinating and

pretentious in about equal measure', locating much of the fascination in the music and staging, and the pretention in the libretto.<sup>72</sup>

This was a moment, though, when London music criticism was dominated by some vocal defenders of new music—including William Mann at *The Times*, but also Andrew Porter at *The Financial Times*, Peter Heyworth at *The Observer* and Michael Nyman at *The Spectator*—and they threw their support behind the opera.<sup>73</sup> Porter declared that the English Opera Group had 'gained for themselves the first modern English opera', calling the premiere an 'important event both for the Group and for the Festival'.<sup>74</sup> Heyworth wrote, 'with all its faults and failings it seems to me the most vigorous shoot of new life that native opera has put out since Britten and Tippett first came on the scene'.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps the most negative major review was by an American critic, Henry Pleasants—best known for his 1955 book, *The Agony of Modern Music*—who observed with disapproval that 'Most of the London critics have chosen to take it seriously, and Mr. Birtwistle is doubtless well on the way to becoming fashionable'.<sup>76</sup>

If *Punch and Judy* brought something new and welcome into the opera house, according to these elite critics, what it broke away from was not the operatic tradition writ large, but rather recent trends in British opera. Nyman saw it as challenging the 'aesthetic backwardness of most new serious operas which present B-feature plots and attempt psychological and physical naturalism in a losing battle with an artificial convention'.<sup>77</sup> Porter similarly highlighted the problem of realist opera, describing *Punch and Judy* as 'breaking with veristic opera tradition' even while upholding 'the older traditions of a ritual theatre'.<sup>78</sup> Another critic called it 'a breakaway from literary opera into a form of musical theatre as yet only hinted at'.<sup>79</sup> And Heyworth figured it as a critique of 'conventional opera', adding that '*Punch and Judy* has an impact that reveals most of the neo-romantic plush that generally passes for modern

opera for the tired stuff it is'.<sup>80</sup> The target that emerges in this criticism, then, is a particular style of realist or 'literary' opera—precisely the mode that Boulez, associating it with the Hamburg Staatsoper, criticised so harshly.<sup>81</sup>

The British trend for 'literary' opera owed much to the precedent set by Britten's *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd* and *The Turn of the Screw*. If Britten himself turned away from literary realism between that 1954 opera and *Owen Wingrave* (1971), many new British operas were still very much invested in realism, particularly in a comic mode, from Maw's art-world farce *One Man Show* (1964) to Bennett's *A Penny for a Song* (1967) and almost any of Williamson's nine operas from the 1960s. Britten himself seemed to be revisiting his older realist mode in the late 1960s. The major Britten work at the 1968 Festival was a revival of his neglected Coronation opera, *Gloriana*. This restaging of his grandest opera, along with new television productions of *Billy Budd* (in 1966) and *Peter Grimes* (in 1969), portended the turn to the explicitly 'literary' operas that would dominate his later years, *Owen Wingrave* and *Death in Venice*. Meanwhile, Britten's current engagement with a more ritualistic, artificial type of opera was very much on display at the 1968 Aldeburgh Festival, in his *Prodigal Son*, the last and perhaps the most critically successful of his Church parables. But this too provided a useful foil for *Punch and Judy*, demonstrating a bad sort of operatic artificiality. Heyworth, covering it in the same review as Birtwistle's opera, felt it was too hermetic, evoking 'less a confrontation with the world than a germ-free refuge from it'.<sup>82</sup> *Punch and Judy*, the implication is, represented a delicate balance: artificial, and yet somehow relevant, a 'confrontation with the world'.

Critics distanced Birtwistle's opera from a more conservative new music on one hand, then. Experimental music hovered on the other, as another thing that *Punch and Judy* was not, at least not quite. Certainly, it seemed to exhibit some contact with or awareness of London's burgeoning experimental scene, both in its details and its

overall conception. In the central section where Chorges is bowed to death, for instance, Nyman found ‘Shades of Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik’, whom he had just seen at the ICA.<sup>83</sup> But the opera was praised for bringing a kind of modified, mainstreamed experimentalism into the opera house, in ways that stand out from the critical denunciation heaped on Focus Opera’s ‘three avant-garde operas’ a few months earlier. Porter praised it as an ‘opera created by kinds of thinking more familiar (in this country) in the small concert-hall, the contemporary theatre and dance movements, than in our tradition-bound opera-houses’.<sup>84</sup> Critics identified pop-art touches in Rice’s staging.<sup>85</sup> And they regularly compared the opera to Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, prompted in part, it seems, by the director, Anthony Besch.<sup>86</sup> But this was Artaud by way of Peter Brook and the Royal Shakespeare Company, whose ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ season in 1964 and production of *Marat/Sade*, adapted as a film in 1967, brought Artaud to broad audiences.<sup>87</sup> For Nyman, the opera represented ‘fresh thinking, new solutions’, yet it was ‘not revolutionary or experimental’.<sup>88</sup>

## **Tradition**

If *Punch and Judy* established a certain distance from the experimental scene, it also proclaimed some significant engagement with operatic tradition. These operatic links were made explicit in Pruslin’s programme note.

*Punch and Judy* is an opera in quotation marks. We wanted the quintessence of all the components and conventions of opera. The characters are not real people; they are archetypes, or stock characters raised to a principle. The set-pieces...are likewise formulas that recur with different meanings in many operas. Our aim was the collective generalisation of known operas into a ‘source-opera’ which, though written after them, would give the illusion of having been written before them.<sup>89</sup>

Pruslin goes on to suggest some more specific references to central composers in the operatic canon—Mozart, Beethoven and Monteverdi—in similarly convoluted terms. With reference to the love duet at the end of the opera, for instance, he writes, ‘The triumph of Punch and Pretty Polly is a photographic double-image which could then lead to Tamino-Pamina or Florestan-Fidelio as the ‘positive’ and to Nero-Poppea as the negative’.

Pruslin’s obfuscatory note has bothered critics since the premiere, but its contortions are perhaps best understood as symptoms of an increasing discomfort with its engagement with the operatic canon. The idea of a source-opera, for instance, seems an attempt to mystify a much simpler point, which Pruslin makes in an earlier draft of the note from March 1968. He makes no mention of a ‘source-opera’ here, writing instead, ‘We wanted to achieve the quintessence of all of the conventional apparatus of opera’.<sup>90</sup>

In these earlier drafts, the opera’s particular investment in Mozart also emerges more clearly. Hall mentions that when Birtwistle asked Pruslin to write the libretto for *Punch and Judy*, it was shortly after—and perhaps in response to—a talk Pruslin gave on Mozart’s operas at the first Wardour Castle Summer School in 1964. Hall proposes that the idea of a number opera must have formed the basis of Mozart’s appeal, but other evidence suggests that the engagement with Mozart was more multifaceted.<sup>91</sup> Pruslin’s early drafts of the programme note provide an expanded sense of Mozart’s centrality to the project.

