

Exploring contributions to opera by

The Black Tie Ensemble:

a historical case study

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the contribution to opera in South Africa by The Black Tie Ensemble. The research follows a qualitative research design. It is a historical case study which is conducted against an interpretivist philosophical perspective. Data were collected through interviews conducted with prominent role-players in The Black Tie Ensemble and through various articles from newspapers and magazines. From the data collected, specific themes crystallized; the impact of performance and training opportunities flourished during the twelve years of the existence of this unique programme, the development of singers and sponsorship to the arts contributed significantly to the success or failure of this phenomenon and outreach programmes introduced the genre to the broader community. Recommendations from this study could lead towards the planning and guidance of sponsorships for similar programmes in the future and indicate the need for more training facilities of young singers throughout the country, whilst gaining performance experience in a theatre. Such training and experience could ensure a future career in singing and hence job creation.

Keywords: The Black Tie Ensemble, South African opera, outreach programme, opera development, historical case study, sponsorship, job creation, performance.

ABSTRAK

Hierdie skripsie verken die bydrae tot opera in Suid-Afrika deur The Black Tie Ensemble. Dit behels kwalitatiewe navorsing. Die historiese gevallestudie word deur 'n interpretistiese filosofiese perspektief benader. Data is ingesamel deur onderhoude met prominente rolspelers van The Black Tie Ensemble en uit artikels in koerante en tydskrifte. Tydens hierdie data-insameling het verskeie temas gekristalliseer; die impak van opvoerings- en onderriggeleenthede het floreer gedurende die bestaansjare van hierdie unieke program, die ontwikkeling van sangers en befondsing vir die kunste het bygedra tot die sukses en/of mislukking van hierdie fenomeen en uitreikingsprogramme het die genre na 'n breër gemeenskap geneem. Aanbevelings uit hierdie studie kan daartoe lei dat beplanning en leiding van befondsing vir soortgelyke programme in die toekoms bewerkstellig word en wys die behoefte na meer formele inrigtings vir verder formele opleiding van jong sangers in die land terwyl hulle in teaters ervaring kan bou. Sulke opleiding en ervaring kan lei tot 'n toekoms vir sangers en sal werkskepping kan bevoordeel.

Sleutelwoorde: The Black Tie Ensemble, Suid-Afrikaanse opera, opera-ontwikkeling, historiese oorsig, uitreikprogram, befondsing, werkskepping, uitvoering.

LIST OF OPERAS¹ AND OPERETTAS TO WHICH THIS MINI-DISSERTATION REFERS

V. Bellini (1801–1835)	<i>Norma</i> ²
G. Bizet (1838–1875)	<i>Carmen</i>
A. Cellier (1844–1891)	<i>Dorothy</i>
G. Donizetti (1797–1848)	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>
	<i>L'elisir d'amore</i>
	<i>Don Pasquale</i>
W.S. Gilbert (1836–1911)	<i>The Mikado</i>
A. Sullivan (1842–1900)	<i>The Mikado</i>
C. Gluck (1714–1787)	<i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i>
C. Gounod (1818–1893)	<i>Faust</i>
F. Lehár (1870–1948)	<i>Die Lustige Witwe</i> ³
A.J. Lerner (1918–1986)	<i>Camelot</i>
R. Leoncavallo (1857–1919)	<i>I Pagliacci</i>
P. Mascagni (1863–1945)	<i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i>
Etienne-Nicolas Méhul (1763–1817)	<i>Une Folie</i>
G. Menotti's (1911–2007)	<i>The Telephone</i>
	<i>Amelia goes to the Ball</i>
	<i>Amahl and the night visitors</i>

¹ All opera titles in this mini-dissertation will be typed in italics

² All operas marked in bold were performed by BTE

³ The BTE performed this opera in English (*The Merry Widow*).

W.A. Mozart (1756–1791)	<i>Don Giovanni</i>
	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i> ⁴
	<i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i>
O. Nicolai (1810–1849)	<i>Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
J. Offenbach (1819–1890)	<i>Les Contes d'Hoffmann</i>
G. Puccini (1858–1924)	<i>La Bohème</i>
	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
	<i>Gianni Schicchi</i>
	<i>Tosca</i>
M. Mussorgsky (1839–1881)	<i>Boris Godunov</i>
G. Rossini (1792–1868)	<i>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</i>
F. Smetana (1824–1884)	<i>The Bartered Bride</i>
B.C. Stephenson (1839–1906)	<i>Dorothy</i>
G. Verdi (1813–1901)	<i>Il Trovatore</i>
	<i>Rigoletto</i>
	<i>Un Ballo in Maschera</i>
C.M. von Weber (1786-1826)	<i>Der Freischütz</i>
R. Wagner (1813–1883)	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>
	<i>Tannhäuser</i>
	<i>Die Walküre</i>

⁴ OPSA performed both *Die Zauberflöte* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* in Afrikaans (*Die Towerfluit* and *The Marriage of Figaro*).

E. Wolf-Ferrari (1876–1948)

Susanna's Secret

Besides the composers mentioned in the list above, the following composers are also mentioned in the mini-dissertation.

B. Britten (1913–1976)

Noël Coward (1899–1973)

H. Hofmeyr (1957)

L. Janacek (1854–1928)

R. Temmingh (1948–2012)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextualization

The purpose of this historical case study is to determine the contribution that The Black Tie Ensemble (henceforth referred to as the BTE) made to opera in South Africa, by investigating the history of this phenomenon from its inception in 1999 to 2011. The scope of this study is limited to the period from 1999 to 2011 when, due to circumstances, the focus shifted from purely opera performance to the inclusion of a more diverse repertoire. Furthermore, in 2012 the BTE name changed to BTE VO1SS (Vocal Opera 1 Stop Shop) and at the end of 2013 to Gauteng Opera; a company with two divisions, namely an opera company and a lighter entertainment group.

Since time immemorial music has been a vehicle through which the dramatic articulation of human experiences has taken place. In the context of time, space and identity opera can be explored to articulate diversity. Human experience takes place within different contexts, allowing different individuals', as well as a group's articulation of identity. Frie and Coburn (2011:xiii) assert that our perceptions of ourselves are the "result of the social, cultural, and biological contexts that provide our framework for understanding human experience". The contexts in which human experience takes place have temporal and spatial dimensions. The articulation of human identity within these temporal and spatial dimensions can be achieved through opera. Opera is one of the genres by which this articulation of contexts and identities can be achieved.

It is not the purpose of this mini-dissertation to record the history of opera in South Africa. Roos (2010) has already documented the history of opera in the Western Cape quite admirably. Some of the earliest records (see Bouws, 1946:37) state that South Africa inherited operatic traditions from the Netherlands and England when it was a former settlement and colony. A new era in the development of the cultural life of the country was initiated by the decision of the central South African government in 1962 to make funds available for the founding of Performing Arts Councils in the four provinces at the time (Transvaal, Cape Province, Orange Free State and Natal), as well as in South West Africa/Namibia (Peskin, 1990: vi). Permanent, stable funding enabled the arts councils to promote Western art forms such as opera, ballet, drama and orchestral concerts and thus creating work for South African artists (Peskin, 1990:12). As the arts councils developed

during the subsequent years, the newly-built State Theatre in Pretoria was envisioned and became the permanent residence of PACT Opera in 1981.

When the State Theatre in Pretoria ceased to exist as a permanent opera company in 1997, a need arose to develop a programme to educate talented young singers from diverse cultural backgrounds and expose them to the professional opera stage in South Africa and abroad. Such a programme would have the benefit of not only educating but also celebrating cultural diversity. In the introduction to her work about music education in South Africa, Oehrle (1987) asserts that “by experiencing different musics and understanding their construction [students will] begin to appreciate musics about which they know very little”. Such experiences would promote reciprocal respect and understanding.

In order to fill the need as stated in the previous paragraph, the BTE was established in 1999 by South Africa’s diva Mimi Coertse, acclaimed singer of international stature, and the renowned South African opera director and costume designer, Neels Hansen. This programme helped to promote opera amongst the broader communities in South Africa and by creating a valuable, supportive development programme to meet the BTE’s special objectives (Engelbrecht, 2013). This unique programme was aimed at developing all talented young singers who were interested in performing Western art music, especially opera. As the researcher, my personal experience with BTE confirmed the perception that music is a shared mode of communication which knows no boundaries. The BTE aimed to create opportunities and provide training for those who could not afford tertiary education.

In the introduction to his book about the history of the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, Drogheda (1981) points out that “it is difficult to treat history, let alone recent history objectively”. The context of BTE is important and therefore the findings cannot be generalized or compared to other similar programmes. In Chapter 3 it will become evident that existing literature about the main concepts, namely BTE and opera in South Africa, is very limited. The history of opera is recorded scantily and when recorded, has not been published widely. The mini-dissertation offers a brief discussion of the history of opera in general before and after 1994 as a background for the BTE’s contribution. No formal research articles have been published on the history, development and contributions of BTE. A summary of the research on existing literature in Chapter 3 will show that only newspaper reports and informal articles in magazines, such as *Classic Field*, are available. One of the benefits of this research study being anchored in a real-life situation is that

much can be gained in direct data collection through in-house resources as well as interviews with individuals still connected with the BTE. This data will offer insights into BTE for this historical case study and will advance the knowledge of this case (see Merriam, 2009:50). In the relationship between the data collected and analysed and the advancement of knowledge lies the strength of qualitative research (see Creswell, 2013:110).

The value of this study will lie in the fact that, at least to some extent, it would reduce the lack of formal documented research on the BTE. The research will provide a valuable educational study that could inspire young singers, teachers and all who have a vision for the future development of the BTE and similar programmes, as well as for the patrons of the arts and culture.

1.2 Research questions

The main question that this mini-dissertation considers is: What contribution has the Black Tie Ensemble made to opera in South Africa? In order to answer this question, several sub-questions will have to be answered, namely

- What were the origins of BTE?
- How did the BTE develop?

1.3 Layout of the mini-dissertation

The chapters that follow this introduction are dedicated to answering these questions. I have decided to present the sequence of the chapters with Chapter 2 as the research design and methods. Although this order differs from that which is traditionally presented in most mini-dissertations Chapters 3 and 4 should be read as a unit. The following visual presentation illustrates about the planning of this investigation: In Chapter 2 I will also present a short summary of the rationale for choosing a qualitative research design for this particular study. It will also explain the paradigm and the research methods for data collection and data analysis. This chapter will also provide insight into the role of the researcher and matters regarding ethics and validation of this historical case study.

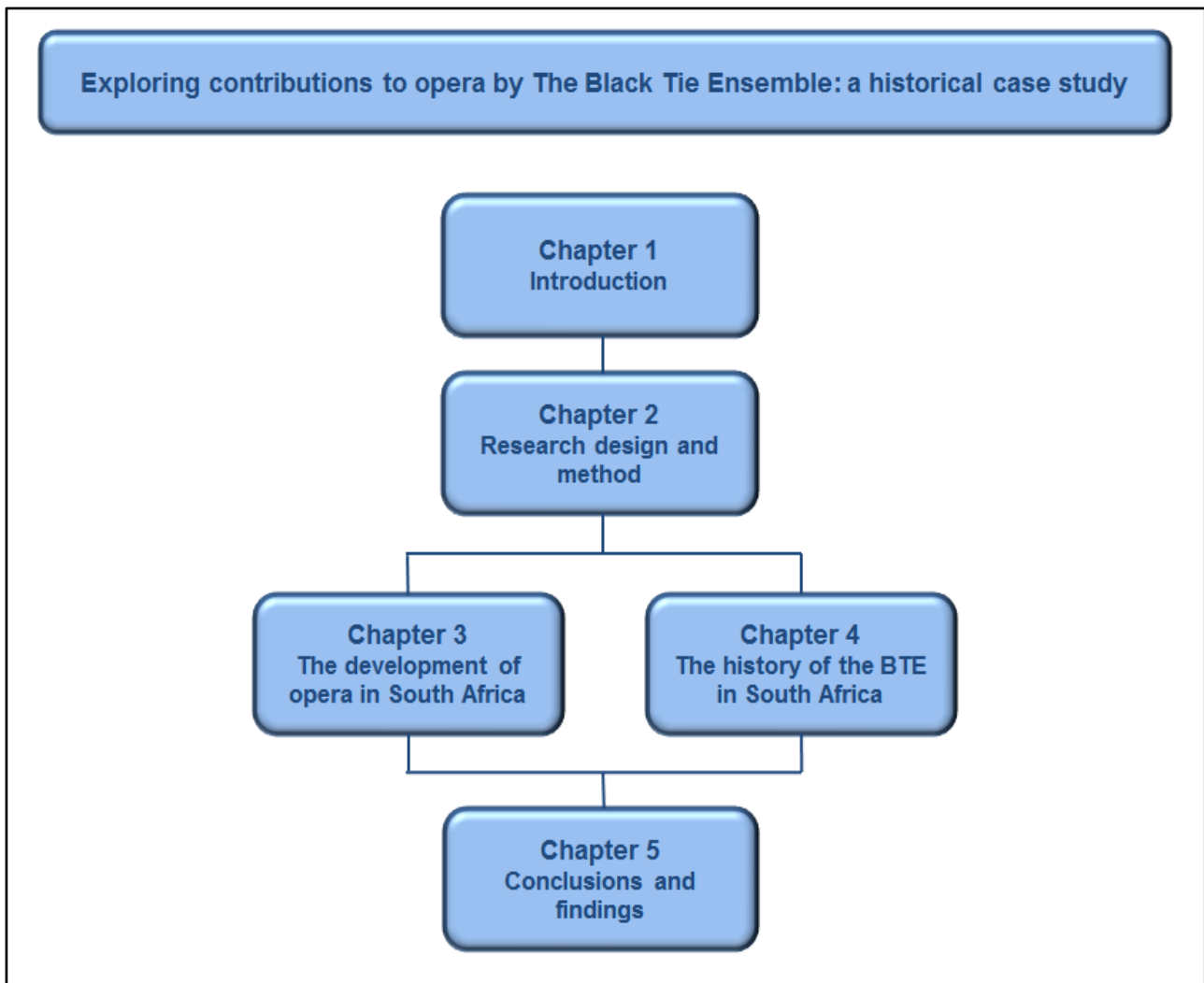


Figure 1: Sequence of mini-dissertation

Chapter 3 offers a literature review of the limited published literature on the history of opera in South Africa. A discussion of the arts councils and theatres will be included as well as a brief discussion of opera in South Africa before and after 1994. This background is aimed at achieving a better understanding of the need for and the origins of the BTE.

