The making of Disgrace Kelly: Dragging the diva through cabarets, pubs and Into the recital hall

Caitlin Cassidy

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The Making of Disgrace Kelly: Dragging the Diva through Cabarets, Pubs and Into the Recital Hall

By
Caitlin Cassidy, Bachelor of Music, Graduate Diploma of Opera Performance

This exegesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Arts

Edith Cowan University
Education and the Arts/WAAPA

March 2013
Abstract

This research project investigates the synthesis of cabaret and recital performance as a way to re-invigorate the recital as a performance platform. As a curious classical singer with a passion for cabaret, I have explored cabaret in my own creative practice as a classically trained opera singer through the employment of practice-led research methodologies.

This project includes research manifested in rehearsals, performance and exegetical writing, including a unique self-reflexive voice in the writing style, to encompass a practice-led research methodology. The culmination of these approaches was a final performance program entitled *Diva Bites the Dust*.

A study of the diva and her role within different musical forms has played a key role in the research and creation of *Diva Bites the Dust*. I developed a diva character named Disgrace Kelly, an aggregate of a multitude of divas studied and performed throughout the research. This study informed the structure of *Diva Bites the Dust* programme and is explored contextually within the exegesis.

*Diva Bites the Dust* was the culmination of experimentation with performance hybridity. The diva icon was a unifying agent within which disparate musical styles, genres and dramatic themes could co-exist and illustrate narrative arch.
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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

i. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or

iii. contain any defamatory material

Signed:________________________

Date:___15/3/13______
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors Cat Hope and Lyndall Adams for being ridiculously supportive, clever, hilarious and patient throughout the course of my masters: taming the diva to the desk is not an easy feat!

Many thanks also go to:
My collaborator Sam Knee, who contributed Byron Bard’s voice both written and spoken to Diva Bites the Dust.

David Wickham for his incredible piano playing.

Patricia Price for helping me unleash The Diva.

Nick Maclaine for contributing a wonderful interview and allowing me to be part of Parodies Lost.

Clare Norelli for being the other half of the silliest and most wonderful band in the world, Ladyboner.

My family and my boyfriend, Robbie for their unwavering support.
Background and Aims of the Research

This exegetical document aims to explain the phenomenology of my vocal performance practice. The depiction of this subjective experience requires contextualisation, comprising of relevant information about the practice that has preceded my research and therefore informed it. The inclusion of my performance background will assist in illuminating the reader about my tacit knowledge and the subsequent impetus for the research. Previous practice is an obvious influence on the new work created, however it may be extended and modified through the application of practice-led research methodologies. The scope for this research has been outlined in a set of research questions that aim to clarify the aims of performances carried out throughout the course of this research.

During my undergraduate studies as a classical singer, I engaged in the study and performance of the classical repertoire in many forms; opera, chamber music, oratorio and most commonly, the recital. The recital is an established performance platform of the conservatorium syllabus at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) and in other conservatoriums worldwide: particularly in Europe and the USA where it is referred to as “a staple of virtually all vocal performance degrees in universities and conservatories in this country” (Nova, 2005, p. vi). To illustrate this further, I have included my own programme from my Graduation Diploma Graduation Recital in 2009. This gives an idea as to the kind of thematic curation that occurs as unspoken syllabus within the conservatory. This method of curation is artistically perfunctory and adds cohesion for an audience, not to mention narrowing down the choices of repertoire for a young singer whose lack of experience renders their knowledge of art song and operatic repertoire limited. Amongst the repertoire I had studied, I found a large volume of repertoire about mothers written for the mezzo-soprano voice, finding it to provide me with a rich and varied programme from
different musical styles. The initial inspiration for the theme of the recital was primarily to create a vehicle for the *Zwei Gesänge* by Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) and song cycle *A Charm of Lullabies* Benjamin Britten (1833-1897) which I had been working on with my vocal teacher throughout the academic year.

"Mother"

Graduate Diploma Recital Programme

Caitlin Cassidy 2009

1. “Der Kleine Sandman Bin Ich!” From *Hänsel und Gretel*, Act 2, Scene 2 by Englebert Humperdinck

2. Ambroise Thomas (1811-1896)
   "Connais-tu Le Pays?" from *Mignon*

3 & 4. Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
   *Zwei Gesänge*, Op. 91
   I. Gestillte Sehnsucht
   II. Geistliches Wiegenlied

5. J.S. Bach (1685-1750)
   St. Matthew Passion, BWV 244,
   Pt. Two: No. 47 Aria (Alto): "Erbarme dich, mein Gott"

6-10. Benjamin Britten (1833-1897)
   *A Charm of Lullabies*, Op. 41
   I. A Cradle Song
   II. The Highland Balou
   III. Sephestia's Lullaby
   IV. A Charm
   V. The Nurse's Song

11. Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)
   *Gypsy Songs* (*Cigánské melodie*) Op. 55/4
   IV. Songs My Mother Taught Me (*Když mne stará matka zpívat*)

12. George Gershwin (1898–1937)
   "Summertime" from *Porgy and Bess*

Figure 1 Recital programme for my Graduate Diploma Graduation recital at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2009.
This recital programme was manufactured in order to showcase my vocal talents in addition to foreshadowing the role of “mother” in vocal music. This device of using a theme is common practice for recitals, particularly in conservatorium environments. Not only does it narrow down the repertoire available for recital presentation but is helpful in creating cohesion for an audience. Moreover, a thematic connection of subject matter in the poetry and libretti of the songs and arias presented, means that the theme can be represented through works from several different periods, satisfying the conservatorium’s standard requirement for diversity of musical style in the programme and the audience’s need for cohesion. In retrospect, this repertoire, whilst perhaps suited to my vocal timbre was not my first choice in terms of its subject matter and dramatic content. As a young performer, it would be ideal to treat the process of programme curation of art song and operatic repertoire as an actor would be cast in a play, viewing songs as small roles. Freedom of curation was afforded through adopting cabaret performance methods.

A part of the appeal of creating a synthesis of cabaret and recital is that I may have access to a wider range of repertoire in many musical styles and from many different time periods, which I could manipulate in order to express myself as a classical singer in a similar way to a visual artist, who has access to eclectic materials from the ancient to the modern. In this synthesis, I was able to edit music and text in order to exploit their humour or meaning within the context of the show. These liberties are taken often in the world of cabaret, to elicit humour, create satire or increase the relevance of a previously unrelated song to the dramatic context of that particular performance. The limitations of recital curation have led me to this project to increase diversity in this platform. I aimed for boundless creativity and self-expression with less emphasis on prescriptive propriety.

My need to re-invigorate the recital was a major catalyst for this research. I became bored with the prescriptive etiquette of the recital: the ascribing of a
theme, the chronological order of pieces, the predictability of what was to come by including a programme and a stiff slightly over-rehearsed encore. It is evident that other singers are experiencing their own discontentment with it’s current state, as research is being conducted world-wide about the slow death of this wonderful art form and its songs. Christian Nova’s doctorate thesis If You Enliven It, They Will Come: Turning the Classical Recital On Its Ear (2005) is one example of an artist committed to finding out the standing validity of the song recital and why the public has lost touch with this performance platform. The recital however, is an especially useful performance platform for the assessment of university students. It provides an assessable format for an individual performer and demands the display of a wide spectrum of vocal skill.

In the context of an undergraduate Bachelor of Music, the recital is used to exhibit a culmination of the skills learnt within a classical vocal degree such as the “working knowledge of languages, musical styles and vocal technique” and is done in order to pass units in vocal performance (Nova, 2005, p. 5). These skills are demonstrated usually from a programme consisting largely of art song repertoire, with the exception of one or two arias from opera or the oratorio repertoire. These recitals are usually the first that a singer ever performs.

Despite the Western Art Music focus during my own training at WAAPA, I have personally enjoyed stylistic variety whilst singing jazz and music theatre subsidiarily. This is perhaps due to my eclectic musical interest and the ability to study such forms in a multi-disciplined conservatorium environment that includes jazz, music theatre and contemporary music departments where this education is easily accessible. Apart from classical repertoire, cabaret is the stylistic platform in which I have performed the most extensively. Cabaret and vocal recital are in essence a showcase for a singular vocal performer. This research project enabled the exploration of combining the classical recital and cabaret styles in concert presentation, offering an opportunity to diversify artistic possibilities for the solo vocal classical performer.
The process of synthesising two art forms must naturally include a detailed understanding of both for informed interplay and deviation to occur. From this analysis, creative decisions can be made. In addition to understanding the conventions of cabaret, recital performance and curation in contemporary practice, research into the several permutations and evolutionary stages of the art form have been examined. In my practice, the most exploited elements of performance are commonalities to both vocal recital and cabaret, enabling me to create a sense of a unified art form, rather than an incomprehensible “Frankenstein” of self-conscious or meaningless artistic choices. To remedy ambiguity the following questions are included. These questions refine the aims for this research and provide rationality to subsequent courses of action throughout:

**Research Questions**

1. What processes are required to create a hybridised form of performance that operates between the art form of the classical song recital and a cabaret performance?

2. What are the ways the diva can be portrayed in solo vocal performance?

3. What repertoire can be used to explore the performance potential of cabaret and recital hybridity?

These questions are a summation of what has been attempted through the use of practice-led research in order to diversify artistic possibilities through synthesis. The research questions have been diversely addressed in the following chapters of this exegesis. The Background and Aims section has provided the reader with contextual information and established the point of view of the author for the remainder of the document, making the reader aware of bias and creative impetus. Chapter 1 highlights the utilised elements of cabaret and recital in a series of performances and includes an analysis of
comparative and contrasting features outlining the suitability as well as the disparity of the two forms in preparation for synthesis inquiry. This is followed by an articulation of the research methodologies used in Chapter 2, focusing particularly on the Practice-Led Research model. Chapter 3 focuses on the identification of artists at the forefront of the synthesis of “low” and “high” performance platforms. The parody of pop music is commonplace in the performances conducted in this research and the study of pop parodies by these cabaret performers have informed my own. These include two cabaret acts Frisky & Mannish and The Kransky Sisters. The remaining case studies of performances Wunderschön and Winterreise are examples of the contemporary interpretation of classical repertoire and the subsequent extraction of theatricality.

The study of character and its role in the cohesion of incongruous musical material is a featured in the four case studies. My created character Disgrace Kelly borrows much from the iconology of the diva (as does performer and case study, Meow Meow). Study of the diva occurs in Chapter 4 with accented focus on diva theory provided by the opera Les Contes d’Hoffmann, queer diva worship and the subsequent feminist deconstruction of the futility of the diva by such authors as Catherine Clément. Queer theorist Wayne Koestenbaum aptly aids my rationale for creating the final performance that pays tribute to the diva. Chapter 5 sees the translation of diva worship into practice and the genesis of my character Disgrace Kelly. It is important to note that I do not borrow from Queer theory or Feminism, although I acknowledge that this could be done, however it was necessary for me to examine in a self-reflective and reflexive manner how I personally was able to identify and shape this persona as an entry point for performance creation. This characterisation is brought to the fore in the construction and performance of Diva Bites the Dust in Chapter 6, my final statement regarding the process performance creation and the cabaret and recital synthesis. In chapter 5 and 6 I integrate the contribution of my collaborators in a reflective manner, always feeding back into how their work
influenced my practice, and have included full interviews as appendices. The presence of these interviews have fed into the subjective paradigm of the knowledge used to create these works and are written about in a personal tone.
Chapter 1: Recital, Cabaret & Everything In Between

In order to develop the performative and curation methodologies of the recital for performance, it is essential that the etymology, origins and evolution of both recital and cabaret be understood. This chapter will provide the historical context and artistic scope of both cabaret and recital performance and curation so that the areas of difference and similarity are clearly defined for application in the research.

The Classical (Or Western Art Music) Recital

To begin this research, I needed a snapshot of the cultural significance of the recital as a performance platform: namely its history, artistic aims and common practices. Grove Music Online illustrates the significant evolution of the term ‘recital’ (Weber, 2011). Since the sixteenth century it has meant “a speech or narrative account” (Weber, 2011 par. 1). The word later came to take on musical significance, then referred to “a performance or interpretation of a specific work” (Weber, 2011 par. 1). By the mid-nineteenth century, the musical term came to mean exclusively a concert given by one or a small group of performers, which is how the term is currently understood. In the eighteenth century recitals were given, but named ‘benefit concerts’ and were not only to exhibit artistic prowess and virtuosity, but rather to expose the calibre of the artist’s network of both patrons and fellow musicians as to secure the best teaching appointments (Weber, 2011).

The earliest known examples of recitals that featured a single or group of performers were conducted in the nineteenth century exhibiting virtuosi such as Hungarian pianist and composer, Franz Liszt (1859-1867) (Weber, 2011). Liszt can be credited for giving the most important early concerts that can justifiably
be termed recitals in its current definition (Weber, 2011). Between 1837–40, he decreased the number and importance of other performers in his concerts and sometimes appeared alone, thus developing the recital as a solo showcase. Interestingly, these recitals featured predominantly his own transcriptions and paraphrases of pre-existing pieces, which is incidentally a major technique used in cabaret. “In a paraphrase the arranger is free to vary the original and weave his own fantasy around it…” (Walker, 2007, p. 10). This liberty in interpretation and flamboyance of virtuosity is heavily linked to the art of cabaret. As the recital developed, gaining ever more popularity, it maintained this sense of skill showcase and an opportunity to exhibit their talents not only for the benefit of possible employers but for the paying public. Liszt helped to establish the recital form as a “freakshow” of immense talent and ability allowing the audience to take part in the risk of the performance of fiendishly difficult music safe only in the hands of a master. Both the recital and the cabaret behave as a circus in which performers walk a tightrope of transcendent triumph and human error, which is irresistibly exciting for an audience:

The attraction of the virtuoso for the public is very like that of the circus-crowd. There is always the hope that something dangerous may happen. M…x (Ysaye) may play the violin with M…y (Colonne) on his shoulders; or M…b (Pugno) may conclude his piece by lifting the piano with his teeth. (Debussy in Sitwell, 1967, p. x).

Like a travelling sideshow, Liszt toured so extensively in England, he referred to his existence as “Ma vie de saltimbanque” (“My travelling circus life”) (Allsobrook, 1991). Being able to transport recitals around Europe required financial viability for an expanding audience. Requiring only the musician and an instrument, the recital became a wonderfully economical art form. Thanks to the ingenuity of musicians such as Liszt, the late nineteenth century saw the recital become a regular fixture of music performance (Weber, 2011).

Throughout the nineteenth century, the piano enjoyed much success not only as a vehicle for virtuosi but as an instrument for the masses, serving as a source of
entertainment for middle-class families who could afford them, in the way that a television serves as entertainment in contemporary households (Burkholder, Grout, & Palisca, 1960). As a result of this, a great demand for music that could be performed in the intimate setting of the house was composed. This also included music suitable for both piano and voice, which caused many art song composers to emerge (Burkholder et al., 1960). In Germany Franz Schubert (1797-1828) and Robert Schumann (1810-1856) generated significant outputs of lieder, in the forms of both song collections and song cycles (Kennedy, 2012). These composers were major figures in setting the country’s great poets such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1842) and Friedrich Rückert (1788 –1866) to music and greatly contributed to the creation of music in an intimate setting: the song recital. Their compositions contained much subtlety and music supportive of the poetry, aiming to emphasise the beauty and meaning of the words.

Intimate song recitals were particularly present in France in the nineteenth century, French composers were also creating works for the combination of voice and piano: romances (Tunley & Noske, 2012). These compositions aimed to emulate German and Austrian music of the eighteenth century Classical period, aiming for elegance with simplicity, using such techniques as symmetry of phrasing, simple (and predictable) harmony, Alberti Bass (Tunley & Noske, 2012). Despite the volume of romances composed, today they are performed less and are considered less noteworthy than the melodies that were composed in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Tunley & Noske, 2012). These were composed by such innovators of the song as Claude Debussy (1862-1918) and Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924). The influence of these composers manifested itself in many more small concerts in salons. It is interesting to note that the French and Germans were as prominent leaders in the areas of art song composition as in the creation of cabaret, highlighting their love of the intimate performance of song.
At the beginning of the twentieth century audiences tastes became increasingly discerning and the recital became a common performance platform (Emmons & Sonntag, 1979). The success of the medium emerged due to the concept of the vocal recital and became a vehicle for the stars of the opera world such as Australian soprano, Nellie Melba (Emmons & Sonntag, 1979). These recitals would feature a programme of that particular singer’s most loved operatic arias, along with one or two art or folk songs, to exhibit their exemplary vocal technique. Where it was logistically possible and financially viable, an orchestra accompanied the singer. Alternatively an accompanist played pianoforte and was made to play inconspicuously so not to outshine the celebrity singer (Emmons & Sonntag, 1979). In fact, this particular kind of celebrity recital, is what most modern audiences tend to associate with the term. It is perceived as, “Some diva in a tuxedo or evening gown standing in the crook of the piano singing uninteresting songs in a foreign language.” (Nova, 2005, p. 1). As Liszt found success in the recital on the piano, historical singers and illustrious members of the García family Maria Malibran (1808-1836) and Pauline Viardot (1821-1910) found success in vocal recital (Christiansen, 1984). Disparate music finds cohesion with the use of characterisation formed through the examination of the diva prototype. Though divas in their own rights with intriguing biographies and accounts of their considerable talent, the lack of immediate connection of Viardot and Malibran to a contemporary public rendered these figures inappropriate for parody and therefore beyond the scope of this research.

More identifiable figures for contemporary audiences can be found in those given by the Three Tenors (Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and José Carreras). The Three Tenors were considered the most significant celebrities of the opera world, restoring a mass interest in opera. Pavarotti was the celebrity giant of the three:
Pavarotti drew a similarly large audience (150,000) with a televised concert in Hyde Park in London in 1992, the first classical music concert to be held in the park, while in June 1993 more than 500,000 people attended his performance on the Great Lawn of Central Park in New York, and millions more around the world watched on television. (Weber, 2011 par.14)

This peak in popularity reflects well on the celebrity recital containing stars of the opera world, not the art song recitalists. As the recital became a sub-genre of the operatic world, the popularity of the art song recital began to dwindle. As recitals began to take place in opera houses, not the smaller venues as were previously used, the performances were curated in order to feature the hits from the operatic repertoire, not the art songs written with subtler musical gestures in order to communicate finer brush strokes and “pastel” vocal colours as opposed to opera’s “primary colours” (Nova, 2005, p. 11). These recitals were needed to exhibit the full extent of the performers’ talent and to fill the spaces in which the recitals were performed, which were usually the large opera houses built for grand opera. These celebrity recitals were subject to portions of both satire and tribute in my performative research. There have been artists since who have brought about somewhat of a renaissance for the art song recital, namely Graham Johnson and his ensemble the Songmaker’s Almanac (Blyth, 2011).

Johnson sought to invigorate the recital by making it a more collaborative artform involving a larger group of singers in order to celebrate a “songmaker” or a central theme (eg. war, the seasons etc.) (Blyth, 2011 par. 1). A songmaker was one of the creative bodies involved in the creation of a song, whether it be a poet, composer or performer (Blyth, 2011). To accompany the songs, readings of prose and poetry about the notable songmaker or theme were given (Blyth, 2011). The approach of the Songmaker’s Almanac is notable because of their attention and restoration of poetry back into the recital. Though my interest lies outside the art song, like Johnson and the Almanac, I intended to revive the recital by restoring potency to the texts of songs. My argument is different in its methods for showcasing cohesive and comprehensible performance through curation. Blind to the subjectivity of “quality” I wanted to expose the poetry of
any song found in any place whether it be on the radio or in the opera house. In place of a programme related to the history of composers and of “songmakers” I hoped to bring about a highly original and personal collage of material from many styles of music in a way that links material from the world of classical music to the contemporary music of today.

**Cabaret**

“What is cabaret?” As with any constantly evolving art form it is difficult to pin down its precise parameters, yet cabaret seems to be defined by its inability to be defined. Rather than pursue the question of what it is, I have tried to deduce what it is not.

Cabaret in this sense is the idea of a certain kind of performance and its relationship to the audience – half play, half concert, certainly personality-based, not a replacement for theatre, but an alternative, the way vaudeville provided an alternative for legitimate theatre and commedia for the court theatre. Cabaret is, above all, illegitimate. (Friedman, 2006, p. 319)

*Cabaret is not performed in large, stuffy theatres and you can usually drink and eat there.* One may conclude that the simplest way to identify a cabaret performance is by defining it by the venue in which it is performed i.e., a cabaret or nightclub. When used in modern vernacular, the most common image associated with the word ‘cabaret’ is usually that of the sets of the film of the same name, depicting the “air of Weimarian decadence and a hint of satire which is lost all too quickly in sentimentality” (Appignanesi, 1975, p. 9). One might also see “visions of seedy strip joints on dank, dimly lit, city streets, or alternately, nightclubs where the exorbitant price of drinks is rarely linked to the meager stage fare” (Appignanesi, 1975, p. 9). This conjured image is in fact referring to *Kabarett*, the German medium for discourse with political and satirical content during the 1920s and early 1930s (Lareau, 1990). Despite an economic struggle between artists and venues for a literary *cabaret* in Germany, crowd-pleasing *Kabarett* performances were common entertainment
(Lareau, 1990). These were far removed from the original performances at the Chat Noir of the fin de siècle and the beginning of the twentieth century, where the focus aimed to be artistic venture, exploration and the avant-garde. However this is not always accurate as cabaret songs have been heard in music halls, films or one man or one-man or one-woman shows (Ruttowski, 2001). This immediately indicates that the semiotics of cabaret are further developed than the name of the venues in which they occur.

In the cabaret that I love, there is always a sense of rawness, or perhaps just “realness”, even when covered in sequins and lush chordal structures... The intimacy that can be created through the excitement of this "realness", this spontaneity, regardless of the size of the performance space....There is something also about some kind of exposure that is possible within cabaret—within a song – be it of the vulnerability of a vocal fold or a human heart, or a viewpoint.” (Madden-Grey in Howard, 2010 par. 9)

**Cabaret is not a big spectacle.** “Based in the idea of kleinkunst, ‘small art’ or ‘art in small forms’, Cabaret was opposed to the monumental forms of late nineteenth-century high art and kitsch” (Friedman, 2006, p. 320). Cabaret was a vehicle for an eclectic number of artists representing the marginalised working class. Appignanesi describes the “cat” (the Chat Noir and it performances): “a cat who could sing, recite, dance, create shadow plays, write music, lyrics, farce and above all, perform” (Appignanesi, 1975, p. 15). The showmanship and variety of theatrical skill is what appeals to me as a classical performer as opposed to being confined to “park and bark” during a recital. It was “a meeting place for artists where quasi-improvisational performance takes place as an intimate small scale but intellectually ambitious revue” (Appignanesi, 1975, p. 15). The small scale of cabaret and its emphasis on presentational intimacy can expose the vulnerability of the performer. This is also referred to as “breaking of the fourth wall”, which describes performing directly to audience through, “…the imaginary "wall" at the front of the stage in a traditional three-walled box set in a proscenium theatre, through which the audience sees the action in the world of the play” (Bell, 2008, p. 203).
Cabaret is not limiting one's self. It seems that it is the work of a cabaret performer to find a unique voice and try to encompass all of their gifts and virtuosities into one show. No stone goes unturned in showing the full artillery of one's skill. In her manifesto, Guilbert refers to songs as “condensed dramas”, in which each song would present a complete narrative and a full scope of human emotion (Ruttowski, 2001, p. 46). Personally, I found this approach intensely appealing and feel that it is reflected in my own performances. My own performance journey has been the process of developing an approach to interpreting songs: new ways of exploiting my talents in a way that is entirely personal and beyond singing in a particular style. Guilbert was intensely involved in the communication of text through the extension and full utilisation of the voice:

...So, if you want to make a real career as a singer of songs, the career of a Chansonneur, you must have a long special voice training. You must not be either a soprano or contralto, either a barytone (sic), bass, or tenor, you must be a soprano and contralto, you must be baritone (sic), bass, and tenor, all in one. (Guilbert, 1918, p. 3)

This has been a process in finding a creative voice that is uniquely my own, keeping to a set of my own tonal preferences, which switch fleetingly from a base of classical or bel canto technique quickly to jazz, music theatre and operatic sonorities according to its textual propriety and my own imposed dramatic choices and interpretation.