*Punch and Judy* stems from our mutual obsession with Mozart. *Die Zauberflöte*, particularly Act II, was our ideal of form and continuity, and *Così fan Tutte* provided a basic sensibility in which the parodistic and the seriously meant are always simultaneous and never mutually exclusive.<sup>92</sup>

Early in the opera's genesis, Pruslin also wrote about its individual vocal parts similarly in terms of Mozart and Beethoven. In a letter giving directions for auditions, dated December 1965, Pruslin writes: 'Dorabella's aria from Act I of *Così fan Tutte* or Leonore's... [arias] from *Fidelio* would reveal much of what we imagine for the voice of Judy...'.<sup>93</sup> In the same set of directions, Pruslin suggested auditioning two baritones for the roles of Punch and Choregos with Don Giovanni's and Leporello's graveyard duet. The effacement of this Mozart 'obsession' can be seen in later drafts of the programme note: The statement above is cut, and while Pruslin refers to the ending moral as 'Mozartian', this reference is then cut as well, crossed out in red ink.<sup>94</sup>

It is unclear how much authority to give Pruslin's accounts of the opera's musical goals, and it is possible these changes were made precisely because those notes seemed misleading, or because the creators began to imagine the opera in a slightly different way. Nonetheless, references to operatic tradition are quite evident in *Punch and Judy*: in Choregos's comic epilogue; Punch's nighttime punishment by his victims, dramatically if not musically reminiscent of the punishment of another paunchy anti-hero, Verdi's Falstaff; or the riddle game with the executioner Jack Ketch—a devilish figure of death—which recalls not only *Don Giovanni*'s graveyard scene, but also a related one, the card game between Tom and the devilish Nick in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (1951). The mix of the parodic and the serious that Pruslin mentions is clearly central to *Punch and Judy*, as indicated in its very subtitle, 'A Tragical Comedy or A Comical Tragedy', and its precedent in Mozart makes sense, as does Pruslin's recourse to the set of trials that structures Act II of *The Magic Flute*, a canonical model for the ritualistic play of *Punch and Judy*. It seems important that Pruslin roots these elements of parody and ritual firmly in the operatic tradition, rather than as a confrontation with it.

Critics have long noted the opera's engagement with historical styles, genres and forms. The score is littered with terms that call on the musical past: Lullaby, Toccata, Passion Chorale, Passion Aria, Recitative, Couplets, Serenade, Sinfonia, Canonic Prelude, Melodrama, Lament, Love-Duet. These historical debts are perhaps most audible and sustained in the part for Judy, particularly her Recitative and Passion Aria II, a lament in the form of a *da capo* aria. Hall also hears references to the *St Matthew Passion* (in Choregos's repeated Moral, 'Weep, my Punch'), which is also identified by Pruslin as a structural model.<sup>95</sup> The music occasionally suggests Baroque dance forms through its rhythmic gestures (as Beard notes, Birtwistle cited Bach's orchestral suites as another model), while there are gestures to more contemporary composers throughout the score, especially Stravinsky (in the mechanical Toccatas, for instance).<sup>96</sup> For Adlington, the 'parodying' of styles and forms—from plainsong and Baroque dance forms to the sound of Webern and Stravinsky—produces something like 'a succession of comedy turns'.<sup>97</sup> Beard, similarly, hears these references as parodic, and modeled in particular on *Pierrot Lunaire*'s ironic and grotesque references to the musical past; they add up to a 'subversive relationship to opera'.<sup>98</sup> Beard goes on to complicate this idea, reminding us that parody (in the words of Linda Hutcheon) is 'fundamentally double and divided; its ambivalence stems from the dual drives of conservative and revolutionary forces that are inherent in its nature as authorized transgression'.<sup>99</sup> *Punch and Judy*'s relationship to the traditions it references and specifically to opera, he concludes, is multi-sided, and ambivalent, rather than straightforwardly subversive (78).

If Beard tends to focus on the more ironic, 'transgressive' side of this tension, reading the work through the lens of *Pierrot Lunaire*, earlier criticism on Birtwistle tended to cast *Punch and Judy* as more indebted to tradition than in conflict with it. In his 1984 book on Birtwistle, Hall suggests that Birtwistle 'selects contexts which have

the weight of tradition behind them' (although here he may be thinking more of the Punch and Judy show than the art-music tradition).<sup>100</sup> He observes that 'the various categories of opera' at work in *Punch and Judy* 'are palpably obvious' (58), and talks about its references to the baroque and to the *St Matthew Passion* in terms of modeling and shared expressive aims (65-66). Birtwistle spoke of the piece in similar terms, recalling in the 1980s how *Punch and Judy* 'relied on tradition', particularly in its use of instrumental forms, and adding that in his later work, he 'didn't want to hark back any more'.<sup>101</sup> As Birtwistle's comment suggests, the authority of the musical tradition itself was partly at issue. Indeed, *Punch and Judy* explored the problem of authority—and the possibility for individual action within and against it—perhaps primarily as a musical one, as a problem of artistic production.

### **Punch and Judy: Urban Entertainment and Popular Culture**

*Punch and Judy* introduced the idea of revolt and tradition simultaneously, through its recourse to the puppet tradition itself as a relic of English popular culture. For Birtwistle, as for Davies and Goehr, English traditions offered another point of both confrontation and continuity with the previous generation of composers. We can see the centrality of such traditions in Birtwistle's next theatrical project, *Down by the Greenwood Side*, which references mummers' plays and folk ballads.<sup>102</sup> Meanwhile, Goehr's opera was an adaptation of the Elizabethan play *Arden of Faversham*, and Davies' major project of the period was an opera about John Taverner, looking to more canonical Elizabethan culture. Even at the time, critics did not generally discuss *Punch and Judy* as an intervention into operatic uses of English traditions. Still, this aspect of the opera seems foregrounded in the context of the Aldeburgh Festival, where it departed significantly from the other versions of both tradition generally and Punch specifically that were on offer.



The festival presented its own narrative of the Punch and Judy shows in its 1968 programme book, which featured a long essay excerpted from George Speaight's book *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*.<sup>103</sup> Rooting Punch in the tradition of *commedia dell'arte* and linking it to medieval mystery plays, it neutralised Punch's violence—figuring it as a fundamentally formal device—and elided any class associations. Elsewhere in the programme book, we see Punch as harmlessly nostalgic seaside entertainment, as the festival also featured open-air performances by Codman's Punch and Judy Theatre.<sup>104</sup> (This even ended up taking place in the same space as Birtwistle's opera, Jubilee Hall, due to inclement weather.)

