An investigation Into Lindsay Vickery's Rendez-vous: An opera noir

Adam Willett
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An Investigation into

Lindsay Vickery's *Rendez-vous: an Opera Noir*

Adam Willett

2006

Bachelor of Performing Arts (Honours)

WAAPA

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
Abstract

A study of Rendez-vous: an Opera Noir, a contemporary chamber opera written by Australian-born composer Lindsay Vickery (b. 1965). The opera was based upon the novel Djinn by the French postmodernist author Alain Robbe-Grillet. Vickery composed the opera over a two-year period from 1993-1995. It was finally performed in 2001 after some revision. The novel contained a non-linear narrative and film genre references. The non-linear narrative structure was represented through a serial-like musical device. Musical influences were derived from classical music and film. Applied technology was utilised in the composition process and in the final production with the introduction of video sets and synchronization.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any situation of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by a person except where due reference is made in the text. I also grant permission for the Library at Edith Cowan University to make duplicate copies of my thesis as required.

Signature:

Date...
# List of Tables

**Table 1.** Chart of the first six scenes with interval/locale/plot relationships  
9  
**Table 2.** Tempos and Ratios of Scenes 1-6  
16
# Table of Contents

Use of thesis ii
Abstract iii
Declaration iv
List of Tables v
Table of Contents vi
List of Figures vii

1: Introduction
Sources 1
Lindsay Vickery 1
Inception to production 2

2: Vickery text and vocal works 4

3: Robbe-Grillet and Djinn
Robbe-Grillet 5
Djinn 5

4: The underlying musical structure
The event hub 7
The dripping tap 8

5: Opera and classical influences
Formal Structure: Wozzeck 10
Word Setting: Pelléas et Mélisande 10
French flavour 12

6: Film influences 13

7: Music software 15

8: Vickery multimedia and technology work 17

9: Production technologies
Video Sets 18
Synchronization 20

10: Conclusion 21

Bibliography VIII
Appendix IX
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1:</td>
<td>Dripping tap sequence</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2:</td>
<td>Rendez-vous Scale</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3:</td>
<td>Example of vocal lines from Scene 1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4:</td>
<td>Melody excerpt from “Over Again”</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5:</td>
<td>Piano and accordion rhythm in “Gypsies”</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6:</td>
<td>“Prolog” excerpt</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7:</td>
<td>Another “Prolog” excerpt</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8:</td>
<td>Marie’s imagination as she sings “Gypsies”</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9:</td>
<td>Communication between Lecoeur and little Jean</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1: Introduction

Amongst his highly prolific compositional output totalling almost 120 works,\textsuperscript{1} \textit{Rendez-vous: an Opera Noir} (1995 rev. 2001) would be Australian-born composer Lindsay Vickery's (b.1965) largest single work to date. The 70-minute chamber opera was created from the synthesis of many elements from the intriguing world of Vickery's artistic influences that can be traced through his earlier and later musical works and interests in general. These channels include his artistic and literary interests, use of text, composition techniques, narrative forms, and the use of creative technologies.

This paper is concerned with exploring \textit{Rendez-vous} within the framework of the composition and production – The musical, conceptual and technological aspects of the opera will be of primary focus. Underlying that is its relation to the composer's previous works.

SOURCES

A large portion of the information concerning the composer and the production was obtained from the following resources. "Invisible Symmetries: a retrospective of the works of Lindsay Vickery," a conference paper by Jonathan Mustard, provided an overview of Vickery and his works over the span of his career.\textsuperscript{2} Vickery's own paper, "The Synthesis of Cinematic Narrative and Opera in \textit{Rendez-vous: an Opera Noir}"\textsuperscript{3} (co-authored by collaborator Vikki Wilson) was a significant exposition of the structural and conceptual elements fused in the opera. Various media, including recordings and footage was essential in gaining a first-hand 'experience' of the production. Most of the archival information including some of the composer's academic writings was accessed at his home pages. Additionally, direct correspondence with the composer has been pivotal in filling the gaps in or expanding upon the available information.

LINDSAY VICKERY

Lindsay Vickery is a Western Australian born composer and performer. His music includes works for acoustic electronic instruments in interactive-electronic, improvised or fully notated settings, ranging from solo pieces to opera and he has been commissioned by numerous groups for concert, dance and theatre.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1} Jonathan Mustard, "Invisible Symmetries: A retrospective of the works of Lindsay Vickery," \textit{In Sound Scripts: Proceedings of the Totally Huge New Music Festival Conference 2005} (Perth: Edith Cowan University, 2006).
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{3} Lindsay Vickery and Vikki Wilson, "The Synthesis of Cinematic Narrative and Opera in \textit{Rendez-vous: an Opera Noir}," (paper presented at the Encountering Transformations Conference La Trobe University, Melbourne, 2002).
Composers of influence include György Ligeti, John Zorn, Stockhausen and Helmut Lachenmann. Styles he has been influenced by include 20th century techniques such as aleatoric, serialism, totalism, and free jazz.