Cabaret is not all about the music. In cabaret, text is prized. In its purest and original form, one can deduce a rough sense of what the first cabaret performances sound like from the ‘cleaned up’ recordings of French cabaret artists such as Yvette Guilbert and Aristide Bruant. Guilbert wrote a manifesto of her philosophies and approach to the performance of songs entitled How to sing a song: the art of dramatic and lyric interpretation (1918). In this manifesto specific gestures facial expressions and non-verbal communication methods are articulated, illustrating the scope of necessary craft for cabaret singers, thus
making its parameters specific and mannered. These techniques are all deciphered in order to exploit the expression of the text of songs, sometimes at the detriment of beautiful sound. Guilbert saw the cabaret singer’s role as “an actor serving a singer without a voice, who demands the orchestra or from the piano to sing instead of her” (Guilbert in Ruttowski, 2001, p. 46). With this statement, Guilbert highlights the importance of the singer as actor, letting sound be deciphered by the singer’s response to text as opposed to adhering to any sonic convention.

We are really painters, designers. Our voice is our palette. We color and illuminate the multitude of out ‘nuances’- persons, themes, their atmosphere, epoch—... All of my songs were worked out like roles or poems, depending on the kind of text. (Guilbert in Ruttowski, 2001, p. 46)

In addition to the study of other art forms and their incorporation into her act, Guilbert was a highly original performer, on the forefront of what was new in music. She was one of the first recorded cabaret singers to use improvisation within the rhythm both emulating and influencing jazz singers of the time (Ruttowski, 2001). In complete contrast with this, Aristide Bruant sang songs simply and personally, without much of a nod to the dramatic and whose approach could be compared to a folk singer (Ruttowski, 2001). He incorporated street poetry into his songs and foregrounded socio-political subject matters into his performances, which is now commonplace and a hallmark feature of cabaret (Ruttowski, 2001). The two almost directly contrasting approaches shed light on the wide scope of cabaret performance and its function as a deeply personal art form in which each person can bring their individual talents.

_Cabaret is not for the masses_. A far cry from the glittering celebrity recitals of the _Three Tenors_, cabaret has predominantly occupied a place within fringe culture and the content of cabaret still has those associations attached to adult worlds of sex, politics and controversial social commentary. Cabaret has always sought to present a viewpoint from the fringes. In _La grande encyclopédie_
(1889), there is much written about “the traditional association of cabaret with vice and illegal activities of all kinds throughout the centuries” (Wachsmann & O’Connor, 2007 par. 2).

**Cabaret has not finished evolving.** Having inquired as to the historical imprints of cabaret and having found out what it is not, it was my mission to find voices that spoke to me within a contemporary cabaret scene. It is my own admission that I had initially only accessed older cabaret songs through the performances of contemporary cabaret artists such as Australian cabaret performer, Meow Meow (Melissa Madden-Gray), the nineteen-eighties recordings of opera and cabaret singer Teresa Stratas and contemporary German cabaret singer Ute Lemper. The cabaret form is still influenced by the French and German schools. In fact Madden-Gray still features many German and French cabaret songs in her performances by the likes of composers Hanns Eisler (1898-1963) and Kurt Weill (1900-1950) in conjunction with newer compositions such as pop songs and torch songs (Meow & Palmer, 2007). Ute Lemper has based almost an entire career on the interpretation of songs by the collaborative pair of composer Kurt Weill and lyricist and playwright, Bertolt Brecht (1898 –1956) (Barizien, 1992). Despite what influence is owed to the past, it is the mode in which cabaret is delivered to modern audiences that creates relevance. It was important to gauge the definition of how modern audiences see cabaret and what it has to offer in its most evolved form.

**Cabaret is not either “low” or “high” art**

One of the appealing features for me in that cabaret cannot be categorised into “low” and “high” art forms. Its eclecticism provided new colours to my palette as a curator of a programme and increased diversity in my ideas. Madden-Gray cited in Howard describes exciting contradictory nature of cabaret as:

...high and low art (in the same breath), the ancient and modern, astounding virtuosity, some kind of truth in delivery that makes us hear a song or an idea completely differently to the way we’ve always (or never) heard it, that feels comforting, healing or revelatory.
The meeting of high and low art is something that has been particularly attractive throughout the course of this research and is particularly reflective of my own standing as a performer caught between the worlds of classical music and contemporary music which includes jazz and music theatre. The somewhat jarring juxtaposition of contemporary music with classical is a predominant characteristic within this project. In our current context, classical music is considered a high art form (Brottman, 2005). There are several factors in why this may be so, as cabaret has continued to evolve over the years, moving with the trends of mass audiences. Classical music aims for historical purity, for the authenticity of performance. It is merely time that provides the criteria for classical music to become a “high” art form:

...the essence of “high” or “literary” culture is in fact far from ahistorical: historicity invades the very nature of these modes of activity and their products. It is the fixity of the hierarchical scale of values and the arbitrariness of its contents at any given point, which provide the scale with its particular power. (Brottman, 2005, p. XII)

In my own experience there is something highly personal and human about the cabaret form as opposed to the super-human and transcendental beauty of classical music. It is a culmination of the visceral and the intellectual that Meow Meow feels is most successful about her approach to performance: “It should be a dangerous and passionate mix of art and craft, heart, head and spirit! It’s life in macro-microcosm.” (Howard, 2010 par. 4)

**Where Recital And Cabaret Meet**

I had to establish early on in my research that there was enough substance on which to base the synthesis of cabaret with recital, which meant deducing their similarities as well as their differences. It was important to cite even the most obvious of similarities, as they could offer something artistically to my research.
As I have previously mentioned, both of the art forms are *kleinkunst* or small art forms in which the performers on stage must provide all of the interest of the performance. The pianist is an especially important collaborator in cabaret and recital. The pianist must provide the total sum of rhythmic and harmonic support to the solo vocal performer. The pianist replaces the orchestra or ensemble that may have been present in larger art forms such as opera. Despite contrasts in style, philosophy or mode of delivery, the instrumentation of voice and piano are the basic instrumentations of both forms. This bestows responsibility on the part of the singer and pianist to incite the imaginations of the audience. Much of the literature about the reinvigoration of recital, particularly by American vocal teacher and author Shirlee Emmons, presents as an art form is similar to Guilbert’s ideas concerning songs as “condensed dramas” in *How To Sing A Song: The Art of Lyric Interpretation* (Guilbert, 1918, p. 56): “A recital is a one-man or one-woman show…Songs are small dramas. You must make it possible for your entire audience to share in your understanding of those miniature events.” (Emmons, 2004 par. 39)

There is much to distinguish repertoire written specifically for this intimate instrumentation and traditionally smaller venues. One may find directions in the score from the composer that will achieve dramatic effect in a small theatre or recital hall, yet will prove too subtle for fully staged opera in a large theatre. More is demanded of the audience in terms of the artist's demand for the suspension of disbelief. In art forms such as opera and musical theatre, layers of symbolic details are found in elaborate sets, costumes, other characters (including chorus) and an orchestra. In the case of recital or cabaret, it is up to the performer to deliver a completely developed character and world in which an audience can spend an entertaining 90 minutes. For this reason, opera singers have already ventured into the world of cabaret in order to diversify a recital programme. One can find a plethora of recordings of opera singers interpreting the songs of Kurt Weill (1900-1950), Erik Satie (1866-1925) and Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951). These composers and their art song/cabaret song
hybrids have been well-documented and catalogued for the use of classical singers (Bronner, 2004). I have not included a large amount of this repertoire for this reason. I have instead tried to use the techniques and functionality of cabaret performance methods. Re-arrangement of songs, using unexpected sequences of songs and re-interpretation were intentionally innovative, giving more creative voice to the performer. The re-imagining of songs with new interpretive approaches, re-writing of lyrical content and musical re-arrangement is a marked feature of contemporary cabaret. This is in deep contrast with the traditions of art song repertoire aim to serve the composer precisely and humbly. The interpreter of art song must adhere to every marking on the score. More often than not, cabaret performance features one character. All of the songs are weaved together to express the journey of one character. Adversely, recital demands the metamorphosis from one character to the next: a challenging undertaking for even the finest of thespians! The comprehension of the audience is tested in recital when not only must the singer inhabit several characters but also deliver these narratives in languages other than the vernacular.

It is the work of the classical singer to acquire skills so that their singing may appear effortless and yet spontaneous, attaining the label of virtuoso. This thrilling combination of the danger of failure and feeling in the safe hands of that links the virtuosi of recitalists in Western Art Music with cabaret performance. Creating a circus-like exhibition and “…an expectation that anything could happen, and those exquisite moments of genuine uncensored reaction where we cannot even understand why we are suddenly weeping or laughing!” (Howard, 2010 par. 8) Where the difference lies in the ability for the classical performer to merely look like these performative acts are spontaneous and delivered for the first time, whereas cabaret adds to itself the danger of legitimately improvised moments.
The cabaret performer is required to make personal and dramatically charged decisions for musical interpretation, that are almost always decidedly different to the popular performances of that piece from previous and current notable performances. The cabaret artist should always be looking for something new in a song:

I love the flexibility of a cabaret format to take risks – to be endlessly reinvented, to respond to the personal and political circumstances of the audience, the performer, the larger world environment. It is a vehicle built for changes, in all senses and for me, at least, drags its history marvellously (sic) with it. (Howard, 2010 par. 9)

Cabaret and recital are both vehicles for the “condensed drama” (Guilbert, 1918, p. 56). It is my work as a performer to create characters and tell stories with little else but my voice and piano accompaniment. To have an extended palette of vocal colour provided by classical vocal technique is a gift to give to the cabaret. Similarly, the cabaret’s ability to bring fun from the fringes is a welcome change to the formality of the recital. As a practitioner of both cabaret and recital, it was integral to find the correct methodology in which to begin their fusion. Performances were prepared and given within the paradigm of a practice-led methodology and were the most effective trials for hybridisation prior to the final performance, Diva Bites the Dust.
Chapter 2: Methods of A Diva with A Death Wish

Practice-led research is a comparatively new research paradigm that uses groundbreaking ways to collect data. The following provides insight into how the performances themselves are research (as are their documentation and analysis). The series of performances contained in this research are the framework in which the synthesis of art forms can occur and their documentation and analysis deconstruct their effect.

Practice As Research

After a breath-taking performance of Paul Capsis’ cabaret/concert *Make Me A King* at His Majesty’s theatre, I rushed to the merchandise stand to have my CD signed. Bewildered, I asked Capsis “How did you learn to do that? Could you do a masterclass at my uni?” He replied, “You know that you mostly learn from just doing it, don’t you?” (Capsis, 2011). Taking Capsis at his word, my research was conducted through a series of performances as character, Disgrace Kelly. These performances were necessary experiments carried out in order to arrive at the conceptual framework and practical expression of my final performance *Diva Bites the Dust*.

Firstly initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners.” (Carole Gray in Haseman, 2006 par. 2).

The practice-led research methodology I have utilised in my research follows the model outlined by Gray above. My course of inquiry has been consistently led by my creative practice as a singer. Attempts to answer questions proved more fruitful when singing was “…the actual process of thinking,” and not “…the outcomes of thinking done previously”(Vincs, 2007, p. 100). This highlights the inclusivity of previous knowledge and its instrumental role in the accumulation of new knowledge and is so coloured by the subjectivity of my own experience, training and bias. Grierson describes creative research as being “about
innovative thinking and practice, about making and testing assumptions, performing, proposing, speculating, asking questions and paving the ways for new questions or propositions to be made next time” (2009, p. 5). It would be immensely difficult and incommodious to dispose previously learned vocal technique for the sake of innovation. Thus, I needed to think about research through a developmental paradigm in which tacit knowledge and subjectivity of the performing body could be taken into account. This was achieved through the influence of the rhizomic model conceived by philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and political activist Felix Guattari (1930-1992), discussed in their seminal text A Thousand Plateaus (2004).

The performing body and the art form of vocal performance can each be seen through the rhizomic paradigm as a “acentred” and “non-hierarchical” containing politically organised, yet mutually dependent parts (Deleuze and Guattari in Vincs, 2007, p. 100). This model was liberating as an opera singer who has previously had to diligently defer to other authorities and operate within a pre-determined hierarchy, to be the creative authority. Taking responsibility for this performance and its curation meant addressing all elements of a multi-faceted art form (rhizomic in structure), with innumerable considerations that range from vocal technique to textual analysis to musical interpretation. In addition to these skills, my research required turning a semi-staged vocal showcase into a staged production, requiring collaboration, direction and production. The scope of my research is crystallised down to my own specific paradigm and embodied mechanism, while aiming to avoid the “dilution” that comes, according to Haseman, with using qualitative or quantitative research paradigms (2010, p. 148).

Practice-led research and the rhizome both work to capture subjectivity present in creative and performative work, capturing the performer’s individual feelings, impressions and opinions. The rhizomic model takes into account the ineffectiveness of a positivist approach to creative arts inquiry and suggests in
its stead a system that “… operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots” (Deleuze and Guattari in Vincs, 2007, p. 103). This acceptance of subjectivity meant asking myself a series of variations on the questions: “Does it work and how does it work?” (Deleuze in Vincs, 2007, p. 100). The rhizomic model also makes room for pre-existing (or tacit knowledge). The researcher must make new performances from pre-existing skills and allow this to form new skills. In my case, I was juxtaposing two disciplines, cabaret and classical vocal performance, which I had previously kept separate. Here were two sets of creative artillery that needed altering or re-organising in order to break new ground. Opera is an art form comprised of traditional elements and hallmarks, some of which were essential and others malleable or optional. In order to contemporise this art form, it was necessary to use rehearsal and performance to deduce I had to employ the dynamic feedback of inquiry: reflexive and reflective practice. These feedback loops of practice and critique took place in private and collaborative rehearsal rooms and through exegetical writing (Haseman, 2010). The simultaneous use of reflexive and reflective modes of inquiry is identified by the term “double loop learning”, referring to the two loops of feedback “practice itself and the retrospective analysis of practice” (Schön and Argyris in Haseman, 2010, p. 153). The rehearsal studio housed the space in which these feedback loops were most employed.

The rehearsal studio provided the space for refining the process, for happy accidents to occur and for non-functioning material to be re-worked, edited or omitted. In a private rehearsal room, it is possible to stop and correct small technical matters and repeat them until they feel “correct” according to autonomous feedback or feedback from a supporting figure, such as a vocal teacher or coach. The rehearsal room houses reflexive practice: a “dynamic interaction between reflection and action with an intention to learn and change” (Antonacopolou, 2004, p. 47). Reflexive practice is critical analysis placed within the action of creative practice itself: “Probably the most important single process is learning while doing” (Beckhard and Pritchard in Antonacopolou, 2004, p. 49).
Whilst rehearsing privately, the only way to decipher problem areas in my practice was through immersion in the creative practice itself. This exhibited whether the necessary embodied knowledge was revealing itself or feeling absent. Where there existed incongruity between the desired outcomes of performance and practical execution, rehearsal was carried out to rectify this. The complex “aggregate” of desired outcomes addressed in rehearsal were impossible to unpack theoretically before the act of singing (Parnet in Vincs, 2007, p. 100). Singing is a hugely complex act, fraught with operation of cerebral and physical mechanisms. Whilst I am singing I am making conscious interpretive decisions whilst concurrently employing embodied knowledges and tacit knowledges.

Supporting Kim Vincs’ statement that, “the nature of artwork itself is emergent”, the following vital tasks arose from this reflexive and reflective practice: curation or the shaping of my programme; editing; collaboration with other artists; interviewing my collaborators; writing a practice review of the performances of influential artists and keeping a written journal and videorecording of notable performances of my own for critique (2007, p. 101). Beyond the rehearsal room and exegetical writing process, microcosmic reflexivity and reflection also took part in improvised moments, in which decisions and courses of action were deciphered on the stage as opposed to in the rehearsal room prior to performance. Assessing performance situations and using prior knowledge and performance instinct, allowed me to think of appropriate verbal and non-verbal insertions. The entirety of the process is referred to as ‘data’ informing and re-informing the practice in ‘double loop learning.’

**Small Art, Big Undertaking**

The lonely experience of this research could be referred to as *kleinkunst*, (a German word for “small art”) which is often used to categorise the cabaret form.
Far from defining the impact of the work, the term *kleinkunst* describes the microcosm in which the performance-making is conducted: usually in a venue containing no more than two hundred people and usually with a small number of performers (Ruttowski, 2001, p. 50). This literal definition of *kleinkunst* says nothing of the impact of the work, but of the philosophy and political semiotics that point to the fringe world of the artists and bohemians (Wilson, 2001). The antithesis of this philosophy is exhibited in the operas of Wagner which embody the term *gesamtkunstwerk*, which refers to an art form containing all art forms and a large number of collaborators aiming to create an all-incorporating artwork (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). The Wagnerian spectacle is enormous and the singers act as merely a cog in the production machine. As an opera singer within this structure, one must interpret and be guided extensively by artistic authorities: directors, conductors and composers.

Just as Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht decided to create reactionary small works to Wagner’s spectacles, I embarked upon making a small work in which I could control most of its elements (Kowalke, 1993). The act of creating a piece of *kleinkunst* was carried out with the rhizome in mind, refining the performance without an accompanying committee of opinion. Possessing a limited budget, a small venue and only few handpicked collaborators meant that the research was an exercise in intimacy and autonomy, driven by one-person and her performative alter ego. I wanted to remove the opera diva from the self-contained realism of an opera to breaking the fourth wall and exposing her to the environment of microcosmic closeness: the cabaret. I wanted to take the epic icon of the diva used to treading the boards of enormous opera houses and cage her like an animal for the perverted voyeurs of the cabaret.

**The Embodiment of Disgrace**

The caged songbird in question is Disgrace Kelly: a character I created through this research. Characterisation was a filter through which I could deduce the
necessary embodied knowledges needed for performance. She was initially created for performances for burlesque troupe *Sugar Blue Burlesque*. In a sense, she is a heightened version of myself: a version of myself I deemed performative and able to conform to the artistic criteria of performances featuring burlesque. The creation of character provided a performative identity in which synthesis could thrive. The character of Disgrace Kelly is the cohesive agent in which disparate elements could co-exist and thrive. Aimed to be an expression of the encompassed divas (the queens of song), Disgrace Kelly demanded a certain standard and brand of performance. Being able to picture this diva and impersonate her, as opposed to the indulgence of my own neuroses, gave me clearer goals for choosing appropriate repertoire, driving me to refine my vocal technique. Characterisation was a psychological method for the clarification of what embodied knowledge I wanted to develop:

The emission of song is, in and of itself, the acoustic exhibition of embodiment. It is not a sound that comes from a mechanical instrument; rather, it is produced by the very body of the singer, the corporeal flux that emerges from the most hidden cavities, and which determines its particular “grain”...; not a generic timbre, codified in advance by technical instruments, but rather a peculiar, elusive, highly individualized, acoustic image of a specific embodiment. (Beghelli in Cavarero, 2005, p. 117)

In singing, corporeal skills are drawn upon to perform acts designed to affect an audience. “Embodied knowledge situates intellectual and theoretical insights within the realm of the material world. Embodied knowledge is sensory; it highlights smell, touch, and taste as well as more commonly noted sights and sounds” (Ellingson, 2008 par. 1). As a wholistic form of both practical and theoretical learning, the acquisition of embodied knowledge is a long and complex process. In addition to the clarification and comprehension of new ideas, a singer must develop the ability for kinaesthetic deduction of what is effective and ineffective expression. This develops through either my own feedback or the judgement my educators have provided me with, accumulating a sense memory of how vocal production should feel. It is impossible for the singer to know precisely how the work is being projected precisely at the time.
they sing it and must instead memorise sensations of effective, dramatically convincing and vocally healthy singing. Whilst studying with vocal coach Neil Semer at the Neil Semer Vocal Institute in Coesfeld, Germany in 2011, he would often ask “how did that feel?” when a phrase was sung to his satisfaction. Whist the student was responding, he would often put the student on a “one word diet” in which the student would choose one word in order to express the sensations they were feeling within their bodies. This was done immediately after the phrase so as to ensure the sensation was freshly experienced and so that one word may be used in order to memorise the sensation as opposed to an obtuse or flowery explanation, that one would not be able to recall later. The simplification of mental cues in order to complete tasks in the voice is more helpful for singers’ sense memory.

This clear feedback as to the tonal quality of a singers’ voice from a trusted vocal teacher, accompanist or coach is invaluable to a singer. Even as the singer becomes more experienced and is able to deduce “good” from “bad” vocal technique through the memorisation of these “good singing” sensations, the singer’s own ear is never totally accurate. The sound the singer is making is conducted by bone to the ear, rather than being conducted by air within the acoustic of the room. Therefore, the singer will never hear what the audience hears:

Singers who think they have "opened up the voice, or have found "roundness" and "depth" are often enjoying an internal auditory experience (largely through bone conduction) that is not shared by the listener. It sounds and feels bigger inside, but smaller out here. (Miller, 1996, p. 273)

Throughout the course of my research, to maintain healthy vocal phonation, especially whilst experimenting in different genres such as jazz and musical theatre, I have received weekly feedback from my vocal teacher, Patricia Price and occasional input from my accompanist, David Wickham. In addition to feedback from these accounts from educators, I have used the aid of voice recordings and video recordings of my performances in order to improve on or omit what seem to be trends of ineffective performance.
Characterisation

An important part of being a singer and musician, who interprets rather than composes original music and lyrics, is that the choice of repertoire is integral to shaping the expression of a recital or cabaret as a whole. In both recital and cabaret, the artist is the unifying factor: "Cabaret is the kind of theater in which there’s no typecasting, where there’s no role to play except yourself" (Eaker in Harrington, 2000, p. 12). The intimacy of cabaret and performance in all kinds of kleinkunst involves a microscopic look at the artist making it. It is this deep personalisation of the way songs have affected me and the choices that deviate from what the original composers intended that I feel will feed classical vocal performance with contemporary spontaneity.

If you’re looking for an outlet where you can express your feelings and your personal life, honestly and openly, where you can dare to take chances and to be different, then cabaret is the performance venue you want to explore. (Eaker in Harrington, 2000, p. 12)

It was pleasurable to perform and be able to be uncategorised, to capture an image of a timeless diva. The songs and styles that I have chosen for Disgrace Kelly demand slightly different vocal technique than bel canto alone that I use most often (for the interpretation of opera and art song) and therefore need supervision. I deduced early on that it was not in my vocal interest to change my technique entirely but pepper my performances with different sonorities from cabaret, music theatre and jazz. I used bel canto (or classical) vocal technique throughout as a foundational sonority whilst adding interpretive choices that I believed more conducive to particular arrangements of songs and their dramatic content. One technique I exploited was directing the pianist to alter of the original musical style in the piano arrangements. These were often antithetical or based on a pun, used to produce humour, sense to the narrative or provide musical interest. The stylistic alterations of my technique were at times pre-
prepared during my own private practice and at others, instinctive reactions to the musical offerings I had in rehearsal with a pianist.