Birtwistle's opera, however, emphasised the violent and disruptive elements of the Punch and Judy tradition. Pruslin's original programme note associated these elements not so much with popular culture as with childhood itself:

*Punch and Judy* the original is a puppet-play for children in which the audience's glee increases in direct proportion to the overt violence of the events on the stage. At our distance from childhood we repress this identification by convincing ourselves that the characters are 'only puppets'.  
*Punch and Judy* the opera is a puppet-play for adults written in the hope of allowing the audience to re-experience the vividness of its childhood reaction.<sup>105</sup>

The opera, then, drew on the remembered directness of childhood perceptions. In this regard, at least in the context of the Aldeburgh Festival, it might have recalled Britten's children's opera *Noye's Fludde* of ten years earlier—and since then a staple of the festival—while turning its idealised vision of childhood upside down. Just as Pruslin's note called on the viscosity and directness of childhood memory, it perhaps aimed at a parallel stripping back of cultural memory, seeking to restore an anarchic energy dulled by years of familiarisation and cooptation. Punch had been appropriated

for middle-class children's entertainment since the early nineteenth century, even appearing within didactic children's literature, or as a harmless, domesticated paper doll.<sup>106</sup>

The opera's visual elements called on this Victorian tradition and its associations with children's entertainment. Birtwistle's and Pruslin's published 'Notes for Production' suggested that the colours used should recall 'the illustrations in Victorian children's books such as Struwelpeter, with their 'strong pastels', while the costumes should 'recreate the aura of George Cruikshank's woodcuts in Victorian editions of Punch and Judy'.<sup>107</sup>) The on-stage windband was to be 'costumed in typical Victorian military bandmen's uniforms' (ii). Meanwhile, another late 19<sup>th</sup>-century reference added a nightmarish twist: the paintings of James Ensor, with their brightly coloured carnival scenes and grotesque masks, would 'prove suggestive for the visual aspect of the opera as a whole' (v). While the production seems to have been largely consistent with the authors' notes, for the most part reviewers overlooked these more disturbing aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, as well as its specifically Victorian references. For at least one reviewer, the production directly invoked the seaside tradition still familiar in the 1960s, its red and white colour scheme reminiscent of the red and white stripes that decorated the puppet theatre from the early nineteenth century to the present. The sets were 'straight out of a seaside funfair', and included 'a fortuneteller's booth, a carnival bandstand (five musicians play on stage), an onion dome reminiscent of Brighton Pavilion, and traditional drawings of Mr. Punch'.<sup>108</sup> Oliver Knussen recalls simply that the singers 'really looked like huge Punch and Judy puppets'.<sup>109</sup> Another reviewer added that the on-stage windband was dressed in 'old military uniforms' (perhaps also recalling Birtwistle's own early musical experience as a clarinetist in the North East Lancashire Military Band, as well as his two years of national service in a military band).<sup>110</sup>

At the same time, the Punch tradition is significantly transformed in the opera, in ways that counteract its disruptive energy. Some critics have seen it as a vehicle for exploring Greek tragedy, especially with the addition of the narrator figure, Choregos.<sup>111</sup> More fundamentally, the opera turns the entertainment into a ritual, slow-moving and deliberate where the puppet show is relentlessly fast, while musically, its noisy disruptions are balanced by meditative and lyrical passages, as well as brokenly mechanical ones. Relatedly, the puppet show is inflected by a new quest narrative—much as in Birtwistle’s later opera *Gawain and the Green Knight*—as Punch searches for his ideal, embodied in Pretty Polly. Birtwistle and Pruslin also add images of renewal at the end of the opera. These include traditionally comic images of spring and marriage, but also ones drawn from English folklore, as the murdered characters return and the miming chorus dances around the maypole, ‘in maying guise’ (see Figure 1).<sup>112</sup> One of these guises is the traditional ‘green man’.<sup>113</sup> The effect of these folklore elements is to highlight *Punch and Judy* as an engagement with English traditions and also to absorb the urban entertainment into a larger body of more rural, ‘authentic’ folklore. In this sense, it was perhaps a bid for inclusion—much like Birtwistle’s own—as much as an act of provocation.

Nonetheless, Birtwistle’s *Punch and Judy* could be seen to restore some of the show’s association with a ‘festive, working-class inversion of authority’ (to use one literary critic’s words) in the midst of operatic culture at Aldeburgh.<sup>114</sup> It seems doubtful that the opera or its audience took on Punch and Judy’s complicated history of negotiating elite and popular culture and class politics, but it would seem difficult for audiences to completely ignore the tradition’s class associations, as displayed, for instance, in the 1963 film *The Punch & Judy Man*. Here, Tony Hancock plays the titular puppeteer. The world of seaside entertainment he inhabits—a world of fortune-tellers and sand-sculptors—is clearly on the brink of collapse, his own traditional

puppet show largely displaced, he points out ironically, by television. (Hancock himself was famous as a television comedian.) The puppeteer is heavily marked as working-class, clinging to an identity that also seems to be under erasure, the social space it occupies quickly shrinking. He is treated as a pariah by the local dignitaries, and as an obstacle to the modern fashionable town they want to create. In one scene he persistently taunts them in the local pub; the wall he attempts to breach so annoyingly here—separating the more exclusive saloon bar from the public bar where he meets his friends—is just one of many such barriers in the film, innocuous but apparently uncrossable. The film reaches its climax when the Punch and Judy man is forced to perform at a party for the town's elites—thanks to his naively social-climbing wife—and it degenerates into drunken, bun-throwing chaos, and from there into naked class-hostility. This is Punch and Judy as carnivalesque disruption, but also as working-class culture for bourgeois consumption, and as a melancholy relic of a world quickly fading away. Punch performs some similar functions in Birtwistle's opera, and we might be tempted to see something of the film's climactic performance in the legendary scandal of *Punch and Judy* at Aldeburgh, casting a narrative of avant-garde provocation as also one of class hostilities. But the more sedate reality suggests that elite culture tended to absorb any kind of assault: another kind of melancholy truth.

### **Punch's Revolt**

The action of *Punch and Judy* offers further commentary on the larger tensions it navigates: between avant-garde revolt and operatic tradition, and between individual artists and institutions. Indeed, in this sense it has much in common with Goehr's and Davies' operas of the same years; all three deal with how individuals—especially artists—respond to social and political pressures. In *Arden Must Die*, a witness to a

murderous conspiracy fails to speak out under the weight of social pressure, in what was widely taken as a commentary on the recent German past.<sup>115</sup> Davies described Taverner as offering parallels with the situation of the artist, as ‘somebody breaking down under social or even purely commercial pressures’.<sup>116</sup> *Punch and Judy* explores this theme in slightly different terms: less overtly political, and perhaps more ambivalent. As Birtwistle’s comment suggests, the authority of the musical tradition itself is partly at issue, and *Punch and Judy*—more than *Arden Must Die* or *Taverner*—explores the problem of authority in musical terms, with music itself as an object of revolt.