The fourth chapter will draw meaning from the personal interviews of selected participants and the researcher's personal reflections. Data extracted from newspaper and magazine articles (the case records for this study) will be integrated with the data gathered from the interviews in order to present a rich description of events. The aspect of funding will also be discussed as it is the major obstacle in the way of the survival and success of any company. Furthermore, Chapter 4 will discuss the history and origins of BTE which will highlight of the development and performance growth of this phenomenon. A full cast list of all staged opera productions will be included.

Having examined and presented case records and interviews in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 will conclude this research report by highlighting the prominent themes that have surfaced during the process of data-analysis, such as finances, development of young singers, outreach programmes and creating opportunities for young opera singers. This will enable me as the researcher to ascertain the contribution of the BTE and to make suggestions to further possible research of this phenomenon or others like it.

1.4 Abbreviations and acronyms

ABSA	Bank group
BASA	Business and Arts South Africa
BTE	The Black Tie Ensemble
CAPAB	Performing Arts Council of the Cape Province
CFM	Classic Feel Magazine
DAC	Department of Arts and Culture
EOAN	Opera Company in Cape Town
JMI	Johannesburg Music Initiative
MTN	Cellular Phone Company
NAPAC	Performing Arts Council of Natal
NAC	National Arts Council
NEDCOR	Bank group
NEDBANK	Bank group
NLDTF	National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund
OPEROSA	Opera Organisasie van Suid-Afrika
OPSA	Operavereniging van Suid-Afrika

PACOFs	Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State
PACT	Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal
SAA	South African Airways
SAPPI	South African Pulp and Paper Industries
SASOL	South African Synthetic Oil Liquid / Suid-Afrikaanse Steenkool en Olie
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology
UCT	University of Cape Town
VODACOM	Cellular Phone Company
VOISS	Vocal Opera One Stop Shop
UNISA	University of South Africa

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Research design

This chapter conceptualizes different components of a qualitative research design. It explains the four dimensions of a research design (see Figure 2 below), namely the paradigm, purpose, context and research methods used in this research.

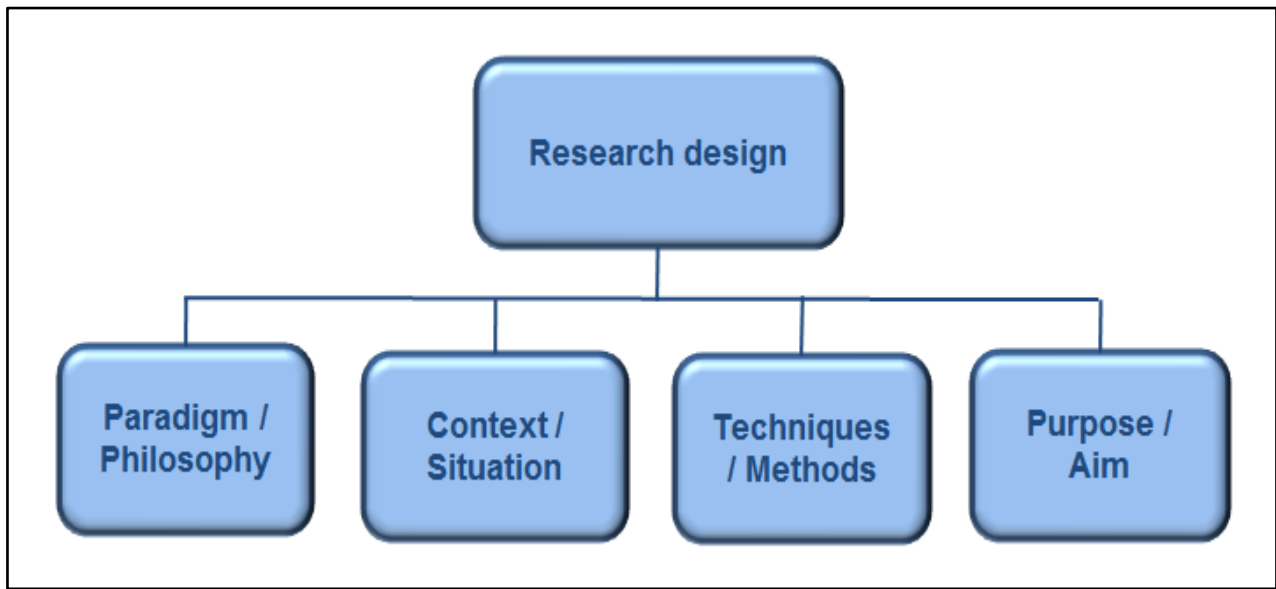


Figure 2: Dimensions in research design (Durrheim, 2006:37; Creswell, 2013:45–47)

The chapter provides a plan of the research design used for this study. During the first phase of a research project, planning (see Figure 3 on the next page) is essential and is done by formulating the research question and setting the research design (Durrheim, 2006:35). This visible relationship between the research design and the research question shows that the research design creates a framework for the research questions as well as for the methods of collecting relevant data. Only then can data be analysed and can it set the scene for the purpose and application. Therefore, an established research design leads to the collection and analysing of data according to the specifics of research methods (Durrheim, 2006:34). Thus, the researcher must make decisions relevant to the type of study and the dimensions of the research design.

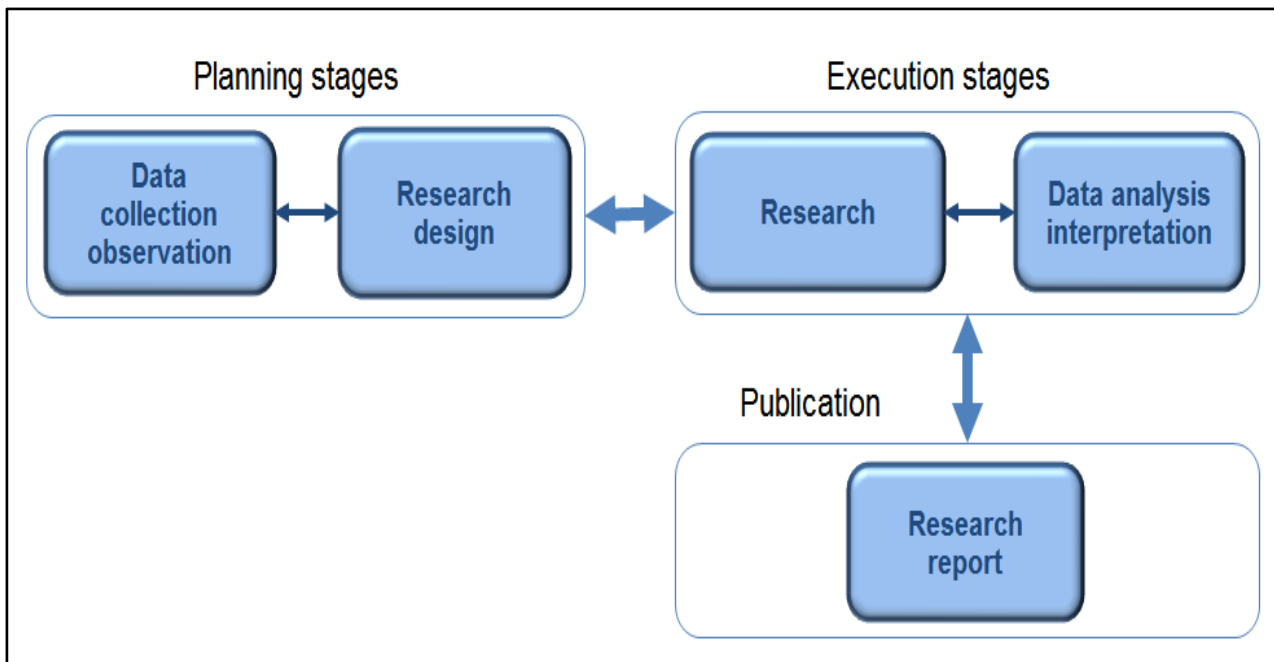


Figure 3: The research process (Durrheim, 2006:34)

This research study follows a qualitative research design. Durrheim (2006:48) claims that a qualitative research study is naturalistic, holistic and inductive, while Creswell (2013:46) highlights more characteristics of qualitative research studies such as reflexivity, multiple methods and the researcher as key instrument. The researcher conveys her⁵ own background and involvement in the study. The interconnectedness between the researcher and the subject being studied is acknowledged and therefore it is understood that they have an influence on one another (Creswell, 2013:253). The study also takes into account that there are two types of studies that influence the research design, namely empirical and non-empirical studies (see Figure 4 next page).

⁵ For the sake of expediency, the female pronoun serves to indicate both the male and the female gender.

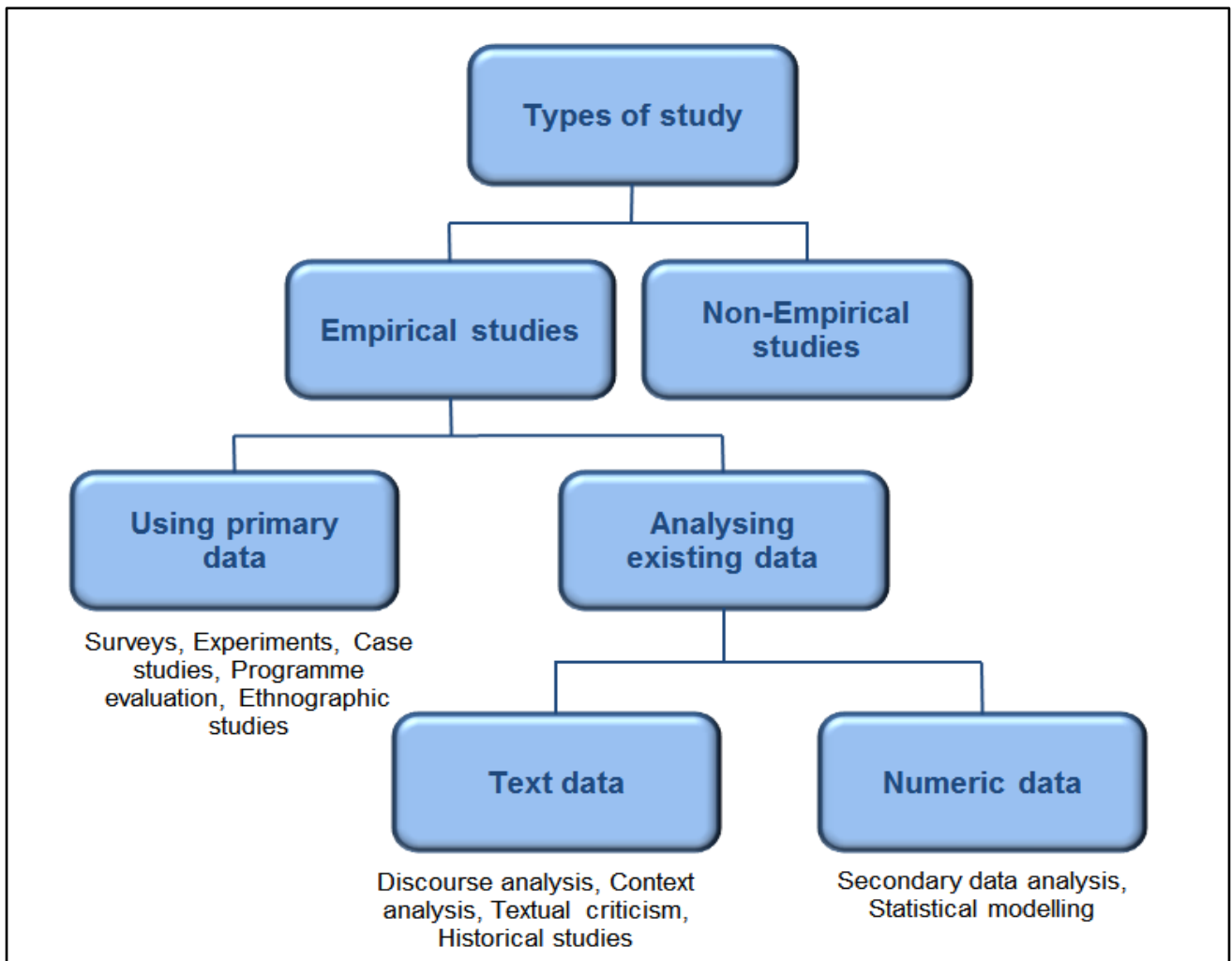


Figure 4: A typology of research design (Mouton, 2001:57)

Empirical studies rely on observation or experiments and not on theory, whereas non-empirical studies focus on text and theory. This research project is an empirical case study that relies on the researcher's observations and data collected through interviews and a literature review.