**Recording and Reflection**

The weakness of the *reflexive* feedback loop is where *reflective* modes of inquiry come into play. Removing the pressures of time and critiquing with the knowledge afforded in between the act of creative practice and retrospection allows the researcher added insight. Participating in performance or rehearsal produces a series of critiques and improvements to be improved upon, yet the performer/creative researcher battles two adversaries in attempting to diagnose the subsequent course of action: 1) memory failure and 2) lacking the perspective of an outsider. Throughout this research effective moments in performance are deduced through what responses I can gather myself, however input is also received from artistic authorities such as my vocal teacher and coach. From these sources I can elicit detailed opinions about my performance. One useful approach I have employed is making film and sound recordings of my performances. As I then view singing and the experimentation is allowed to run its course in real time, revealing much about the reality of the effectiveness of a creative enquiry and can then provide critical reflection as an audience member; actions that cannot be performed concurrently. Therefore, this proves a useful and popular tool for performative, creative practice-led research.

**Collaboration**

Choosing appropriate collaborators was integral to my research. Musical collaboration occurs virtually every time I perform. Choosing the right pianists for this research was immensely important as I needed musicians capable of the re-arrangement of piano accompaniments that require compositional skills and theatrical instinct. Fortunately my collaborators and colleagues, pianists Ben Yap and David Wickham are also gifted arrangers, which meant I could
supply them with simplistic scores (that were often little more than a series of chord progressions, similar to a jazz chart) and they were able to compose arrangements that were appropriate to my needs. Much of the humour and imagery of my performances relied heavily on the arrangement of the piano accompaniment. For instance David Wickham’s insertion of the first bars of *Scotland the Brave* (Traditional, 1900) was an inspired and humorous addition to my parody of Lady Gaga’s *Paparazzi* (Fusari, Germanotta, & Maclaine, 2008) re-imagined to depict the tale of Lady Macbeth.

Being privy to their previous work, it was no surprise that my collaborators and colleagues added great depth and detail to my research. Sam Knee was an integral part of the project, providing particular help in the editing of the script that I had written for my final performance, *Diva Bites the Dust*. As a gifted writer, he was an excellent sounding board and helped to improve the structure of the piece. His involvement was also essential, as I had written the script for the character Byron Bard, a character that Sam had created and written under for years. He supplied me with “Bard-isms”, helping me to refine the script so that it felt like Byron Bard’s voice. The choice to use Sam Knee as Byron Bard as an MC was born from my exposure to Sam’s work during our friendship, when I observed certain similarities in our performance philosophies. Sam uses masterworks of poetry as a medium for sardonic humour. A meeting of low and high art to exploit virtuosity and create satire. Secondly, the MC was an important structural device for the show. Not only did he guide the audience through the evening, he created diversity in the performance: a literal and figurative new voice for the show. Byron Bard is an anti-hero, charming the audience with the humour of his absurd cruelty. He universally represented all of the pejorative characters present in the *Tales of Hoffmann*, including Hoffmann (himself a poet). There needed to be a ringleader to my circus animal and a source of misery to cause the diva’s dysfunction and demise.
Interviews & Practice Review

Interviews were another useful source of inquiry as they allow artists to provide the project with a primary source of information into their own creative processes. Sam Knee and Nicholas Maclaine were both obvious choices for interviewees as they also fulfilled collaborative roles in my research and performances (see Appendices 3 and 4). As the writer, director and producer of the cabaret show *Parodies Lost*, Nicholas was able to provide me with his thoughts on parody and its role in performance. Sam Knee gave valuable insights into characterisation. They were able to eloquently voice their points of view and provide me with knowledge in the areas that I perceived to be their strengths. Both gifted writers and performers, I was able to glean knowledge from their great abilities in the structuring and execution of performances (see Appendix 4 & 5). The inspiration of others’ work was a major factor in the excogitation of my research and reinforced my decision to include a practice review. The sum of these methodological elements presents an explanation for the collected data. The exegetical format in which the subjective nature of creative work and the veritable processes of the performer can be captured was based on contextual research into other artists work and the self-reflection process of practice-led research.

The exegesis is an integral but by no means complete element of this research. The aggregate of my research methodology depicts a dialogue between two co-dependent roles: the performer and the researcher. As the performer, I have executed tasks in real time in a rehearsal studio or in front of an audience. These performances are themselves practice-led research, providing proof of embodied knowledge. However, subsidiary theoretical or analytical research may use an unmeasured amount in order to report or provide contextual information surrounding performances. My methodology has aimed to promote creativity whilst offering a comprehensive documentation of these processes.
Chapter 3: A Diverse Practice

This chapter presents a review and analysis of four artists that have helped me to envision the possibilities of solo vocal performance. These are all cabaret artists and their performance expertise has been tailored for an intimate audience, informing my abilities to tame the giantess that is the diva and readying her for her close-up in an intimate setting. I have deliberately reviewed contemporary Australian performance acts in relation to their contribution to performance creation and how this might influence my research in the synthesis of cabaret and recital to illustrate the depth of the practice review much the same way a literature review would operate.

The work of other performers has often been the catalyst for new ideas throughout my process. Whilst compiling the repertoire I sought performers and artists that synthesise classical recital material and cabaret. The work Wunderschön (Schumann, Schubert, & de Leeuw, 2010) directed by Rodney Fisher and featuring cabaret artist Meow Meow can receive credit for supplying evidence of an achievable working relationship between the worlds of Classical music and cabaret. Winterreise (Schubert & Holloway, 2011) directed by Matthew Lutton was also a clear choice for analysis and reference. This piece combined theatrical performance techniques with classical music infused with a contemporary Australian voice: an important artistic aim for my own research.

In addition to these works that featured the re-imagining of art songs, it was necessary to source inspiration from purely cabaret acts from which I could draw elements to apply to classical repertoire. Meow Meow, Australian trio The Kransky Sisters and British duo Frisky and Mannish are cabaret acts that I have focussed my attention upon. As cabaret is a new discipline for me it has been important to familiarise myself with the performance methodologies and the forward direction of innovative cabaret artists. Observing methods and studying
the structural templates from a contemporary cabaret stage have proven useful to compare and contrast with my own approach to performance.

**Frisky and Mannish**

![Frisky and Mannish](https://example.com/frisky_and_mannish_image.jpg)

*Figure 2 Cabaret Act, Frisky and Mannish (D. & Edinburgh, 2009). Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C*

When asked to classify their work, Frisky and Mannish answered:

> “Why you wanna try to classify the type of thing that we do? Cos we’re just fine doing what we like, can we say the same for you?” - JC Chazez, *NSYNC…It would appear to be something of a challenge to describe with precision what it is that we do.

> If pressed, we would call it: Popmusicy-seriocomic-mashparodic-stereophonic-LOUD-vaudevillian-sketchcabaret-throwbackcurrent-oldfangled-newfashioned-bapsbotty-infotainment. Or, to be succinct, we tit around with pop songs. You will BLATES love it.” (Moriarty, Corcoran, & Floyd-Jones, 2012 par. 2)

This compiled list of complex, loaded adjectives juxtaposed with a somewhat coarse conclusion, is an acute statement of Frisky and Mannish’s approach to
cabaret. They comprise of two performers, a virtuosic pop singer Frisky (Laura Corcoran) and a versatile singer-pianist Mannish (Matthew Floyd-Jones) making an art form of the pop-parody. Upon seeing their show The College Years (a sequel show to School of Pop) at the Fringe World Spiegeltent in 2011, I responded well to its structure, which was similar to a lecture (Corcoran & Floyd-Jones, 2011). In the early stages of creating Diva Bites the Dust, I had drawn more influence from this, making Byron Bard the professor giving a lecture in Diva 101m using Disgrace Kelly as a pedagogical tool. In typical presentational cabaret style, the duo instructs the audience as to the content of their pop-parodies with intelligent observational humour and acute impersonations of celebrity pop idols. An example of this is Frisky impersonating contemporary pop singer Lily Allen whilst singing the lyrics to nineteen-thirties and forties singer-songwriter Noel Coward’s I’ve Been To A Marvellous Party (Coward, 1938) to the melody of her own song The Fear (Allen & Kurstin, 2009). The process is reversed when Mannish sings Allen’s LDN (Allen, Babalola, Lewis, & McCook, 2006) arranged to sound like Coward’s own vamping patter songs. Without the addition of classical music in the mix as is present in my project, Frisky and Mannish draw opposing elements from two or more pop songs and bond them together in order to create humour. A technique used often by the cabaret duo is musical “mash-up”:

A fusion of disparate musical elements. Now usually: a piece of popular music created by merging the elements of two or more existing songs using computer technology and production techniques, esp. one featuring the vocals of one song over the instrumental backing of another. (Shortis, 2011)

I adopted the concept of mash-up in my own work collecting songs that contained the joining of disparate materials was an important step-forward in the development of the collage that is Diva Bites the Dust.
The Kransky Sisters

Upon seeing the Kranksy sisters perform, it became obvious to me that I wanted to create interesting pop parodies. Their ability crafts new meanings from pop songs through their use of characterisation.

In a quiet town in the middle of south east Queensland lives a huddle of strange sisters, whom, in between tending ants, knitting egg warmers, and hanging out cane toad skins to dry, travel around the country performing their popular musical shows to a growing following. This oddball musical trio marry curious real life stories with a host of uniquely homemade arrangements of popular songs gleaned from their old wireless in a highly entertaining event… (The Kransky Sisters, 2012)

Like Frisky and Mannish, The Kransky Sisters are a cabaret act devoted to the art of pop-song parody. The group comprises of three sisters: Mourne, Eve and Dawn Kransky. The detailed characterisation of the sisters and the highly amusing writing present comic monologues that maintain a through-line for the audience; thus becoming a useful spoken word technique adopted by Byron Bard in our final production. The profound character development of The Kranksy Sisters rely on their anecdotal dialogue and monologues preceding the performances of pop-songs, setting up a contrary image to the pop songs they
sing and therefore creating irony in the singing of them. Their image is in itself a satire of the eccentrics in regional Australia. An interview with the main force of the trio, Annie Lee, suggests that she may be drawing on her own experiences:

I came from the coast of Tasmania and as a child would stand on the hill next to the lighthouse, looking out and wondering what lay over there for me on the other side….on the big mainland. I came from a fundamentalist religious background and those times at the lighthouse were my escape from the confines of the religion and a somewhat disturbing family life. It was the dreaming I did then, this escape through my imagination that led me to the work I do today. (Improv, 2010)

Anecdotes are delivered throughout the performances which describe the lives of women that are old before their time. Though seemingly a band of “anti-divas” in contrast to Disgrace Kelly, the Kransky Sisters exhibit the pompous dogmatic airs of the diva that comes with their fictional background. One particular parody of Psycho Killer (Byrne, Frantz, & Weymouth, 1977) (a pop song by Talking Heads), is given new meaning by an anecdote given by the sisters about the accidental killing of pets. The musical interpretation is aimed to juxtapose the caricature of the prudish, fundamentalist religious Australian living in a time capsule of a bygone era in rural Australia against the concept of cool perpetuated in contemporary pop music. I used this kind of detailed characterisation as well as using alternate readings or interpretations of songs to parody. The formal, commanding outsider that is the presence of the bel canto voice against the sexy, “cool” and perhaps somewhat banal lyrics of pop music makes for an amusing and fresh way for the audience to hear a song anew.
Winterreise

There are several potent opinions surrounding the performance of German lieder. Performers, vocal pedagogues and critics have written analysis of the poetry to which the music is set, as well as the musical and lyrical interpretation of lieder. However, contemporary Australian director Matthew Lutton found an Australian voice within the music of Winterreise by Franz Schubert. “It’s really interesting that the songs are about a vastness and a starkness - a single tree with a single leaf - so there is a relationship with the Australian landscape,” (Tompkin, 2011). I found the performance thrilling in its fearless hybridity. The performance is eclectic in many ways, all of which aim to facilitate the breaking of new ground with old music and telling a story that is from a uniquely Australian point of view. This performance offered some ideas on how to stage a performance made almost exclusively from songs that were not written for theatre and create ways to bring the imagery and emotional effect of the poetry to the forefront. The production, which featured prominent Australian cabaret artist, Paul Capsis featured a true understanding of the text by both the artists who were accomplished actors and the audience, who delivered the songs with as much detail and realism in their interpretation as a monologue or soliloquy. The songs were also delivered in English, not the original German in order to allow the language to resonate more efficiently with the Australian audience. The text aims to be faithful and truthful within the confines of this new narrative created by Lutton. “It's really taking the lyrics and stripping them, exposing them, going for a deeper, more dramatic theatre” (Yeoman, 2011 par. 15).
The use of Paul Capsis as the singer and narrator for this piece helps the audience to be removed from the well-loved classic recordings by such singers as Peter Pears (1910-1986) (Britten & Pears, 1963). Such a recording is heard on a record player throughout the performance that belongs to the old man, played by actor George Shevstov. The recording acts as a signpost for the audience, exhibiting to them what this performance is not: a performance that ignores the possibility for theatrical opportunity. Capsis brings us into the present time by applying his highly original vocal sonority, which has been used in previous cabarets such as Boulevard Delirium to impersonate the great divas of the past such as Janis Joplin, Billie Holliday and Nina Simone (Capsis, 2004). These divas do not leave Capsis’ vocal timbre in the performance as he uses Joplin-esque wailing to express emotion in Schubert’s melodies. The effect of this was the creation of universality, discovering resonance of Wilhelm Müller’s (1794-1827) through the contemporary and androgynous sonorities of Capsis’ cabaret vocality. Lutton aims for Müller’s text to be embodied in a contemporary Australian setting. This embodiment was helped along in the third part of Lutton’s “fugal triptych” by dancer, James O’Hara (Tompkin, 2011). The presence of a dancer in Winterreise highlighted the importance of aesthetic interest and the capabilities of physical expression in performance. Classical singers often neglect the body as an expressive tool in recital, using a “park and bark” approach. Moving bodies on stage beyond the static standing position holds within it much symbolism which I experimented with in Diva Bites the Dust.
Wunderschön

Figure 5 Promotional poster for Wunderschön, starring Meow Meow (Madden-Gray, 2009).
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My exposure to Wunderschön during the Perth International Arts Festival in 2010 was a major catalyst to this research (Schumann et al., 2010). Viewing this performance was the first evidence I had seen of the synthesis I am attempting to achieve: a meeting of cabaret and classical vocal recital.

Wunderschön featured cabaret performer Meow Meow (Melissa Madden-Gray) as the central character, creating narrative with songs by Robert Schumann (1810-1856) and Franz Schubert (1797-1828). Madden-Gray’s performances as Meow Meow in Wünderschön are unique because she approaches German lieder as if she is performing cabaret: she sacrifices beautiful sounds at times in order to really delve into the text of the songs. Madden-Gray uses a variety of vocal sonorities throughout the performance. This vocal hybridity is best exemplified by her performance of Der Erlkönig by Franz Schubert. To achieve this, she exploited the used of a microphone during the performance of this song, using it to characterise a young, frightened boy, a gruff but fearful father and the nasty Erlking through the use of dramatically informed vocal techniques. A squeaky voice pitched the octave above the other characters “voices” symbolised the young boy, a stronger music theatre belt conveyed the father and a growled belting revealed the character of the Erlking. In Diva Bites the Dust I attempted to use different voices to explore all the archetypes of the diva and the extremities of my vocal capability. Therefore all of the narrative voices sound vastly different and their characterisation is very clear. I exhibited
this variety in my vocal approach in *Diva Bites the Dust*, for example the vampy, jazz inflected approach to *Bieber* (Cooley, Blackwell, & Williams, 1956) almost directly opposed the traditional bel canto delivery of *A Word On My Ear* (Swann & Flanders, 1989) (See Appendix 6). The study of performers such as Meow Meow bring to the fore the diversity of the cultural icon that is the diva. Meow Meow in particular weaves together incongruous musical and dramatic elements through the depiction of a diva.

The diva figure is omnipresent in the construction of all of the performances examined throughout this chapter. Meow Meow exemplifies the diva’s ability to transcend musical style and genre. This spirit of pluck and entitlement was exhibited by such divas of the past as soprano Dame Nellie Melba (1861 – 1931) who proclaimed, “I am Melba. I shall sing when and where I like, and I shall sing in my own way,” (Melba in Koestenbaum, 1994, p. 131). Though Meow Meow has largely given performances that feature German and French cabaret repertoire from the first half of the twentieth century entwined with rearrangements of pop music, she decides to give a similar vocal performance to the German lieder repertory without any change in her approach. The expression and recognition of the diva inspires confidence in both the performer and the audience. It is with the aid of the diva icon that I have endeavoured to ease the audience into contemporary realms through traditional diva characterization and repertoire. Singer Paul Capsis is famous for performances that pay homage to the diva and has consequently earned acclaim. Capsis has helped to found a career on the vocal imitation of notable divas in several cabarets and concerts such as *Boulevard Delirium*. His unique voice with expansive range and his facility for vocal imitation of famous divas has afforded Capsis the creative authority to challenge traditionalism in a work such as Lutton’s *Winterreise* (Lutton, 2011).

The diva’s considerable cultural significance makes her not only a vehicle for innovation but also ripe for parody. Applying the acoustic and old-fashioned
musical talents of the diva’s unamplified voice works in a similar way to the Kransky Sisters’ own acoustic versions of pop songs using toilet brushes and bowed saws in order to create sounds usually created by synthesizers in the tonal world of contemporary pop music. The Kransky sisters remove the slick, robotic and futuristic veneer of synthesized instruments to reveal the humorous banality of pop song simplicity of form and content. The central character of the act, Mourne Kransky, exemplifies diva behaviour, perpetuating an air of superiority and serving the other sisters with criticism for their lewd or inappropriate behaviour. The finesse and skill of the diva is exemplified in the sisters’ immense musical talent accompanied by unconventional musical arrangement including an acoustic guitar accompanied by a tuba and bowed saws (The Kranksy Sisters, 2009). Similar techniques are used to elicit humour and exhibit exceptional vocal ability in the work of Frisky and Mannish, in which style and structure of two or more contrasting pop songs are synthesised to create a humorous result. The technique usually involves the lyrics of one song being applied to the melody of another. This juxtaposition is perceived humorously as the text and melody from separate pop songs usually contain vastly contrasting subject matter or recording artists in their original form. This humour relies on the audience’s knowledge of one or both songs, which is prompted by the skill of the performers. The integral vocal facility is provided by Frisky (Laura Corcoran), who occupies the role of the diva within the act and who aims to encompass the divas present in the pop music they parody (Moriarty et al., 2012).

In order to outline the impact of the Diva on my process and practice the next chapter will focus on the history and manifestation of the diva icon within this research.
Chapter 4: Hoffmann’s Women: A Study in the Diva

“I have this funny relationship with that persona that is the diva. Obviously it’s meant a lot to my life but at the same time I realise it could be very destructive.”
(Lennox in Leonardi & Pope, 1996, p. 223)

From the Sirens in the ancient Greek myths of Homer and Ovid up until pop star, Beyoncé Knowles, the diva has existed in a multitude of incarnations. She brings together old and contemporary musical genres and styles and more importantly, provides a connection between cabaret and recital. In my mind, one needs only to place opera singer Maria Callas (1923 – 1977) next to cabaret performer Meow Meow and deduce that both singers are unequivocally divas. It was necessary to deduce this common thread to utilise in performance. A well-documented icon and uniquely female phenomenon it is noted “that in opera commentary and criticism the adjective ‘divine’ is reserved for the female voice” (Poizat, 1992, p. 179). A swirling pool of contradiction, descriptions of the diva range from “the moment Angel becomes Woman” to “caprice” (Poizat, 1992, p. 80). The diva’s inherent contradictions inform the academic discourse that surrounds her, where the scrutiny of her character construction by feminist commentators such as Catherine Clément sits on the shelf next to documentations of queer diva worship by Wayne Koestenbaum’s The Queen’s Throat (1994). Clément’s influential Opera, Or the Undoing of Women reveals the grim fates of divas within operatic plots and lists their cause as the inherent misogyny in operatic libretti (1988). There is no opera that proves Clément’s theory more than Les Contes d’Hoffmann (The Tales of Hoffmann) (Offenbach & Barbier, 1851). This chapter will explore how the diva has provided the frame and the departure point for my exploration of the meeting place of recital and cabaret and that finding the diva was a vital component to the practice-led research.
In June and July of 2011, I was employed as a chorus member in the West Australian Opera Company’s production of *The Tales of Hoffmann*. It was useful to my research (in addition to subsidiary reading) in its revealing of the concentrated elements that formulate the archetypal operatic diva. In the opera, Hoffmann falls in love with three different women: Olympia, Giulietta and Antonia, only to find out that they are all the same woman: La Stella, the prima donna. La Stella is an aggregate comprising of all the elements of the diva.

These three women—doll, bitch and corpse—are aspects of Stella, a gorgeous opera goddess whom the poet Hoffmann is (surprise) unsuccessfully wooing. And if you believe stereotypes, Stella's three aspects handily represent just about every diva that ever was. (J. Knowles, 1997)

Whilst curating the repertoire of diva bites the dust I used the five female protagonists of the *Tales of Hoffmann* on which to model my choice of repertoire and characterisation.

**Act I Olympia (The Doll)**

![Figure 6 Soprano Rachelle Durkin as Olympia in West Australian Opera’s Production of The Tales of Hoffmann (2011). Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C.](image)

The prima donna is the prisoner of machinery, and booby-trapped by a machination. She is a living doll to be carried off and taken around for one’s personal pleasure. She takes the place of a child’s object: a stuffed animal
endowed with a maternal voice, in her womanly weakness, will never get away. (Clément, 1988, p. 26)

Olympia is an automaton created by the scientist Spalanzani. She is made so lifelike that Hoffmann falls in love with her. In choosing repertoire reflective of Olympia in performance, I wanted to echo her famous aria *Les oiseaux dans la charmille*, in which she seduces Hoffmann (Offenbach & Barbier, 2009). Olympia reminded me of the sideshow that is coloratura and the machine-like precision that is the mechanism of the classical voice refined with technical exercises needed to create it.

The symbol of the automaton provides imagery of the diva’s manipulation by pejorative figures. Olympia is quite literally constructed by men to elicit the desire of other men. There is a bleeding of these stories from opera into real lives of divas. I translated the idea of a mad scientist in *Diva Bites the Dust* by using Byron Bard as the ringleader and puppeteer. Byron Bard has the ultimate power over the fate of Disgrace Kelly, which he abuses for his financial gain and the audience’s entertainment.

He holds a long whip in his hand as if to tame a wild cat. In fact he has a wild animal act. Here comes the wildest of them all, the animal that spelled man’s ruin: the snake. Enter the marionette woman: this is the prima donna. (Clément, 1988, p. 25)

In contrast with the robotic submission of Olympia, Disgrace Kelly responds as human and not machine to her enslavement by Byron Bard with rebellious digs at him to the audience and acting out with the excess consumption of food and alcohol. This deviant behaviour however, is perhaps more descriptive of Giulietta, the courtesan.
Act II: Giulietta (The Bitch)

Giulietta is representative of the diva’s flaws that cause her “undoing” (Clément, 1988). At the top of the list of the diva’s flaws is unflinching ambition. Taking her drama from the dressing room to the stage, the diva is guilty of engaging in “unruly”, “extravagant”, “insatiable” and “excessive” behaviour in the name of getting what she wants (Robson, 2004, p. 49). She is the epitome of the siren, using the desire of men to entrap them in order to steal their souls. Described as a “deviant”, the diva is morally corrupt and excessive, using her womanly wiles for her own benefit (Koestenbaum, 1994, p. 105). Sexuality and sensuality have an established place in cabaret and opera, so it was not a challenge to find material expressing Giulietta’s outward expressions of both. The music of Georges Bizet’s (1838-1875) Carmen for example was an easy choice to fulfill the Giulietta “quotient” of the performance (1875). Just as Giulietta carried out despicable acts to receive a diamond from Captain Dapertutto, the archetypal diva revels in excess.