The opera is structured by a series of murders, as Punch attacks the constraints around him—from familial duty to societal forces of law and medicine, to death itself—in an individualistic quest for the ideal. However, these attacks are far from celebrated. Punch’s final victory over Jack Ketch, the figure of death, is the only straightforwardly triumphant one, inaugurating a celebration of spring and rebirth, followed by a love duet between Punch and Pretty Polly. The other murders, in their ritualistic guise, are presented more as necessary sacrifices than gleeful acts of violence, despite the triumphant ‘War Cry’ that follows each one. Before each of these sacrificial acts, the victim calmly offers him/herself up. ‘To die for Punch’, Judy says ‘is unending bliss’.<sup>117</sup> Meanwhile Punch, Pierrot-like, is often an object of sympathy, even pity, if of a slightly sardonic sort. ‘Weep, my Punch... Weep, poor, pathetic Punch’, Choregos sings in the sombre, lyrical ‘Moral’ after Punch’s rejections by Pretty Polly (the passage Hall compared to the Evangelist in *St Matthew Passion*, addressing Peter after his betrayal).<sup>118</sup>

Punch’s melancholy violence was often framed in quite negative terms in earlier criticism, as something like an unfortunate necessity, or even a critique of such acts of revolt. For many, it spoke to the necessity of constraints, and the impossibility

of breaking free. In an early review, the composer Gordon Crosse saw Punch's violence as the unformed part of us any individual—'destructive, regressive, hurtful; the baby's tantrum beneath our civilized sociability'.<sup>119</sup> The opera was thus 'about the positive business of growing up.' Nyman saw Punch even more negatively, as the 'archetypal anti-hero, who without conscience destroys social institutions in his search for personal liberty; he is also the arrogant dictator who silences reason and opposition to achieve evil ends'.<sup>120</sup> Hall cast *Punch* in Jungian terms, as staging a confrontation between the individual and the collective, emphasising their interdependence: 'if Mr Punch's ego becomes too assertive it will overwhelm Choregos, the chorus, the collective. To restore the balance Punch must recognize the situation and make amends'.<sup>121</sup> Elsewhere, he wrote more broadly of this idea of interdependence and symbiosis:

Birtwistle insists, in this period, that the individual cannot survive without the collective, without 'the other'. The outrageously assertive Punch needs to be tempered by Choregos, his social and psychological complement, and by Pretty Poll [sic], his ideal woman and spiritual complement'.<sup>122</sup>

This sense of symbiosis can indeed most clearly be seen in Punch's relationship with Choregos.<sup>123</sup>

The climax of Punch's series of murders is his attack on Choregos, whom he inserts into a kind of throne in the stylised shape of a bass-viol and proceeds to bow to death (Figure 2).<sup>124</sup> After he kills Choregos, Punch makes his most regretful statement, labeled 'Lament': 'O Gods, this vile disfigured sight opens an abyss of agony in my soul.... The lights of the world go out, and I am alone with the beating of wings' (Example 1). Detached, half-spoken and expressionless, it highlights Punch's state of abjection, and his alienation from music at this moment of crisis.<sup>125</sup> This is a turning point in the opera, as Punch goes on to be punished by his victims in the

‘Nightmare’ section, before encountering the devil/executioner and finally triumphing over death.<sup>126</sup>

[FIGURE 2]

[EXAMPLE 1]

Choregos emerges as Punch’s central antagonist, and the most agonised object of revolt. But what precisely does he represent? For Hall, as we have seen, he is the collective, Punch’s ‘social and psychological complement’.<sup>127</sup> For Besch, in his Sadler’s Wells programme note, Choregos is Punch’s ‘alter ego’, his ‘better nature’.<sup>128</sup> But he is also the narrator, and he begins and ends the opera, literally providing its frame. He is the only character who is not a puppet, as Hall observes, and seems in charge, despite becoming a victim himself. Historically, the choregos is not precisely a chorus or narrator, but rather a patron of the theatre, the one who pays for the chorus.<sup>129</sup> He might even be said to embody the institutional authority of the teacher and curator that Bourdieu, writing in 1966, saw competing with the personal authority of the creator—here Punch—for cultural legitimacy, in a relationship of both opposition and complementarity.<sup>130</sup>

[FIGURE 3]

[EXAMPLE 2]

Most fundamentally, Choregos is a figure of music, as suggested visually by his instrument-covered throne (Figure 3).<sup>131</sup> ‘Let music begin’, he sings in the ‘fanfare’ shortly before his death, ‘let trumpets sound, let sounds of Pretty Polly here abound. Sing-song of Polly, shining and clear, will ringadum for all to hear’.<sup>132</sup> His singing here, while at first recalling the last trumpet of Stravinsky’s ‘Tuba Mirum’ in the *Requiem Canticles*, also includes melismas of almost Handelian proportions, serving to depict the pervasive power of sound (Example 2). Indeed, throughout the large section culminating in his sacrifice, ‘Melodrama III’, the text is almost entirely

concerned with sound, and with its real-world efficacy. In the opening duet, for example, Punch ‘turns suddenly to Choregos’ and sings ‘A sound that sings and sounds a thousand wounds’ (91), words introduced by Choregos himself much earlier, in the ‘Word game’ (15). Sound’s efficacy is also at issue in the labeling of some sections of ‘Melodrama III’ as ‘Gebrauch[s]musik’—use music—a term meant very literally here, perhaps. The power of music is both thematised and parodied in the repeated injunction to ‘crown him [Choregos] with trumpet and cymbal’ in the ‘Preyer and Coronation Scene’, echoed by the raucous sound of toy trumpets, cymbals and drums in the ‘Dithyramps’. Sonically, too, this section is perhaps the most vivid, with the noise of the toy instruments and the sonic enactment of Chorego’s murder, as well as Judy’s virtuosic ‘Recitative and Passion Aria II’, one of the central numbers of the opera, with its injunction to ‘Be silent, strings of my heart’. Clearly, music itself is centrally at issue in Melodrama III. Choregos’s murder, too, is extensively described in terms of sound, as Punch ‘bows a serenade on the bass-viol’, apparently as a form of torture: ‘With downbows of destruction and ponticelli of pain, he turns tones of terror into a song of suffering’ (123).

Punch kills Choregos with his own tools, just as he kills the Doctor with a hypodermic syringe and the Lawyer with a quill pen (64). And yet, his appropriation of Choregos’ tools is much more extended: in addition to the act of bowing, we also see Punch bang a cymbal, a trumpet and a drum over Choregos’s head (100, 106, 113), in an aggressive act of ‘crowning’, while the murder itself is more extensively represented in sound. In other ways, too, Punch seems associated with music alongside Choregos, rendering them doubles. Punch appropriates some of Choregos’ music-obsessed language, and they are bound together in their joint attempt to serenade Polly. Punch’s assault is an assault of music on itself, in other words.

[EXAMPLE 3]



Despite Punch's despair, though, Choregos is not entirely vanquished. He lives on through the opera, and even has the last word. Moreover, the idea of music for which he stands is transformed, apotheosised, in the shape of Punch's attained ideal, Pretty Polly. As Punch triumphs, she takes up where Choregos left off, elaborating on his melismatic 'ringadam' in a song of spring (Example 3).<sup>133</sup> We might read the trajectory of Punch's quest in quite simple terms, as suggesting that music as authority (embodied in Choregos) has to be conquered for music as ideal to thrive. And yet, Choregos's centrality and durability bely this reading. What we end up with is something quite resigned, in which revolt is a personal necessity for the artist, but it is inseparable from art as both ideal and authority.