One of the four dimensions in the research design mentioned earlier (see Figure 2) requires of the researcher to set down her personal paradigm of life orientation. The researcher will draw meaning from this philosophical perspective by means of interpretation (Merriam, 2009:14). This paradigm is essential to the research question and the purpose of the research as well as a method of putting everything in context (see Creswell, 2013:19). The paradigm for this study is interpretative/social constructivist, which enables me to use inductive reasoning to derive meaning from human experiences and by understanding the world within which people live and work (see Creswell, 2013:25). I believe that the studied reality consists of people's subjective experiences and subjective

relationship between me and the subject, which is characteristic of an interpretative approach.

It is important to ascertain what I would like to accomplish through this research project. The object of this research is to determine the contribution that The Black Tie Ensemble (BTE) made to opera in South Africa. An exploratory approach allows the researcher to explore this phenomenon through interviews and a casual explanation of the case is employed to reach the purpose of the research focus through this inductive open and flexible research (Durrheim, 2006:44).

2.2 Research methods

Research methods are to be identified in such a manner as to establish a trustworthy research outcome. By establishing a solid, valid plan of methods used for collecting and analysing data, the process of combination is ensured effectively. In this research study research methods will be applied as set out for a single historical case study. In case study research, the researcher relies mainly on multiple methods of data collection such as interviews, observation and narratives. The researcher is also the key instrument of collecting data which is bounded by time and place. The focus in this historical case study lies on the case itself which presents a unique situation. Therefore a thick description of the specific case in context and surroundings is presented (Creswell, 2013:102).

This single historical case study about the BTE is bounded by time and place (temporal and spatial contexts; henceforth designated as contexts) from 1999–2011 in South Africa. The contexts of this historical case study meet the demands of inquiry of a phenomenon exploring its origins, development, changes and contribution. Furthermore, a historical case study is a presentation of a case from a historical point of view over a period of time (Merriam, 2009:47). Rule and John (2011:9) specifically mention that context is crucial as it explores a specific interest in the past and how it changes and develops in time. All interviews are with key-role individuals from the BTE. They all share their personal involvement and experiences of this phenomenon in a narrative style, based on open-ended questions posed during unstructured interviews.

Historical case studies are descriptive but, according to Rule and John (2011:29), can also include exploratory or evaluative aspects. A few of these aspects to motivate the research question are “what and how” questions such as:

- What are the origins?
- How did the phenomenon develop?
- How did it change?
- What contribution did it make?

Descriptive studies provide a rich, full description of detail and texture and in combination with evaluative studies, reflect on the purpose of the case.

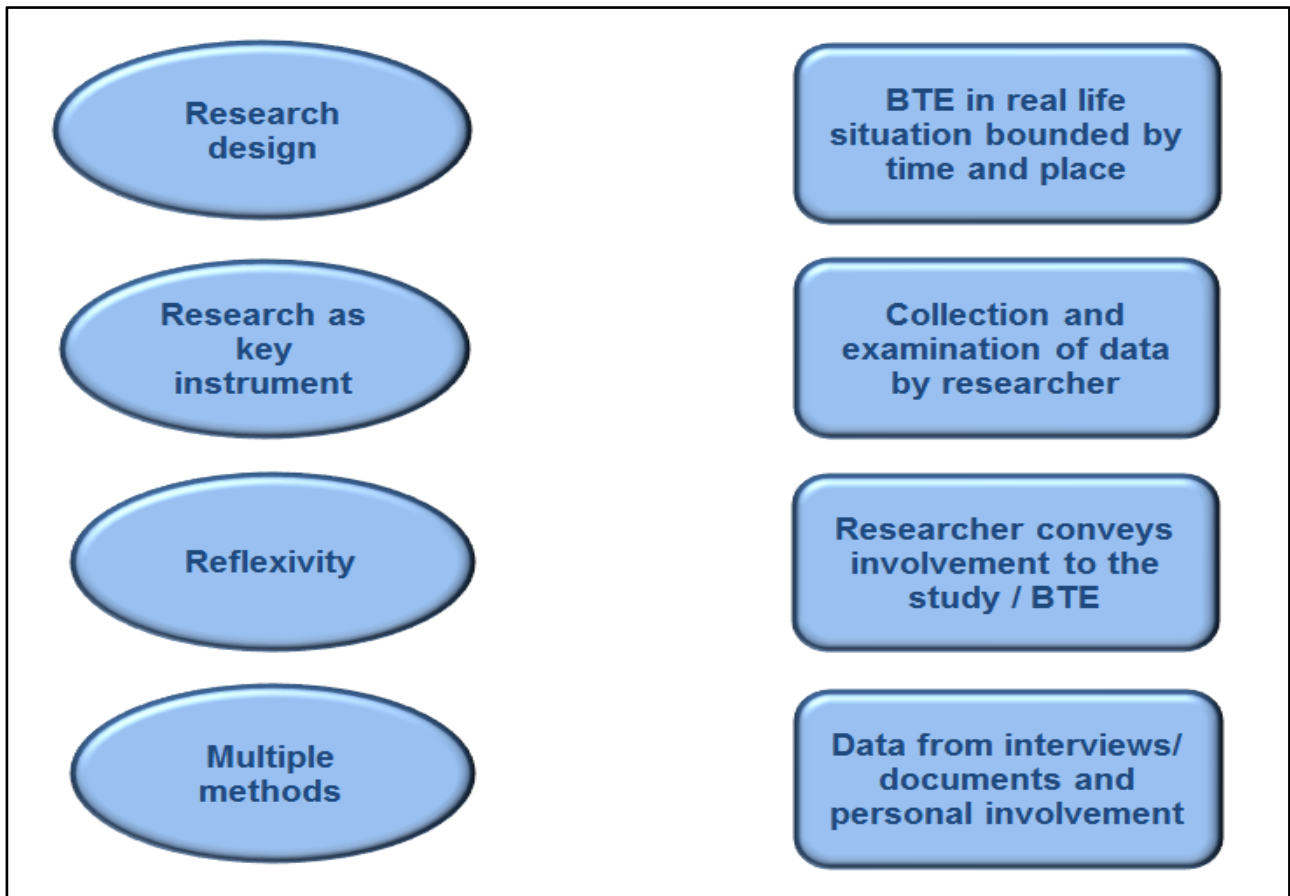


Figure 5: Themes of qualitative research (see Durrheim, 2006:48, Creswell, 2013:45)

Durrheim (2006:48) lists holistic, naturalistic and inductive approaches as themes of qualitative research, while Creswell (2013:47) agrees with Durrheim and adds more characteristics of qualitative research studies, such as reflexivity, multiple methods, the researcher as key instrument, natural setting and participants' views. However, in addition to their ideas about the themes of research, one can also argue that reflexivity and multiple methods can be a valuable asset to qualitative research, as will become evident in this study. The diagram below (see Figure 6) stipulates how this study enfolds in a combination of the above-mentioned with relevance to this case study and is based on the themes of qualitative research as expounded by Durrheim (2006:48) and Creswell (2013:45).

2.2.1 Data collection

Creswell (2013:187) mentions that most of the research in the social sciences applies methods of data collection such as interviews and observation. Rule and John (2011:59) identify elements of data collection in case study research (see Figure 6).

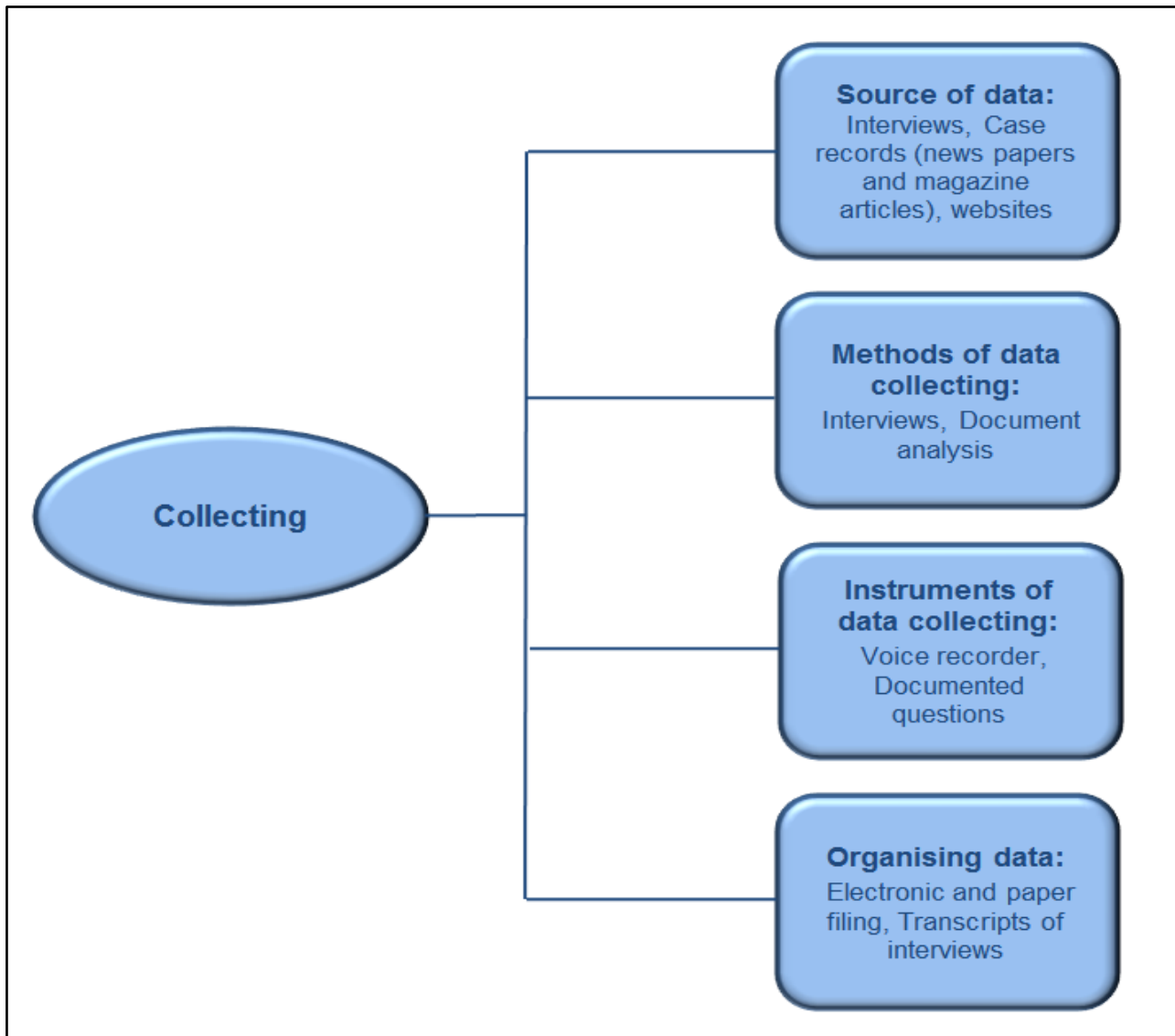


Figure 6: Elements of data collection: Case study approach (see Rule & John, 2011:59)

For the purpose of this study, methods of qualitative research as set out for a single case study are implemented, namely a literature review and interviews. In these qualitative methods of data collection it can be noted that I have been the key instrument for purposes of collecting data anchored in a real life situation. All data from documents and limited literature review, as well as the interviews, are analysed into a rich description and validated for trustworthiness. The following section provides an explanation of how

relevant data were collected by means of different search approaches, namely a systematic literature review and interviews.

- **Systematic literature review as a method for data collection**

One of the sources of data collection for this study involved gathering several documents which include published articles in newspapers and magazines and literature from other, limited sources. This method is commonly known as a literature review. There are two types of literature review, namely a traditional literature review and a systematic literature review. A traditional review does not present a defined method and is usually critical. It is based on the researcher's selection of material and may be biased (Jesson *et al.*, 2011:15).

In this study I have chosen a systematic review where the emphasis lies on a focused methodology that should be transparent to the reader (Jesson *et al.*, 2011:103). Following a systematic approach, sources from articles in newspapers and magazines, integrated with internet sources were studied and assessed according to specific criteria, such as whether articles appeared in accredited or non-accredited journals, whether textbooks were written by authors who are acknowledged as experts within the field, whether websites from which articles were downloaded are beyond scrutiny and how recent publications are. This systematic, integrated literature review determines the relevance of all data collected and ensures the validity and trustworthiness of this study according to the criteria expressed by Lincoln and Guba (1985:290), namely internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. These criteria are discussed in more detail at a later stage in this chapter.