Excess is a word strongly associated with the diva. She is literally excessive in her physical appearance and therefore in her relationship to food: “Singers are supposedly fat. The body must be huge. The body must spill over, embarrass itself, declare immensity,” (Koestenbaum, 1994, p. 101). I took great pleasure in
inserting the gluttony of the diva into *Diva Bites the Dust*, creating maracas from chicken legs in a parody of *Habanera* from Carmen (Bizet, Meilhac, & Strindberg, 1845). Yet the diva’s gluttony does not stop at food. In *Diva Bites the Dust* I chose to focus on many types of appetite; addiction, sexual promiscuity, thirst for power, a yearning to be loved and a literal reading. It is the inability to sate these appetites that leads to excessive behaviour, which in turn kills the diva. Presenting these ‘appetites’ in a variety of different ways was the challenge and the joy of creating *Diva Bites the Dust*, as I aimed to present them with as broad a palate of intention and skill as possible. By creating variety in the repertoire, moving swiftly from a slapstick aria parody to torch song to requiem mass I aimed to communicate the yearning of the diva for satiety, for freedom from hunger: to have it all. To use Clément's terminology, excess is yet another “undoing” of divas, both historical and contemporary (1988). This yearning is a large part of the divas make-up and is present regardless of musical genre. One must only think of the recent deaths of Whitney Houston or Amy Winehouse to see the effects of excess on the diva, inserting drugs where Giulietta has diamonds. It is because of the diva’s excess of being; her physical presence and sheer volume of voice that no matter what she tries to fill up her enormous frame with, she will never be satisfied. Therein lies her need to sing: a lost child’s cry out for help, for sustenance, for love and we the audience are privileged to hear it in its essentiality: *jouissance*. According to Kennedy:

*Jouissance*, abstractly speaking, becomes the ‘temporary’ pleasure afforded by our recognition of otherness, the undifferentiated. Along with death, *jouissance* lies outside the confines of any knowable construct; it lies outside positionality within the realms of the unfixed, the infinite, the fragmented, the dispersed…(Robson, 2004, p. 14)
The term *jouissance* is particularly appropriate to the music sung by Antonia, the diva of the third act. One cannot think of a more achingly beautiful swansong as the aria, *Elle a fui la tourterelle* (The turtledove she has flown) (Offenbach, 1851). *Jouissance* is discussed in depth in Michel Poizat’s *The Angel’s Cry* (1992) and aims to depict the indescribable, unfathomable beauty that we experience in the sounds that the diva produces in her moments of death. Historically and in operatic commentary and criticism it is only the woman’s voice that is referred to as divine in opposition to the male voice that lacks that transcendent power (Poizat, 1992). Antonia is the representation of what purity the diva possess: her love and devotion to music. Despite what imperfections she possesses outside of music making, her existence as a devoted musician is monastic, involving much sacrifice. Choosing repertoire to correspond to Antonia’s angelic naivety, sacrifice and victimisation brought me to include the torch songs of lost love by Harold Arlen (1905-1986) and the most
beautiful of requiems by Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986) in *Diva Bites the Dust*. Antonia is the martyr to divahood as the “diva corrupts virtue” (Leonardi & Pope, 1996, p. 13). The *jouissance* experienced by Antonia’s vocal offering in the final trio is evidence of her final downfall.

The character construction of the divas in the *Tales of Hoffmann*, who represent the archetypal diva, has received much criticism from those looking at them through a feminist paradigm. Catherine Clément’s *Opera, Or The Undoing of Women* dissects the habitual deaths of women in operatic plots and that in essence: the diva always dies (1988). Not only is her existence doomed to misogynistic oppression, she is fated to a death by the hands of men. This is exacted by opera’s male-dominated voice and has perpetuated a patriarchal paradigm in which not only do women die, but the audience takes much if not excessive pleasure in it. For this reason I decided to create a ring of death, a colosseum for all kinds of diva deaths to happen in *Diva Bites the Dust*. However, I decided to make most of them figurative so that the narrative could progress and avoid monotony of thematic material. Upon reflection I discovered that “death” and “dead” are used in many common day-to-day idioms. Idioms such as “death by chocolate” and “knock ‘em dead” instantly came to mind. After poring over lists of idioms, I discovered the majority of them to merely show extreme emotions about something. “Scared to death” or “sick to death” are merely expressing that one is experience an extreme level of either fear or frustration. “Le petit mort” or (little death) is a reference to an orgasm, an extreme expression of stimulation and arousal. I found many of these to express something about the diva and the fact that she is a figure existing on sub-human plane. These idioms compelled me to think about deaths *within the diva’s life*. The extremities and heights that she consistently surpasses are exhibited in Clément’s poem:

> “See how I can fly
   I can stay up alone
Detach myself from earth
Spin and rise
Rise wingless, wingless
Climb into the air the way you fall

This led me to devise my entire final performance *Diva Bites the Dust*. The diva’s life is situated on the extremities of the stave, of human experience of life and death. The diva goes on stage night after night and dies for the audience and allowing them to experience an expression of epic and transcendent proportions. Diva deaths, as well as deaths for all of us, are an inevitability. It is the extremity, the panache with which the diva carries out her death that makes it transcendent for the voyeur as audience.

**Epilogue: La Stella (The Prima Donna)**
La Stella is the ultimate diva: an all-encompassing prima-donna who has played all three roles in Hoffmann’s imagination. In the last scene of the opera, as Hoffmann drowns his sorrows in the Tavern and the opera culminates, La Stella is revealed as an aggregate of his three loves (Olympia, Giulietta and Antonia). The illusory deaths of the three women provided an important concept for me to use in performance: the diva’s life as a series of deaths, of futilities. Contrary to Clément’s commentary, the status of diva comes with immense power. Like a cat with nine lives, the diva can die over and over again to the sound of applause:

…the soprano’s story is never over, for the curtain rises and there she is again. The prima donna can be silenced in the poetic imagination and its fictions, but the practical reality of opera performance rewrites the endings of Hoffmann’s musical fantasies by allowing the soprano to survive her “most dread moment” night after night. (Hadlock, 2000, p. 85)

On the other end of the spectrum from Clément’s elegy for women in opera, Koestenbaum writes a love letter to the construction of the diva; a comprehensive documentation of his reasons for diva idolatry. This polarisation
of resentment and worship of the diva construct, makes up the iconography used in *Diva Bites the Dust*. For example, I hoped to show her in her best light vocally by choosing repertoire that I thought most flattered my voice attempting to achieve the status of diva, whilst concurrently presenting her as an animal and a glutton.

**Nicklausse (The Muse or Fag-Hag)**

“I am a gay man in a woman’s body.” (Beckham in Reporter, 2010)

Nicklausse, who is later revealed as The Muse of Poetry is not the archetypal diva, therefore she does not feature in the performance of *Diva Bites the Dust*. However, her role was present behind the scenes. She is the creative voice that fills the mouth of the poet Byron Bard, yet she does not have her own voice. Despite her status as a deity, like La Stella, she is an expression of a *real* woman as opposed to the hyper-reality of other female divas created in the imagination of Hoffmann. She is relegated to the position of Muse as opposed to the status of artist in her own right. She does not possess her own voice, she must speak through the voice of Hoffmann. The Muse must pretend to be a man in order to gain Hoffmann’s trust, though she pines for him in secret. Their relationship has the most intimacy of all of Hoffmann’s relationships in the opera, yet is not sexual. She is not merely a construct to obtain the desire of men; she is the desirer. This tale is a relatable one, particularly in my own experience as a “fag-hag” or a woman who identifies with gay men:

…what makes a fag hag a fag hag is not—or not only—what she identifies as (usually, but not always, a straight woman of sorts), but more importantly whom she identifies with (primarily gay men, and secondarily the Queer community at large). (Thompson, 2010, p. 43)

It is not surprising that as a fledgling opera singer and a self-admitted fag-hag that I have made a habit of worshipping divas. Thus, Wayne Koestenbaum’s queer paradigm in the seminal text, *The Queen’s Throat* (1994) provided
illumination to the diva worship phenomenon. In Italian diva means “goddess”: the diva is believed to be divine, channelling the gods whilst singing transcendent bel canto or operatic voice (Robson, 2004, p. 49). This regard for operatic informs Koestenbaum’s chapter titles, namely “The Callas Cult” (1994, p. 104). As a woman who has been consistently surrounded by the company of gay men, Koestenbaum’s queer paradigm through which he examines the diva speaks loudly to me, as not only an opera singer but as an opera appreciator. As a fan, reading about the lives of great opera singers has helped to make me feel more intimately connected to them, allowing their human idiosyncrasies allow me feel as if I myself could be one day be a diva. Koestenbaum similarly recounts: “…I adore the trashy cadences of diva prose…I’m affirmed and “divined”- made porous, open, awake, glistening- by a diva’s sentences of self-defence and self-creation,” (Koestenbaum, 1994, p. 84).

These autobiographies have a reputation for being ridiculous inflated accounts of the lives of divas. Quoted in The Diva’s Mouth, opera singer Frances Alda (1879-1952) recounts “I…always made fun of the autobiographies of opera singers. If you’ve ever had one of those gilded, pompous volumes…you know what they are like” (Alda in Leonardi & Pope, 1996, p. 116). Having loved opera since the age of eleven, I too have a mental scrapbook of my favourite divas collecting factoids or gossip about Maria Callas’ eating a tapeworm to lose weight or Kathleen Battle’s banging on the piano to correct the tempo in concert.

I don’t claim to prove any historical facts; instead I want to trace connections between the iconography of the diva as it emerges in certain publicised(sic) lives and a collective gay sub-cultural(sic) imagination- a source of hope, joke and dish. (Koestenbaum, 1994, p. 84)

Diva Bites the Dust does not contain any historical facts, merely “impressions” of the diva from these autobiographical texts. For example, opera singer Monserrat Caballé’s (1933-) overweight body impressed upon me that she might sit at a table and devour pastries and an entire chicken, an image
reinforcing both the gluttony and the loneliness of the diva. These images helped me to establish a collage of imagery to make my own. Despite my diva idolatry I relished in gathering together a selection of negative stereotypes that make-up the iconography of the diva. As well as receiving accolades and divine worship, “she is associated with difference itself, with a satanic separation from the whole, the clean, the contained, and the attractive,” (Koestenbaum, 1994, p. 104). The diva is known as much for her divinity as pre-disposition to devilish attacks of madness.

Mythically she is perverse, monstrous, abnormal and ugly. Though divas have been firmly associated with queens and with the perpetuation of an empire, they have been considered deviant figures capable of ruining an empire with a roulade or a retort. Mozart’s librettist Lorenzo da Ponte condemns diva Brigitte as “an asp, a fury, capable of upsetting an empire, let alone as a theatre.” (Koestenbaum, 1994, p. 104)

Specifically, the bad behaviour of divas seemed wonderful fodder for parody in my performance. These parodies aimed not to be biting satire, but images to be played with. The factoids reinforcing the stereotypes of the diva were used as variations on a theme, as opposed to a mere re-iteration. It was the way in which I delivered them that holds the interest, creating inventions and variations on the diva’s themes. This chapter has identified how the persona of the diva has provided structure for my varied performances. The diva is an iconic figure pregnant with possibility for development of character. The following chapter establishes the distinguishing features of my diva character Disgrace Kelly, tracing her origins and the evolution of character development to the fully developed character in Diva Bites the Dust.
Chapter 5: The Making of My Disgrace-ful Diva: Diva Worship in Practice

“For the diva-to-be, difference is power; she seeks profit in her deviance.”
(Koestenbaum, 1994, p. 91)

I am almost always playing an incarnation of Disgrace Kelly. She is the diva that possesses me during performance, the performative personality that follows me into my work. She is the practical expression of my diva idolatry. The creation of this character has been integral in reaching new heights in performance beyond what I believed was possible as myself (which seemed diminishing and wrought with imperfections) and into the sphere of the diva. Her creation has created a paradigm for hybridity and an inclusion of my complete range of skills as a singer including music theatre, jazz and bel canto singing, exploiting them to create interest for myself as the artist and for the audience. In order to examine her full scope, I devised: a Lunchtime Concert at WAAPA, Talking Dirty at the Fringe World Festival, Parodies Lost downstairs at the Maj and in the two-piece band Ladyboner. These performances acted as determinative experiments for my final performance Diva Bites the Dust. My personal reflections and analysis of knowledge created in and through practice-led research are integral to the sum of my methodology as they include data that is only communicable after the action of creative practice.

Origins of Disgrace

After having studied the divas of the past and today, I was equipped with a dialogue between those divas of the past and my pre-formed ideas about the character of Disgrace Kelly. My cabaret career up to this point has been largely, if not solely performed as Disgrace. Her name is modelled after the names of drag queens, which often contain references to celebrity culture and humorous puns. Eerily, my first real exposure to opera was hearing the aria Sempre libera
from Giuseppe Verdi’s (1813-1901) La Traviata (Verdi & Piave, 1853) whilst viewing *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*, a film centred around the journey of drag queens from Sydney to Alice Springs on a bus (Elliott, 1994). The drag queen and the diva are not so foreign: both hyper-real expressions of femininity. In addition to my interest in drag culture, much is said in the name of Disgrace Kelly. Firstly, I wanted to shape the paradigm with which the audience would view me. I wanted to convey glamour and humour, contemporary edge and the timelessness of referencing the music and people of the past and present, all carried off with panache and outrageousness.

The first performances that allowed me to begin experimentation with hybridisation were with a Perth-based burlesque troupe, *Sugar Blue Burlesque* (Bruyer, 2008). I became involved as friends of mine from high school were actors and MCs and asked me to perform in their series of burlesque performances, regardless of the fact that I had little experience in this genre. Having never seen burlesque before, my associations with it, were merely that of the art of striptease. However, it’s roots are in England and the parody of the classic works dating back to the seventeenth century: “…grotesque imitation of the dignified or pathetic, and in the early 18th century it was used as a title for musical works in which serious and comic elements were juxtaposed or combined to achieve a grotesque effect” (Schwandt, Wilson, & Root, 2012). In fact it was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in America, when it was associated with striptease (Schwandt et al., 2012). It was quite by accident that I had stumbled on ‘authentic’ burlesque performance, that I parodied classic operatic works. It was here that I began exploring the possibilities for hybridity in opera, inferred by a younger demographic who had come for raunchy, funny and circus-like performance. These performances allowed me to refine my approach to performance in small venues as opposed to auditoriums or the operatic stage.
Exposure to cabaret performers provided inspiration for thinking about my own. *Sugar Blue Burlesque’s* shows contained several types of performances including comedians, musicians and circus performers. Over time I began to shape my performances like an act within a circus: the statement of my talent had to be made quickly (i.e. the singing of impressive top notes or the incorporation of coloratura or florid passages) and with finesse.

These performances re-enforced the notion that the large majority of audiences perceive the operatic voice to be an antiquated freak-show. Oddly, this did not seem to deter audiences. Just as they delighted in seeing a contortionist bend and stretch their bodies or a girl swing twenty hula-hoops at once, the audience loved to hear an opera singer. They still love to hear a singer soar to the heights of the stave, sing difficult florid passages and hold notes longer than one thought possible. The circus-like virtuosity of burlesque has created a need for a character and act that is virtuosic and circus-like. Thus, Disgrace Kelly was born. I made my performances extreme, freakish, sexy and daring in order to keep the show feeling homogenous.

The Perth-based venues that housed these performances such as *The Bakery* and *The Burlesque Lounge* were both intimate venues where patrons could drink alcohol, lacked formal theatre protocol and talking during a performance was common practice. The noise that was generated by the audience and the use of microphones used by the MC, bands and comedians rendered microphones necessary. It was with a microphone that I learned subtler vocal gestures and the power of the whisper.

Using microphones opened up a large amount of vocal possibilities for me. I could still use the full heft of my operatic voice or I could make new sounds for effect. The use of the microphone is a layer of complexity and modernity to add to my traditional divas. I wanted to involve my own tastes and reflect my own context with Disgrace Kelly: my reactions to the fun or banality in the pop music
of today, for example. It was apparent that the diva icon had undergone evolution according to contextual ideology and had taken on a series of categorisations discerned by musical genre and the cultures that surround them. The semiotics of the diva for a mainstream audience had changed to include music theatre, jazz, pop and beyond. This fact is illustrated by such texts as *The Diva’s Mouth*, which lists contemporary singers such as Madonna, Annie Lennox, Diamanda Galas as divas (Leonardi & Pope, 1996). The globalisation, commoditisation and evolution of the term meant that ‘defining’ the diva became wrought with subjectivity. The diva has moved on from opera and has spread herself all over the world and into different cultures, music and classes. There were common threads that I could identify, but the juxtaposition of the incongruities of different divas made the identifying criteria especially difficult to ascertain. Rather than wrestle with this fact, I chose to allow these incongruities to supply much of the humour and interest to the performance. *Diva Bites The Dust* aimed to encapsulate all divas into one.

For instance, pairing the operatic diva with pop singer Beyoncé Knowles created a humorous combination, bringing together worlds of high art and blue rinses to the young, cool and African-American. In Beyonce’s single *Diva* (Beyoncé Knowles, Crawford, & Garrett, 2008) she defines the diva as the female equivalent of a “hustler”, a term used to describe male hip hop artists aiming to emulate the performers of the Civil Rights movement in the sixties and seventies (J. Garnes, 2009). The song is a celebration of feministic affirmation of the woman’s trajectory of sexual equality in hip-hop music. In mainstream media, every other female pop star is referred to as a diva. In order to draw together divas, I needed to hybridise the old with the new, both in the form of parody and by merely juxtaposing older material with new on the programme. In order to create hybridity in performance I used simple and identifiable semiotics for the operatic diva that bordered on cliché, so that the audience could still recognise her during moments of fugal combination with elements from popular music divas such as Lady Gaga, Beyoncé or Kylie Minogue. As
with choosing repertoire I deconstructed cultural stereotypes of the diva, reassembling them to reflect a personal construction of who I believed her to be. In addition to her iconic stature in culture, I myself have bestowed personal idolatry on the diva in the process of this research and in my practice previous to its undertaking. In direct contrast to Clément’s reproaching attitudes towards the patriarchal construct of the diva, I have always felt the diva to be a source of empowerment, allowing self-consciousness to dissolve and creativity to thrive. The diva is a character underpinning all of my characters whilst performing. She is the performative version of myself.

In contemporary society, the diva retains many of the qualities of the operatic diva. Pop music and jazz have long been associated with “cool”, an elusive yet universally recognised concept (Nancarrow, Nancarrow, & Page, 2001). Strongly linked with both youth and African-American culture, contemporary and ever evolving notions of “cool” are used as a commodity to appeal to a mass market (2001). Contemporary pop music can be compared to the jazz music played on the scene of the inter war years in terms of its cultural significance to youth and “the context of metropolitan clubs, bars and parties” (Nancarrow et al., 2001). The concept of cool is exclusive and dangerous and “…is still in love with cigarettes, booze and drugs”(Nancarrow et al., 2001, p. 314). This feeling of exclusivity ironically makes it an irresistible commodity to a mass market and is constantly being exploited in the music industry, particularly in the pop charts. This means that it is perhaps the cultural antithesis to classical singing and opera. Due to its immersion in the retrograde, its musical complexity and the fact that it exists primarily in other languages than English, it also presents itself as an intellectual exercise to an audience, lacking the accessibility that is intended by those manufacturing pop music. Bel canto and the classical voice are associated with the old world of music and the wealthy classes as opposed to its pop or jazz counterparts that aim to facilitate dancing, drinking and sex.
It is for these reasons, that an immediate juxtaposition between a music that is deemed “uncool” next to one that is “cool” will immediately cause a discordant conflict that seems somewhat irresistible to an audience. Is it combining the familiar world of Top 40, which bombards us from the car radio to elevators with bel canto classical singing a high art form that seems unfamiliar, melodramatic, lofty, ethereal and confronting. In Diva Bites The Dust, Beyoncé’s Crazy In Love (Beyoncé Knowles, Harrison, Carter, & Record, 2003) received this treatment. The operatic timbre raised the stakes of the text immediately, whilst the repetition of the lyrics highlighted her insanity (See Appendix 3). The operatic diva, the prima donna giving her recital is as commanding as she is vulnerable, demanding full spotlight. This means that her role can never take the background role that the Top 40 pop song might in the daily lives of the majority. She must take the audience on a journey through her triumphs as well as her pain and suffering. The diva is not “cool”. The diva puts a mirror to ‘ourselves’. To develop Disgrace Kelly, I undertook a series of performance tests, detailed below.

**Lunchtime with Disgrace Kelly**

The aim of performing as Disgrace Kelly at a Lunchtime Concert at WAAPA was to challenge myself to devise a “calling card” performance for the character of Disgrace Kelly. This performance also introduced David Wickham as my collaborator. The concert contained a variety of postgraduate classical instrumentalists and singers, each showcasing their “party piece”. I was given a limit of two songs to perform, which forced me to think about a concise statement of what I wanted to communicate with this character and with this hybrid performance in its ultimate incarnation. My choices were Can’t Get You Out of My Head (Cathy Dennis & Robert Davis, 2001) (made famous by Kylie Minogue) and George (Bolcom & Weinstein, 1985) by William Bolcom (1938-). The priority for this performance was to break through an illusory sense of formality and elicit substantial response (particularly humour).
Humour was key in this performance. In *Can’t Get You Out of My Head* (Cathy Dennis & Robert Davis, 2001), my objective was to create stark and sudden changes in dramatic objective to the point of absurdity in order to create interest out of the several repetitions of “la la la” in the chorus. David Wickham’s arrangement raised the dramatic stakes of this pop song by borrowing stylistic devices from German composer, Kurt Weill (1900-1950).

“The germ of the idea was yours - without mentioning Weill your delivery was very intense and rhythmical, like Lotte Lenya on the 60s Weill/Brecht recordings, but ironical of course.

So turning the electro-pop beat into a driven tango feel seemed an easy transition - it has the same manic intensity when taken to an extreme. The next task was to make it a Weill-tango, again like the Berlin pieces, and not go too Latin; looking at the Dreigroschenoper score, the trick is to stay very simple, almost blunt, rhythmically, and to copy the drums, banjo, small circus band articulation and voicing, dark, mostly low and dense.

When the song develops, it's irresistible not to go more poppy, with a "disco" left hand.

The harmony is also more obscure than the two-chord blandness of the original, acknowledging though its intended deliberate, "Brechtian" constancy and spareness, with lots of minor third/major seventh clashes, and higher dominant additions, plus occasional chromatic grit.

The introduction was lifted from the opening of Mahagonny-Songspiel, as being instantly recognizable as Weill but not as Kylie; it needed just a few bars of "this is going to be another standard cabaret song" before gong off-piste. (Wickham, 2011)

I wanted this performance to express the capriciousness of Disgrace as the diva, as well as the depth of her obsession for the object of her affections. As intended, the audience responded to this with laughter. To contrast this absurd humour, I began the performance *George* (Bolcom & Weinstein, 1985). This performance aimed to capture exhibit the interpretation of music that was composed with both art song and cabaret in mind. I felt that it was a pre-formed synthesis of cabaret and classical voice and spoke succinctly about the territory in which I was investigating.
Talking Dirty

The significance of this performance was the initial collaboration with performance poet Sam Knee, who adds his created character Byron Bard as a collaborative force and a Master of Ceremonies. This character guides the audience through a series of songs with the addition of his poems, providing a contrasting male voice to Disgrace’s distinctly female voice. The construction of this piece was instigated by my presentation of a group of my favourite songs. To this, Sam Knee was able to search his existing work and contribute poems that contain similar themes to the songs. After matching the songs and poems, it was easy to make thematic links to take the audience from the hopeful beginning of a relationship to the bitter end of one. Early e-mail correspondence between Knee and myself about the project can be found below:

Hey, Caitlin!