It is this sense of resignation, finally—this recognition of an impasse—that prevents the opera from simply replaying what Georgina Born, drawing on Bourdieu and Raymond Williams, called the 'necessary relation between the accumulation of cultural authority and a show of containing minority elements of dissent and opposition'.<sup>134</sup> The opera might seem to court this description, introducing the disruptive energy of the Punch and Judy show only to undermine it at every turn. But what emerges is less a gesture of discipline and control than one of melancholy, as the opera acknowledges the impossible contradictions of avant-garde activity in the late 1960s. *Punch and Judy* offers a self-conscious reflection on the interdependence of authority and dissent, using the traditional and institutional apparatus of opera as a way of making this relationship explicit rather than masking it. The story of its premiere moreover, makes that interdependence manifest, revealing an avant-garde less interested in rejecting opera than in rescuing it, and a set of critics and institutions eager to embrace this effort.

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This article originated in a talk for the Barbican's 'Birtwistle at 80' study day (sponsored by the Institute of Musical Research) in 2014; I'm grateful to Jonathan Cross for inviting me to participate, and to the other participants in that event, especially David Beard. The article also benefited from stimulating discussion at the Oxford Faculty of Music, where it was delivered as a colloquium, and from the suggestions of the anonymous readers of this journal. Thanks also to the staff at the Britten-Pears Foundation, especially Nicholas Clark.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Nyman, 'Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*' (*The Listener*, 10 October 1968, 481), *Michael Nyman: Collected Writings*, ed. Pwyll ap Siôn (Aldershot, 2013), 41; Also see 'Humphrey Searle's *Hamlet*: The Composer Talks to Martin Kingsbury', *Musical Times*, 110 (April 1969), 369. In both cases, though, this idea of a 'death sentence' on opera is immediately complicated or contested by the authors.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Boulez, 'Opera Houses?—Blow Them Up!' *Opera*, 19 (June 1968), 442. Originally published as 'Sprengt die Opernhäuser in die Luft', *Der Spiegel*, 40 (25 September 1967), 166-74. On the middlebrow in relationship to musical modernism, see Christopher Chowrimootoo, 'Reviving the Middlebrow, or: Deconstructing Modernism from the Inside', *JRMA*, 139 (2014), 187-193; Danielle Fossler-Lussier, *Music Divided: Bartok's Legacy in Cold War Culture* (Berkeley, 2007), 83-85; Ian Wellens, *Music on the Frontline: Nicolas Nabokov's Struggle Against Communism and Middlebrow Culture* (Aldershot, 2002), 99-113.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Rosenthal, introduction to Pierre Boulez, 'Opera Houses?—Blow Them Up!' *Opera*, 19 (June 1968), 442.

<sup>4</sup> The Hamburg Staatsoper was originally to present the Searle and Goehr operas in Edinburgh, but these were replaced by repertory works because the available theatre was considered technically inadequate for the newer productions ('New Operas Dropped From Festival', *Glasgow Herald*, 27 January 1968). The Edinburgh Festival frequently hosted visiting opera companies, including perhaps most famously the Frankfurt Opera in 1971, in a particularly scandalous production of Prokofiev's *The Fiery Angel* featuring topless 'nuns' (Angela Bartie, *The Edinburgh Festivals: Culture and Society in Post-War Britain* [Edinburgh, 2013], 209).

<sup>5</sup> Boulez, 'Opera Houses?' 442-443.

<sup>6</sup> David Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle's Operas and Music Theatre* (Cambridge, 2012), 43; John Payne Collier, *Punch and Judy: A Short History with the Original Dialogue* (London, 1828).

<sup>7</sup> Nyman makes a similar connection between *Punch* and Boulez, in 'Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*', 41.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Pruslin, *Punch and Judy* programme note, first draft, 15 March 1968, English Opera Group (EOG) Admin File: *Punch and Judy*, Britten-Pears Foundation (BPF). Birtwistle himself was engaged with the figure of Pierrot by way of *Pierrot Lunaire*: he'd founded the Pierrot Players to mimic the ensemble in Schoenberg's piece, in response to a commission from the Austrian Institute, and had written *Monodrama*—a close relation of *Punch and Judy*—for the ensemble in 1967: Michael Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle* (London, 1984), 50. On musical relationships between *Punch and Judy* and *Pierrot Lunaire*, also see Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle's Operas and Music Theatre*, 43-51.

<sup>9</sup> Joan Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 141-44.

<sup>10</sup> On Birtwistle and 'the post-war disapproval of opera—that bourgeois genre *par excellence*', see Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: Man, Mind, Music* (Ithaca, 2000), 70. On Birtwistle and avant-garde 'ambivalence about the possibility of dramatic expression', see Robert Adlington, *The Music of Harrison Birtwistle*

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(Cambridge, 2000), 6-7. On Birtwistle and avant-garde 'opposition' to opera, see Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle's Operas and Music Theatre* 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> On the avant-garde's engagement with opera, also see Arman Schwartz, 'A Note from the Guest Editor', *The Opera Quarterly: 'Opera and the Avant-Garde'*, 30 (2014), 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> Joan Peyser, *To Boulez and Beyond*, rev. ed. (Plymouth, 2008), 228. Even in the course of 'Opera Houses?' he discussed writing a theatrical work himself, expressed admiration for Peter Brook (who had briefly been 'Director of Productions' at the Royal Opera House) and suggested smaller, experimental stages of the kind that many opera houses went on to create (Boulez 'Opera Houses', 442, 445, 446). After Boulez's interview, he was invited by the director of the Paris Opera, Jean Vilar, to institute reforms; it was only when Vilar resigned in solidarity with the May 1968 protests that the project collapsed and Boulez left, to direct the BBC Symphony Orchestra (Peyser, *To Boulez and Beyond*, 228-29). Beard also points out that 'it would be misleading to suggest that Boulez was unambiguously opposed to opera or music theatre', in *Harrison Birtwistle's Operas and Music Theatre*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> This claim is related to David Beard's useful suggestion (discussed below) that 'the "dual drives of revolutionary and conservative forces" are fundamental to *Punch*' but different in that Beard locates these drives within parody. Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle's Operas and Music Theatre*, 74, quoting Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Chicago, 2000), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu, 'Intellectual Field and Creative Project', *Social Science Information* 8 (April 1969), 110. Translated by Sian France from 'Champ Intellectuel et Projet Createur', *Les Temps Modernes* (November 1966), 865-906. See also Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley, 1995), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, 29; Benjamin Piekut, 'Actor-Networks in Music History: Clarifications and Critiques', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 11 (2014): 212.

<sup>16</sup> On this narrative, see Matthew Riley, ed., *British Music and Modernism, 1895-1960* (Farnham, 2010), 1; Philip Rupprecht, *British Musical Modernism: The Manchester Group and Their Contemporaries* (Cambridge, 2015), 4-5. The narrative can already be found in Andrew Porter, 'Some New British Composers', *Musical Quarterly*, 51 (1965), 12-21; also published in *Contemporary Music in Europe*, ed. Paul Henry Lang and Nathan Broder (London, 1966), 12-21.