Vickery has used a number of different techniques that have been associated with different periods in his compositional career. These include Collage works (1986-89); Cypher Works (1989-); Readymades (1985-90). Vickery is also a highly regarded performer of reed instruments and electronics of his own works and has been active in touring across Europe, the USA and Asia. He is also the founding member of Alea New Music Ensemble (1987-1992), Magnetic Pig (1992-2003), GRIT (2001-), SQUINT (2002-) and HEDKIKR (2002-).

Vickery is currently based in Singapore at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts, as Head of School - Music. He has recently been completing his PhD at Queensland University of Technology on New Structural Models in Interactive Multimedia.

INCEPTION TO PRODUCTION

Rendez-vous was based on the novel Djinn (1981) by the French postmodernist author Alain Robbe-Grillet (b.1922). The title of the opera was a reference from the prologue of the novel to “the text in question”, its title “The Rendez-vous”.

The subheading, “an Opera Noir” is in reference to the film noir allusions of the text.

Rendez-vous began as a commission from a small Perth-based opera company, Pocket Opera Company that approached Vickery in 1993 to write an opera for them. Following the work’s completion and workshop in 1995, Pocket Opera lost money in their first production and disbanded leaving Rendez-vous without a producer.

Vickery’s own ensemble Magnetic Pig picked up the opera and later performed a concert version in 1997 to record and push the project forward. For several years Vickery performed excerpts from the opera with Magnetic Pig members Cathie Travers and Taryn Fiebig. Various collaborations, grants and organizations such as Tura (Events Company), Black Swan (Theatre company), and Edith Cowan University gradually came on board to assist in the plan for the eventuation of the full opera.

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6 Mustard, “invisible Symmetries.”
6 Ibid.
7 Vickery, “Curriculum Vitae.”
6 Mustard, “invisible Symmetries.”
9 Lindsay Vickery, interview with the author, 30 May 2006.
10 Andrew Beck, ”Lindsay Vickery: running up an opera noir,” RealTime, no. 46 (2001), http://www.realt imearts.net/r146/beck.html
11 Ibid.
Rendez-vous was premiered in 2001 at the Rechabites Hall featuring a cast of three: Andrew Broadbent, Kathryn McCusker and Taryn Fiebig. Magnetic Pig made up most of the instrumentation with reeds, cello, keyboard and percussion, with the addition of a violin (and an occasional accordion). It was directed by Talya Masel, had a DVD set devised by Vikki Wilson and Rick Mason, was designed by Lawrie Cullen-Tate and was lit by Duncan Ord.  

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2: Vickery text and vocal works

Before *Rendez-vous*, Vickery had no specific intention of writing an opera. Although he admits he had a general disregard toward the traditional classical opera form at that time he nevertheless did have an affinity with some early 20th Century operas, such as those by Alban Berg (1885-1935) and Claude Debussy (1862-1918).\(^{14}\)

Despite having written only two vocal works prior to *Rendez-vous*\(^{15}\) (while other works included spoken words), Vickery's skill in the application of words can easily be observed.

His broad usage of text in composition includes works such as *Vo* (1990 rev. 1999), a soprano vocal work which collages text from *The Magnetic Fields* (1920) by Breton and Soupault; *In Forgetting* (1991 rev. 1995) based on a short work by Serbian Poet Vasko Popa, which developed into a work for six female voices;\(^{16}\) *Ed Teller Remembers*, a recited text concerning Dr. Edward Teller a nuclear physicist;\(^{17}\) and *The Giant is Speaking Through You* (1991) which uses the letters of the title as the basis\(^{18}\) for an electro-acoustic work.

Australian composer Jonathan Mustard bears witness to Vickery's gift with words in a recent publication, "Invisible Symmetries," a retrospective of Vickery's works.\(^{19}\) Mustard remarks:

"I think if Vickery had not been a composer he might be known for his work with words. That is; aside from the poetry, lyrics, libretti, academic papers, theses, and the many volumes his personal journal runs to; a journal that he has kept since age fourteen or fifteen, his storytelling abilities are legend and clearly this love of a good story infects much of the music he makes."\(^{20}\)

Furthermore, having corresponded with Vickery several times this year, I marvel at his ability to articulate and explain his practice with clarity and insight, even in off-the-cuff instances, which is why I have often quoted him in this paper.