Thanks very much for thinking of me for this. I have heard of the Spiegeltent, and performing there would be a real treat!

I think we can find a pretty neat way to work Byron Bard into an act with your cabaret persona. Being rude and classy is kind of his thing, and that could work quite well in the context of this show.

I already have quite a few poems about women, and love, and sex, and Byron Bard's misunderstanding of them, which could be about right for the feel of the show, and I can write more depending on whether there are any thematic gaps we'd like to fill, and how much non-music filler you need…

(Sam Knee, 2011)

The following is an email containing a list of songs sent to Sam Knee and pianist, David Wlkcham with some explanatory notes on pieces with text in other languages than English. This list of songs was formulated from commonly performed cabaret material, for example songs made famous by French singer Edith Piaf (1915-1963) and American singer Judy Garland (1922-1969) and jazz standards. I tried to include a variety of subject matter to avoid any stagnation in the themes or general sonority of the songs. It was my hope that Knee could find appropriate material from his catalogue of pre-existing poems to add an
arch of narrative or create a dialogue with this collection of songs and therefore allow new ideas to infiltrate the interpretation the songs:

Hey Sam and David,

I've attached a set list for the show. Suggestions are welcome!

Sam- I've included brief explanations of the songs not in English. If you don't know any of the English songs, let me know or Youtube if you'd like. I'm rehearsing with David on Monday at 4 if you'd like to come and discuss your ideas for the show generally and your poems.

Cheers!

Caitlin

Can't Get You Out of My Head- melodramatic Kylie Minogue cover
Complainte de la Seine- Kurt Weill
Talks about the things at the bottom of the Seine in Paris- flowers, jewels, aborted foetuses, the ring tossed by an ungrateful lover, discarded limbs etc. Gruesome but slightly removed.
Je ne t'aime pas- Kurt Weill
A woman trying to get across that she is no longer in love with an ex, but keeps giving little clues to suggest that she is.
La Vie En Rose- Edith Piaf
Summertime- Gershwin
God Bless the Child- Holliday & Herzog Jr.
Come Rain or Come Shine
The Man That Got Away
Somewhere Over the Rainbow

(Cassidy, 2011)

Two performances of *Talking Dirty* were carried out at the Fringe World Festival in Perth in February, 2011. Fringe World was a vehicle for “non-mainstream or commerical performance with a programme that included cabaret, burlesque and boutique shows in the Pearl Spiegeltent and PICA in February 2011” (Dawkins, 2011). The spirit of the show aimed to emulate that of the aspects typical to those of Fringe Festival Performance. It aimed to push the envelope, be experimental, involve intimacy with an audience and have adult content. This content may include nudity, politically liberal discourse, physicality, new groundbreaking performances and inspiration from the circus and sideshows.
from the 19th and turn of the 20th century. Thematically, the performance sat comfortably next to the other acts in the fringe, borrowing material from the past but with a contemporary approach. The aim was to present a meeting between the antiquity of the torch song and juxtapose it with the new poems of Sam Knee as his character Byron Bard in which he shocks and amuses with tales of his fictional sexual exploits and tales of love, obsession and rejection.

_Talking Dirty_ was an important experiment as it served as a prototype for _Diva Bites the Dust_. Sam Knee and I discovered a performance dynamic for our two characters, experimenting with what would be the basis for _Diva Bites the Dust_. I chose to incorporate Byron Bard for a variety of reasons. The ideas behind the characters of Byron Bard and Disgrace Kelly have important similarities: they are both influenced by the retrograde, but with that aim to make new statements. The appearance of the two characters: Bard, who wears a cheap suit from the 80s, tinted glasses and hair full of Brylcreem is a satire of the intellectual and Kelly is costumed to diva archetype: corseted, pale and covered in lace and feathers. Their outward appearance looks derivative so that what is delivered verbally and non-verbally is comparatively shocking. Characters that seem frozen in the past begin to sing or speak in a style or with attitudes from beyond the era of their costume. It was for this reason that I felt we could make a cohesive performance.

The course of the performance aimed to reflect on the journey of the human romantic relationship through the mediums of both poetry and song. Rather than interact with each other, Disgrace Kelly and Byron Bard directed their performances all the audience sharing their intimate thoughts with the audience, but not each other. The texts of the songs and poems were juxtaposed, so that the next item would be a comment on, or be slightly related to the last, aiming for a dialogue between male and female viewpoints of relationships (See Appendix 1). From the songs that I had chosen to sing and from Byron Bard’s pre-existing poetry, we garnered a journey of a relationship from both a man
and a woman’s from the hope of love, to the full bloom of lust, to the joy of
deeper love to obsession to acceptance of solitude. Byron Bard’s poetry
bookended the songs and his witty quips as the MC suspended the interest of
the audience, foreshadowing the themes portrayed in the songs. The
performance avoided tedium as Sam Knee’s poems as Byron Bard were able to
amuse the audience after a segment of torch songs with darker text and
musical feel.

Involving an MC helped to re-situate the song into a unfamiliar thematic territory,
which in turn titillates the audience. The aim of this is to shock and amuse,
using the technique from cabaret to re-interpret songs wildly differently, almost
antithetically to produce a comic response, juxtaposing cool, smooth jazz and
comparatively stiff-backed, resonant and confronting bel canto singing. This
change in musical interpretation and arrangement allows the audience to hear
the text anew, realizing the pure melodrama can be drawn from the text. In
contemporary live music performance we are not accustomed to such direct
emotional outpourings, so a natural reaction of both the performer and the
audience is to view it in a comical manner.

Parodies Lost, Parodies Gained
The parody is a popular device used often in the cabaret medium. The beauty of
the parody lies in its element of surprise, as commonly heard material (i.e. pop
music) gets given a new treatment. The “essential formula” of humour is said to
be “the sudden presentation of a novel, pleasurable contrast to an expectation”
and parody delivers this (Wolff, Smith, & Murray, 1934). When offered the
opportunity to perform in a cabaret/concert hybrid called Parodies Lost, I
jumped at the opportunity to realise performances of sharply written parodies.
Written by Andrew Williams and Nick Maclaine and directed by Andrew
Williams, Parodies Lost was another opportunity to explore the synthesis of
classical vocal technique with contemporary pop music through the use of
parody. I had been inspired by cabaret singers and musical comedians such as Frisky and Mannish and The Kransky sisters to create parodies before and this was an opportunity to extend my knowledge, to be guided and directed by parody lyricists.

Parodies Lost uses two techniques with which to structure parody. In addition to the alteration of the arrangement of the pop song, a technique I explored with Kylie Minogue’s hit Can’t Get You Out of My Head (Cathy Dennis & Robert Davis, 2001), the parody is created by re-writing the lyrics to find humour. The number that begins the show, The Lines They Are A Changin’ (lyrics written to the melody of Bob Dylan’s The Times They Art A Changin) served as both a prologue and indicator for the parameters for the parody in the cabaret (Dylan, Williams, & Maclaine, 1964 & 2011). “Come gather round people, wherever you roam, cos’ tonight’s not about all the lyrics you’ve known. We’ve rewritten them all, changed the words to our own…”(Dylan et al., 1964 & 2011). With these re-written parodies, the apposition of incongruity is explored throughout; pairing pop singer Lady Gaga with Lady Macbeth, filthy words with the elegant melodies of Cole Porter and outward expressions of sexuality with the pre-pubescent contemporary teen pop star Justin Bieber with the music of jazz singer, Peggy Lee (1920-2002). These parodies brought to the fore the power of disparity in humour. The audience responded so well to these parodies, I immediately wanted to include them in Diva Bites the Dust as an expression of humour (a hallmark of cabaret I often find missing in classical vocal performance). The programme of my performances in Parodies Lost is found in Appendix 1.

My performances in Parodies Lost were schooling in refining comic timing and the delivery of parody. For instance, the words and more specifically how they are altered from the original are paramount in parody. Having developed a slightly narcissistic obsession with my sound as an opera singer, I was consistently given notes by director Andrew Williams to “not sing so much” so to
provide the audience with more cohesion of the sung text. Moreover, keys of songs were transposed down where necessary so that my operatic sound in my higher range would not overwhelm the words and would be more compatible with the use of microphones. This is exhibited in the following film of the song “Bieber” (Cooley et al., 1956) in which the vocalism is more influenced by jazz singer Peggy Lee, who originally brought the song “Fever” to fame. I aim to emulate Lee’s iconic recording through my use of finger clicks and a speech-like vocal delivery with some omitted vibrato, which usually characterises my operatic vocal sound. This delivery optimises the audibility of the humorous lyrics and expresses a full portrait of the woman who has a sexually charged obsession with teen pop idol, Justin Bieber.

Figure 9 https://vimeo.com/60035858

In order to mirror the sounds made by Lady Gaga and her contemporaries aimed to use more “chest voice” which can be defined as the “sensations experienced in the lower voice where the ‘heavy mechanism’ is allowed to operate” or the action of the vocalis muscle is allowed to predominate (Miller, 1926, pp. 311-312). Contrast was created by sections of the chorus which use the identifiable operatic or “head voice” in which the “light mechanism” is allowed to function primarily in place of the vocalis muscle and vibrato features heavily (Miller, 1926, p. 312). This contrast in vocality, as well as stark and exaggerated facial gestures were used to create quickly changing, surprising dramatic and aural moments for the audience in which they could fully appreciate the humour and disparity in the cultural significance between Shakespeare and a Top 40 artist such as Lady Gaga. This can be viewed in the video below:

Figure 10 https://vimeo.com/59988743
Viewing this particular recording of my performance created a more fathomable idea of the comically effective elements. Exaggerated facial expressions attempting to convey the madness of Lady Macbeth in between the verses was an improvised addition in *Parodies Lost* and was later made deliberately blocked into *Diva Bites the Dust*. Journal notes from my viewing of this recording read:

“Sharp head turns with hard stabs from the piano are funny. All movements need to be sharp, deliberate and quite literal helping the new lyric to make sense in place of the old one.”

Despite the comic successes of the show, the critique of *Parodies Lost* and its “stubbornly old-fashioned” premise featured in a review in the West Australian voiced legitimate concerns of the antiquated nature of the parody. This critique brought to light my desire for the parodies to say something current in addition to referencing the past. The desired effect was to demonstrate the timelessness and universality of the diva. Her place in contemporary culture was something I explored, though cabaret cover band, Ladyboner.
The two-piece cover band, *Ladyboner* began as an excuse to collaborate with composer and singer-songwriter, Clare Norelli. Whilst attending one of Clare’s solo performances at the Swan Basement in Fremantle, she invited me to sing an impromptu version of En Vogue’s *Don’t Let Go (Love)* (Martin, 1996). Clare and I had shared enthusiasm for African-American hip-hop and pop divas of the nineties up until today. Female singers and hip-hop artists Beyoncé, Missy Elliott, TLC and Salt n’ Pepa had blared heavily from our car radios or at parties, where it dominated the airwaves. This particular New Year’s Eve took our appreciation one step further: covering and making duets out of these songs. “If I could wear your clothes and pretend I was you…and lose control” (Martin, 1996) is an apt way to describe our attraction to African American contemporary music and the sense of fun and play in pretending to be them. Conversely, we found immense humour in arranging the songs to accentuate that we were two conservatory-trained Caucasian women.

Clare and I had become friends whilst completing our Bachelors of Music in the classical department at the WA Academy of Performing Arts. Clare was
studying composition and had a strong background in classical piano whilst I studied classical voice. However, she and I had also made departures from the classical department, hoping to extend our studies further than the repertoire offered our courses. Clare, as well as a wonderful classical pianist, was also an excellent self-taught jazz vocalist and pianist. She had grown up playing songs from the Great American Songbook and emulating the great jazz singers of the past and as a result, her own songs were heavily influenced by the likes of Billie Holliday and Nina Simone amongst others. This repertoire had also featured alongside classical repertoire for a significant part of my vocal development: I had sung in swing bands from the age of sixteen and spent two years electing to do two years of a Jazz Vocal Workshop unit at WAAPA where I learnt fundamental principles of jazz singing, the appreciation of jazz vocal performance and developed a further love for the jazz genre.

The sum of our stylistically varied musical backgrounds allowed us to create a cabaret act in which we could use any and all of our talents and indulge all of our passions. Combining the mass appeal of pop music and the strange eclecticism of our collective tastes and training in music allowed Clare and I to stumble onto a unique sound. Using the base melodies and chord progressions of pop songs, Clare In a similar method to cabaret act Frisky and Mannish we too like to “tit around with pop songs” (Moriarty et al., 2012 par. 2). She and I were both in the position of classically trained musician in a world saturated in contemporary pop music: on our radios, on the television and on Youtube. We decide to cover pop songs exclusively as they provide an easy frame of reference for a mass audience.
“Out damned spot!”: A Queen In Disgrace

Taking into account my perceptions of a positive audience response and newspaper review I had received in Parodies Lost for my highly-strung cover of Kylie Minogue’s Can’t Get You Out of My Head from the point of view of an obsessive lover, I decided I wanted to create a vehicle for this element of Disgrace Kelly’s character that I had left a little undiscovered: a woman confronting her descent into madness. Having already sung a cover of Paparazzi by Lady Gaga as Lady Macbeth, the iconic character from Macbeth by Elizabethan playwright William Shakespeare (1564-1616), the character was fresh in my mind. I wanted to use a fully formed character from literature that the audience would immediately recognise, even if they did not recognise the pop song. The songs could then foreground themes associated with that specific character. The Embodied Knowledges Symposium at Edith Cowan
University provided me with the opportunity to review my work placing it in front of a new audience. The performance can be seen in its entirety below:

Figure 13 https://vimeo.com/61508485. Password: disgracekelly.

In place of the personal responses that I may have to the songs, I chose to try and use them to externalize the inner turmoil of Lady Macbeth. I made her as the central character for the performance as many of the pop songs I wanted to cover were in some way related to losing control or grip with reality. These seemed apt to describe Lady Macbeth’s frame of mind. Additional inspiration for using Lady Macbeth as a central character was a wonderful parody written by Nick Maclaine for *Parodies Lost*. From my exploration of the diva, I deduced two key elements of the character of Lady Macbeth tied in perfectly with that of the diva: ambition and vulnerability or fragility. She has enormous power and influence yet ultimately drives herself mad. With great strength and intelligence comes incredible neuroses and lack of emotional intelligence. She is a pool of contradictions and conflict, specifically about her identity as a woman and a civilian. She allows this frustrated hunger for power mask her deeply hidden empathy and compassion and in the process allows herself to implode and descend into madness. I have seen such behavioural patterns in female singers I have known, particularly ones with great talent. Despite hard work and wonderful artistry their deep insecurities and yearning for perfection will always feed a feeling of impotence and they will either self-destruct, or be destructive with others. This sort of backstabbing behaviour is aligned with the stereotype of the diva. In this way I was able to both create a microcosm for the character of Lady Macbeth to feature with pop songs, which could externalize her journey in a way that was pithy, satirical and contemporary.

Her attributes matched up to the divas that I had been studying: ambition, beauty, a fickle relationship with power, male oppression, vulnerability and most
importantly, a cruel end. More thematic links were made as I pondered the themes that re-occurred in the “diva-licious” pop music that I longed to cover. The pop songs that I found interesting musically were related to the conflict of ambition and love, sanity and insanity and most importantly, the conflict with one’s self: obsession. Apart from the well-loved and pre-performed Kylie cover and the pithy Gaga parody written by Nick Maclaine which I deemed useful and descriptive of the journey of Lady Macbeth’s emotional journey, it was not long before songs such as Beyoncé’s *Crazy In Love* (Beyoncé Knowles et al., 2003) began revealing themselves as subjects with which to carry out synthesis.

As this was an academic forum held in a gallery space, I decided to begin the performance with a preamble as I thought it would be a good way to experiment with contextualising my performance (see Appendix 2). I wanted to guide the audience towards connecting Lady Macbeth with The Diva. It was necessary to hit the right balance between explanatory and creative, between informative and poetic to understand the sequence of songs and the intention of the performance. The conference forum provided me with the opportunity to do this comfortably. This intimacy of space allowed me to focus on just the text and sonority of my voice without the additional complexity of staging or blocking of movement. Whilst still using sheet music in front of an audience expecting to be informed as much as entertained, this particular performance served a similar function to a “table reading” where actors first read a play in its entirety, hearing the words out loud and in front of others, gauging possible audience reactions and getting a feel for the arch of the performance.

The rest of the performance featured me as both the narrator and character, Disgrace Kelly. As a device for the narration of the performance, I introduced each pop song with a title made up of lyrics from the parodied pop song and lines from the Shakespearean play. The following is a parody written by Nick Maclaine that acted as the prologue of the performance. This piece served as a detailed exposition, whilst the other songs behaved more like meditations on the
significant points of Lady Macbeth’s emotional journey (see lyrics in Appendix 2). This performance was the final experiment in realising the potential of pop music as a tool for the expression of narrative and for the manipulation of audience reaction. This final experiment secured the place of pop music in my final project, Diva Bites the Dust, the chronology and creation of which is outlined in the following chapter.
Chapter 6: Diva Bites the Dust: Composition to Decomposition

For the purpose of documenting the development from genesis to the performance of *Diva Bites the Dust*, I have divided it into its production elements. This chapter involves the mechanics of the creative process as opposed to the critical self-analysis presented in the previous chapter. In addition to my primary role as singer and performer (which constituted the bulk of my creative practice), I took on programme curation, editing, scriptwriting and direction. Such an experience reinforced an ethos of *kleinkunst*, where the solo performer can contribute an excess of singing and acting to the storytelling. This supports Yvette Guilbert’s philosophy, that the singer must be skilled and utilise all art forms concurrently (Guilbert, 1918). Fortunately, cabaret and recital are both art forms in which the majority of storytelling and the suspension of disbelief are achieved through the skill of the performer/s, with the other production elements taking an ancillary role. This is due in large part to the intimate spaces such as bars and small theatres where they are performed. The following task divisions were carried out in the following approximate chronological order:

1. The curation of the programme.
2. Choosing the venue.
3. Discussions about the performance and programme and rehearsals with pianist, David Wickham.
4. Writing the script to accompany the songs.
5. Finding Byron Bard’s voice in *Diva Bites the Dust*
6. Detailed song rehearsals with the David Wickham.
7. Rehearsals with Sam Knee and David Wickham combining musical and dramatic elements.
8. Dress rehearsal in the venue.
1. Curation of the Programme

The process of performance making commenced with “curation” of the performance or the choosing of songs. It was an enjoyable process in which I could examine the character of Disgrace Kelly through the paradigm of others’ music, excavating a skeleton on which to hang the performance. The music I chose began to reflect both my academic study of the diva as well as a collection of personal images that helped to form a more complete iconography of the diva, beyond the divas in *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Offenbach, 1851). I began to experience the same *Schadenfreude* as Wayne Koestenbaum, playing with divas lives and deaths like toys: “Divas are my dolls; I play with the story of their lives and I learn from these fables how to transcend affliction,” (Koestenbaum, 1994, p. 88). This study of autobiographies and the collation of songs allowed a refinement of the characterisation of Disgrace Kelly and a shaping of the narrative arch for performance. I saw the course of the performance as the course of the diva’s life, as if she were merely alive for the duration of the hour of performance. The lifespan of Disgrace Kelly is dependent on audience appreciation. She is born from the paradigm of performance and nourished by applause. Within this hour, I wanted to emphasise the contradictions presented in the character of the diva by reflecting them in the music. The aim was a constant hopping from moments of sophistication to animalism, freakishness to humanity, strength to vulnerability, insight to madness, woman to child. This meant a constant juxtaposition of musical styles, all helping to create a detailed portrait of a contrary character. The following is commentary on my choices of repertoire for *Diva Bites the Dust* and their significance:
Una voce poco fa (Rossini & Sterbini, 1816) (Accompanied by a backing track for Beyoncé’s Diva (Beyoncé Knowles et al., 2008). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)

This aria was chosen as an expression of diva as automaton-like, taking influence from the character of Olympia in The Tales of Hoffmann (Offenbach, 1851). The synthetic and robotic-sounding backing track of Beyoncé’s Diva aimed to echo Les oiseaux dans la charmille (Beyoncé Knowles, Crawford, & Garrett, 2009). It was interesting to note the automaton’s presence in pop music, specifically the African American “Robo-diva”, (James, 2008). This was highlighted not only for its humour but revealing that a) the diva can sing to a level that is “inhuman” and that b) she is a commercial commodity (James, 2008, p. 402).

Habanera Gastronomique (A Parody on the Aria ‘Habanera’ from Bizet’s Carmen) (Bizet et al., 1845)

My friend and colleague Clint Strindberg composed this parody for his cabaret duo Cheeky Chic Cabaret. I felt it to be a wonderful expression of the diva’s appetite and excess. This has double meaning, as phallic food is sensuously played with to symbolise the diva’s sexual appetite as well as for food. In addition to this I felt it was a biting satire on modern audiences lack of text comprehension in opera. His replacement of some of Meilhac’s original libretto with words about food impresses upon the audience that up to that point in the aria, they have not understood the exactitude of the text.

A Quel Diner! from La Perichole (Offenbach, Meilhac, & Halévy, 1868)

A further expression of excess, this aria highlighted the grotesque nature of the diva’s gluttony and the after effects of this excessive behaviour. As a circus-like trick at the conclusion of her, Disgrace skulls a bottle of wine. This piece was an encoded message for the audience telling them that she is drunk but cannot the let Byron Bard know, or he will punish her. She is reacting negatively to her commodification by Byron Bard and self-destructing through the abuse of alcohol.
A Word on My Ear (Swann & Flanders, 1989). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)

This song marked the beginning of the diva’s decay. The diva is finally facing the repercussions for her excessive behaviour and the consequences are manifesting themselves in her vocal skill, exhibiting her as “tone deaf”.

Bieber (A Parody on the jazz standard ‘Fever’) (Cooley et al., 1956). (Exception to copyright ss 41A, 103AA)

This parody had more to imply about the diva’s sexual appetite. Using the parody of jazz standard Fever, (which carries with it images of a young and sensual Peggy Lee) and re-writing the lyrics to create a confession of love for Justin Bieber was not only humorous but showed the diva to be lecherous. Just as the Sirens stole the souls of sailors and Giulietta steals Hoffmann’s reflection for a diamond, the Disgrace will use men for her own gain to merely dispose of them later. This disposal takes its form in the suggested murder of Justin Bieber. The next phase of the performance indicates Justin Bieber’s murder and that Disgrace is driven mad by guilt. This is indicated by the following songs and expressed through the journey of Lady Macbeth in pop song parody, originally developed for Out Damned Spot!

Lady Mac’s Prologue (Paparazzi Parody) (Fusari et al., 2008). (Exception to copyright ss 41A, 103AA)

The most significant lines exposing Lady Macbeth’s character are outlined in the parody acting almost as a Shakespearean prologue, so that the pop songs may act as soliloquies, reflecting on the given information. The parody also echoes the themes of the original song, though the direct subject matter differs. Lady Gaga’s original song which comments on the blurring of the lines of what fame an infamy in contemporary society and an abandonment of morality in order to attain celebrity. The parallels between these concepts and Lady Macbeth are obvious. I had already performed this parody in the cabaret show
Parodies Lost and loved the way he had so pithily illustrated the narrative arch of the Lady Macbeth. I thought it an ideal prologue of sorts, inspired by Shakespearean plays which position the prologue in the beginning of a play, telling the audience exactly what will happen in the plot and then witnessing its unfolding. This is remarkably appropriate the parodies that I perform and to the forms of cabaret and recital: the audience know the songs, but they do not know how I will deliver them. The performance walked a constant tightrope of irony and complete earnestness.