<sup>17</sup> Virginia Anderson, "'1968" and the Experimental Revolution in Britain', *Music and Protest in 1968*, ed. Beate Kutschke, Barley Norton (Cambridge, 2013), 175. Anderson writes of the 'Manchester School' composers: 'As a consequence of their ties to this tradition, these composers played a negligible part in the 1968 revolution. If anything, they formed a tangential association with 'swinging' London, an establishment culture that took in mainstream pop, Bond films and the Playboy Club, as well as couture, design, publishing and government-supported high arts'.

<sup>18</sup> Rupprecht, *British Musical Modernism*, 6-8, quoting Percy Cater, 'The Dull Young Things of the 'Fifties'', *Daily Mail*, 10 January 1952; Dai Griffiths, 'On Grammar Schoolboy Music', in Derek B. Scott, ed., *Music, Culture, and Society: A Reader* (Oxford, 2000), 143-45, originally published as 'Genre: Grammar Schoolboy Music', *Critical Musicology Newsletter*, 3 (July 1995).

<sup>19</sup> These doubts are effectively summarised (and countered) by Robert Adlington in his edited collection on politics and the 1960s avant-garde (a collection in which British music is conspicuously absent): 'Introduction', *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (Oxford, 2009), 4.

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- <sup>20</sup> On similar tensions within the French ‘modernist avant-garde’, see Born, *Rationalizing Culture*.
- <sup>21</sup> ‘A Task for the ICA: A First Statement by Michael Kustow’, 6, in Anne Massey and Gregor Muir, *Institute of Contemporary Arts 1946-1968* (London, 2014), 151.
- <sup>22</sup> Porter, ‘Some New British Composers’, *Musical Quarterly*, 51 (1965), 12.
- <sup>23</sup> Porter, ‘Some New British Composers’, 16.
- <sup>24</sup> ‘Anti-Camp Composer’, *Observer*, 21 February 1965, 23.
- <sup>25</sup> Michael Nyman, ‘Minimal Music’ (*The Spectator*, 11 October 1968), *Collected Writings*, 42.
- <sup>26</sup> Benjamin Piekut, ‘Indeterminacy, Free Improvisation, and the Mixed Avant-Garde: Experimental Music in London, 1965-1975’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 67 (2014), 772; Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (London, 1974). In the opening pages of the book, Nyman notes that his choice to focus ‘on the *differences* between the experimental and the avant-garde’ was a strategic one, and could be balanced by attention to the overlaps between them (2).
- <sup>27</sup> Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 201.
- <sup>28</sup> Michael Nyman, ‘Enter Birtwistle’ (*The Spectator*, 30 August 1968), *Collected Writings*, 31.
- <sup>29</sup> Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2.
- <sup>30</sup> Rupprecht, *British Musical Modernism*, 24-25, 57-58.
- <sup>31</sup> Andrew Clements, ‘The Io Passion’, *The Guardian*, 14 June 2004 [http://www.theguardian.com/music/2004/jun/14/classicalmusicandopera1, accessed 21/2/2016]
- <sup>32</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "Punch and Judy (opera)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Punch\\_and\\_Judy\\_\(opera\)&oldid=551044702](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Punch_and_Judy_(opera)&oldid=551044702) (accessed 21 February 2016); David Beard refers to Britten’s ‘alleged walkout’ (*Harrison Birtwistle’s Operas and Music Theatre*, 38); See also Michael Hall, *Music Theatre in Britain, 1960-1975* (Woodbridge, 2015), 105.
- <sup>33</sup> Benjamin Britten, *Britten on Music*, ed. Paul Kildea (Oxford, 2003), 329. On this statement, also see Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle’s Operas and Music Theatre*, 38.
- <sup>34</sup> *The Britten Companion*, ed. Christopher Palmer (London, 1984), 96. In his introduction to the interview, Donald Mitchell recalls (presumably from some distance) that it took place in February 1969, and was first broadcast on the BBC in 1971 (87). Britten mentions that this composer neglected to see a Mozart opera among ‘other operas being performed in the neighbourhood’ at the time of the premiere, but this would be puzzling if he is referring to *Punch and Judy*, since there were no Mozart operas at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1968.
- <sup>35</sup> Hall, *Music Theatre*, 105.
- <sup>36</sup> Hall, *Music Theatre*, 102.
- <sup>37</sup> Harrison Birtwistle and Stephen Pruslin, ‘Notes for Production’, in *Punch and Judy: A Tragical Comedy or a Comical Tragedy: Opera in One Act* [libretto] (London, 1968), i, iv. Note that some copies of this publication (UE1419aL) do not include this introductory section.
- <sup>38</sup> Brook, *The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate* (London, 1968), 84-85. On *Punch and Judy* as ‘rough theatre’, see Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 66, 70.
- <sup>39</sup> See Hall, *Music Theatre*, 71-87.
- <sup>40</sup> Hall, *Music Theatre*, 16-1, Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle’s Operas and Music Theatre*, 18. See also Michael Hooper, ‘Wardour Castle Summer School’ [https://wardourcastlesummerschool.wordpress.com], accessed 24 February 2016.

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<sup>41</sup> Hall, *Music Theatre*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Hall, *Music Theatre*, 16-17. Hall appears to be relying mainly on Anthony Gilbert's recollections.

<sup>43</sup> John Tooley, *In House: The Story of Covent Garden* (London, 1999), 79. The published libretto is dated 26 December 1965: Birtwistle and Pruslin, *Punch and Judy* [libretto], 28. See also this article's discussion of the EOG's performance plans and correspondence with Pruslin, below.

<sup>44</sup> Hall, *Music Theatre in Britain*, 96.

<sup>45</sup> Davies's began working on *Taverner*, for instance, as a student in 1956. See Peter Maxwell Davies, 'Taverner: Synopsis and Documentation', *Tempo* 101 (1972), 4.

<sup>46</sup> Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 50.

<sup>47</sup> *The Mask of Orpheus* was taken over by Glyndebourne before it eventually premiered at ENO in 1986, and originated in a 1968 commission by London Weekend Television for an opera on Orpheus; see Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: The Mask of Orpheus* (Farnham, 2009), 31-38; Tooley, *In House*, 79-80; Fiona Maddocks and Harrison Birtwistle, *Harrison Birtwistle: Wild Tracks - A Conversation Diary with Fiona Maddocks* (London, 2014), 80-81; see also Michael Nyman, 'Mr Birtwistle is Out' (*Music and Musicians*, September 1969), *Collected Writings*, 76. The alchemists project is mentioned in a letter from Birtwistle to Britten, 22 November 1965, BPF. See also Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle's Operas and Music Theatre*, 39.