The table below provides a summary of literature found, having searched via specific search engines such as the International Index to Music Periodicals (IIMP), JStor, EbscoHost, www.books.google.com and the Index to South African Periodicals (ISAP). This summary clearly illustrates the lack of scholarly articles and the limited number of textbooks written on the history of opera in South Africa and the Black Tie Ensemble.⁶

⁶ A source list of all the textbooks and articles is included in the reference list.

TYPES OF PUBLICATION	SEARCH KEY WORDS	FOUND	USED
Articles from non-accredited journals	Opera, history, South Africa, Black Tie Ensemble	0	0
Articles from accredited journals	Opera, Black Tie Ensemble, history,	0	0
Textbooks	Opera, Black Tie Ensemble, South Africa, history,	6	6
Articles from newspapers and magazines	Opera, Black Tie Ensemble, Outreach	200-250	30-50
Websites	Opera, history, South Africa, Black Tie Ensemble,	2	2

- **Interviews**

As mentioned previously in 2.1, this research implemented a case study approach where interviews, amongst others, are used to collect data. Through these interviews a detailed description of the case unfolded, which enabled the researcher to present details of the history of the case and a chronology of relevant events (see Creswell, 2013:101). Interviews are a valid method of data collection in case studies (Rule & John, 2011:62), because it allows interviewers to share their own experiences with the interviewee and the trust between the researcher and interviewee encourages the interviewee to share a narrative of shared experiences (see Griffin, 2005:182). All interviews on for this study on 27 and 28 of June 2013 in Pretoria were personally conducted by me and digitally recorded and transcribed. The advantages of interviews became evident in that they supplied a richer description of information. Criteria for ensuring effective methods of interviewing include the following as mentioned in Rule and John (2011:64).

- Interviews should take place in a relaxed environment.
- All interviews should be handled with respect and sensitivity.
- The researcher should
 - explain the purpose of the research study to each interviewee;
 - allow participants/interviewees to ask questions about the relevant study;
 - inform interviewers about ethical issues;
 - use of informal narrative interview;
 - allow the participant to tell his/her own reflections without interrupting too much; and
 - allow all transcribed data to be verified by participants.

When participants are allowed to convey their narrative of events in a free, spontaneous manner, a variation of interviewing is created that contrasts with the archetypal structured interview that is based on specific questions. According to Rule and John (2011:65) storytelling allows for such freedom.

For the purposes of this study unstructured interviews were designed for each participant and took place within an informal and relaxed environment. The unstructured interview serves its purpose as primary source for the kind of data being collected from the narratives which are responses to open-ended questions. The relationship between open-ended questions and narrative responses is necessary as a method of data collection for the relevant study. The narratives resulting from open-ended questions during unstructured interviews, therefore, can lead to a rich, thick description as it allows for elaborate information regarding the interviewee's narrative (Griffin, 2005:182). The trust between researcher and interviewee encourages the interviewee to give a full description of shared experiences which allows for further questions and extended responses (see Griffin, 2005:182).

It was impossible to involve all members of the BTE directly in this case study. Therefore only key-role participants from the management of the BTE were identified and approached. Individual, open-ended interviews were constructed informally for the purpose/need of the individual interviewer in a narrative style. The combination of methods ensures a high quality study. Interviewers in this case study were selected according to specific criteria in order to shed the most light on this case. People were identified as research participants because of their suitability which would enhance the case and would lead to a trustworthy in-depth account of the case. Four interviewers were selected for this case as mentioned in Chapter 1 for ascertaining a criteria of key role players in forming and developing the BTE through their personal experience and expertise in the professional genre of opera in South Africa and internationally.

- Neels Hansen: Founder and director of The Black Tie Ensemble
 Former Artistic director of Pact Opera
 Acclaimed costume designer and stage director
 Interviewed: Friday 28 June 2013, Pretoria

- Mimi Coertse: Founder of The Black Tie Ensemble
Acclaimed international opera singer
Interviewed: Friday 28 June 2013, Pretoria
- Arnold Cloete: Managing director of The Black Tie Ensemble
(at present)
Interviewed: Thursday 27 June 2013, Pretoria
- Fortunato Mazzone: Board member and sponsor for The Black Tie Ensemble
Sponsor for “Adopt an artist” programme and concerts
Owner of Ristorante Ritrovo, Pretoria
Interviewed: Friday 28 June 2013, Pretoria

Electronic interviews: September 2014

- Thys Odendaal: Music critic and editor for *Bee/d* newspaper
- Susan Steenkamp–Swanepoel: BTE accompanist, repetitor 2000–2011
- Tshepo Dikgale: Former BTE Incubator: 2008–2010
- Goitsehang Lehobya: Former Incubator and BTE soloist: 2005–2010
- Teresa de Wit: Former BTE soloist: 2003–2011
- Dewald von Solms: Former BTE soloist: 2000–2011
- Louette Johnston: Former BTE soloist: 2001–2011

2.2.2 Data analysis

By selecting a specific appropriate research design for data analysis, it ensures that the paradigm is linked to the research and that data will answer the research question (Durrheim, 2006:52). In processing relevant data, the researcher first should make sense of the information and sort it into proper categories. During the sorting process the researcher should record an in-depth descriptive narrative of events and identify and categorise patterns in data. Documents analysis, although limited by literature, can further add to more meaning of data.

Steps to ensure a structured data analysis include the following:

- Sorting of data to establish relevant data material.
- Organising of data.
- Presentation of data.

When selected interviewees shared their perspectives and roles within the BTE, it differed from typical structured interviews, which are usually based on set questions. They were allowed more freedom in their storytelling from which data were then generated. For this study, methods of data analysis relating to a qualitative approach were implemented, after which themes were identified to add meaning to and the collaboration of patterns. According to Rule and John (2011:65) the researcher, in order to make sense of the data, must organise it into different themes and patterns. In this study, for example, data is organized into various categories and themes such as:

- staged opera performances;
- selected “quotes” from relevant published media articles;
- outreach and development programmes; and
- financial support for opera companies.

The final step towards data analysis is the integration of interviews and documents such as articles from newspapers, magazines and a literature review. Rule and John (2011:75) regard it as the vehicle of creating meaning through reoccurring themes. In Chapter 4 the integration of themes and patterns, as they materialized from the interviews and case records of this study, will be presented.

2.3 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can be regarded as the measure of credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:294). Creswell (2013:250) refers to this trustworthiness as *validation*. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:290) there are four conventional criteria which ensure trustworthiness in research, namely internal validity (truth value), external validity (applicability), reliability (consistency) and objectivity (neutrality). However, these conventional criteria are appropriated for naturalistic paradigms and are designated as credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

There are various ways through which to ensure the credibility of a research study. In the first instance, the credibility of this study is based on my prolonged engagement with the BTE. Rule and John (2011:35) mention that “[h]ow and when you share your own feelings in the study depends on the purpose and focus of the study, and your own positionality in relation to the study”. As I have always been deeply involved with the BTE and the interviewees and, therefore, have had more than enough time to observe this phenomenon, I can admit that I am a source of information (Rule & John, 2011:35). My personal involvement started as a founder-member in 1999 with the BTE as a singer. I performed in many concert and opera productions between 1999 and 2002 with the BTE. As the company developed and the need for training young singers grew, I decided to venture into a teaching capacity by teaching theory and singing classes. This enabled me to be still a part of the BTE team of developing artists as well as still performing with them as a guest artist. I experienced the many changes and development that took place between 1999 and 2011 when the BTE ceased to exist as a purely opera company.

Furthermore, the credibility of this study is ensured by employing the principles of crystallization which, according to Pitney and William (2009:63), is an effective strategy with which to ensure trustworthiness and enhance credibility. Crystallization involves data being collected from a variety of sources, using many different ways of analysis and verification in order to ensure a better understanding of the phenomenon (see Durrheim, 1999:287). In her introduction Ellington mentions that ...

[i]n the form of crystallization, a methodological framework I developed for bringing together not just different forms of data and analysis (as in multimethod research), but also different genres and forms of sense making within interpretative methodology (Ellington, 2009:xii).

This study adheres to the principles supported by the authors mentioned above by using multiple methods to collect data, such as interviews, documents and a literature review and observation, from various available sources. Finally member checking is considered “[a]s the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:314). This technique was employed when I, the researcher, presented the transcribed data to the interviewees to ensure a true rendition of events described by each individual. The interviewees’ insight into the transcribed data prevented any discrepancy before data-analysis took place and established credibility. The other criteria of trustworthiness, namely transferability, dependability and confirmability are equally achieved though the

techniques which ensure the credibility of this study (the researcher's prolonged engagement with and observation of this phenomenon, crystallization of data and methods and member checking). The study consequently displays stability and will establish the same conclusions/findings, should the participant should participate again within the same context.

2.4 Ethics

I have followed and implemented ethical guidelines in accordance with institutional standards as directed by the research committee of the North-West University guidelines for ethical research practices. An example of the letter of consent (signed by all participants) can be viewed in Addendum A. All participants waived anonymity to this study as there were no intimate or sensitive questions. In planning, conducting, analysing and reporting this study I strived to be non-biased, accurate and honest as is humanly possible in all phases of the research (Merriam, 2009:216).

2.5 Conclusion

Through a research design a framework is provided to enable a link between the research questions and research process. This process enables the researcher to decide between the types of study, i.e. empirical or non-empirical studies, and should therefore highlight the purpose, context and methods of the specific study. As soon as a research design is established, it provides a method of how data are to be collected and analysed. In this research project a qualitative approach is implemented. Data are collected through a literature review as well as informal interviews. After being collected all data were analysed in order to answer the research question.

CHAPTER 3: THE DEVELOPMENT OF OPERA IN SOUTH AFRICA

This chapter offers a literature review of the limited published literature on the history of opera in South Africa. The chapter focuses on providing a brief discussion of opera in South Africa before and after 1994. The chapter also endeavours to present certain aspects regarding the development of South African singers within the opera genre. It is inevitable that political changes that happened in South Africa would have affected opera and the development and survival of the genre relies very strongly on the success of local singers from the diverse cultural societies. The discussion about the background of opera in South Africa is aimed at leading to a better understanding of the need for and the origins of the BTE.

3.1 Introduction

In her dissertation *Geleentheidsmusiek as kultuurhistoriese bron 1786–1899*, Bender-Brink (1982:1) mentions that far more sources are available about the history of South African architecture, visual art, furniture, clothing, customs and religion than that of music and opera. The lack of sources concerned with the history of opera in South Africa makes research into aspects relating to this genre challenging. Therefore, the integrated literature review in this chapter is based on a limited selection of sources, namely interviews, articles published in magazines, newspapers and personal reflection.⁷

From its rich European past, opera was to be one of the entertainment traditions to be upheld. Any discussion about the history of opera in South Africa before 1994 has to include information about the performing arts councils that also provided job opportunities for local singers. Following a brief discussion of the performing arts councils (PACT, PACOFS, CAPAB and NAPAC), the chapter then continues to investigate the history of the BTE. Chapter 3 concludes with a brief description of the changes that took place in the BTE since it was reconceptualised in 2012.

3.2 Opera before 1994: A brief history

South Africa's colonial past contributed towards its inheritance of opera traditions from countries such as the Netherlands and England. During the 1800s the public in the Cape Province showed a particular interest in light opera (Bouws, 1946:37). The first opera

⁷ Personal reflection is based on my own involvement at BTE from 1999 to 2011.

performed in South Africa in 1809, *Une Folie* by the French composer Etienne-Nicolas Méhul opened the stage for productions to follow such as *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* by Rossini, performed in Afrikaans in 1824. Ten years after its première in Berlin, *Der Freischütz* by Von Weber was performed in South Africa in 1831. Operas were also mostly performed by travelling artists (Bouws, 1946:38). In the late 1880s, the Theatre Royal – Johannesburg’s first opera house – was built by musical composer and impresario, Luscombe Searelle. The Port Elizabeth Opera House followed in 1891 and the first performance in this venue was *The Mikado* by Gilbert and Sullivan. The Cape Town Opera House was opened in 1893 with a musical, *Dorothy*, by Stephenson and Cellier and the Tivoli in 1903. Thus all theatres mentioned above were built before and after the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and changed the face of South African Theatre (Fletcher, 1994:119).

The discovery of gold and the opening of an opera house, the Theatre Royal, were two of the most lustrous events in Johannesburg during the late 1880s. Malan mentions that from 1870 many European immigrants and visitors came to South Africa and many of them brought more opera culture (Malan, 1986:348). Opera productions were presented by international touring opera companies such as the Carl Rosa and Arthur Rousse opera companies. Operas such as *Faust* by C. Gounod (1818–1893), *Il Trovatore* by Verdi, as well as works by Gilbert and Sullivan were performed in the Theatre Royal (Peskin, 1990:vii). Soon after, in 1891, a larger and more suitable theatre for opera and musical events, the Standard Theatre in Johannesburg, opened with productions of *Faust* by Gounod and Bizet’s *Carmen*.