\(^{14}\) Vickery, interview.
\(^{15}\) Lindsay Vickery, correspondence with the author 2006.
\(^{16}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Mustard, "Invisible Symmetries."
\(^{19}\) Ibid.
\(^{20}\) Ibid.
3: Robbe-Grillet and *Djinn*

As with Vickery’s earlier works that utilise text, the topic of *Rendez-vous* was associated with his literary interests at the time.

Vickery had discovered the works of Alain Robbe-Grillet whilst a student at university some years earlier, having previously been interested in other French authors such as the Surrealists.21

**ROBBE-GRILLET**

Robbe-Grillet was one of the leading proponents of the ‘nouveau roman’ or New Novel genre of French postmodern literature. His novels typically deliberately avoid conventional elements such as dramatic plotting, a chronological narrative and psychological analysis of the character. Instead his stories are mostly comprised of repeated elements, impersonal physical objects and random events.22 Petri Liukkonen of Pegasos (a top-rated literature-related website) explains:

“Robbe-Grillet argued that the writer should content himself with the impersonal description of physical objects. Psychological or ideological analysis should be excluded – the reader must guess what hides under details and events. Despite its focus on objective reality cleansed of human feeling, Robbe-Grillet insisted, the nouveau roman is entirely subjective – its world is always perceived through the eyes of a character, not an omniscient narrator.”23

This visual emphasis relates to Robbe-Grillet also being a notable writer and director of films, the most well known realisation being his screenplay for *Last Year at Marienbad* (France, 1961) directed by Alain Resnais.24

**DJIINN**

Robbe-Grillet’s novel *Djinn* (1981) was a commissioned work for an American university, as a text for a “didactic French tutor.”25 The story concerns Simon Lecoeur, a young man, whose involvement with a secret organization under the command of Djinn, an alluring and androgynous female spy, ensues an uncanny sequence of events, which make the reader perplexed as to the true identity of Lecoeur.26

The decision of *Djinn* as the narrative for the opera was in consequence to Pocket Opera Company’s lack of interest in Vickery’s first two propositions namely Richard Brautigan’s

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21 Vickery, interview.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Vickery and Wilson, “Synthesis.”
27 Robbe-Grillet, *Djinn*. 
Sombrero Fallout (1976) and Michael Ondaatje’s The Collected Works of Billy the Kid (1970). Vickery then suggested Djinn as a third option, yet Pocket Opera were keen to take it on as their first choice.27

Although Djinn was one of his favourite Robbe-Grillet novels, Vickery’s initial hesitance at basing an opera on it was due to a perceived conflict of interests it presented. The subdued nature of the film noir laden novel was rather at odds with the opera form, which was traditionally very expressive and extraverted. Nevertheless he did also observed the practicalities associated with staging Djinn in contrast to other Robbe-Grillet novels.28 In a recent interview with the author he described some of these qualities:

“It’s not as experimental as some of the other Robbe-Grillet novels, which from that point of view it could actually be staged... a lot of Robbe-Grillet is really all about the word play so it wouldn’t have made sense to make an opera out of something that was just so semantic... Secondly is that it was quite short – Robbe-Grillet is very wordy so it was important to choose a short work, because I knew I was going to have to chop quite a lot of words out of it and I didn’t really want to do that.”29

Vickery also pinpointed other qualities of the text that would render an accessible translation on the stage to the audience. That beneath a rather ambiguous narrative there was nevertheless, a storyline that could be highlighted, as well as allusions to familiar film genres that could be represented.30

Djinn could also accommodate the structural elements that Vickery observed in his two favourite operas at the time, Alban Berg’s Wozzeck (1922), and Claude Debussy’s Pelléas et Melisande (1902).31

These features will be addressed in the following chapters, of their respective relations to the structural framework and the stylistic character of Rendez-vous.
4: The underlying musical structure

Vickery’s initial approach in his composition works are generally concerned with finding a structural basis as a starting point. In the case of putting *Djinn* to stage, the particular nature of the plot of the novel had to be taken into account. Though it presented its challenges, it was not unfamiliar territory to the composer.