<sup>48</sup> A British Council report from 1965 reads: 'It is we think only now that foreign audiences are beginning to appreciate the special qualities of British contemporary opera. Much of this is the result of extensive touring in the last four or five years by Sadler's Wells and the English Opera Group'. R.A.H. Duke to Arts Council, 6 January 1967, ENO Ad 61 box 11, in Susie Gilbert, *Opera for Everybody: The Story of English National Opera* (London, 2009), 191.

<sup>49</sup> Gilbert, *Opera For Everybody*, 188.

<sup>50</sup> An essential source of information on these operas is Margaret Ross Griffel, *Operas in English: A Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Plymouth, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> *Musical Times*, 109 (1968), 233; Hall, *Music Theatre*, 80-82. Hall points out that the programme was entitled 'Three? Avant-Garde? Operas?' (169), but the questions marks do not appear in the *Musical Times* advertisement. Nonetheless, most critics did not recognize these works as operas (Hall, 173). Cardew addressed *Schooltime Compositions*' relationship to opera in 'Sitting in the Dark', *Musical Times*, 109 (1968), 233-234.

<sup>52</sup> Board of Directors Minutes, 23 November 1966, EOG 1/23, BPF. Indeed, there are some indications that *Punch and Judy* was expected even earlier. When Britten wrote a recommendation for Birtwistle's Harkness Fellowship in 1965—just as he had for Peter Maxwell Davies and would do again for Jonathan Harvey—Birtwistle assured him that the opera would be produced before he departed to take up the fellowship in the US, where he proposed to work on a new opera. Birtwistle to Britten, 22 November 1965, BPF.

<sup>53</sup> Keith Grant to John Rhys Evans, 10 January 1966, EOG Admin File: *Punch and Judy*, BPF.

<sup>54</sup> *Programme Book for the Twenty-First Aldeburgh Festival, 1968*, BPF. The previous two Parables for Church Performance were presented on the first night of the Aldeburgh Festival, according to the programme books for 1966 and 1964 (BPF).

<sup>55</sup> The broadcast was on 23 January 1969 (*Opera*, 9 January 1969, 54). Peter Heyworth bemoaned the lack of a broadcast in 'Opera of Cruelty', *Observer*, 16 June 1968, BPF.

- <sup>56</sup> The attempts to schedule a Milan performance, at La Piccolo Scala, are detailed in Grant to Anthony Besch, 21 November 1968, 5 December 1968, 27 January 1969, EOG Admin File: *Punch and Judy*, BPF.
- <sup>57</sup> Birtwistle to Britten, 2 July 1970; Britten to Birtwistle, 15 July 1970, BPF. *Punch and Judy* was revived at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1991 (Andrew Clements, ‘Punch and Judy’, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed 25 February 25 2016, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/O008031>).
- <sup>58</sup> On Britten’s harsh response, in 1965, to Bennett’s *The Mines of Sulphur*, see Anthony Meredith with Paul Harris, *Richard Rodney Bennett, The Complete Musician* (London, 2010), 152. My thanks to Nicholas Clark for bringing this to my attention.
- <sup>59</sup> Britten to Anthony Gishford, 23 January 1969, quoted in Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke, eds. *Letters from a Life: the Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten, 1913-1976*, Vol. 6, 1966-1976 (Woodbridge, 2012), 307.
- <sup>60</sup> Keith Grant to Anthony Besch, 21 August 1969, EOG Admin File: *Punch and Judy*, BPF. Besch’s note is held in this file.
- <sup>61</sup> Some reviewers comment on having gone to both concerts, for example Desmond Shawe-Taylor, ‘Guys and Dolls’, *Sunday Times*, 16 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>62</sup> This time—late on the first night—was the regular slot for new operas at the Aldeburgh festival, but they did normally begin a bit earlier, at 8:30 (*Programme Book for the Twentieth Aldeburgh Festival, 1967*, *Programme Book for the Twenty-Second Aldeburgh Festival, 1969*, BPF). In 1966, Britten’s *Burning Fiery Furnace* premiered in this slot, but even later, at 9:30 (*Programme Book for the Nineteenth Aldeburgh Festival, 1966*, 11, BPF).
- <sup>63</sup> Benjamin Britten, ‘On Winning the First Aspen Award’, *Britten on Music*, 255-63.
- <sup>64</sup> Tooley, *In House*, 79.
- <sup>65</sup> William Mann, ‘Punch and Judy for Adults at Aldeburgh’, *The Times*, 10 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>66</sup> ‘Aldeburgh’s Noisy Experiment’, *Glasgow Herald*, 18 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>67</sup> Leslie Ayre, ‘Adults’ Punch is Quite Puzzling’, *The Evening News*, 10 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>68</sup> Andrew Porter, ‘Aldeburgh Festival: *Punch and Judy*’, *Financial Times*, 10 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>69</sup> Desmond Shawe-Taylor, ‘Guys and Dolls’, *Sunday Times*, 16 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>70</sup> K.W. Dommett, ‘Aldeburgh Festival’, *Birmingham Post*, 10 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>71</sup> Conrad Wilson, ‘Food for Thought in “Adult Puppet-Play”’, *The Scotsman*, 10 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>72</sup> “Punch and Judy Grow Up With a Vengeance,” *Daily Express*, 10 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>73</sup> On the new generation of music critics, also see Porter, ‘Some New British Composers’, 16.
- <sup>74</sup> Andrew Porter, ‘Aldeburgh Festival: *Punch and Judy*’, *Financial Times*, 10 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>75</sup> Peter Heyworth, ‘Opera of Cruelty’, *Observer*, 16 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>76</sup> Henry Pleasants, ‘Britten’s Third Parable Premieres at Aldeburgh’, *International Herald Tribune*, 12 June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>77</sup> Nyman, ‘Harrison Birtwistle’s *Punch and Judy*,’ *Collected Writings*, 39.
- <sup>78</sup> Andrew Porter, *Musical Times* (August 1968): 743, BPF.
- <sup>79</sup> Noel Goodwin, ‘*Punch and Prodigal*’, *Music and Musicians* (August 1968), 18-19, BPF.
- <sup>80</sup> Peter Heyworth, ‘Opera of Cruelty’, *Observer*, 16 June 1968, BPF.

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<sup>81</sup> On the related term ‘Literaturoper’, see Geoffrey Chew, “‘Literaturoper’: A Term Still in Search of a Definition”, in *Sborník Prací Filozofické Fakulty Brněnské Univerzity, řada hudebněvědná* (continued as *Musicologica Brunensia*) 56-57 (2007-8): 5-13.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Heyworth, ‘Opera of Cruelty’, *Observer*, 16 June 1968, BPF.

<sup>83</sup> Nyman, ‘Harrison Birtwistle’s *Punch and Judy*,’ *Collected Writings*, 40; Michael Nyman, ‘Minimal Music’ (*Spectator*, 11 October 1968), *Collected Writings*, 43.

<sup>84</sup> Andrew Porter, *Musical Times* (August 1968): 743, BPF.