Another touring opera company, namely the Thomas Quinlan Opera Group, made significant contributions to opera productions in Cape Town and Johannesburg in 1912–1913. The Quinlan group performed operas by Wagner for the first time in South Africa at the Wagner Centenary Festival in Johannesburg and Cape Town. *Tristan and Isolde*, *Tannhäuser* and *Die Walküre* were all performed in English. In 1913 The Cape Argus newspaper hailed these productions to be the greatest events which the musical community had ever been asked to support (Hale, 2013:55). Quinlan’s company was said to have “[b]rought great advancement to opera in South Africa”. During the nineteenth century, opera underwent a growth in South Africa led by people such as British actor and singer, Harry Stodel and Johan Connell, a founder member of the Johannesburg Operatic and Dramatic society. According to Peskin (1990:vii), Stodel and Connell endeavoured to make opera accessible to people from all walks of life. Connell was also responsible for

producing operas such as Bizet's *Carmen* sung in English and Afrikaans in 1946 and Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. He also started to employ local singers such as Dirk Lourens, Betsy de la Porte and Cecilia Wessels (Kapp, 2008:15).

During the next few decades many productions with a few local, but mainly foreign singers (Italian companies touring with singers like Alessandro Rota and Joseph Manca who remained in South Africa) followed, setting and creating a high standard of performance excellence. Operas such as *The Bartered Bride* by Smetana, *Don Giovanni* by Mozart, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by Nicolai, Boris Godunov by Mussorgsky and Verdi's *Rigoletto* to name but a few, were added to the repertoire at the Standard Theatre (Peskin, 1990:viii). Alessandro Giuseppe Rota, an Italian tenor, played an equally significant role in the development of the Cape Town Opera Company in 1939 as John Connell did in Johannesburg. In collaboration with the College of Music at UCT, Rota managed to produce and perform opera in various towns, such as Kimberley, Graaff-Reinet, Cradock and Grahamstown. In 1939 Rota founded the Cape Town Opera Company (Kapp, 2008:15).

The College of Music at UCT was the first to introduce formal singing and opera studies and was a very valuable asset that provided local singers opportunities to tour in South Africa in order to perform opera. Singers who studied at the college were Cecilia Wessels, Emma Renzi and Desiree Talbot (Kapp, 2008:13). Another group from Cape Town, the EOAN group, started as a charity cultural association for the coloured community in 1933. In 1949 the musical activities of the EOAN group started under direction of an Italian, Joseph Manca. From 1956, this group performed mainly Italian opera repertoire as well as operas in other original languages in mainly the Cape Province. May Abrahamse was the first coloured singer to perform the leading role in Verdi's *La Traviata* in Italian. She became an active music teacher and an inspiration to young singers. The EOAN group received grants from the local government and Cape Town Municipality which enabled them to start their own trust in 1964. In 1974 Manca and the EOAN group received accolades for their contribution to the arts by the South African Academy for Science and Arts (Kapp, 2008:20). The EOAN group developed many young singers and Ronald Thys, Virginia Davids and Sidwell Hartmann were the first coloured singers to be introduced as fulltime members of CAPAB.

Many large-scale productions, such as opera and variety shows, were also performed all over the country in cinema houses that had large seating capacity. One of the

entertainment highlights during the time of the second world-war was the arrival of Noël Coward (1899–1973) in Durban. In March 1944 he visited South Africa to perform at the Playhouse and to entertain the troops in camps and hospitals as well as to raise money for the Red Cross (Woolfson, 1986:31). There were a considerable number of South African singers who wished to perform and develop their careers and who had no realistic expectation of being able to do so unless they went overseas. Gobbato (2008), former director and producer at Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB), points out that “[m]any excellent private singing teachers, both from Italian and German extraction, had made their homes in South Africa, especially after World War II”. He also states that these singing teachers “organized staged operatic performances and operatic concerts in smaller theatrical venues around the country” (Gobbato, 2008).

The role played in the development of opera by Alessandro Rota and Joseph Manca in Cape Town was mentioned earlier. They were the inspiration for the founding of the first National Opera Association of South Africa which was formed in Johannesburg in 1955 by Rota, following a failed attempt at founding a similar company in 1946 by Connell. Kapp (2008:17) points out that this association was never financially viable. Connell initiated a concert series called Music Fortnights which were subsidised by the Johannesburg municipality. These concerts presented a choir and orchestra – usually from the SABC – to promote classical music and opera to the public. Admission to all concerts was free of charge, as Connell endeavoured to bring music a little closer to the public (Malan, 1986:296). As a result, other associations emerged.

The main aim of the *Operavereniging van Suid-Afrika* (OPSA), founded in Johannesburg in 1956, was to promote the development of opera and related arts – particularly in Afrikaans and original languages (see Kapp, 2008:18). OPSA organised concert tours of extracts from operas to various towns such as Rustenburg, Alberton and Ontdekkers. OPSA received generous sponsorship from government and the future for a State Opera was envisioned (Kapp, 2008:19). When OPSA and the National Opera Association of South Africa applied for funding from the government in 1958 it was mentioned by government that they would not be able to fund two opera associations. It was clear that OPSA promoted translation of opera into Afrikaans whereas the National Opera Association of South Africa was English with a strong Italian influence for opera (Kapp, 2008:18). During this time, singer Cecilia Wessels invested money in the National Opera Association but lost everything. Kapp (2008:19) furthermore states that government

suggested that both associations should work together to ensure funding. Accepting this suggestion, the *Federasie van Operaverenigings van Suid-Afrika* was established in 1958.

When OPSA and the National Opera Association joined forces in 1958 as *the Federasie van Operaverenigings van Suid-Afrika*, OPSA produced many operas translated into Afrikaans. Operas in Afrikaans and English such as Mozart's *Die Towerfluit (Die Zauberflöte)*, *Die Huwelik van Figaro (Le Nozze di Figaro)* and Menotti's *The Telephone* and *Amelia goes to the Ball* followed. These productions gave South African singers the opportunity to become leading singers in local productions (Malan, 1986:126). Singers such as Mimi Coertse, Nellie du Toit, Gé Korsten, Rita Roberts, Hans van Heerden, Dawie Couzyn and Fred Dahlberg established themselves as performers within the opera tradition. These local acclaimed singers elevated the opera scene in South Africa to a level of excellence with productions of *Un Ballo in Maschera* by Verdi and *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* by Offenbach. Opera productions were supported by the South African Broadcasting Company (SABC) orchestra, conducted by various local and international conductors such as Edgar Cree, Anton Hartman, Jeremy Schulman and Leo Quayle who was to play a significant role in the history of the Performing Arts Council of Transvaal (PACT) (Malan, 1986:313).

Another company, namely the *Opera-organisasie van Suid-Afrika* (OPEROSA) was founded in 1957 in Pretoria. Contrary to OPSA, this organization did not endeavour to produce opera but rather to negotiate funding from private sponsors, provincial and municipal government. OPEROSA would encourage opera associations from Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town to join forces by establishing a National Opera Company (Kapp, 2008:19). After very successful performances sponsored by the government, the Johannesburg City municipality and Transvaal administration at the 1959–1960 Union Festival, the *Federasie van Operaverenigings in Suid Afrika* drafted a memorandum in 1960 and presented it to the government. In 1962 parliament accepted the proposal and funding was made available for four performing arts councils in South Africa (Kapp, 2008:21). With secure funding from the government, opera in South Africa would be able to offer full-time positions to professional local artists in future.

The Civic Theatre in Johannesburg opened in 1962 and became the home of PACT Opera in 1963. For the next three decades, the performing arts councils that were founded in each province would play a significant role in the history of opera in South Africa (Peskin, 1990:viii).

3.3 Performing Arts Councils

In 1962, the Central Government decided that the performing arts should become part of South African society. They allocated funds for the formation of PACT, CAPAB, the Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State (PACOFS) and the Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC). With the advent of the four Arts Councils in 1963, South African theatre initiated a tradition of opera (Peskin, 1990:viii). When the arts councils were initiated in 1963 they all faced a major problem of not having adequate venues in which to rehearse and perform (Eichbaum, 1988a:37). Between 1971 and 1986 an enormous growth in the cultural and entertainment environment occurred. The Nico Malan Theatre Centre opened in Cape Town in 1971 (becoming the home of CAPAB), followed by the State Theatre, Pretoria in 1981 (the home of PACT), the Sand du Plessis Theatre in Bloemfontein (home of PACOFS) in 1985 and the Natal Playhouse in Durban (home of NAPAC) in 1986 (Woolfson, 1986:vi). Each of the provincial arts councils was given an annual budget by the central government and, within this budget each council had to operate departments which were responsible for the productions of drama, opera and ballet. Funding for the arts has always been a challenge. As early as in 1951, Racster (1951:201) regards it as unfortunate that “South Africa’s halls and private theatres are seldom, if ever, equipped to take a large scale production and the cost of presenting spectacular productions. Until local authorities realize the value of providing properly equipped stages, neither National Theatre nor independent society can embark on any large scale programme for presenting the best in theatre to the public without heavy subsidization”.

The provincial performing arts councils were conceived by the government of the day solely for the benefit of white performers and white audiences. This elitism and the exclusiveness of productions were evident in, for example, the fact that the Nico Malan Theatre – upon opening – was declared a “whites only” building. The waves of boycotts and protests that followed caused the government to revoke the policy and the theatre was declared open to all races in 1976. Opening theatres to all races also influenced decisions about casting performers. Gobbato (2008) remembers how he tried to find partners who would share his vision and would be committed to staging productions with artists who represented the diversity of our nation. The perseverance of Gobbato and his partners influenced the experience of Western art music in black communities and eventually the growth of this style amongst black artists after 1994 (Gobbato, 2008). During the early years CAPAB ventured to introduce opera to the general public by performing in smaller

towns. Many of these productions were in collaboration with the University of Cape Town (UCT) College of Music. The result was that South African singers were given more opportunities to perform and local communities created more music societies (Eichbaum, 1988e:35).

PACOFS was founded in 1963 and operated on an ad hoc basis before establishing the first ever permanent opera company in South Africa. The Sand du Plessis Theatre opened in 1985 (becoming the permanent residence for PACOFS) and was the best equipped theatre with modern technology in Africa. PACOFS operated as a section 21 (non-profit) company until 2003. PACOFS became the first arts council to collaborate with other arts councils, co-producing productions with PACT and CAPAB such as *Carmen* by Bizet in 1989 funded by the largest sponsor from the private sector at that stage, South African Airways (Eichbaum, 1988c:25).

NAPAC was established in 1963 as a unique experiment from a variety of touring companies in ballet, drama and music. They would never develop properly because of inadequate buildings. During the early years mainly ballet, musicals and drama were performed. Smaller scale productions were introduced to schools and musical societies in towns throughout Natal (Eichbaum, 1988f:13). The main objective of the former director of NAPAC, Rodney Phillips, was to establish a full-time orchestra before establishing a permanent opera chorus. Both were crucial in improving the standard of opera. The Natal Playhouse became the permanent residence for NAPAC in 1986. Most of the productions staged were in collaboration by touring arts councils such as PACT and CAPAB (Eichbaum, 1988f:14).

PACT Opera celebrated its birth in 1963. The history of this company originated in three different opera houses in two city centres, Johannesburg and Pretoria (Peskin, 1990:vii). For the first eighteen years of its existence, the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg and the Aula Theatre at the University of Pretoria were home to PACT productions, before its permanent residence at the State Theatre in Pretoria in 1981. PACT's contribution to the performing arts became an esteemed and essential part of South Africa's cultural life. The diversity and quality of opera as one of the performing arts available to South African audiences may be attributed to the standard of excellence in especially opera performances. When the government agreed to open the State Theatre to all cultural groups in 1981, audiences and productions represented a wider racial adversity. This diversity steered PACT Opera into venturing towards a permanent company with

permanent administrative, production staff, orchestra, and opera chorus and company singers. Opera productions were supported by international singers, conductors and producers. The Stagione system, a system that allows temporary ensembles of international singers to perform in local productions, was employed. This system is a viable practice in opera houses across the world and ensures the highest standard of performance (Peskin, 1990:87).

In 1982 PACT Opera introduced the first international singer of colour, namely the American soprano, Martina Arroyo, in the leading role in *Aida* by Verdi with a supported opera chorus from all cultures in South Africa. This set a dramatic change in the demand to introduce opera to a wider circle of the public. The opera repertoire presented at PACT was performed in five languages and spanned the operatic literature from Mozart to contemporary works. Contemporary works included operas by Janacek and Britten, operas by South African composers such as Hofmeyr and Temmingh, as well as musical comedies and operettas (Peskin, 1990:75).

Since PACT's inception in 1963, efforts were initiated to create an awareness of opera at schools and in smaller communities. PACT visited schools and communities with smaller scale productions, sponsored by the Department of Education in Transvaal (Peskin, 1990:81). However PACT tried to build bridges between cultural groups in South Africa (Eichbaum, 1988d:7) but had no collaboration between tertiary establishments of training for young opera singers. According to Eichbaum the majority of young singers found it necessary to further their studies and careers overseas (Eichbaum & Viljoen, 1987:23). By the late seventies there were only two opera training facilities for young singers, namely at UCT in Cape Town and the Technikon in Pretoria (Eichbaum, 1977:31) and during the eighties Durban, Cape Town and Pretoria began training black singers at various tertiary institutions.