THE EVENT HUB

When staging *Rendez-vous*, Vickery aligns with a narrative form that could more readily accommodate the story of the novel than the traditional three-act opera form. He refers to this narrative form as an ‘event hub’, a concept synonymous to the ‘violence hub’ proposed by New Media Theorist Janet Murray, but allowing for a wider context. The event hub is essentially a non-linear narrative form where a significant event becomes the centre-point for a number of different viewpoints or possibilities. This structure type is exemplified in films such as *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, USA, 1993) and *Run Lola Run* (Tom Tykwer, Germany, 1998) where different variations of the same episode of events are given.

Non-linear structures are of particular interest to Vickery and have been utilised in many of the composer’s works. He has discussed the historicity of the form and the applications of these ideas to his own practice in research papers such as “Non-linear structures for real-time interactive musical works”. Mustard suggests Vickery’s interest in this form of structure associated with his “strong engagement with film and film theory”. This would also account for Vickery’s interest in the films of director David Lynch, which also pertain to postmodern aesthetics through the use of non-linear narrative structures and rather iconic pop culture references. Thus multiple identities and outcomes are explored in Lynch films such as *Lost Highway* (USA, 1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (USA, 2001), which also exude strong noir overtones.

Concerning the event hub Vickery observes, “Its power as a narrative form lies in its psychological resonance.” Statements as these tend to reflect the concern the composer has for the “mind-like” nature of this structure.

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32 Vickery and Wilson, “Synthesis.”
33 Mustard, “Invisible Symmetries.”
35 Mustard, “Invisible Symmetries.”
36 Vickery, interview.
37 Ibid.
38 Mustard, “Invisible Symmetries.”
In Vickery's own inventory, the event hub concept has been demonstrated in works such as *Ed Teller Remembers* (1990) and *Leo Szilard* (1990), which contrasts the different outcomes of two people involved in the same situation.\(^3^9\)

In a similar way with respects to the text of *Rendez-vous* there are several different possibilities suggested as to the "true" identity of the lead character Simon Lecoeur. Of these, there are two overriding perspectives presented in the story, that from "Lecoeur's" point of view and that of "Djinn's". Contained within these viewpoints is a repetitive pattern of six locations, with strikingly similar characters and events, which serve to obscure the linearity in the narrative.\(^4^0\)

THE DRIPPING TAP

*Rendez-vous* contains an underlying musical device which Vickery formulated in order to accomplish his aims of representing the repeating series of locations of the narrative in a similarly subtle but effective manner.\(^4^1\)

Vickery recounts that when collecting sound effects for the soundtrack, he noticed that one of the dripping tap samples he had made voiced a distinctive melody that contained "all the six possible intervals" (in relation to set theory) "between its first seven notes", which conveniently corresponded to the number of locations (six) in the repeating sequence in *Djinn*.\(^4^2\)

![Dripping Tap Sequence](image)

**Figure 1:** Dripping tap sequence – G, Eb, F#, B, C#, G, Ab, D, Db, C, B Eb\(^4^3\)

The full sequence of twelve drips formed a scale of eight notes, which determined the pitch content that would be used in the entire opera.\(^4^4\) This is maintained throughout the score through the use of accidentals and the absence of key signatures ("Over Again" is an exception to this).\(^4^5\)

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\(^3^9\) Mustard, "Invisible Symmetries."

\(^4^0\) Vickery and Wilson, "Synthesis."

\(^4^1\) Vickery and Wilson, "Synthesis."

\(^4^2\) Ibid.

\(^4^3\) Ibid.

\(^4^4\) Ibid.

Subsequently an interval was assigned to each of the six locations in the cycle which in effect determined the number of scale notes that would be used for that location and as a result shape the tonal character for each one.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INT.</th>
<th>LOCALE</th>
<th>PLOT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>PROLOGUE (voiceover)</td>
<td>Simon Lecoeur is missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIMON LECOEUR'S STORY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>WAREHOUSE</td>
<td>Simon meets Djinn given mission to go to Gare du Nord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>CAFÉ</td>
<td>Harrased by Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>STREET/APARTMENT</td>
<td>Saves fake dead Child (Jean) and meets Marie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>CAFÉ</td>
<td>Lying contest with Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>TAXI</td>
<td>Drugged by Jean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>WAREHOUSE</td>
<td>Knocked out (killed?) by Dr. Morgan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Chart of the first six scenes with interval/locale/plot relationships

The dripping tap melody was engrafted into the score both as a sound effect as well as a motif in the instrumentation. Its entry is gradually layered by the piano at the opening of scene 1. Even its placement here in the narrative (of both the opera and the novel) is significant in a way that it subtly introduces the ‘source’ or ‘code’ behind the underlying structure whilst providing a suitable motif for the opera with its haunting and chromatic character.