Toxic (Karlsson, Winnberg, Dennis, & Jonback, 2004). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)
This was included to convey Lady Macbeth’s erotically charged enjoyment of the manipulation of Macbeth. The word “toxic” is an apt one to describe her current state of mind, the situation and the effect that she has on Macbeth, that he too is becoming toxic. Whilst performing I imagined that such lyrics as “I’m addicted to you, don’t you know that you’re toxic” (Karlsson et al., 2004). This refers to herself, Macbeth and her thirst for power and its consequent intoxicating results when she is given it.

Crazy in Love (Beyoncé Knowles et al., 2003). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)
This song was covered in order to communicate Disgrace Kelly’s awareness of her descent into madness and her powerlessness to fight it. I was inspired to make it into a ballad after having heard a cover of it by English singer Antony Hegarty with his band Antony and the Johnsons on Youtube (Hegarty, Knowles, Harrison, Carter, & Record, 2009). Interestingly, David Wickham was the pianist for the Perth leg of the Antony and the Johnson’s Australian tour in 2011. He was able to use some inspiration from what he remembered of Hegarty’s own arrangement to use in Diva Bites the Dust.
A Hard Day’s Night (Lennon & McCartney, 1964). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)
This is the only song used as spoken performance poetry by Byron Bard. A Hard Day’s Night was read as a poem in order to express Byron Bard’s exhaustion with Disgrace Kelly’s insane utterances. The meeting of Shakespeare and pop music immediately made me think of comedian Peter Sellars’ spoken word cover of a Hard Day’s Night by the Beatles. I had heard this particular recording on a tape of my mothers’ years ago and had never seen a video recording. On first hearing it I was not aware that Sellars’ was parodying the great Shakespearean actor, Laurance Olivier (1907 – 1989) in his iconic performance of Richard III. Not only was the song an apt tribute to this performance, but remarkably apt in describing the morning after Duncan’s murder occurs. Sellars’ parody is brilliant and hilarious for many reasons, but what stuck me most was the immediacy to which the audience cottons on to what is happening, why it is funny and the maintaining of their attention by merely altering the vocal delivery, adding in nonsensical pauses and accentuating the propriety of Olivier-esque delivery. Again this is a meeting of high and low art creating a sense of irony. The incongruity of the hip rock band and the haughty villain engaged in melodrama. Byron Bard attempts to wake Disgrace from this nightmare. She cannot wake up. She cannot get her despicable actions out of her head.

Can’t Get You Out of My Head (Cathy Dennis & Rob Davis, 2001). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)
The humour of this performance was greatly helped along by an inspired arrangement of Kylie Minogue’s hit Can’t Get You Out of My Head (Cathy Dennis & Robert Davis, 2001). Hardly suitable repertoire for the classical recital hall, pianist David Wickham and I decided to give it the Kurt Weill (1900 – 1950) treatment. The idea had come to me years before when I played through the minor chords of the pop song on the piano, experimenting with the arrangement. I had recently been made aware of
Kurt Weill and Teresa Stratas’ recordings of lesser-known songs he had written with playwright, poet and theatre director, Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) (Weill & Brecht, 1982). Immediately drawn to Brecht’s compositional style, I began to play the minor chords of Can’t Get You Out of My Head like the vamps that many of Weill’s songs were based on (Cathy Dennis & Rob Davis, 2001). I had drawn particular reference from Teresa Stratas’ recording Complainte de la Seine, a song that I was particularly fond of and had performed from The Unknown Kurt Weill (1982). The Weill-inspired vamping chords created a comparative sense of gravitas, sadness and seriousness that is not present in the original recording by Kylie Minogue. The detail in David Wickham’s accompaniment made much of the humour possible, creating a constant source of backdrop from which to draw inspiration and create an older, darker world of Kurt Weill, as opposed to its original futuristic place in Bubblegum pop.

The Man That Got Away (Arlen & Gershwin, 1954). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)
Stormy Weather (Arlen & Koehler, 1933). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)
Little Girl Blue (Rodgers & Hart, 1935). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)

I wanted to include a bracket of torch songs in order to reveal the origins of the diva’s dysfunction and help to further answer the question “Why is the diva damned to a life of tragedy and sudden death?” I wanted to reveal a side of the diva that was not parodied, but a sincere expression of her helplessness and vulnerability. I needed the audience to care about the death of the diva, not just laugh at her capricious behaviour. These songs were also a condensed drama unto itself, exhibiting the diva’s story of an old lost love. The Man That Got Away (Arlen & Gershwin, 1954) was the exposition of the story, indicating to the audience that the diva had been abandoned by a previous love. Stormy Weather (Arlen & Koehler, 1933) was an expression of the feelings of loss and grief for the relationship. Little Girl Blue (Rodgers & Hart, 1935) was a statement of the diva’s resignation to her fate. This was also a method for showcasing
vocal hybridity. Some of my influences for choosing these pieces couldn’t help but be an influence on my vocal interpretation. For instance, after listening several times to singer Judy Garland’s (1922-1969) recordings of The Man That Got Away (Arlen & Gershwin, 1954), it was impossible for her influence not to seep in (Garland, 1961). I felt that Judy’s own tragic loves and the dysfunctional behaviour that accompanied her torch singing (not to mention an untimely death) made her an obvious choice of diva to pay tribute to (Clarke, 2001). These songs were also an opportunity for vocal hybridity, making use of jazz vocal techniques and classical bel canto techniques within the confines of the same song. These were used in order to respond to the text of the songs. In The Man That Got Away (Arlen & Gershwin, 1954) for example, I used growls on the lyric “the road gets rougher” in order to exploit the onomatopoeic “roughness” of the alliterated “r’s” in the lyric. In this same song, I used classical technique in order to sing the higher notes of the phrase “but where’s he gone to?” in order to raise the stakes of Disgrace’s desperation. This approach was used throughout this bracket of torch songs in order to bring the text to life.

Maybe This Time (Kander & Ebb, 1966). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C) Over the Rainbow (Arlen & Harburg, 1938). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)

Maybe This Time (Kander & Ebb, 1966) and Over the Rainbow (Arlen & Harburg, 1938) were included to create tension and variety in the performance. After bombarding the audience with emotionally heavier material, I wanted them to experience the resolve of the diva. This is an attractive trait of the diva: she has worked hard to be here and she will not be taken down so easily. I chose to perform Maybe This Time (Kander & Ebb, 1966) from the film Cabaret as Disgrace’s anthem of defiance. More tribute to Garland is paid, through the use of Over the Rainbow (Arlen & Harburg, 1938) from the film The Wizard of Oz (Fleming, 1939). This song was included as a posing of the question to MC Byron Bard “Will I ever be free?” only to be refused by him.
George (Bolcom & Weinstein, 1985). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)
With this piece I had hoped to reveal Disgrace’s fears of her own mortality and the mourning that she has experienced for other divas. This song was also a wonderful example of pre-existing material that brings together all of the elements of the piece: synthesising operatic divas with cabaret songs and revealing their tragic fate. The song was in fact written for the composer William Bolcom’s wife, mezzo-soprano Joan Morris (1943-). Bolcom and Morris are renowned for their interpretation of The Great American Songbook as well as Bolcom’s own compositions (Morris & Bolcom, 2012).

When I Am Laid in Earth from Dido and Aeneas (Purcell & Tate, 1689)
This aria was used to represent the diva’s final acceptance to die. She needs to feel in control of the way she will die, if indeed she must. She reaches out to the audience to nurse her in her final moments. The audience who had once given her affection for her performance are impotent in this situation and the diva is resigned to her death. I wanted to use the non-characteristic intimacy of singing an aria in a small venue to make the audience feel as if they are part of the performance.

Blow Gabriel Blow from Anything Goes (Porter, 1934). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)
With this “resurrection”, I wanted to highlight the illusory nature of deaths onstage, allowing the audience a sense of light relief before making the mood dark once again. I wanted to reveal the diva and her invincibility briefly before ending the performance, perhaps the only moment of finality in the entire performance.

Pie Jesu (Duruflé, 1947). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)
By singing this particularly lush setting of the Pie Jesu from Maurice Duruflé’s Requiem, I wanted to present an example of jouissance. I wanted to choose a
beautiful and quite romantic setting of the requiem mass so to highlight the intense pleasure that both the diva and the audience take in her death.

*Is That All There Is?* (Leiber & Stoller, 1966). (Exception to copyright ss 40, 103C)

It was quite by accident that I stumbled across the song “Is That All There Is?” by Leiber and Stoller and found it to be a pithy microcosmic re-statement of the entirety of *Diva Bites the Dust*. The diva finds her initial exposure to the circus of performance to be intensely attractive, yet ultimately is disappointed by the reality of it. She falls desperately in love with a man, he leaves and she is disappointed yet again. She is ultimately unsatisfied by life and what it has to offer, so she must remedy this with her own excess. She claims “…if that’s all there is my friend, then let’s keep dancing. Let’s break out the booze and have a ball” (Leiber & Stoller, 1966). This behaviour of the diva highlighted the existential philosophy present in the concept of the performance: that life is in fact is a series of transient futilities. The performance itself is a transient futility, as are the moments, the songs and your expectations of the performance. The death of the diva will happen every night on the stage as it does in life. Performances will end and these series of moments create the sum of a lifetime, all of which we should celebrate without judgment.

2. **Choosing the venue**

Choosing the venue to house this journey was the easiest of my series of responsibilities in the creation of this performance. The Roundhouse Theatre (apart from being my favourite venue at WAAPA) had many features recommending it. Its most important feature was an audience’s wrestling between intimacy and distance, having no obstacle between the audience and performer. It’s roundness also drove home the theme of the circus and colosseum, influenced by Clément and her chapter title “Prima Donnas or the Circus of Women” from the *Opera or the Undoing of Women* (1988). To further
foreground this, the audience surrounding the stage resembles the ring of a circus, a reoccurring motif in the texts of the songs I had chosen.

3. **Discussions about the performance and rehearsals with pianist, David Wickham**

After having solidified a programme, I wanted to approach David with it for his opinion. In place of merely talking about them we played through them after I directed David with the approach or concept I wanted to achieve that was somehow different from the original. David improvises new song arrangements according to these ideas. As a result of this there is subsequent editing of the programme. Songs are then omitted for a variety of reasons. Some of them are boring or too similar to others in the programme or are not relevant enough to the subject matter. I had decided that I didn’t want an interval to sustain the suspense for the audience, keeping them asking the question “How will she die next?”

4. **Writing the script to accompany the songs.**

After having curated the programme, having both solidified my ideas and received feedback from David, I was able to begin writing the script for Byron Bard (Sam Knee’s own character) to narrate the performance. I found this process the most challenging, attempting to find Byron Bard’s voice to no avail. However, I pressed on, making more of a map of concepts, signposted by explanatory placards (See Appendix 2), containing the element of the diva Disgrace that I wanted to reveal at each point of the performance. For instance, I wanted to exhibit the appetite of the diva early on in the performance and the placard that reads “Death By Chocolate” helps to introduce this concept, allowing the audience to look out for this. These placards helped to concentrate what I felt to be the statement of each of the songs.

5. **Finding the Byron Bard’s voice in Diva Bites the Dust**
In order for Byron Bard to speak in his own voice, I had to ask Sam Knee (his creator) to help me to edit my script. With this editing process, Sam was able to lend turns of phrase and poetic know-how to the dialogue spoken by Byron Bard in the show. Our editing process included reading the script aloud, so that Sam could experiment with the words and their dramatic effect. In my attempt to parrot Byron Bard’s hilariously floral of the banal or filthy, it became too difficult to say or was not in-keeping with the character. Sam was an integral part of shaping the text and helping to make sense of my concepts through the editing process.

6. Detailed Song Rehearsals With David Wickham
In these rehearsals David and I began rehearsing and structuring the songs and arias. I was predominantly directing David as to what I wanted musically, giving him interpretive ideas. David occasionally gave me pointers as a coach, alerting me to inaccuracies in the music, bringing my attention to incorrect pronunciation of foreign languages, rhythms or questionable interpretive choices. Most importantly, I was able to communicate what I envisioned for the songs in more detail specifically and within the framework of rehearsal. At this time David could also improvise or try out new ideas for piano accompaniments and I would respond newly to them.

7. Rehearsals with Sam Knee and David Wickham, combining musical and dramatic elements.
Combining dramatic and musical rehearsals was an important process in discovering the holes in the performances. These rehearsals occurred in David’s room and office. Sam and I were able to work out the necessary blocking and physicality of our own work, find ways to interact with each other physically and work out transitions between each of the pieces of dialogue and songs. We found that having edited the script thoroughly together we both already had quite detailed ideas of how we wanted to block the performance. In addition to this, we were able to work out the logistics of the explanatory
placards. Originally, I wanted these to be drawn on a blackboard, however the process of writing on the blackboard took too long. This also allowed David to witness the map of the performance, in the geography of the people and things on stage as well as newly discovered dramatic contexts created by incorporating Sam. This also helped Sam and David work out any necessary musical or spoken cues. In addition to the nuts and bolts rehearsal of performance logistics, my teacher Patricia Price attended these rehearsals to give feedback as to the vocal proficiency and embodiment of character in my performance.

8. Dress rehearsal in the venue
The dress rehearsal was very important in that it provided an opportunity to use more of the production elements. Being able to physicalise on stage caused Sam and I to edit some of our previous blocking. This was especially important for me as I had planned symbolic entrances and exits from the aisles of the theatre. One aisle provided the birthplace of the diva, the other aisle her death. It was also a wonderful opportunity to start using more of the props and becoming more accustomed to the timing of moments of physical comedy. For example, I was able to experiment with the length of time necessary for Disgrace to skull a wine bottle. It was also a good opportunity to revise the blocking so that Disgrace would include all of the audience surrounding her in the theatre-in-the-round setup. Songs that were sung only to the front required some turning to the audience on either side.

Unfortunately we were only able to conduct one full production rehearsal two hours before the performance due to the utilisation schedule of the venue. However, I was able to communicate my needs to the lighting and sound technicians and they were taken on quickly and with accuracy. In this time we were able to mark quickly through the blocking and lighting cues, refamiliarising ourselves with our work done previously and giving any notes that we had for
one another. I was able to re-run musical moments that had been less than secure from the dress rehearsal. It was also an opportunity to try out some new props for the first time (i.e. the chicken legs, baguette and profiteroles for Habanera Gastronomique (Bizet et al., 1845)).

10. Performance

The performance of Diva Bites the Dust was an interesting one I believe for myself and for the audience. I enjoyed the experience of performing to an audience that weren’t quite sure what they were going to get. I hadn’t given the show a label or provided a programme of the repertoire I was singing. This was partly to honour the synthesis that I was trying to achieve and partly to avoid the separation between the audience and I. I had occasions in my memory of attending recitals and having my head down the programme for half of it, reading the texts of the poetry, as opposed to watching the performance. I aimed to create a piece of classical vocal performance that did not require constant translation.

The inability to use the programme as a communicative tool meant that I had to increase my use of gesture and physicality. At times I felt it allowed me to further embody the text that I was singing about. However, it had the converse effect in other moments, when I felt I moved around for the sake of it as opposed to marrying my gestures to text. For instance, I felt retrospectively that the torch songs could have been more stationary. I feel that this may have been aided by using a director, helping to deduce more symbolism in my physicality. Having seen the recording of the performance what felt expressive to me at the time did not necessarily read expressively. This would have been particularly helpful as the performance was held in a theatre in which the visibility from the auditorium can be problematic.

Having more depth of experience and rehearsal vocally I felt that the singing was more erudite. From what I could feel, I achieved the sonorities I wanted to
in most points in the performance. I felt that technically and dramatically my intentions were clear and in turn were realised. I experienced some throat dryness that occasionally worsened the tonal quality. I feel that the changing of styles was quite challenging and at times it proved difficult to sing an aria after having sung a jazz or music theatre song that sat in a lower tessitura (or area of the voice). If I revised the order of songs in the show I would take tessitura into more consideration, keeping more of the arias (which are make more use of the higher extremities of the voice) together and place music theatre and jazz songs that use lower sonorities together to create more vocal ease.
Conclusion

The research I have conducted has utilised a body of practice-led methods in which to diversify vocal performance techniques and curation for the classical performer using elements of cabaret. This research has led to a number of new approaches for performance and curation alike, resulting in new performance works. These works update the performance platforms of solo classical vocal showcase by including comparatively more contemporary elements from cabaret. The opera singer is no longer confined to the immensity of the operatic stage, he or she may autonomously create a piece of kleinkunst within the recital forum.

Making innovative repertoire choices of songs outside the classical vocal tradition and applying the knowledge garnered from practice-led research methods to an innovative crossover of genres has provided new and interesting results relating to performance creation. This synthesis of cabaret and classical genre was cultivated in the characterisation of Disgrace Kelly and the subsequent creation of narratives for her performances. This has been informed by my study of the iconic figure of the diva, using practice-led research methods. This study of the idiosyncratic archetype of the divas that I had both admired and abhorred has provided a richness of detail to the character of Disgrace Kelly, incorporated through ongoing experimentation, reflection and performance.

The tragic flaws of the diva are illuminated by the repertoire she sings. Disgrace Kelly’s art is a mirror of her own life. The detail of her image informed by biographies and academic discourse allowed me to choose repertoire and in turn, inform the interpretation of the music and assess the music’s ability to contribute to the narrative of the final performance in this project, *Diva Bites the Dust*. This process has brought songs into a contemporary practice whilst
developing what I hope has provided an unique journey for an audience. My research has enabled singing to be essential to the unfolding of the narrative, and not just to the ephemeral vehicles of vocal beauty. The research is revealed within the text of the songs and narratives as well as the performance of them.

Possibilities for further research
One of the main purposes of this research was to empower myself in the spirit of *kleinkunst*, enabling my own creative authority and exploiting all of my artistic abilities. However, on reflection, the external input of a director may have been useful for *Diva Bites the Dust*, and could be a beneficial next step for further development of *Disgrace Kelly*. As the performer I would like to retain the responsibilities of the vision of the performance, yet receive assistance with its execution. The performance was effectively a character analysis and the ideas and elements that I attempted to evoke may have been made clearer with the assistance of external, objective voice. There would be great value in the director as sounding board, available for practical and artistic questioning from myself as the performer, during rehearsal. My ideas and actions on stage could be either reinforced by another imagination and adding more variety and perspective.
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Bibliography

Appendices

Appendix 1: Talking Dirty & Parodies Lost Programmes

Talking Dirty Programme
1. Talking Dirty (Knee, 2008)
2. Come Rain Or Come Shine (Arlen & Mercer, 1946)
3. Summertime (Gershwin & Heyward, 1934)
4. Treachery Thy Name Is Woman (Samuel Knee, 2011e)
5. Nil By Mouth (Samuel Knee, 2011c)
6. Over the Rainbow (Arlen & Harburg, 1938)
7. The Man of Your Dreams (Samuel Knee, 2011b)
8. The Man That Got Away (Arlen & Gershwin, 1954)
9. I Will Touch You In the End (Samuel Knee, 2011a)
10. Can’t Get You Out of My Head (Cathy Dennis & Robert Davis, 2001)
11. Smother (Samuel Knee, 2011d)
12. Je Ne T’Aime Pas (Weill & Magre, 1934b)
13. Complainte de la Seine (Weill & Magre, 1934a)
14. God Bless the Child (Holiday & Herzog Jr., 1941)

Parodies Lost Programme
(N.B. This programme denotes my own performances in Parodies Lost, not the complete programme)
1. You’re the Top (Porter & Berlin, 1934)
2. Lady Mac’s Prologue (Fusari et al., 2008)
3. Bieber (Cooley et al., 1956)
5. Can’t Get You Out of My Head (Cathy Dennis & Robert Davis, 2001)
6. Anything Goes (Cathy Dennis & Robert Davis, 2001)
Appendix 2: Preamble to Out Damned Spot!

Caitlin Cassidy: My research up until now has focused on the hybridisation of cabaret with the classical vocal recital. As a singer with a predominantly classical background, I found that my artistic sojourns into the cabaret form allowed an increased amount of creative scope and interpretive freedom, allowing me liberation from some of the learned performance conventions of solo classical performance, whilst still singing with bel canto (or classical) technique. On my research journey, a re-occurring figure was that of the diva, who crosses into both genres. She sings bel canto like Maria Callas, she sings chansons like Edith Piaf, she belts out showtunes like Ethel Merman. She is as powerful as she is vulnerable. She is as seductive as she is ugly.

She is a figure that I struggle with as a female performer. She fascinates me and repels me in equal measure. The term ‘diva’ carries with it much stigma. In addition to greatness of artistry, one thinks of backstage writers including white lilies, baths of milk, professional nipple tweakers and candles. Despite the distaste for the image I had of the diva, I could not deny that an image of her motivates my performances. I have to be the diva in order to performance. People paid to see the diva. People gave up Keeping Up With the Kardashians to see the diva.

The diva has been described in history as a deity. This is why I found interest in placing the sacred next to the profane: Maria Callas next to the booty shaking of Beyoncé. I have chosen to use pop songs to execute this performance. Not only are they vehicles for parody, a performance practice commonly used in cabaret but are pithy expressions of human emotion. They are as incisive as they are banal. I found as a performer that pop songs are an
excellent blank canvas for creative play and dramatic inference
and create an even playing ground for an audience, breaking down
any impermeable blockades caused by foreign languages for those
not previous fans of opera or classical art song.

This performance is a study in the diva. I feel that in many ways
Lady Macbeth is the ultimate diva. She is deeply ambitious but
even more deeply insecure. She reminds me of almost every
soprano I’ve ever met. This performance is a condensed version of
her inner journey.
Appendix 3: Diva Bites The Dust (Script)

DIVA BITES THE DUST

Written By Caitlin Cassidy & Samuel Knee

With Parodies By Nick Maclaine, Clint Strindberg and Bri Williams
The objects on stage consist of a grand piano and 3 stations. The first is a covered table of food and chair and a flower arrangement on a stand the effect is similar to that of a celebrity dressing room; the second is another chair and a small stool with a bottle of liquor and a glass beside it; and the third is an easel with pre-prepared placards resting on them and a large black marker.

Lights up.
Byron Bard enters.

BYRON BARD:
Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. It is my privilege to welcome you to Diva Bites the Dust, which is hosted by me, Byron Bard. As the MC of this show and first among two equals and a superior, I will be your guide through time and space from here and now, into the world of the diva. We shall begin here at the beginning, follow the diva through her downfall, and finish with her eventual death. You are all here to bear witness to her last glorious gallop around the paddock before we mercilessly blow her brains out and boil her down to a single pint of diva glue. I can afford this public death because I am possessed of great wealth. But what use is wealth, when there are not people here to share (pause) in the jealousy of it. My first enviable treasure is the humble stable boy of this operation, David “Sticky” Wickham.

(David Wickham enters mournfully, sits down and plays the “Funeral March” by Frederic Chopin underscoring BBs next line)

BYRON BARD
Cheer up David. Play nicely for the audience and there’ll be an extra banana in your feedbag this week.
DW plays four bars of the melody of “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life”. (Idle, 1991)

BYRON BARD
And now gasp in jealous delight as I present the crowning jewel of my collection. She’s great for entertainment on long car trips, she’s the diva, she’s Disgraceful, the one, the only, Disgrace Kelly.

Ride of the Valkyries plays loudly. Disgrace Kelly enters grandly and falls over an audience member. She dusts herself off, limps to the stage and writes “GOOD EVENING PER”, pauses, then whispers something similar to “What’s this town called again?” to BB.

BYRON BARD
Yes, this town is called Perth, Disgrace.

DK nods and then finishes the word and it reads “PERVERTS” on the placard.