<sup>85</sup> William Mann, ‘Punch and Judy for Adults at Aldeburgh’, *The Times*, 10 June 1968, BPF.

<sup>86</sup> Only the *Daily Mirror* admits the prompt: ‘Producer Anthony Besch likened the work for me to ‘an operatic theatre of cruelty’ (David Clemens, ‘Scene’, *Daily Mirror*, [undated] June 1968, BPF).

<sup>87</sup> Also see Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 122; David Beard discusses Artaud’s theatre as an important context for Birtwistle’s works; see especially *Harrison Birtwistle’s Operas and Music Theatre*, 280-286. He highlights Brook’s production of *Marat/Sade* as a possible reference point for Birtwistle’s work, in this case *Bow Down* (297).

<sup>88</sup> Nyman, ‘Harrison Birtwistle’s *Punch and Judy*,’ *Collected Writings*, 41.

<sup>89</sup> *Programme Book for the Twenty-First Aldeburgh Festival, 1968*, 21, BPF.

<sup>90</sup> Pruslin, *Punch and Judy* programme note draft, 15 March 1968, EOG Admin File: *Punch and Judy*, BPF.

<sup>91</sup> Hall, *Music Theatre*, 103.

<sup>92</sup> Pruslin, *Punch and Judy* programme note draft, 15 March 1968, EOG Admin File: *Punch and Judy*, BPF.

<sup>93</sup> Pruslin to Grant, 7 December 1965, EOG Admin File: *Punch and Judy*, BPF. The opera was not complete at this point, but Pruslin’s letter provides further evidence of plans for a 1966 performance.

<sup>94</sup> Stephen Pruslin, *Punch and Judy* programme note draft, undated, EOG Admin File: *Punch and Judy*, BPF.

<sup>95</sup> Hall, *Music Theatre*, 104-5; Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 125 (referring to Pruslin’s note in the 54<sup>th</sup> *Annual Cheltenham Festival Programme*).

<sup>96</sup> Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle’s Operas and Music Theatre*, 40.

<sup>97</sup> Adlington, *The Music of Harrison Birtwistle*, 10.

<sup>98</sup> Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle’s Operas and Music Theatre*, 40, 42, 43.

<sup>99</sup> Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle’s Operas and Music Theatre*, 74, quoting Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 26.

<sup>100</sup> Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 57.

<sup>101</sup> Birtwistle, in “Michael Hall, ‘composer and producer speak’, in the programme booklet for the ENO premiere of *The Mask of Orpheus*, May 1986, quoted in Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle’s Operas and Music Theatre*, 79.

<sup>102</sup> See Rupprecht, *British Musical Modernism*, 57-66.

<sup>103</sup> ‘The Puppet Theatre in England: Excerpts from *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* by George Speaight’ (London, 1955), *Programme Book for the Twenty-First Aldeburgh Festival, 1968*, 10-12, BPF.

<sup>104</sup> Annotations in *Programme Book for the Twenty-First Aldeburgh Festival, 1968*, 29, BPF.

<sup>105</sup> *Programme Book for the Twenty-First Aldeburgh Festival, 1968*, 21, BPF.

<sup>106</sup> Rosalind Crone, ‘Mr and Mrs Punch in Nineteenth-Century England’, *The Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), 1055–1082. Also see ‘*Punch and Judy* and Cultural Appropriation’, 24.

- <sup>107</sup> Birtwistle and Pruslin, *Punch and Judy* [libretto], v.
- <sup>108</sup> David Clemens, 'Scene', *Daily Mirror*, June 1968, BPF.
- <sup>109</sup> Maddocks and Birtwistle, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 69.
- <sup>110</sup> William Mann, 'Punch and Judy for Adults at Aldeburgh', *The Times*, 10 June 1968, BPF; Maddocks and Birtwistle, *Harrison Birtwistle*, illustration 2.
- <sup>111</sup> See Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 69-73; Adlington, *The Music of Harrison Birtwistle*, 8. Both refer to Gabriel Josipovici, *The Lessons of Modernism and Other Essays* (London, 1977), 176.
- <sup>112</sup> Harrison Birtwistle and Stephen Pruslin, *Punch and Judy: A Tragical Comedy or A Comical Tragedy: Opera in One Act* [score] (London, 1968), 233.
- <sup>113</sup> Hall observes that one of the dancers is a 'green man' in *Harrison Birtwistle*, 63, and this can also clearly be seen in the production photographs. The published production notes call for 'the traditional Green Man, with foliage stemming from his mouth; another male should have a hobby horse's head, as if to indicate that even Punch's hobby horse is involved in the final revelry; the remaining three dancers should also be attired with reference to a traditional mummer's play' (Birtwistle and Pruslin, *Punch and Judy* [libretto], v).
- <sup>114</sup> Shershow, 'Punch and Judy and Cultural Appropriation', 20-21. Shershow points out that this association might also be seen in a less celebratory sense as a patronizing displacement of violence onto marginalized segments of society.
- <sup>115</sup> Goehr, the librettist Erich Fried and performers in the premiere discuss this theme in a BBC documentary from 1967 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnHtvz-moD0>, accessed 11 August 2015)
- <sup>116</sup> Peter Maxwell Davies and Stephen Walsh, 'Taverner', *Musical Times* 113 (July 1972): 654.
- <sup>117</sup> Birtwistle and Pruslin, *Punch and Judy* [score], 26-27.
- <sup>118</sup> Birtwistle and Pruslin, *Punch and Judy* [score], 43-44; Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 66.
- <sup>119</sup> Gordon Crosse, 'Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*', *Tempo*, 85 (June 1968), 25.
- <sup>120</sup> Nyman, 'Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*,' *Collected Writings*, 39
- <sup>121</sup> Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 59.
- <sup>122</sup> Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 61.
- <sup>123</sup> Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 16.
- <sup>124</sup> The score calls for Punch to pretend to play a 'bass-viol' (123).
- <sup>125</sup> David Beard reads this moment as somewhat more ambiguous in its expression of regret (*Harrison Birtwistle's Operas and Music Theatre*, 74-74).
- <sup>126</sup> On Choregos's murder as 'turning point', also see Hall, *Music Theatre*, 103.
- <sup>127</sup> Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 61.
- <sup>128</sup> Anthony Besch, *Punch and Judy* programme note, enclosed in Besch to Grant, 18 August 1969, EOG Admin File: *Punch and Judy*, BPF.
- <sup>129</sup> Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 16.
- <sup>130</sup> Bourdieu, 'Intellectual Field and Creative Project', 110.
- <sup>131</sup> Beard discusses this association but connects Choregos more specifically to opera (*Harrison Birtwistle's Operas and Music Theatre*, 68, 73). On Choregos as a figure of music, also see Adlington, *The Music of Harrison Birtwistle*, 10. As Beard points out (68), the connection was first highlighted by Michael Nyman, in 'Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*,' *Collected Writings*, 40.
- <sup>132</sup> Birtwistle and Pruslin, *Punch and Judy* [score], 91-92.
- <sup>133</sup> Also see Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, 59.
- <sup>134</sup> Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, 27.