This use of a post-serial device to structure the music of the opera is reminiscent of Vickery’s frequent use of number series that he refers to as “cyphers” in his works to determine various musical parameters. These cyphers are sometimes derived from attributes relating to the piece, such as the title words in *The Giant is Speaking Through You* (1991) or the highest, lowest and centre notes of the piano in *Piano Geography* (1991). Similar to *Rendez-vous*, the system used was derived from the notes and intervals of the dripping tap melody.

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46 Vickery and Wilson, “Synthesis.”
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
51 Mustard, “Invisible Symmetries.”
5: Opera and classical influences

The narrative of Rendez-vous could also align to the structural elements that Vickery identified in the operas by Berg and Debussy – Wozzeck’s formal structure, and Pelléas et Mélisande’s vocal setting. Although comparisons to these particular operas maybe subtle, it nevertheless demonstrates how a recent contemporary opera can still retain these elements to both purpose and effect in respect to the text it is based upon.

FORMAL STRUCTURE: WOZZECK

The underlying structure of the Rendez-vous is not based on the traditional opera form, however its treatment of formal structure – correlating abstract musical concepts to dramatic form is similar to Berg’s correlation between musical forms and narrative in Wozzeck. This is indicated in the first Act of Berg’s opera. Andrew Clements explains:

"...the self-contained musical structure of each scene is precisely tied to its dramatic function. Thus the five scenes of Act 1, an exposition that introduces the five main characters in turn and delineates Wozzeck’s relationship to them, are designated as a series of five character-pieces”

In a similar way, the structure of Rendez-vous is “wrapped up” in the music in that the “level on tension is mirrored in the favoured intervals of each section.” The sequential allocation of the intervals to their respective plot locations had a more meaningful purpose than for the sake of matching numbers. The psychological character of each of the intervals was taken into account and how this would relate to audiences perception of it. This was reflected in the character of the songs in their relation to the dominant interval of each scene – the music would become “more lyrical and operatic” as it approached the consonant intervals of scene 3 and 4. This, like the fashion of the text takes a more subtle approach than the more obviously detectable leitmotifs or character themes, but is equivalent in theory.

WORD SETTING: PELLEAS ET MELISANDE

Vickery was particularly conscious of exhibiting a stylistic quality relating to the-word setting that was present in Debussy’s Pelléas et Mélisande: “Setting the music to the idiosyncratic shapes of words and phrases, rather than the other way around” This particular characteristic of Pelleas (an innovation of Debussy’s) is described by J. Peter Burkolder et al:

51 Vickery, interview.
52 Vickery, correspondence.
54 Vickery, correspondence.
55 Vickery and Wilson, “Synthesis.”
56 Vickery, correspondence.
57 Ibid.
"The voices, set in fluent recitative that matches the flow of the French language, are supported but never dominated by a continuous orchestral background, while the instrumental interludes connecting the scenes carry on the mysterious inner drama."\(^{58}\)

Moreover, Richard Langham Smith states in regards to *Pelléas*, "the work eschews both aria and recitative in their conventional forms, and uses a kind of declamation which only in the most emotional (or symbolic) moments extends into more melodic writing."\(^{59}\)

Likewise with *Rendez-vous* the singing typically maintained the rhythm of the words of the libretto (in this case English) without being caught up by the surrounding music into conventional song-like forms as arias. (There were some exceptions to this -- the more song-like forms in "Over Again" Vickery and "Gypsies"\(^{60}\))

At times the singing in *Rendez-vous* would verge on natural speaking but like *Pelléas*, it would extend to more dramatic singing in a symbolic fashion according to its relation with the plot. As discussed in the last section, the favoured intervals for each location scene, would shape the level of expressivity in the singing.

![Figure 3: Example of vocal lines from Scene 1\(^{61}\)](image)

This draws us to looking at the function of the music revolving around the sung words of this manner. In regards to *Pelléas*, François Lesure explains that the singing which "remains on the threshold of speech, ideally adapted to the specificities of language" brings out the "interior music of the text" and reveals the "hidden nuances" of the plot of the drama. This is through the "identifying motives" associated with characters or other plot elements which are "woven into" the music of the opera "in order to unify" and subtly realise the "tension and progression of the drama".\(^{62}\)


\(^{60}\) Vickery, correspondence.

\(^{61}\) Vickery, *Rendez-vous: an Opera Noir*.

This again has strong bearing on *Rendez-vous* in which the more speech-like recitative style of opera singing made way for the instrumentation to maintain the subtlety of its dramatic aims, through the identifying marks of each scene (intervals etc).