BYRON BARD
Now Disgrace, manners cost nothing but bitterness and ulcers. Disgrace speaks only at my command. As one of my assets she must conserve her voice. Disgrace, the time has come for you to hop on the merry-go-round, pick the sweetest pony of your dreams and ride up and down on this carousel of carnage! (To David) And you, Boy, hold your tongue while this electronic gigolo (BB points at bio box) smears his greasy fingers all over my sweet Calliope. Disgrace, start singing for these kind perverts.
BB takes off the first placard and reveals a new one that reads “I’m A Diva $$$”

The backing track to “Diva” by Beyoncé plays. DK does a few R&B/Hip hop style moves before she sings phrases from “Una voce poco fa” by Gioachino Rossini. After she sings a high note, BB is not satisfied and she must sing the phrase again. This continues until the DK does an impressive coloratura phrase and a high finishing note.

DISGRACE KELLY

**UNA VOCE POCO FA (Abridged Version)**

Una voce poco fa  
Qui nel cor mi risuono,  
Il mio cor ferito e già  
E Lindor fu che piagó  
Si Lindoro mio sarà  
Lo giurai, la vincerò!  

(Rossini & Sterbini, 1816)

After the song finishes Byron Bard rewards DK with a sweet. He throws it in the air and DK catches it in her mouth. If she misses, she crawls on the floor like an animal and licks it up.

BYRON BARD

“The Diva is hungry for your sweet brava” but also for sweets! She really is a greedy gal! Here is a song about what the diva hungers for. Hint: it’s mainly LOVE...and carbohydrates. For after all, who can forget those divas: Monsterfat Caballe’ (ka-ba-ye), Jelly Fatzgerald and Aretha Franklyfatlin. You know the old saying: “It’s not over ‘til the fat lady sings” and also “the lady cannot sing, unless she is overly fat.” Disgrace is well on her way, but she is not a true artist yet. Eat up, piglet, eat up.
BB reveals a placard that reads “Death By Chocolate”

DISGRACE KELLY

HABANERA GASTRONOMIQUE

Le beurre
Le chou
Le jus
Eclair!

mais Je vous drais, fois gras, confit, salade, parfait, jus et le champignon
Le poisson, le poisson, le hee hee hee, haw haw haw.
mais je vous dres dine, La crème fraîche, l'aubergine, la tarte
Adieu j'attend diner, Yoplait, fromage, les pois.

mais je vous drais diner, La crème fraîche, l'aubergine, la tarte
Adieu j'attend diner, Yoplait, fromage *(DK Skulls a bottle of wine.)*
Les pois!
Prefix - Alternate lyrics by () Prefix - Music by (Bizet et al., 1845)

Before the last phrase of the aria DK skulls a bottle of wine. She then sings the last phrase and slams the bottle down onto the table.

BYRON BARD

Gorged on chocolate the diva can resist everything but temptation *(pause)* and hard liquor. Here’s a song devoted to those Divas who only knew how to say “no, no, no” to rehab. *(To DK)* Disgrace, your alcoholism has become a problem! And for some reason it makes you bilingual!

DK: *(drunkenly)* Pas de problem! Pas de problem!
BB storms back to his chair. DK begins to nod off to sleep. BB places a placard that reads “They TRIED to Make Me Go to Rehab”. David begins to play “A Quel diner” from La Perichole by Jacques Offenbach. He wakes DK with a loud chord on the downbeat of the vamp.

**A QUEL DINER**

Ah! quel diner je viens de faire!
Et quel vin extraordinaire!
J’en ai tant bu... mais tant et tant,
Que je crois bien que maintenant
   Je suis un peu grise...
   Mais chut!
Faut pas qu'on le dise!
   Chut!

Si ma parole est un peu vague,
Si tout en marchant je zigzague,
   Et si mon oeil est égrillard,
Il ne faut s’en étonner, car...
   Je suis un peu grise...
   Mais chut!
Faut pas qu'on le dise!
   Chut!
(Offenbach et al., 1868)

**BYRON BARD**

When the diva descends into squiffiness, she usually loses a little of her skill. This diva lost her pitch. Can YOU find it?

*Byron Bard reveals a placard that reads “On Dead Ears”.*
A WORD ON MY EAR (Abridged Version)

Before I deliver my Seventh Encore
There's one thing I'd like to make clear -
They say I've brought pleasure to millions or more;
They say that my singing half won the last war
When I sang to the troops in the rear.

I'm a Dame with a name
At the peak of my fame,
I'm known as the Empress of Song.

The critics 'bravo' -
And the critics should know -
But I cannot help feeling they're wrong.
I'm lauded, applauded, recorded - but list'!

I've a musical flaw that they seemed to have missed . . .

I'm tone deaf;
Music means nothing to me.

It's only the way
My accompanists play
That makes it appear I'm in key.

Stone, tone deaf;
Can't tell a key from a clef.
I stand by the pianist watching his face,
For he's told me to start when it gets to the place
When he'll give me a whacking great fff in the bass,
Because I'm tone deaf . . .

I'm tone deaf -
Never could understand pitch!
Some people you know
Can sing 'soh-la-tee-do'
And claim they can tell which is which!
Stone, tone deaf!
Can’t tell a B from an F.
Richard Bonynghe once said “now I don’t want to carp,
But if that’s a B natural played on the harp
Then you’re either B flat, dear, or bloody B sharp!”
But then I’m tone deaf.
(Swann & Flanders, 1989)

BB: It is not just food or drink that the diva craves. She must also satisfy her sexual appetite. For her next trick, as a precursor to her actual death, Disgrace shall perform the Little Death, or le Petit Mort as the French call it.

**BIEBER (FEVER PARODY)**
Got a dirty little secret
Thinkin’ that I oughter confess
Haven’t been a teen for a while now
But all the same I’m absolutely obsessed
With Justin Bieber

When he’s winking
Bieber when he’s singing up high
Bieber in my headphones
Bieber all through the night

Got my phones in at the office
Workin’ for the bosses above
But Justin’s in my ear and entrustin’ me with
A prepubescent lesson in love
I love the Bieber

When he’s smirking
Bieber when he’s bustin’ a move
  Baby, baby, baby oh!
Bieber gets me into the groove

Got my phones in at the gym now
  Working up a cardio sweat
But not because of weights or pilates
Young Bieber is the reason I’m wet
  I love the Bieber

  Just his music
  Fine, I think he’s sexy as hell
  I will never say never!
  Guy or girl? It’s tricky to tell

  Everybody loves the Bieber
  Maybe even someone you know
  Half a billion people on YouTube
And this guy sitting in the front row
  We love the Bieber

  When he dances
  Bieber executin’ a turn
  Baby, baby, baby no!
  What a lovely way to burn
(spoken) in hell cos he’s sixteen!
  What a lovely way to burn
  What a lovely way to burn
  (Cooley et al., 1956)

BYRON BARD
And now you can see how tender tis’ to love the Bieber that milks her, though she would while he was smiling in her face have pluck’d her nipple from his boneless gums and dash’d the brains out.

*DK lifts a knife up from the table and mimes cutting her throat.*

**BYRON BARD**

This next death is the most tragic yet - the death of the diva’s mind. Her excesses have driven her into the realm of the insane and her ambition keeps her there.

*(Reading from a placard)* Unsex her here and she won’t stop until that boy is hers.

**DISGRACE KELLY**

**Lady Mac’s Prologue (Paparazzi Parody)**

I can be queen
I can see it all now
Duncan’s coming to stay
That’s when we’ll make a play for his life and crown
Brave Macbeth will bring him down

Unsex me here
Fill me top to the toe
With a black cru-el-ty
Because I want to be where the king’s wife sits
Fill with bile my lady bits
(By which I mean these gorgeous tits)

Power is my idol, I’m a homicidal harpy, plus I’m really hot and I won’t sleep until you keep your vow to kill the rightful, rightful king of Scotland
Heed my dark commands (and help me get this blood out of my hands)
Carry out the scheme to make my evil dream come true, I’ll – be the – queen of Scotland

Baby, your face
Is a wide open book
Try a-wearing a mask
Baby, this is the task you must undertake:
Look the flower but be the snake

You were a man
When you promised to kill
Baby, murder’s a laugh
Blood comes off in a bath. Darling, I advise
Do the deed and take the prize
(Can you see it in my eyes?)

Power is my idol, I’m a homicidal harpy, plus I’m really hot and
I won’t sleep until you keep your vow to kill the rightful, rightful
king of Scotland
Heed my dark commands (and help me get this blood out of my hands)
Carry out the scheme to make my evil dream come true, I’ll – be the – queen of Scotland
(Fusari et al., 2008)

BYRON BARD
(Reading from a placard) Screw your courage to the sticking place,
for Lady Mac must taste her poison paradise...

DISGRACE KELLY
TOXIC

Baby, can't you see
I'm calling
A guy like you
Should wear a warning
It's dangerous
I'm fallin'

There's no escape
I can't wait
I need a hit
Baby, give me it
You're dangerous
I'm lovin' it

Too high
Can't come down
Losing my head
Spinning 'round and 'round
Do you feel me now

With a taste of your lips
I'm on a ride
You're toxic
I'm slipping under
With a taste of poison paradise
I'm addicted to you
Don't you know that you're toxic
And I love what you do
Don't you know that you're toxic

It's getting late
To give you up
I took a sip
From my devil cup
Slowly
It's taking over me

Too high
Can't come down
It's in the air
And it's all around
Can you feel me now

With a taste of your lips
I'm on a ride
You're toxic
I'm slipping under
With a taste of poison paradise
I'm addicted to you
Don't you know that you're toxic
And I love what you do
Don't you know that you're toxic

Don't you know that you're toxic
Taste of my lips and having fun
With a taste of your lips
I'm on a ride
You're toxic
I'm slipping under
With a taste of poison paradise
I'm addicted to you
Don't you know that you're toxic
And I love what you do
Don't you know that you're toxic

With a taste of your lips
   I'm on a ride
   You're toxic
   I'm slipping under
With a taste of poison paradise
   I'm addicted to you
Don't you know that you're toxic
   And I love what you do
Don't you know that you're toxic

I'm intoxicated now
I think you'll love it now
I think I'm ready now
I think I'm ready now
I'm intoxicated now
I think you'll love it now
I think I'm ready now
(Karlsson et al., 2004)

BB takes the knife from Disgrace holds it up. Blackout. DK screams.
Lights back up. DK is in a braced position as if ready to be stabbed, however, nothing has happened.

BYRON BARD

**HARD DAY'S NIGHT**

*(Spoken)* It's been a hard day's night and I've been working like a dog.

It's been a hard day's night I should be sleeping like a log.
But when I get home to you I find the things that you do
Will make me feel alright
You know I work all day to get you money to buy you things
And it's worth it just to hear you say you're gonna give me everything...

(DK tries to interrupt BB, but he silences her)

But when I get home to you I find the things that you do
Will make me feel alright.

It's been a hard day's night, and I've been working like a dog.
(Lennon & McCartney, 1964)

BB drops the knife. Disgrace is left powerless. She realises the futility of her attempted manipulation of BB.

(Pause)

DK sings the Blue Danube whilst flicking her lower lip like a crazy person. It goes on slightly too long and BB interrupts her.

BYRON BARD
(Reading from a placard). She's not herself. She’s foolish, she doesn’t do this!

DISGRACE KELLY

Crazy In Love (Abridged Version)
I look and stare so deep in your eyes
I touch on you more and more every time
When you leave I'm beggin you not to go
Call your name two, three times in a row
Such a funny thing for me to try to explain
How I'm feeling and my pride is the one to blame
Yeah, cause I know I don't understand
Just how your love can do what no one else can

Got me lookin' so crazy right now
Your love's got me lookin' so crazy right now
(Your love)
Got me lookin' so crazy right now your touch's
Got me lookin' so crazy right now
Your touch
Got me hoping you page me right now your kiss's
Got me hoping you save me right now
Lookin' so crazy your love's got me lookin'

Got me lookin' so crazy your love
Got me looking so crazy, my baby
I'm not myself lately
I'm foolish, I don't do this
I've been played myself
Baby I don't care
(Beyoncé Knowles et al., 2003)

BYRON BARD
(Reading from a placard) What's done is done and this sorry sight
can say naught but lalala.

CAN'T GET YOU OUT OF MY HEAD

La, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la

I just can't get you out of my head
Boy, your lovin' is all I think about
I just can't get you out of my head
Boy, its more than I dare to think about

La, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la

Every night
Every day
Just to be there in your arms
Won't you stay
Won't you stay
Stay forever and ever and ever ah ah

La, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la

I just can't get you out of my head
Boy, your lovin' is all I think about
I just can't get you out of my head
Boy, its more than I dare to think about

There's a dark secret in me
Don't leave me lost in your arms
Set me free
Feel the need in me
Set me free
Stay forever and ever and ever ah ah

La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la
La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la

(Cathy Dennis & Robert Davis, 2001)

BYRON BARD

Diva deaths have many causes including stabbing, suicide and tuberculosis. But behind these deaths, the real cause is usually a broken heart. Disgrace’s broken heart will now sing for you.

Byron reveals a placard that reads “Diva Depression”.

DISGRACE KELLY

THE MAN THAT GOT AWAY

The night is bitter,
The stars have lost their glitter,
The winds grow colder
And suddenly you’re older,
And all because of the man that got away.
No more his eager call,
The writing’s on the wall,
The dreams you dreamed have all
Gone astray.

The man that won you
Has gone off and undone you.
That great beginning
Has seen the final inning.
Don't know what happened.

It's all a crazy game!
No more that all-time thrill,
For you've been through the mill,
And never a new love will
Be the same.

Good riddance, good-bye!
Ev'ry trick of his you're on to.
But, fools will be fools,
And where's he gone to?
The road gets rougher,
It's lonelier and tougher.
With hope you burn up,
Tomorrow he may turn up.

There's just no letup the live-long night and day!
Ever since this world began
There is nothing sadder than
A one-man woman looking for
The man that got away,
The man that got away.
(Arlen & Gershwin, 1934)

**STORMY WEATHER**

Don't know why, there's no sun up in the sky
Stormy weather, since my man and I ain't together
Keeps raining all the time
Life is bare, gloom and misery everywhere
Stormy weather, just can't get my poor old self together
I'm weary all the time, the time, so weary all of the time
When he went away, the blues walked in and met me
   If he stays away, old rocking chair will get me
      All I do is pray, the lord above will let me
         walk in the sun once more
    Can't go on, everything I had is gone
Stormy weather, since my man and I ain't together
   Keeps raining all the time
   Keeps raining all of the time
When he went away, the blues walked in and met me
   If he stays away, old rocking chair will get me
      All I do is pray, the lord above will let me
         Walk in the sun once more
    Can't go on, everything I had is gone
Stormy weather, since my man and I ain't together
   Keeps raining all the time, the time
      Keeps raining all the time
   (Arlen & Koehler, 1933)

**LITTLE GIRL BLUE**

Sit there and count your fingers
   What can you do
      Old girl youre through
Sit there, count your little fingers
   Unhappy little girl blue.

Sit there and count the raindrops
   Falling on you
      Its time you knew
All you can ever count on
   Are the raindrops
      That fall on little girl blue
Wont you just sit there
Count the little raindrops
   Falling on you
cause its time you knew
All you can ever count on
   Are the raindrops
That fall on little girl blue

No use old girl
You might as well surrender
cause your hopes are getting slender and slender
Why wont somebody send a tender blue boy
   To cheer up little girl blue

When I was very young
The world was younger than I
   As merry as a carousel
The circus tent was strung with every star in the sky
   Above the ring I loved so well
Now the young world has grown old
   Gone are the tinsel and gold
(Rodgers & Hart, 1935)

BYRON BARD
The Diva is always hopeful that she may escape the clutches of the
Grim Reaper, and that hope is the foundation of all the excitement
when it all goes tits up. I am a master of suspense and I shall lift her
up by her puppety strings and rattle them around, only to cut them
down later. Some call it cruel. I call it Thursday.

Byron Bard reveals a placard that reads “Hope?”
MAYBE THIS TIME

Maybe this time, I’ll be lucky
Maybe this time, he’ll stay
Maybe this time
For the first time
Love won’t hurry away

He will hold me fast
I’ll be home at last
Not a loser anymore
Like the last time
And the time before

Everybody loves a winner
So nobody loved me;
‘Lady Peaceful,’ ‘Lady Happy,'
That’s what I long to be
All the odds are in my favor
Something’s bound to begin
It’s got to happen, happen sometime
Maybe this time I’ll win
Everybody loves a winner
So nobody loved me;
‘Lady Peaceful,’ ‘Lady Happy,'
That’s what I long to be
All the odds are in my favor
Something’s bound to begin
It’s got to happen, happen sometime
Maybe this time I’ll win.
(Kander & Ebb, 1966)

OVER THE RAINBOW

130
Somewhere over the rainbow
Way up high,
There's a land that I heard of
Once in a lullaby.

Somewhere over the rainbow
Skies are blue,
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true.

Someday I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far
Behind me.
Where troubles melt like lemon drops
Away above the chimney tops
That's where you'll find me.

Somewhere over the rainbow
Bluebirds fly.
Birds fly over the rainbow.
Why then, oh why can't I?

If happy little bluebirds fly
Beyond the rainbow
Why, oh why can't I?
(Arlen & Harburg, 1938)

DK glances over to BB as if to ask him for her freedom. He shakes his head.

BYRON BARD
This next song is about another diva who died. It’s not all about you
Disgrace! Stop lolling about and do your job!

DISGRACE KELLY

GEORGE

My friend George

Used to say "Oh, call me Georgia, hon,
Get yourselves a drink."

And sang the best soprano

In our part of town

In beads, brocade and pins

He sang if you happened in

Through the door he never locked

And said, "Get yourselves a drink."

And sang out loud Till tears fell in the cognac

And in the chocolate milk and gin

And on the beads, brocade and pins

When strangers happened through his open door

George said, "Stay, but you gotta keep quiet

While I sing, and then a minute after,

And call me Georgia."

One fine day a stranger

In a suit of navy blue

Took George’s life With a knife

George had placed beside an apple pie he’d baked

And stabbed him in the middle Of Un bel di vedremo

Which he sang for this particular stranger

Who was in the United States Navy.

The funeral was at the cocktail hour

We knew George would like it that way
Tears fell on the beads, brocade and pins
In the coffin
Which was white
Because George was a virgin

Oh, call him Georgia, hon
Get yourself a drink
You can call me Georgia, hon
Get yourself a drink!
(Bolcom & Weinstein, 1985)

BYRON BARD
Now we come to what we’ve all been waiting for: THE ACTUAL DEATH. We’ve fanned about with deaths by chocolate, seduction and murder, but now it is time for Disgrace to meet her maker. Of course, she’s going to sing about it first. Go on Disgrace. Give us another one.

Byron Bard reveals a placard that reads “Remember me, but ah! Forget my fate.”

DISGRACE KELLY

THY HAND BELINDA (RECIT.)

WHEN I AM LAID IN EARTH
Thy hand, Belinda; darkness shades me:
On thy bosom let me rest:
More I would, but Death invades me
Death is now a welcome guest.

When I am laid in earth,
May my wrongs create no trouble in thy breast;
Remember me! But ah! Forget my fate.
(Purcell & Tate, 1689)

*DK Exits.*

**BYRON BARD**

It seems as if the fat lady has sung.

*DK appears.*

**BYRON BARD**

Ladies and gentlemen, it’s a miracle! She’s been resurrected!

Hallelujah!

**DISGRACE KELLY**

**BLOW GABRIEL BLOW**

DK: Brothers and Sisters, we are here tonight to fight the devil

*(points at BB)! Can you hear that playin’?*

BB: Yes, I hear that playing.

DK: Do you know who’s playin’?

BB: No, who is that playing?

**DISGRACE KELLY**

Well, it's Gabriel, Gabriel playin'!

Gabriel, Gabriel sayin'

"Will you be ready to go

When I blow my horn?"

Oh, blow, Gabriel, blow,

Go on and blow, Gabriel, blow!
I've been a sinner, I've been a scamp,
But now I'm willin' to trim my lamp,
   So blow, Gabriel, blow!

   Oh, I was low, Gabriel, low,
   Mighty low, Gabriel, low.
But now since I have seen the light,
I'm good by day and I'm good by night,
   So blow, Gabriel, blow!

   Once I was headed for hell,
   Once I was headed for hell;
But when I got to Satan's door
I heard you blowin' on your horn once more,
   So I said, "Satan, farewell!"

   And now I'm all ready to fly,
   Yes, to fly higher and higher!
'Cause I've gone through brimstone
   And I've been through the fire,
   And I purged my soul
   And my heart too,
   So climb up the mountaintop
   And start to blow, Gabriel, blow
Come on and blow, Gabriel, blow!

I want to join your happy band
And play all day in the Promised Land.
   So blow, Gabriel, blow!

(Porter, 1934)

BYRON BARD
Ladies and Gentlemen, we have outstayed our welcome. You’re welcome. But on that happy note I must now metaphorically draw the curtain on tonight’s performance.

DISGRACE KELLY
NOOOO!!!!!! *(She grabs her mouth as if she has spoken out of turn)*

BYRON BARD
Disgrace, it must end! You must die! This is what the people have come to see. You can’t cheat fate. The devil will cut your ear off like an angry pimp!

DK looks around, then nods agreeing with him. DK then whispers something in BB’s ear.

BYRON BARD
Oh, God, she wants to sing at her own funeral. She says no one could do a better job at such short notice. Go on then. We’ll indulge.

DISGRACE KELLY
Pie Jesu Domine,
dona eis requiem.
Pie Jesu Domine,
Dona eis requiem sempiternam.
*(Duruflé, 1947)*

DK takes a flower, sits and lowers her head.

BYRON BARD
She’s gone. She’s really gone.

BYRON BARD
CIRCUS EULOGY

Disgrace, my diva,

Though you were not mine to parade,
you suffered me as your ringmaster.

“Here she is!” I’d say, and there you were,
and now you are not.

I was cruel, but you were fair.

May you find your innocence again in heaven.

(Knee, 2012)

Lights fade. DK walks into a spotlight.

DISGRACE KELLY

IS THAT ALL THERE IS? (ABRIDGED VERSION)

And when I was 12 years old, my father took me to the circus, the greatest show on earth.

There were clowns and elephants and dancing bears
A beautiful lady in pink tights flew high above our heads.
And as I sat there watching the marvellous spectacle
I had the feeling that something was missing.

I don't know what, but when it was over,

I said to myself, "Is that all there is to a circus?"

Is that all there is, is that all there is
If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing
Let's break out the booze and have a ball
If that's all there is

Then I fell in love, with the most wonderful boy in the world.
We would take long walks by the river or just sit for hours gazing into each other's eyes.

We were so very much in love.
Then one day, he went away. And I thought I'd die -- but I didn't. And when I didn't I said to myself, "Is that all there is to love?"

Is that all there is, is that all there is
If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing

I know what you must be saying to yourselves. If that's the way she feels about it why doesn't she just end it all? Oh, no. Not me. I'm in no hurry for that final disappointment.

For I know just as well as I'm standing here talking to you, when that final moment comes and I'm breathing my last breath, I'll be saying to myself,

Is that all there is, is that all there is
If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing
Let's break out the booze and have a ball
If that's all there is.

(Leiber & Stoller, 1966)

*Spotlight fades on DK.*

*Blackout.*
Appendix 4: Sam Knee On Byron Bard

What made you want to write and perform poems as a character?

When I was taking a poetry-writing unit at university in 2007, I noticed that a lot of the poems we were reading (particularly those with explicitly modern elements) were written in a pretentious “poetic voice”, often with dissonant echoes of a style from an earlier period, which made it very difficult for me to take these works seriously. At some point, I realised that I found a lot of these poems very funny as unintentional satires. In response, I wrote a few poems in a very grand and pretentious style, and was quite happy with them as little comic pieces. When I was putting together a portfolio assignment, I noticed that these poems could easily have been written in earnest by a personality distinct from my own, and found the idea interesting enough to explore this character further in subsequent work.