3.4 Opera after 1994 in South Africa

After the historical political changes in 1994,⁸ South Africa became well-known for its enormous cultural diversity in various spheres. This diversity is certainly applicable to all fields of South Africa's vocal music tradition, as well as to classical vocal music, especially opera. From 1994 onwards black singers from previously disadvantaged communities

⁸ Nelson Mandela became president of the new democratic South Africa in 1994 and, for the first time in South Africa's history, black people were allowed to vote during free and fair elections.

such as Sibongile Khumalo, Raphael Vilakazi, Abel Motsoadi, Sibongile Mngoma and more recently Fikile Mvinjelwa, Angela Kerrison, Pretty Yende and Given Nkozi were introduced to a new South Africa as opera singers commissioned to uphold an opera tradition in the country (Eichbaum, 1998:8). With the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 a negative effect on especially music activities was felt. The former state-funded Performing Arts Councils were disbanded in 1996. Funding of the Arts was reduced to limited budgets. Each performing arts council had its own opera company which was considered as the so-called Eurocentric “high art”; an unaffordable luxury that caters to a small, elite minority of the population. The Ministry of Arts and Culture turned theatres into playhouses that were destined to become self-sustaining entities. Gobbato (2008) writes: “Regrettably, and predictably, our success in finding and developing operatic vocal talent was not matched by a sudden political change of heart.” Furthermore, Gobbato (2008) states that it is unfortunate that the discovery and training of good opera singers were not equalled by the government supporting this art form.

Some theatres tried to keep their doors open, restructure and become self-sustained entities – as laid out in the vision of the White Paper on Arts and Culture and Heritage (South Africa, 1996). In the White Paper article 16 and 21, Chapter 4 on the Performing Arts Councils, it states:

16. Accordingly the PAC need to be restructured in such a way that the infrastructure and skills built up over decades are not lost, but are directed to serving the artistic and cultural priorities established by the NAC. At base, their activities must align with the general objectives of the Government.

21. The PACs will receive declining subsidies from central government as transfer of payments over the next three years. At the end of this period, the government will subsidise the core infrastructure, core staff and essential activities of the PACs. All other locations will be funded through the NAC. This will require them to diversify their funding base as well as to restructure their ticketing policies. Additionally, the companies associated with performing arts councils, like all other performing arts organisations, will be able to apply to the NAC for grants-in-aid. This shift in funding signals the transformation of the PACs from virtually free-standing production houses to becoming infrastructure accessible to all. The process of change will be

complete by the year 2000, and will be assisted by the resources of the NAC and Ministry.

However, on 15 June 2000 Dr Ben Ngubane, former Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, announced the closure of the State Theatre in Pretoria at a press conference. On 23 June of the same year Dr Ngubane wrote to the editors of artslink.co.za (Ngubane, 2000) and explained that the performing arts in South Africa had always been a contentious issue and it still seemed that the transformations, as explained in 1996 White Paper on Arts and Culture and Heritage, have not been implemented as yet. This lack of transformation led actions that brought about the end of a chapter in South Africa's opera history in which this genre was perceived to be accessible only to an elite minority. The intention of the White Paper was not to deny the existence of the performing arts, but for arts to be transformed into a democratic art form, accessible to all in the new South Africa. This accessibility allows opera to be transformed and suitable for a democratic country (South Africa, 1997:2).

According to the White Paper, companies were supposed to adhere to the alignment of projects which were required to comply with government-approved objectives through development, employment opportunities and skills transfer in order to receive any public funding at all by the National Arts Council. Companies such as the Cape Town Opera (previously known as CAPAB), Roodepoort City Opera, Opera Africa, Free State Opera (previously known as PACOFS) and Natal Playhouse (previously known as NAPAC) developed their own vision and mission in order to sustain the opera tradition within their specific regions. These companies relied very little, if at all, on state funding (De Jager, 2009:56) and depended mainly on private and public funding by larger companies such as ABSA and SASOL. PACT Opera was transformed into the State Theatre Company in 1996 and did not restructure itself in line with the new principles according to the White Paper. Before resigning as director of CAPAB in 1996, George Loopuyt mentioned specifically that, without the financial support from the private sector, a spiritual bankruptcy will face the future of the arts in South Africa. Arts councils have started building audiences throughout all communities by means of all South Africans participating in the arts (Eichbaum, 1996b:3). Adequate funding from business and government could boost South Africa's resources in terms of talent and could prove South Africa to be an asset as a great opera producing nation of the world (Eichbaum, 1989:7).

With the realities and transformation of the new South Africa, the visions as set out by the Departments of Arts, Culture and Technology in 1996 for the arts in its White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage, opera in South Africa was at the beginning of achieving high standards because it was “open to all” and no one was excluded. Eichbaum envisioned (1989:7) enthusiastically that with the increasing number of singers from all walks of life who were passionate about opera, awareness should be created among all South Africans as citizens of the world in order that one’s own culture in African tradition can enjoy the best that the world has to offer. Earlier in this chapter it was noted that very few opportunities for South African artists to develop and maintain a full-time position in the arts were created. History has shown that, in the past and as is the case today, local singers have to relocate overseas in order to pursue a career in the performing arts. During an interview with Van Rooyen for *Musicus*, the conductor David Tidboald mentions that “[f]ar too many good South African musicians leave the country ... while it is positive to allow and encourage young musicians to be exposed to the cultural influences of the wider world, we have to do everything in our power to support and promote local talent” (Van Rooyen, 2001:107).

3.5 Conclusion

Throughout the history of the development of opera in South Africa it has become evident that certain factors always have proved to be highlighted in the history of a dynamic opera culture in a growing and changing South Africa. Opera is a very expensive art form and needs a stable infrastructure such as funding. In 1988 Dr Edgar Cree pointed out in his address at the function where SAA sponsorship was announced that ... “[T]he arts have historically depended upon outside financial assistance for their survival. In centuries past, such sponsorship largely came from members of the aristocracy, but in this modern age, we no longer have people of this calibre who can afford to sponsor the enormous costs involved today. The role of the aristocracy in the modern age has thus now fallen upon large corporations” (Eichbaum, 1988c:39). From the early opera productions presented in South Africa funding was not permanent and there were no full-time engagements for singers. Funding usually came from donations or people offering their services for free.

Training facilities for opera singers were extremely limited, to include mostly private mentors or at a few tertiary institutions. Many local singers had to go overseas to pursue full-time careers (Eichbaum, 1987:23). Some singers did return to contribute a creative input into the training and development of young singers. Local singers, such as Emma

Renzi, Marita Napier and Hans van Heerden – who had international careers – became involved in tertiary institutions all over South Africa. These singer-pedagogues were joined by singers from the EOAN group, such as Virginia Davids and Sidwell Hartmann, who still are teaching applied vocal studies at the College of Music of UCT (Eichbaum, 1998:8).

Since 1994 a new generation of eager young aspiring singers has evolved. However, due to financial constraints many could not afford tertiary training and many who graduated from tertiary institutions could not foresee a permanent position in a permanent opera company and left the country. Only limited permanent positions existed at Cape Town Opera, hardly enough to fill the need of performing and supporting young singers financially. Opera training facilities have been flooded in major cities such as Cape Town, Pretoria and Durban since 1994.

Against the background described above, a new company – based in Pretoria – was established in 1999, encompassing all the requirements mentioned at the beginning of the previous paragraph, and with a vision and mission as aimed at primarily keeping opera going for a younger generation of emerging singers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

CHAPTER 4: THE HISTORY OF THE BLACK TIE ENSEMBLE (1999–2011)

This chapter presents data collected from available case records (mainly articles in newspapers and magazines) regarding the BTE, as well as from the interviews conducted with participants who had been part of the BTE from 1999–2011. The chapter provides insight into the origins and development of the BTE, as well as the history of their logistic, administrative and financial challenges. Furthermore, the chapter considers the history of the BTE's performances, as well as its activities outside the theatre.

4.1 Origins of the BTE

It was mentioned earlier that, after 1994, the Performing Arts Councils were disbanded. With the dissolution of these councils and the withdrawal of consistent state funding, a new reality emerged in which opportunities for young singers in South Africa aspiring towards a successful career in opera no longer existed to the extent they had once done. This reality – one that persists even to this day – was one that confronted not only singers, but virtually every young person who chose to enter the world of the performing arts. The need for the process leading to the transformation of the arts – especially opera – became crucial. Apart from this transformation, artists had to adjust to these new circumstances by adopting a truly entrepreneurial spirit and to create their own work, much in the manner of the touring theatrical companies of old. New opportunities were created every day.

In South Africa a few tertiary institutions provide effective training for opera singers; however, many singers still have to go overseas. During its existence the arts councils did not endeavour to establish a national opera school. With the many black choirs of good standard there was no lack of good voices (Eichbaum & Viljoen, 1987:23). When the State Theatre ceased to exist in 1997, it was in the spirit of entrepreneurship mentioned earlier, and with the determination to preserve the traditions of opera performance for everyone in this country, that South African diva, Mimi Coertse and celebrated opera director, costume designer and former artistic head of PACT Opera, Neels Hansen, established the Black Tie Ensemble (BTE) in 1999 (Engelbrecht, 2013). “BTE was born out of necessity” declares Holden (2010:66) at a time when performing arts councils closed and the future for young performers became bleak. Hansen (2013) states that BTE was not started exclusively for previously disadvantaged people, but for all young opera singers. The intention was that only classical music and, specifically opera, was to be promoted. Hansen (2013) explains:

Yes. It actually originates from an idea that we had, Mimi and I, to start some sort of academy attached to theatre, the Opera Department, in the golden days that never materialized. And then, when the theatre started to become slightly shaky in presentation and financially and eventually closed, this was a solution to look after young singers that never had the opportunity to perform, can also perform. Let me put it very clearly: the Black Ties were not a project started for the previously disadvantaged people; it started for young opera singers.

During the first year of BTE's existence, singers were identified and invited to form the core of the group. Coertse comments that "[t]hey have beautiful voices. There is not one in the group who does not have a great future" (Feris, 2000). I have witnessed the following: singers that joined the ensemble, like Elizabeth Lombard, Eric Visser, Antoinette Olivier (yours truly), Isabella Masotte, Albertus Engelbrecht, Nita van der Walt and Stefan Louw, were already established singers and would help to set a standard for the more inexperienced singers. Younger singers such as Jonathan Boinamo, Agos Mohagi and Kaiser Nkosi, who had already had a background in music and some voice training from tertiary institutions, also joined the BTE. These singers were funded by management and private sponsors in order to undertake further vocal training with their individual singing teachers such as Emma Renzi, Eric Muller, Louis Botha, Virginia Davids and Sarita Stern. BTE only provided coaching sessions with international opera coach Brenda Rein, who continued working with the opera department at the State Theatre until it closed. Susan Swanepoel-Steenkamp took over from Rein in 2000 (Cloete, 2013; Hansen, 2013). She was assisted by other pianists such as Engeli le Roux and Willem Luitingh.

Beginning a project such as the BTE implied that certain demands had to be met. In the humble beginnings of the BTE, all administrative activities were conducted from Hansen's apartment in Pretoria and rehearsals had to take place in various rehearsal venues such as at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) opera school, the State Theatre and private venues. The BTE only moved into its permanent residence at the State Theatre in Pretoria in 2002 (Hansen, 2013). It must be mentioned very clearly that the BTE was never a part of – or supported by a theatre or institution, meaning that it was always an independent company. According to Hansen "[n]o theatre could afford them [the BTE]. They just had to survive by themselves and allowing us to rehearse in a venue and perform in a venue, in the State Theatre, were already a big contribution, but it was not enough". The State Theatre contributed from 2001 until 2011 by allowing the company to rehearse and perform in, but they had to survive on their own (Hansen, 2013). Thanks to the international language of music and opera culture which knows no boundaries, this unique

project was not only aimed at the development for young opera singers but also to create work in order to generate income for the singers on a continuous basis. The experience gained since the founding of the company has resulted in it now being in a position to embrace more challenging projects for development. Such development of becoming a permanent opera company led to establishing a permanent ad hoc opera chorus. Singers who were not accepted as BTE soloists were not turned away and were considered for a chorus. This resulted in the emergence of a semi-professional opera chorus which, with training, would meet the unique demands of an opera chorus. Whilst earning an income through their chorus activities, choristers would gain valuable stage experience (Hansen, 2013) (see Addendum B).

4.2 Sponsorship

Opera is an expensive art form to produce, let alone to train young talented singers. This is not only a South African, but a world-wide phenomenon. Drogheda confirms this by stating that “[f]rom the opening of the first Theatre Royal in Covent Garden in December 1732 management was faced with the economic nightmare of keeping their business solvent” (Drogheda, 1981:viii). In Europe over the past centuries the arts were sponsored by the private aristocracy. However, in modern times the arts have needed financial support from private companies. In SA very few companies have been involved in supporting the arts by providing consistent and generous funding. It was mentioned earlier in Chapter 3.3 that SAA made funding available to the performing arts councils. Dr Edgar Cree pointed out in his address in comment to the SAA sponsorship.

The arts have historically depended upon outside financial assistance for their survival. In centuries past such sponsorship largely came from members from the aristocracy, but in this modern age, we no longer have people of this calibre who can afford to sponsor the enormous costs involved today. The role of the aristocracy in the modern age has thus large fallen upon large corporations. Sadly, in South Africa too few large corporations have come to see the benefit accruing to them from arts sponsorship.