FRENCH FLAVOUR

Maurice Ravel's (1875-1937) Piano Trio (1914) and Debussy's song cycles *Fêtes Galantes I* (1882, rev. 1891-2) and *Fêtes Galantes II* (1904) as well as the opera *Pelléas et Melisande* were important in conveying a French flavour to the opera. This was also to reinforce the notion that Leucoeur has travelled back in time or is being led to believe so, as in the narrative of *Djinn*. “The Ghost Waiter” in scene 4 for example was modelled on “Les Ingénus” from *Fêtes Galantes II*, which uses the first six notes of the “dripping tap sequence”. 63

The sense of French-ness is perhaps exemplified in an almost stereotyped way with Vickery's chanson “Over Again,” which interludes between the first and second scenes. The melody to the accordion-accompanied song occurred in a dream Vickery had. 64 “Over Again,” adds a welcomed contrast with the rest of the opera songs since it stands alone with it's memorable chorus-like theme, has the French-ness and the wistful nostalgia that is reflected in the music, the lyrics (including the title) and its reference to the narrative. It also emphasizes the major 2nd interval which is the dominant interval of scene 2 which it interludes into.

![Figure 4: Melody excerpt from “Over Again”](image)

A similar French-ness is also exhibited with "Gypsies" in scene 4 which also features an accordion as well as a triple time meter.

![Figure 5: Piano and accordion rhythm in “Gypsies”](image)

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63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Vickery, Rendez-vous: an Opera Noir.
66 Ibid.
6: Film influences

Film influences were integrated into the opera particularly in order to convey the relevant genres and cinematic atmosphere of the novel. The instrumentation and the use of foley-like sound effects was also an ancillary to this function as well as the use of video sets in the final production.

Influences were derived from films such as *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, USA, 1955), *La Jetée* (Chris Marker, France, 1962), and *Alphaville* (Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1965). While films *Kiss Me Deadly* exemplifies the classic film noir genre, others like *Alphaville* combine with other genres such as science fiction and also parallel more with the postmodernist style of the novel. Films such as these also influenced the visual look of the video set in the final production in order to realise more vividly the world described in *Djinn*.⁶⁷

Recognizable attributes relating to the film noir genre (or cinema in general) are introduced musically with the prologue ("Prolog") of *Rendez-vous*. The voiceover narration is an element typical of this genre⁶⁸ in diverse instances ranging from classic noir films such as *Detour* (Edgar G. Ulmer, USA, 1945) to the ‘tech-noir’ of the original cut of *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, USA, 1982). Gradually an accompanying ‘pad’ in the low-register fades in – a film music cliché for any moment that wishes to evoke a sense of looming anticipation. On the score it appears as the sustained piano and cello. Also the use of foley effects throughout the soundtrack reinforces the cinematic atmosphere – in the prologue an example appears on the score as "street sounds".

![Figure 6: “Prolog” excerpt](image-url)

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⁶⁷ Ibid.
⁶⁸ Naremore, "American Film Noir: The History of an Idea."
⁶⁹ Vickery, *Rendez-vous: an Opera Noir*. 
As the voiceover ceases the prologue envelops into a saxophone-led theme (in essence functioning as the “overture” for the opera) backed by the ensemble that is reminiscent of the 50s noir film soundtracks that often incorporated jazz influences (as did cinema in general at the time) attributes that are even retained in noir-influenced films such as *Lost Highway* (Lynch, USA, 1997) and *Blade Runner* (Scott, USA, 1982).

Angelo Badalamenti’s scores for the films of director David Lynch were of influence to the music of *Rendez-vous*. Also jazz composer Paul Motian’s (b.1931) “From Time to Time” from the album *Motian in Tokio* (1991) provided a musical model for the prologue and uses the same first 6 notes of the “dripping tap sequence”.

This quality was particularly established in the revision of the score as a result of Vickery’s experience playing more free jazz and improvised styles in the years between the opera’s inception and production — as a performer of reeds and electronics as soloist and also in projects such as Magnetic Pig.

![Figure 7: Another “Prolog” excerpt](image_url)

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70 Vickery, correspondence.
71 Vickery, correspondence.
7: Music software

Technology is integrated into majority of Vickery's activities as a composer and performer in the form of computer software an important component in the creative process of Vickery's works.