I didn’t start with the intention of creating a character, but as I worked with him more and more, I discovered that I was very interested in this particular character, and enjoyed using his worldview as a source of inspiration. The first poems were not originally intended for performance, but when I did perform them, I found that the character had not only a distinct writing style, but also his own speaking voice. Using this deep, sophisticated narrator’s voice to say filthy and pretentious things was very appealing, and cemented my enjoyment of the character.

What was involved in the process of developing this character?

The first thing I did upon realising that the initial poems were the work of a distinct character was conceived of a name for him. After a lot of thought, I settled on Byron Bard, which seemed perfect for a number of reasons. It’s a very pretentious-sounding name for a very pretentious character, and both the
first and second names are strong references to poets and poetry, which is integral to his view of himself. It’s an unusual name (though not unique - when searching for it on the internet, I discovered a few people who were born with the name, including a registered sex offender somewhere in the USA), which makes it useful to identify the character as an artist. I also like the alliteration, and the fact that I find the name generally fun to say.

A lot of the development of his character has come from building on what I learn about him as I write each poem. Placing him in a variety of situations has given me a very strong understanding of what how he will think and behave in future situations.

One of the things that I discovered early on is that Byron Bard is actually quite a good writer, who just applies his talents in a very wrong-headed way. My initial intention was for Byron Bard to be a very bad poet, similar to William McGonagall, a notoriously awful Scottish poet and actor working in the nineteenth century. I quickly found that this was not a very rich source of comedy for me, and would not sustain itself as a character premise for very long.

An important discovery I made as I continued working with Byron Bard is that he is not an utterly bad person. I found that audiences actually liked him, and I saw that his arrogance coupled with his eloquence and took the place of genuine charm. It is possible to feel real sympathy for him, and though I see him as the villain in almost every story he tells through his poems, the problems he causes come from his misunderstanding of the world and his place in it, rather than hateful intent, and he is frequently punished for being what he is.

Byron Bard is still developing, and I still have more to discover about him. There are some details of his history I believe I will probably not be explicit about in his
work, however, since I enjoy having the question of how he came to be like he is unanswered.

**Are there any drawbacks to writing as Byron Bard as opposed to writing as yourself?**

There are some subjects that I keep Byron Bard’s work away from, usually because they deserve a more serious treatment. His poetry almost always has some joke to it, and I doubt I would ever write a Byron Bard poem on the topic of rape, for example. There are, however, some touchy subjects I am willing to explore and make some satirical point about. For example, on Byron Bard’s Christmas album, I included a very grim poem about the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, with a view to reminding people that the baby they are celebrating the birth of was always destined to die horribly.

A related problem I have is the fact that such a large proportion of Byron Bard’s poetry finishes with a punchline of some sort, and I often sense disappointment in the audience when I deviate from this pattern. This is not such a terrible problem to have, since I do enjoy writing in that way, but I am happy when I find opportunities to subvert the audience’s expectations without leaving them dissatisfied, because I feel that the character does have the depth to explore dramatic territory.

**Is there crossover between your personality and the fictional Byron Bard’s?**

There is a very strong link between my personality and Byron Bard’s. Simply put, Byron Bard is an exaggeration of some of the worst things I see in myself, things I have worked very hard to suppress or deal with. He is misanthropic, pretentious, lonely, and arrogant, and these are all aspects of my own personality I have noticed in the past or present. I believe that these parts of me
came from a very poor self-image, which in me was quite easy to diagnose, but in Byron Bard, we see only faint hints of this paranoia, if it is there at all. He appears genuinely to believe in his own brilliance, right down to the core of his soul.

I have found this common ground between us to be a useful source of inspiration, and I often begin writing a poem by asking what I would think, feel, and do in a particular situation if I were a much worse person. It has also been helpful as a way for me to forgive myself for some of the more unpleasant things I’ve found inside my head. I have my failings as a human being, but I do a better job of overcoming them than Byron Bard does.

This idea also applies to my writing. I am naturally inclined towards an excessive style, and exaggerating it for Byron Bard’s work gives me the opportunity to make use of it in a situation it is actually suited to.

**Which poets are your influences?**

Most of my influences come from outside of poetry, since I consider what I do with Byron Bard to be comedy first, and poetry second. Most of the poets who have influenced me are not modern writers: Shakespeare is an obvious one, Edward Lear, and various old poets I’ve read bits and pieces of, but not their complete works. One modern poet who influenced me was Tug Dumbly, a performance poet I’d heard as a regular guest on Triple J, who introduced me to the idea that poetry in the form of funny little stories could appeal to a wide audience.

One of the other influences on my work has been my love for a lot of Victorian novelists - I like their elegant style, and the world they wrote about. Listening to Tom Lehrer taught me a lot about writing filth and satire presented in a classy way, and Frank Zappa gave me another view of satire.
There are some characters in fiction who have had an influence on the formation of Byron Bard’s personality: Sue Townsend’s Adrian Mole, George and Weedon Grossmith’s Mr Charles Pooter from *Diary of a Nobody*, and John Kennedy Toole’s Ignatius J. Reilly from *A Confederacy of Dunces*.

**How do your influences manifest themselves in your work? Do you satirise them? Write pastiche?**

The main way my influences come through in my work with Byron Bard is in the character’s speech patterns and vocabulary. It’s central to the way he comes across that he is a very grand poet, and while his language shifts between periods, he generally sounds like a man not quite of this time.

I often include quotes and misquotes of, and references to various classic works by other authors in Byron Bard’s work. I’ve read these kinds of works a lot more extensively in recent years, but I used to have quite a wide (but not deep) general knowledge of literature. This is actually very useful in my attempts to avoid making my references too obscure, and my general rule of thumb is that if I knew a quote or a piece of work when I was eighteen, it’s probably safe to assume that a reference to it will not alienate the audience I’m trying to reach.

I usually do not satirise the works that influence me, but I often make use of them to satirise other things, and I am very fond of pastiche. When writing pastiche, the challenge is to stay true to Byron Bard’s style as I work in someone else’s. There are a few pieces I have done which have at least some element of pastiche to them, including a poem written in a biblical style, a reworking of a piece from *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, a couple of poems written for a performance at the Nick Cave Exhibition, and a poem called “Beaten to Pulp” which puts Byron Bard, Poetic Investigator, into a story inspired by Raymond Chandler’s work.
In what mediums and venues do you perform?

Byron Bard is a character I have devised mostly for performance poetry, but I also make use of him in other ways. I consider interviews I have done in character as performances, and a couple of years ago, there was an attempt to use him as the central character in a feature-length mockumentary, which was never completed, although a shorter version may surface at some point. He also appears as a character in an upcoming cartoon strip, and a short film of one of his poems is in development. His other main function is as an MC for various spoken word and music events, which have been held at a variety of bars, pubs, and clubs.

Byron Bard has appeared as a performance poet many times at Cottonmouth, a monthly spoken word night at the 459 Bar at the Rosemount Hotel in North Perth, several times as MC for the whole night, and for the past year, as Chancellor of the Open Mic (basically an extra MC for the open mic section at the end of the night). He was also MC for Cottonmouth’s Perth Writers Festival special event at New Fortune Theatre at UWA. In 2008, he performed in a showcase at Festival Club at the National Young Writers Festival in Newcastle, and in 2009, he performed at a heat and WA state final of the National Poetry Slam (at the 459 Bar), and performed in the national final at The Studio in the Sydney Opera House.

How do you think your work differs from the work of poets who write as themselves?

I think that there is a lot of extra work involved in filtering my ideas through the personality of the character. Everything I write as Byron Bard has to be something I am satisfied with, as well as a piece of work that the character would be proud to have written.
A lot of poetry involves a very direct transference of the poet’s emotions and thoughts onto the page, and working through Byron Bard adds a layer of complexity. He thinks and feels things I wouldn’t or shouldn’t think or feel, and while I want to show the audience what is inside his head, I have to be careful that all the horrible things he says are defensible as art.

**What do you think Byron Bard offers to your performance?**

Besides what he offers to me as a writer, Byron Bard allows for quite a grand performance style. His voice attracts attention from the audience, and his arrogance makes him more captivating than I would be performing as myself. There is also a certain amount of self-promotion built into the character, which is quite useful in making his performance more memorable.

The most important thing he offers my performance is a sense that that is exactly what the audience is experiencing: a performance. I have seen many spoken word performances that could more accurately described as readings, and working as Byron Bard adds a sense of theatrics, and helps me function as an entertainer. His unpleasantness and willingness to express it can add a feeling of danger, as well, since after his first shocking statement, the audience realises that he could say almost anything. I also suspect that the audience sees that Byron Bard is a performance character, and enjoys joining in on the joke that this awful, pretentious person actually exists.

**You often perform as an MC for the Perth spoken word and poetry night Cottonmouth as your character Byron Bard. Has your need to think on your feet and improvise as this character deepened your understanding of him?**
Using Byron Bard as an MC has presented a lot of interesting challenges. Cottonmouth’s usual MC, Tomás Ford, has a very likeable stage persona, and when Byron Bard fills in for him, I need to stay true to the unpleasantness inherent in the character, while still offering entertainment which does not alienate the audience. Developing the ability to improvise witty one-liners that are appropriate to his character has been very valuable, and learning to play on the pity the audience feels for him has also been quite useful, both in terms of functioning as an MC, and getting to know more about Byron Bard and his connection to our world.

The most difficult problem to overcome has been the fact that I am often introducing people I consider to be my peers, whereas Byron Bard considers himself to have no equal as a writer, performer, and human being (using the term “contemporaries” rather than “peers”). Inviting the audience to laugh at his warped worldview helps somewhat, but the most useful realisation I have had is that Byron Bard actually does have some respect for other people involved in literature, and merely considers himself to be at the top of a enormous group of writers who are doing something worthwhile.

**What do you think is needed in the creative artillery of the MC?**

The ability to know and remember the basic structure of everything that needs to be said is very important, as well as the ability to improvise around that to increase the audience’s enjoyment. Being able to read an audience’s mood is crucial, as well as correctly deciding what to say to maintain that mood or change it.

**What do you think Byron Bard offers a collaborative project? What do you think it offered *Talking Dirty* in particular?**
Including Byron Bard in a collaborative project can add an interesting and unusual character for the other performers to interact with, and the often shocking nature of his performance makes for a useful contrast or complement to another performer working in a different medium. An audience may have certain expectations upon learning that a poet is part of an event (either that he will be dreadfully boring, or gently profound), and subverting these expectations is an entertainment in itself. Byron Bard offers a touch of class, and a touch of filth.

*Talking Dirty*, Caitlin Cassidy’s show for the Spiegeltent garden, made good use of what Byron Bard has to offer. Alternating his poetry with Cassidy’s vocal performance as her persona Disgrace Kelly added variety to the show, as well as providing an extra presence for her to interact with on stage. The selection of songs (and various touches to their delivery) already gave a slightly dangerous, satirical feel to the performance, which Byron Bard’s poetry strengthened. The concept for the show was to take the audience on a journey through the stages of love, obsession, and heartbreak, and including Byron Bard’s musings on these themes along with his poems helped to bring this idea together into a complete stage show.

**Did working with a singer offer anything to the reading of your poetry?**

Working with Caitlin Cassidy as Disgrace Kelly encouraged me to improve my performance as Byron Bard. She and David Wickham are trained professionals, skilled musicians, and captivating performers, and joining them on stage required me to bring a worthwhile performance in my medium to avoid sticking out like a sore thumb. A performance poet always has to deal with the fact that most people are not particularly interested in hearing poetry, and having a musical performance of more obvious interest so close to my own little section of the performance space presented a great challenge, particularly because the
point of including Byron Bard was not to compete with, but complement the rest of the show.

It was also useful as a writer to go through my existing repertoire of Byron Bard poetry with Cassidy as we decided what would fit neatly into the progression of the show. There was a thematic gap, and it was decided that I should write a new piece, “From the Heart”, to conclude my selection of poems, and this new poem is now part of my regular performance collection.
Appendix 5: Nick Maclaine: An Interview With the Prince of Parodies

Interview With Nick Maclaine, Director And Co-Writer Of Parodies Lost, Singer, Actor And Lyricist

As a performer who is both a classical singer and employs classical singers (such as myself) for cabaret shows, what do you think that classical singers have to offer the art form of cabaret?

All training courses teach performers to function within ensembles and as soloists. But for classical singers, the culmination of their training is a solo recital where, aided only by an accompanist and the occasional guest artist, they must hold the audience’s attention not for the course of a single piece but over an entire program. In my opinion, this is brilliant preparation for cabaret, where talent has to meet charisma and where the artist must command attention.

I sometimes joke that classical voice students and music theatre students are doing the same course – we just do more pre-twentieth century musicals. But our training does give us some advantages. First, we can pilfer material from the entire western art music tradition. Second, we’ve had training in languages, and many would agree that a little bit of French or German adds zest to a cabaret.

On a more prosaic level, classical singers tend to have excellent musicianship. The good ones can learn material very quickly and perform it with distinction.
What comic opportunities are made possible with the classically trained voice both in Parodies Lost and specifically in previous cabarets you have created?

For most people, hearing a classically trained voice is a rare experience which they will associate with certain contexts and conventions. The big insight of parody is that juxtapositions of style and content can be funny, so one trick with a classically trained voice is getting it to sing something it normally wouldn’t. Bing Crosby singing “White Christmas” isn’t funny, but it’s hysterical when sung by Placido Domingo. A classically trained voice can lend operatic grandeur to a song that never asked for it, and the result can be delightfully preposterous.

In *Parodies Lost*, we sometimes deployed the classically trained voice as a blowtorch, using it to highlight the simplicity and banality of pop lyrics. At other times, it was used to reveal the rather wondrous musical possibilities buried within songs we’ve heard on the radio and taken for granted. This happened within the same song in “Can’t Get You Out Of My Head”. The original’s lyrical repetition was reimagined as the mantra of an obsessive, and its simple harmonies were used to support demented flights of melancholic coloratura fancy. The singer’s voice was deployed to sell the joke – an unlikely but compelling Kurt Weill-esque transformation – and did so very persuasively.

A different use of the classically trained voice was in “Lady Macbeth/Lady Gaga”. The conceit here was that each performer would present a character from Shakespeare using a Glee-friendly pop idiom; this parody set Lady Macbeth’s early soliloquies and incitements to regicide to the song “Paparazzi”. The intended joke was that the audience would see Lady Macbeth expressing herself through a pop song, as opposed to Lady Gaga doing bad Shakespeare, and having the song sung ‘classically’ achieved this neatly. Instantly, the lack of vocal similitude told the audience to forget about impersonation and listen for the jokes, and the strength of vocal delivery conjured a recognisable villainess.
(Another consequence of the singer not ‘sounding’ like Lady Gaga was that we could sit on a visual gag about her music videos until the second verse.)

**Parodies Lost could be described as a musical comedy show as well as a cabaret. What is the difference and why does it belong in a cabaret series like Downstairs At the Maj?**

I could avoid the question by pointing out that *Parodies Lost* was part of the Cabaret and Comedy Carnivale! But it’s an interesting question. Cabaret means different things to different people, and whether you’re watching one can come down to whether you’re sitting in a designated ‘cabaret venue’. Context is key.

A traditional definition of cabaret is a late night musical performance, sometimes hosted by a master of ceremonies, in a licensed venue with patrons sitting at tables. In the French cabaret tradition, the emphasis was on intimacy between the performer and the audience. In Germany, political satire and gallows humour were characteristic. For me, a useful definition is that cabaret happens when a performance takes the form of a conversation with the audience. Whether the artists are playing themselves, versions of themselves or characters very far from themselves, there is no ‘fourth wall’ and the style isn’t naturalistic. And actually, this isn’t so far from comedy. Comedians, like cabaret artists, need an audience and have to share themselves with others over the course of a night.

I think that *Parodies Lost* is a hybrid of cabaret and musical comedy. And whether audiences think it’s one or the other depends on what they’ve paid to see! When it premiered DownStairs at the Maj, we didn’t contradict people’s expectations of ‘cabaret’: the show was a plotless revue, held together by an emcee, with singers who acknowledged the audience at all times. When we perform it next year for the Perth International Comedy Festival, it will be substantially the same production, but it won’t contradict a comedy festival-
goer’s expectations either (i.e. that we'll try to be funny at every available opportunity). So the show is a ‘cabaret comedy’, a hybrid whose blend can move in either direction depending on the venue and the performance context.

**A big target for parody in Parodies Lost is Top 40 pop music. Why is this?**

Top 40 pop music saturates our culture, and the biggest Top 40 artists are global celebrities. So provided their lyrics lend themselves to creative manipulation and substitution, these songs’ notoriety make them excellent vehicles for parody. We could write send-ups of tracks by Miike Snow and Vampire Weekend, but who besides a minority would realise what we were doing? And when people know some of the original lyrics, or even just the title, you can get laughs from writing lyrics that rhyme with or riff on the old ones (e.g. using them in new contexts).

Comedy isn't funny if you’re not in on the joke, so the songs we parody – whether they’re showtunes or chart toppers – aim to make the greatest number of people feel included.

**The inclusion of one female performer and four male performers has been a feature of the handful shows you have created with Andrew Williams (lyricist and director of Tomfoolery, An Evening Wasted and Parodies Lost). What have you found effective about this dynamic of gender in performance?**

A male-heavy gender balance isn't something we’ve ever sought to attain. We used one female performer in Tomfoolery because Cameron Macintosh's libretto specified the gender ratio, and we kept the same cast for An Evening Wasted because we’d all enjoyed our first Tom Lehrer adventure so much. The final cast member of Parodies Lost was going to be particular performer who would have brought a lot of original material to the show, but we couldn’t secure
her. Faced with the knowledge that we’d have to use more of our own material, and given that Andrew and I had written many of our songs for us to sing, it just made more sense to cast a man. And our most recent production, *You’ve Got That Thing*, featured one man and two women. So while gender ratios might look like a deliberate feature, they’ve simply been the byproduct of trying to cast the right people for the material and create a winning mix of styles and personalities.

**As someone who has been involved in the cabaret season Downstairs At the Maj, how do you think your approach differs from other creators of cabaret?**

I can’t really speak to other creator’s approaches, but I can outline ours!

Andrew, Izaak and I discuss the projects we want to pitch to Brainbox towards the end of each year. We run our ideas past our friends and colleagues, including Brainbox’s resident musical director. Depending on the nature of the project, we will cast by audition or by invitation and, if possible, we ascertain everyone’s availabilities so that we can request a specific set of dates. We consider the show’s marketing strengths and weaknesses, and investigate any issues relating to licensing or copyright. Finally, we set up a meeting with Belinda Dunbar (Executive Producer, Brainbox) and pitch our projects, supporting our presentations with as much information as possible in a word document.

What I’m getting at is that for us, the project always precedes the booking. So far, we haven’t pitched a solo project: our shows have been revues (*Tomfoolery, Parodies Lost*) or musicals (*You’ve Got That Thing*), i.e. shows with lots of ‘moving parts’ which may or may not have a singular brand. So we have to decide early what we’d like to perform, and give as complete a picture to Brainbox as we can.
What entertainment does parody provide that other mediums cannot?
What is aimed for in a performance of parody?

Parody combines the joy of something familiar (a genre, a style, or a specific song) with the delight of something new. The ‘new’ can be a comment about the genre or artist, or a comical subject that’s unrelated, or ironically related, to the original lyrics. We favour the latter: finding songs people know and love, and using them as structures for new songs about humorous, unconnected topics. Some gentle comedy at the genre’s or artist’s expense may be had, but generally we avoid ‘passing judgment’ because hearing the music is part of parody’s appeal. Everyone loves a good cover; parodies have the bonus of funny lyrics.

The performer of a parody has to make the material funny to others. How they achieve this is their business! If they're sending up a style or artist, for example, their weapons might include mimicry, caricature and choreography. The only thing that’s never negotiable is great diction, because, with rare exceptions, lyrics are the primary source of comedy. I also believe that renditions of parodies ought to be as musically rewarding as ‘straight’ performances. An assured vocal performance will put an audience at ease; a stellar one can inspire delight and admiration, and ensure that even if the jokes don't take, something else will!

In his review of Parodies Lost in the West Australian, David Zampatti referred to parody as a “stubbornly old-fashioned” art form. What is your response to this, do you think parody has to offer contemporary audiences?

Parody is unquestionably an old art form: Aristotle mentions writers who altered the words of well-known poems for comic effect. It’s also an art form
'discovered’ everyday by children around the world, as they learn the joys of substituting the ‘real’ words of songs with deliciously rude ones. They love it because it’s *fun for fun’s sake*, which is precisely what parody has to offer contemporary audiences.

I don’t mind parody being thought of as ‘old fashioned’, although I personally associate the term with weak impressions of celebrities and a predilection for coarse, broad humour. Furthermore, whether it’s old-fashioned or not, parody is a legitimate comic artform that continues to be massively popular with my generation: witness The Loney Island’s hundreds of millions of YouTube hits.

I would mind, however, if people thought our parodies were poorly written or poorly executed. A lot of what now passes for parody is, in my opinion, puerile, barely reaching the heights of sophistication attained by preschoolers. We strive to make all my parody lyrics as funny as possible, but we also want them to be sound from a songwriting point of view because we regard them as new songs set to existing music. I’ve spent hours poring over songwriting manuals and rhyming dictionaries to find the best of all possible lyrics; my version of Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy (set to “I am the very model of a modern major general”) wouldn’t be intelligible, let alone funny, if I hadn’t put in the effort.

So I don’t think there’s anything ‘old fashioned’ about a hilarious concept executed with panache – and that’s what parody, at its best, has to offer!
Appendix 6: Parodies Lost Review

Parodies Lost is the brainchild of the same crew whose sell-out season of Tomfoolery was one of the highlights of last year's Downstairs at the Maj season.

I'm not going to reprise the accolades that show got in this paper, whose reviewer joined in the encore "because laughing for 90 minutes is not a feeling you want to end", but there's no denying this fresh-faced ensemble, accompanied by the justly ubiquitous Tim Cunniffe, had another packed room eating out of its hands.

Parody is the parrot that perches on the shoulder of satire demanding crackers and that's the difference between the pointed originality of a Tom Lehrer and the more superficial amusement of this show. In the absence of anything of its own to say, all we can judge is how well the bird sings and at its best - Caitlin Cassidy's gothic take on Kylie's Can't Get You out of My Head and Izaak Lim's Oh My Darling Clementine done a la Beyonce - it was very funny indeed.

Lim also contributed the night's best line, in Sheep, his parody of Radiohead's Creep, with "I'm addicted to youse". Not high art, I grant you, but if youse don't like Kiwi jokes youse aren't a real Aussie.
Best of all, though, was the improv by Andrew Williams on three words contributed by the audience; "geologist", "Gillard" and "cat". The resulting political tract, sung to New York New York, was so inevitable and received with such vehement applause by the crowd that I had to lean over to the woman I was sharing the table with, a visitor from Victoria, and whisper "Welcome to Western Australia!".

Sometimes, though, things weren't as clever. Williams' mime of Enrique Iglesias' I Can Be Your Hero was not much more than a party piece and Waltzing Brunhilde - the troupe's German version of our unofficial national anthem, complete with Messerschmitts and other Nazi paraphernalia - felt 50 years out of date.

And for me that was a problem with the whole show. While the performers (Joshua Brant rounded out the troupe) are young and many of the songs they parody are recent chart-toppers, there was something stubbornly old-fashioned about the exercise.

That's not a hanging offence, especially in a season of shows marketed squarely to what might euphemistically be described as a mixed audience, but it makes the laughter a little empty, no matter how much of it there is.
Appendix 7: Diva Bites the Dust DVD Recording

Figure 9 Promotional Poster for Diva Bites the Dust by Vaughan Davies for Stage Left Design (Davies, 2012)