Sponsorship to the arts is no longer a matter of philanthropy (Eichbaum, 1988b:39) and with the political transformation that took place since 1994 in the new South Africa, people from disadvantaged communities now have equal opportunities and the right to develop their talents.

Since its inception in 1999 the BTE has been vigorously searching for sponsors from either the private sector or individuals. Corporate and private funding was crucial if the company

wanted to succeed in pursuing the initial vision and mission of establishing and developing a sustainable opera company. Hansen (2013) recalls the events when the BTE received the first sponsorship from Nedbank in 1999:

Our first sponsorship came from Nedbank, Dr Ivan Murray, who supported me enormously when I was Artistic director of the Opera Department and we had to find sponsorships to stage the quality productions we wanted to stage. The budget was too small, so for many years we had a relationship in sponsorship and the first sponsorship was R60, 000 00. It was to enable us to pay for the accompanist/coach in the form of Brenda Rein and she received a princely salary of R5, 000 00 a month and that was all the money we had. We scrounged around and found equipment that we needed for the office, we changed two rooms in my apartment, we used that as Black Tie offices and the computer was there and the printer was there, but that was not sponsored. And I must say that it was very difficult. It was a nightmare, the first few months, to keep this Black Tie Ensemble afloat. Incidentally we called it the "Black Tie Ensemble" later, not only "Black Ties". We thought it sounded more classical. And our second sponsorship came also came from Nedbank, but from a different portion of the publicity department and this enabled us to get the Black Ties going. The sponsorship was negotiated through BASA, and it was a three year sponsorship. Today it will mean nothing, but an amount of R230 000 00, I think, was awarded to us that we could start and do real work. When Dr May gave me the first R60 000 he said: "[I] give you this money because this project can stand on many legs."

The BTE had to find the many stages (legs) which would ensure the vision of becoming a company (Hansen, 2013). Through corporate entertainment, concert series and school tours, the BTE started to build a support system of funding. During the first year the BTE did not endeavour to do any opera productions due to sponsorship constraints. In order to survive, the BTE undertook performances that were mainly corporate entertainment and also by establishing a series of Sunday morning concerts. However, this was just not enough. Hansen (2013) explains how, despite the lack of funds, the need to perform opera increased:

And indeed we started to find the legs. The first one was the corporate entertainment we had to do to survive; secondly we started to give morning concerts on Sundays. The first concert there were more singers than audience members, but that was fine. It grew to a monthly event and was supported incredibly well. We also realised that we had to go out to the schools. There is an audience out there and because in those days it was regarded as development, we would only get sponsors if we involve ourselves in development. But we went out with a specific programme. The first big tour we did was to Polokwane and we were confronted sometimes in situations under trees, in big school halls, in the square of the school, but we performed. It was a bit like the old Vaudeville or the touring companies. The vision still evaded us. We couldn't do opera; there just was not enough money and as we developed, the need became urgent: we had to do opera.

As mentioned before, the BTE initially received only R60,000 from Nedbank in the first year of their existence before securing a further R230,000 from Nedbank over a period of three consecutive years. The funding led to Neels Hansen's vision of the BTE becoming an opera company when the first opera production was planned for 2001 (Hansen, 2013).

According to Drogheda (1981:viii) financial prosperity is very important to establish and maintain a company. Many generous sponsors, such as ABSA, Nedbank Investment Bank, Investec and later SAPPI, SASOL, the Royal Bafokeng Holdings, Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and the National Lottery Trust Fund were involved in the funding of the BTE. At the 2003 BASA awards for business administration, the former Minister of Arts and Culture and Heritage, Dr Ben Ngubane praised the financial business sector for its involvement in sponsoring the arts (Webster, 2003:1). It was absolutely necessary for arts and culture projects to obtain financial support from all the sectors. However, due to economic changes and fluctuations on financial institutions, it has become increasingly difficult for corporate companies to sustain their sponsorship indefinitely.

The BTE management created opportunities for the singers to generate their own income through their involvement with the BTE, which fluctuated, depending on the number of performances of the individual singers. The Kloppenheim Country Estate near Machadadorp provided a steady income for singers by offering monthly soirées at the estate for one year (Cloete, 2013). The necessity of maintaining a regular monthly income was ensured through another opportunity of monthly dinner concerts presented by the Mazzone family of Ristorante Ritrovo in Pretoria. Cloete (2013) remembers:

We had funding for the administration of the company but not directly to the singers. At that stage the singers only earned when they performed. So what Neels thought of was to get a company or private person who was willing to give at that stage, I think R1500.00 a month.

With these concerts they initiated an innovative sponsoring scheme, *Adopt an Artist*, whereby individuals or companies could adopt an artist, with the result that the adopted artists received a fixed monthly allowance which enabled financial support for housing, as well as travelling costs to rehearsals (Mazzone, 2013). Mazzone (2013) asserts that, because he had very high profile clients, they could convince clients to adopt an artist:

So it was very good for some people with money to be associated with the project that had both a charity aspect to it, which did good. Certainly was, I think, was socially beneficial and of course which was culturally an accepted and a quality art form. So I think people that supported an artist through

Adopt an Artist Scheme saw kinds of social and ego benefits from it. And I mean, I'm not ashamed to admit that's what we were aiming at and I thought it was very successful.

Ristorante Ritrovo received a BASA award in 2003 for sponsoring the arts (Webster, 2003:1). In an interview with *Beeld*, Mazzone mentioned that he had also privately funded BTE (Pienaar, 2009:13). Other sponsors, such as the Sunday newspaper, *Rapport*, soon joined in supporting this initiative. In 2003 the Royal Bafokeng Holdings became a major sponsor with R2.4 million (Retief, 2007:20). Cloete (2013) explains how they went about securing further funding by applying to the Government and National Lottery:

The first time we applied for funding was in 2005. We thought we had it, we did not know how the system worked, so when we heard we got it, we were so excited and early 2006 we did our productions and then the money just didn't come. And we were in debt of over R900, 000 00 for the productions we did. And it took eight months of really ... I mean, many months singers didn't get paid/paid late. Eventually we got the money and everything was sorted out. Then again we received money on a three year basis from the DAC for our Incubator Scheme and it was supposed to be R600, 000 00, R750, 000 00 and R850, 000 00 in three-year span, and in 2009, I remember, was the last year that we were supposed to receive the R850, 000 00 and we did not receive it.

After applying a few times, further funding came from Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) in 2006 for the Incubator Scheme and, in 2010, R5 million from the National Lottery. Cloete (2013) explains how they went about securing further funding:

And again in 2010 we received money from the Lottery and this time it was actually a huge amount of money – it was over R5 million, but very strict on what we had to do with it. And one of the things we had to do was an opera and again they paid out the first tranche. It went well. We did all the outreach work, we did all the concerts we had to do, we did all the community work and then we were waiting for the second tranche. And again, believing that the money is coming, our reports were in and everything, we started with the opera and by the time we saw problems, it was too late. We got the money this time not so late and it also ended up in huge problems, but I think we've now learned our lesson: we know how they work.

Further information on how sponsorships and funding contributed to the eventual changes in the BTE will be provided later in this chapter.

4.3 Training and development

Eichbaum (1995:3) quotes the strong opinion expressed by Abel Motsoadi, a black South African opera singer: "I have never thought of opera as 'white' music. Obviously, it is not a

traditional African art form, but it has been around South Africa for centuries. What's democracy worth if we are going to take out everything that's not indigenous?"

4.3.1 Incubator Scheme

I said: Why are you here? "I want to sing opera." And I still don't know why they wanted to sing opera and I don't know where they got the idea from (Hansen, 2013).

In South Africa only a few tertiary institutions provide good training for opera singers; thus many singers still have to go overseas. During their existence the arts councils did not endeavour to establish a national opera school. With the many black choirs of good standard there is no lack of good voices (Eichbaum & Viljoen, 1987:23).

Many talented singers applied to audition for the BTE, but the majority of these singers had previously had no formal training and, therefore, could not be considered. Noting the vast number of talented singers who could not afford tertiary education, it was decided to create an opportunity for these exceptional voices to develop into prospective BTE members or to be used by other companies. Hansen (2013) recalls:

At one of these auditions, one of the Nedbank people was there. He said: But now what happens to these people that you cannot accommodate? Well, we didn't have the answer to that and he said, Look, I'll find extra money if you start something like an incubator scheme, he called it and we thought that would be a good name.

The Incubator Scheme was initiated in 2002 with funding from NEDCOR and has since developed into one of the most valuable projects to assist young opera singers with no formal training. Through training and by gaining experience these young singers could become part of the Black Tie Ensemble in future (Cloete, 2013). Members from the Incubator Scheme hail from various parts of South Africa and are between the ages of 18-23. During their three-year apprenticeship these young singers receive all the necessary practical classes and tuition to develop as opera singers.

In-house training by professional lecturers includes classes in music theory, piano, singing, stage history and performance. Languages such as Italian, German and French were introduced one a week and students had to learn the basic language rules and pronunciation of these languages. German was taught by a member of staff such as singing lecturer Eric Muller and Susan Steenkamp–Swanepoel and for Italian and French ad hoc language coaches were employed. The practical singing and music theory is

accredited by UNISA. At the end of the three-year apprenticeship the students were at Grade 3 theory level enabling them to

- read and write staff notation in treble and bass clef;
- distinguish between simple and compound time signatures;
- write major and minor scale;
- recognise and write all major and minor intervals and triads;
- know the basics of four-part harmony; and
- have a good knowledge of music terminology.

I have experienced that the success rate of official theory exams by UNISA was 100% through the existence of this development programme. Many of the students who passed with distinction were placed on the honour role of UNISA. Professional singing lecturers such as Eric Muller, Emma Renzi, Antoinette Olivier, Louis Botha, Lionel Mkwazazi ensured a high standard of vocal training of the young singers. Students had to learn a classical repertoire from a variety of genres, expanding through Italian aria antique, opera, operetta, German, Italian and English art songs. Students also received piano classes and aural training. Adding to this, singers received classes in music and costume history as well as acting and stage craft classes, much needed to ensure well-informed and educated singers. BTE productions provided a platform and created performance opportunities, assisting them in gaining experience towards a possible professional career. BTE's management had not been able to ensure accreditation by the Department of Education, however.

The achievements of the Incubator Scheme confirm that it is indispensable, not only for young singers who benefit from it, but it also enhances many facets that make up our unique South African cultural identity. Tshepo Dikale (2014) mentions that "[t]he reasons I joined the programme was purely for the love of classical music. I wanted to learn more about the genre and to pave a way for other opera lovers from my area and also to prove to people especially from my village that one can make a career out of music". The Incubator students are also involved in community outreach programmes, such as taking opera to the people. This scheme is also sustained by corporate sponsorship and by individual sponsorship as in the *Adopt an artist* scheme. Beneficial funding from Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and Rand Merchant Bank (RMB) contributed to a further solid foundation to this scheme. The Royal Bafokeng Holdings from North West supported a few students from its region (Boekkooi, 2007:9). "The DAC as part of the

government's mandate to ensure cultural diversity and the sustainability of creative industries supports various schemes within the arts" (Diko, 2008a:48). The success and demands of this scheme are achieved by means of sponsorships which offer free tuition to the Incubator students and also enable them to develop into competent artists (Anon, 2003).

Young singers from all over South Africa became aware of the BTE and the Incubator Scheme through the media. Many BTE performances were televised by SABC and one such programme, Imizwilili, contributed to aspiring young singers joining BTE. Cloete (2013) points out:

And it's from people that heard from friends or from family or seeing them on television. We were very lucky at some stage to actually have had a lot of our performances aired on SABC 1, the Imizwilili programme. And we got a lot of requests then from people saying, but we want to study with you.

One of the singers who joined was Goitsewang Lehobye who mentioned that "[t]he first time I heard opera was during a television broadcast which featured the BTE". She also mentions that she did not have the funds for university and after a successful audition she joined the BTE in 2005 (Lehobye, 2014).

4.3.2 Outreach

The outreach programme of the BTE has significant implications. Incubator students gain performance experience through outreach work at communities and schools in selected parts of South Africa. In 2000 school visits were introduced to towns in Limpopo province (Polokwane), North West Province (Potchefstroom) and Gauteng (Pretoria)(Cloete, 2013). Official funding from the Royal Bafokeng in 2003 extended these school tours to Phokeng. At schools and community centres, children were introduced to the world of opera through performances of mini-opera productions. It was a matter of taking opera to the people (Retief, 2007:20) and educating new audiences for future productions (Holden, 2009b). Cloete (2013) also mentions that, on occasion, children from nearby schools around Pretoria were invited to experience opera performances in the State Theatre. On one such occasion, during performances of Vignettes from Puccini operas, English subtitles were flashed on a screen to make the understanding of opera more accessible to the large number of attending school children (Boshoff, 2006:25). Nonhlanhla Yende, administrative officer for the Incubator, describes how school tours are more challenging because of the

demands of creating a balance of enough information to the children and, therefore, keeping them informed and entertained at the same time (Holden, 2009b:63).