Certain stylistic qualities including structural, rhythmic and tonal aspects are achieved using computer software. For several scenes in *Rendez-vous*, a particular process was facilitated by the software, which involved regular file-interchange between MOTU's sequencing program Performer (now Digital Performer) and Coda's notation program Finale.73

The notation software functioned as a reference in the construction of other structural elements of the music such as "sections, tonalities, changing textures and harmonies."74 Traditional notation scores could be printed and the new materials or edits written into the program.75

The sequencer's function on the other hand was naturally suited to dealing with the parameter of time in relation to the speech-like rhythms that Vickery wanted to retain. Vickery's use of sequencers goes back to his composition studies at university where he noticed its specialized capabilities in the manipulation of musical materials.76 He has discussed such benefits of using computer sequencers in contrast to traditional notation in an article that was published in Sounds Australian77 not long after *Rendez-vous* was written.

These benefits include the ease of performance of rhythmic augmentation and diminuation even in complex ratios, and the application of multiple manipulations to the metre which is useful for polyrhythmic or polymetric music.78 These benefits are mostly due to the way sequencers handles the metre and durational material, without the need for note-grouping as in notation music.

With *Rendez-vous*, Vickery used the sequencer (Performer) to write the rhythm of the words of the libretto. This was process offered numerous flexibilities including the real-time playback necessary in setting the precise speed of the text in order to retain its comprehensibility and speech-like characteristics.79

It also allowed the tempo to be set first and the text set against it to avoid problems of ending up with sections where tempo changes would make the words too fast to sing. This enabled the gradually increasing tempos throughout the first and second cycle of scenes (1-6, 7-13 respectively).80

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73 Vickery, correspondence.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Lindsay Vickery, interview with Cat Hope 2005.
78 Ibid.
79 Vickery, correspondence.
80 Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Tempo (bpm)</th>
<th>Ratio to scene 1 (bpm)</th>
<th>Ratio to scene 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60:60</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>60:66</td>
<td>1:1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>60:75</td>
<td>1:1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>60:90</td>
<td>1:1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>60:105</td>
<td>1:1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>60:140</td>
<td>1:2.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Scenes and corresponding tempos with ratios of each tempo to initial tempo for Scenes 1-6.
8: Vickery multimedia and video works

Various types of technology have been strongly utilised in Vickery’s work for a number of years, in the compositional as well as performative processes. In his creative output he has produced many works that involve the use of video or other multimedia.

These include works for Disturbia, (a multimedia group formed by Vickery in 1999) who collaborated with lighting designer Andrew Lake on a performance work Three Time Pieces (2000) which used the Yamaha MIBURI MIDI jump suit for a dancer, which allowed the manipulation of MIDI controlled lights.81

One extraction from the music of Rendez-vous that was put to an original text formed an independent standalone piece, Noir (2000), also performed by Disturbia. Elements of Noir were in turn incorporated into the final score of Rendez-vous, in the taxi scene.82

Vickery’s film related interests have also resulted in a number of works that incorporate the use of video, film or DVD. Earlier works such as these included Songs of [Virtual] Love + War (1998) in collaboration with Vikki Wilson and Rick Mason and Whythisandnotanother? (1999); pointing to the direction that Rendez-vous would be taking in its final production.83

Many of the academic research papers Vickery writes are concerned with some technological aspects of his work and that of others, including Western Australian sound artists such as Alan Lamb, Jonathan Mustard and Cat Hope.84

81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
9: Production Technologies

The experimental use of technology in contemporary opera is not a new concept. The use of electronic sounds, motion pictures, or colour slides has been applied to numerous opera works in the 20th Century. Operas such as Aniara (1959) by Swedish composer Karl-Birger Blomdahl and Bomarzo (1967) by Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera feature taped and electronic sounds or unconventional sound effects. Motion picture has been used in staged works even earlier in the century such as Berg's opera Lulu (1935) which contained a silent film for a section in the second act.

Australian works such as Recital (1989) by Chamber Made Opera also feature electronic technology with the use of electronic instruments such as keyboards, synthesizers and samplers. Another CMO production, Phobia (2002) composed by Gerry Brophy takes on a film noir theme that makes use of live foley sound effects, tape loops and spoken words.

Rendez-vous is an example of a work where the integration of creative technologies into the production, namely the use of video sets and the synchronisation of musicians and performers via a click track, is comprehensive in realising its artistic aims. Its function was instrumental in highlighting the particular nature of the text — its pertinence to film concepts and the unconventional structure of the narrative.

PROJECTED VIDEO SET

A characteristic feature of Rendez-vous in its final production is its 'backdrop' of projected video sets, created by Rick Mason and Vikki Wilson of Retarded Eye. The video projects still images and films clips onto the backdrop of the set, depicting the various elements in the plot such as locations, events, characters. These included familiar icons such as the Eiffel tower or genre references from old Sci-fi films and comics.

The idea of using video sets came in about 1998, as a result of the success of several multimedia-type projects that Vickery was involved with and the difficulties Rendez-vous was facing in its progress at the time.

The projection was complementary in rendering the strong cinematic quality of the text, but more importantly it allowed the manipulation of the stage reality, evoking a continuous flow of events in instances such as changing locations or portraying the imagination of the character. This was effective in realising the nature of the structure and narrative of Djinn, or as Vickery

88 Vickery and Wilson, "Synthesis."
89 Vickery, correspondence.
90 Vickery and Wilson, "Synthesis."
remarks "...continually suggesting false explanations for events and in the end self-consciously drawing attention to the synthetic and deceptive basis of all fictional narrative."\textsuperscript{91}

The projection also made interaction between the stage and video characters possible, such as the dialogue between Lecoeur (on stage) and the boy Jean (on video) which also helped to convey the surreal atmosphere of the novel.\textsuperscript{92}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig8.png}
\caption{Marie's imagination as she sings "Gypsies"}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig9.png}
\caption{Communication between Lecoeur (on stage) and little Jean (on video)\textsuperscript{93}}
\end{figure}

The images and footage that made up the video sets were constructed from several different sources. These included public domain materials and photos shot by Vickery in Paris.\textsuperscript{94} Some of the projected images were collages recreated from multiplex photos of real locations such as a derelict building in Le Marais and the façade of the Gare Du Nord which became the 1880s-style apartment and railway station exteriors respectively.\textsuperscript{95} The photos and footage of the video characters were shot entirely in Perth. These included the scenes with Dr. Morgan, the boy Jean and the Waitress which were filmed at locations such as Midland Railyards and the Moon Café. Andrew Beck and Tanja Visosevic were responsible for the filming of these scenes whilst numerous stills were captured by Rachael Dease and Vickery.\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} Vickery, correspondence.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
SYNCHRONISATION

Probably the most masked aspect of the cinematic integration into the final production of *Rendez-vous* is the synchronisation concealed 'behind the scenes'. A system of synchronisation was necessary due to the obvious reason of blending live performance with pre-recorded audiovisual playback material in the execution of a determined sequence of events.

This was achieved with the addition of a click track for the musicians in the band, making allowances for pre-recorded effects without the use of live samplers. It also allowed the precise plotting of the events such as the smooth transition between the 'radio' and 'live' versions of "Over Again". In this respect only the singers were reliant on live music for cues.97

All of these elements were compiled onto a single DVD; the film and stereo soundtrack – containing a click (for the musicians) on one channel and the all the audible audio – the dialogue of the virtual characters, sound effects and some additional music on the other channel.98

This high level of precision with the synchronisation99 was reflected by the audiences seeming unawareness of the forces at work behind the scenes.100

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Vickery and Wilson, "Synthesis."
10: Conclusion

Having explored several aspects of the opera, it is apparent that *Rendez-vous: an Opera Noir* is a culminating work in Vickery’s career. It draws from diverse streams from the composer’s inventory relating to his interests and practices, which has also been accommodating to the hybrid nature of the work. This is particularly reflective of the way these different areas interrelate into Vickery’s work as a composer.

As noted, Vickery’s strong literary sense was foundational, a quality that has shown to bear a strong association with his musical practice in general. This was reflected in his rendering of the text and the approach that he applied when putting it into a staged musical work.

His interests in film and non-linear narrative forms influenced his perception of the way in which the qualities of the novel could be appropriated musically and visually, drawing upon his diverse composition-related activities to produce an opera that could realise its aims of adapting a rather unconventional narrative to the stage.
Bibliography


AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS


NOTES

All correspondence between Vickery and the author took place via email between June and November 2006.
Appendix

Rendez-vous: an Opera Noir (1995) sop., mezzo, bar., vln, vcl, sax/cl, pno/acc., perc. and DVD after the Novel Djinn by Alain Robbe-Grillet. Libretto by the Composer: Score (322p. A4): Duration 67m First performed by Andrew Broadbent, Katheryn McCusker, Taryn Feibig and Magnetic Pig (Cathie Travers, Lindsay Vickery, Iain Grandage, Jessica Ipkendanz and Steven Richter) Directed by Talya Masel, DVD set by Vikki Wilson and Rick Mason, Designed by Lawrie Cullen-Tate, Lighting by Duncan Ord, Performed by November 21-25 2001 Rechabites Hall MPPLV035†

† Available from http://homepage.mac.com/lvickery/lvmusictheatrework.html