The repercussions of these school visits were significant. At one of the school productions, Lazarus Molepolle had his first real introduction to the world of opera and became a member of the Incubator training programme after which he then became involved in over 35 school programmes (Mkwanazi, 2010:21). Another young Incubator student from Phokeng, Tshepo Dikale, who completed his three years and excelled in piano and theory studies, went back to teach in his community (Cloete, 2013). Hansen (2013) mentions that:

It meant that they could in a way help their own people in their home towns where they came from and I thought it was like a wonderful warm chocolate that ran through the whole project.

Outreach programmes also assisted in the training of choir conductors by professional conductors. The community was enriched by performances of their own performers as well as performances by the BTE (Boekkooi, 2007). However, the most significant result of the Incubator scheme and of the nurturing that young singers enjoyed during their involvement with the BTE involves the career development of some of these singers.

4.3.3 Career development (singers' stories)

BTE became a haven for young singers to develop and to take part in productions and concerts. Louette Johnston (2014) explains the joys of ... “[h]aving the opportunity to learn while earning money”. Singers from all over South Africa had to audition. Hansen (2013) explains:

Now as you know, a singer doesn't develop in two years or three years. It is another few years, another stretch. Some singers stayed and some left, they found their niche in Europe; some went to the other provinces, found their niche there and we had to make sure that these people were well enough ... that they were equipped well enough because we'd hate to let an Incubator or a Black Ties go out into the world and not up to standard.

Some of these singers remained with the BTE, but others left to pursue further training in opera, locally and internationally. In 2000 Mimi Coertse mentioned in an interview ... “[t]o get anywhere they will eventually have to leave South Africa, like I did when I was young” (Feris, 2000). Kaiser Nkosi, one of the founding members of BTE, was invited in 2001 to attend master classes in Munich at the Bayerische Staatsoper. He was later offered a position there where he extended his vocal training and is now enjoying a successful

career performing in Europe. One of his most noticeable performances is the role of Sarastro in William Kentridge's production of Mozart's *Magic Flute* in Paris, 2004. After the première in Paris, he repeated this role in South Africa and in 2005 he was invited by the BTE to sing Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Donizetti (Diko, 2008b:48).

In 2000 a young bass from Bloemfontein, Vuyani Mlinde auditioned for the BTE co-founder, Mimi Coertse. At the time, Vuyani said that he did not know anything about opera or expect anything. He was offered the role of Sparafucile in the BTE's first opera production of *Rigoletto* by Verdi in 2001. Neels Hansen offered him a full-time position at the BTE where he extended his training as a singer, whilst building performance experience in concerts. In 2004 he sang the role of Colline in Puccini's opera *La Bohème*. Shortly after Vuyani received a scholarship to the Opera Queensland Young Artist Programme in Australia, which was followed by a full scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music in London (Diko, 2008:48).

Soprano Tsakane Maswanganyi and tenor Stefan Louw also gained valuable experience at the BTE. Maswanganyi was offered to join Amici, a "pop opera" group in London and Louw was offered to sing Radames in Verdi's *Aida* in France (Diko, 2008:49). Johanni van Oostrum, former member of the BTE, is enjoying an international career as a soprano in the Netherlands at present (Cloete, 2013).

As mentioned earlier in this section, some singers remained with the BTE and contributed to its success as a result of the experience and training received through possibilities created by the BTE's management. Names stood out in many productions and concert performances and became household names of the core of singers associated with the BTE; singers such as Jonathan Boinamo, Linda Zitha, Stefan Louw, Louette Johnston, Dewald von Solms, Vuyani Mlinde, Charlotte Silulu, Loveline Madumo, Jonathan Watkins, Reinholdt Moagi, Bongwiwe Madlala, Teresa de Wit, Yolandi Nortjé and Tanya Tait. Soloists who successfully graduated from the Incubator scheme include Khotso Tsekeletsa, Thabang Senekal, Dikgang Mantoro, Caroline Nkwe, Caroline Modiba.

Goitsewang Lehobye is one of the successful students who joined the BTE Incubator scheme in 2005 and after completing the three-year apprenticeship programme she became a soloist for the BTE. She received a scholarship from the University of Cape Town in 2011 to further her studies. Her comment (Lehobye, 2014) in response to my research:

Everything I learned in the programme is everything I learn now at university and I have to excel in it because I have learned most of it before. When I left the ensemble I was already a full artist as the program helps you in everything. Today I sing everywhere in the world and I am proud to say that I am a product of the BTE.

4.4 Performances

Any decision on which productions to put on stage, as well as the magnitude of such a production, was informed and determined by the financial situation of the company. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the BTE's performances during the first two formative years involved corporate entertainment, Sunday morning concerts and performances at Arts Festivals such as Aardklop in Potchefstroom, were the first official opera concerts in 1999 (see Hansen, 2013). Sponsorship and permanent funding were the main obstacles. Throughout BTE's 10 years, corporate entertainment for various companies such as Nedbank, Absa, MTN, Vodacom, Le Canard, was undertaken in order to ensure an income for the ensemble. Management also created concert series with UNISA Music Foundation and a Christmas concert every year. When regular funding from Nedbank was established in 2000, plans for a full opera in 2001 were envisioned.

Rigoletto by Verdi was the first full opera production presented by BTE. There was limited funding available for sets, costumes and direction, the latter undertaken by Neels Hansen. Striving towards cost-effectiveness, sets were inventive and minimalistic. Scaffolding was borrowed from a company and invented into a set and costumes were borrowed from the State Theatre opera wardrobe. As a result of limited funding, the opera could not be performed with an orchestra. However, in an innovative manner the opera was accompanied by two pianos. Conductor Christopher Dowdeswell from Cape Town generously offered his services without any remuneration. It was his way of giving back to the community (Cloete, 2013). South African baritone Lawrence Folley, who resides in the UK, was asked to assist the young Linda Zitha in the title role.

Table 1: *Rigoletto* cast

RIGOLETTO	
Performance dates in the Aula UP: 14, 16, 20, 22, 25, 27 & 28 May 2001	
Conductor	Christopher Dowdeswell
Director	Neels Hansen
Assistance and advisors	Mimi Coertse & Lawrence Folley
Décor	Anthony Farmer
Production assistant	Arnold Cloete
Costumes	Bronwen Lovegrove & Delene Holt
Lighting	Declan Randall
Repetitor	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel
Chorus master	Kobus Buys
Stage manager	Vanessa Nicolau
Orchestra	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel & Engeli le Roux
CAST	
Rigoletto	Linda Zitha
Il Duca	Jannie Moolman/Dewald von Solms
Gilda	Beverley Chiat/Louette Johnston
Monterone	Patrick Shabalala
Saparafucile	Vuyani Mlinde
Maddalena	Johanni van Oostrum/Charlotte Silulu
Borsa	Dewald von Solms/Given Mabena
Marullo	Jonathan Boinamo
Giovanna	Antoinette Olivier
Count Ceprano	Johan Botha
Countess Ceprano	Tsakane Maswanganyi/Marlyn Repsold
Il Cameriera (The Page)	Muriel Motsi

In this production it was important to use all the BTE singers in the ensemble. The cast was doubled where possible to ensure all singers' participation and to ensure the well-being of these young singers. The management of the BTE also contracted professional singers, such as Jannie Moolman, to share a principal role with Dewald von Solms (De Beer, 2001:5). *Rigoletto* was hailed as a triumph by critic Riek van Rensburg (2001:9) of the *Pretoria News* who stated: "It was the most moving tribute paid to Verdi (1813–1901) in Gauteng with the centennial commemoration of his death".

The success of *Rigoletto* was to be followed by *Madama Butterfly* by Puccini in 2002. Funding was still limited. However, a full orchestra, namely the Chamber Orchestra of South Africa (COSA), was employed; once again under musical direction of conductor Christopher Dowdeswell. The opera was produced cost-effectively by Neels Hansen. A young singer from Cape Town, Zodumo Mboniswa, who grew up in a very small town in the Eastern Cape where no one had ever heard of opera, was cast in the eponymous role (Fröhlich, 2002). This was done because BTE was a developmental programme and they wanted to give a local young singer the exposure. Zodumo made opera history in

becoming the first black soprano in South Africa to sing the role of Butterfly (Fröhlich, 2002). The opera was announced by the newspaper The Citizen as: “Puccini done the South African way” (Traub, 2002:26). Performances were scheduled at the State Theatre Drama in Pretoria and at The Sand du Plessis Theatre in Bloemfontein. It was the only opera production to be performed in a province other than in Gauteng (See Addendum B).

Table 2: *Madama Butterfly* cast (State Theatre)

MADAMA BUTTERFLY	
Performance dates in the Drama, State Theatre: 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30 April 2002	
Conductor	Christopher Dowdeswell
Director	Neels Hansen
Décor	Lindy Grindlay
Additional costumes	Lindy Grindlay, Bronwen Lovegrove & Dalene Holt
Original costume design 1978	Neels Hansen
Lighting	Declan Randall
Repetitor	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel
Chorus master	Mathilda Hornsveld
Stage manager	Christa Snyman
Assistant to the director	Jonathan Boinamo
Japanese coach	Ronelle Brand
Orchestra	Chamber Orchestra of South Africa
Concert master	Denise Sutton
CAST	
BF Pinkerton	Luzuko Mahlaba/Dewald von Solms
Goro	Given Mabena
Suzuki	Kathy Henderson
Sharpless	Linda Zitha
Cio-Cio San	Zodumo Mboniswa
The Imperial Commissioner	Jonathan Boinamo
The Official Registrar	Timothy Bull
The Bonze	Vuyani Mlinde
Prince Yamadori	Jonathan Boinamo
Kate Pinkerton	Antoinette Olivier
Trouble	Fortune Modise

Table 3: *Madama Butterfly* cast (Sand du Plessis Theatre)

MADAMA BUTTERFLY	
Performance dates in the Sand du Plessis Theatre, Bloemfontein: 30 October, 01, 03 November 2002	
Conductor	Christopher Dowdeswell
Director	Neels Hansen
Décor	Lindy Grindlay
Additional Costumes	Lindy Grindlay, Bronwen Lovegrove & Dalene Holt
Original costume design 1978	Holt
Lighting	Neels Hansen
Repetitor & Coach	Declan Randall
Assistant Repetitor	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel
Chorus master	Paul Ferreira
Stage Manager	Huibrie Verster
Assistant to the director	Amanda van Zyl
Japanese coach	Jonathan Boinamo
Orchestra	Ronelle Brand
Concert master	The Free State Symphony Orchestra Richard Reid
CAST	
BF Pinkerton	Dewald von Solms
Goro	Given Mabena
Suzuki	Tina Farr
Sharpless	Linda Zitha
Cio-Cio San	Zodumo Mboniswa
The Imperial Commissioner	Jonathan Boinamo
The Official Registrar	Louwrens Strydom
The Bonze	Vuyani Mlinde
Prince Yamadori	Jonathan Boinamo
Kate Pinkerton	Antoinette Oliver
Trouble	Timothy Campbell/Jenade Ridgard

The BTE could not stage another opera till 2004 when a breakthrough happened with funding. *La Bohème* by Puccini was the first opera to be sponsored by a company, SAPPI, who acknowledged the BTE's contribution of its fifth year from conception (Odendaal, 2004:12). This was a major breakthrough for the preservation of opera in South Africa. Under the artistic direction of Neels Hansen and musical direction of Graham Scott, in collaboration with the Johannesburg Music Initiative orchestra (JMI), all leading roles for the opera were allocated to singers from the BTE.

Table 4: *La Bohème* cast

LA BOHÈME	
Performance dates in the Drama, State Theatre: 12, 14, 16, 18 & 20 June 2004	
Conductor	Graham Scott
Director	Neels Hansen
Assistant director	Vanessa Nicolau
Décor	Andrew Botha
Additional costumes	Neels Hansen, Bronwen Lovegrove
Lighting	Declan Randall
Repetitor	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel
Chorus master	Mathilda Hornsveld/Philip Mokone
Stage manager	Stan Knight
Orchestra	Johannesburg Music Initiative
Concert master	Camelia Onea
CAST	
Marcello	Linda Zitha
Rodolfo	Dewald von Solms
Colline	Vuyani Mlinde
Schaunard	Jonathan Boinamo
Benoit	Dawie Couzyn
Mimi	Loveline Madumo
Parpignol	Khotso Tsekeletsa
Musetta	Louette Johnston
Alcindoro	Dawie Couzyn
Custom-House sergeants	Thabang Senekal & Itumeleng Tladi

In 2005 I was part of the team who, with the BTE as a growing company fed by the Incubator development scheme, planned a new idea of opera that was introduced by Neels Hansen in the form of vignettes. These vignettes allowed younger singers to be involved in reduced staged versions of opera. In 2005 BTE soloists and singers from the development group performed *Gianni Schicchi* by Puccini and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* by Rossini. Fully staged, with sets and costumes applied as customary within opera tradition, these performances were accompanied by a smaller ensemble from the JMI orchestra under the baton of Graham Scott.

Table 5: *Gianni Schicchi* and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* cast

GIANNI SCHICCHI & IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA	
Performance dates in the Drama, State Theatre: 14, 17, 20 & 23 April 2005	
Conductor	Graham Scott
Director	Leonard Prinsloo
Assistant director	Vanessa Nicolau
Décor	Colin O'Mara Davis
Costumes co-ordinator	Bronwen Lovegrove
Lighting	Declan Randall
Repetitors	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel Engeli le Roux
Barber script	Leonard Prinsloo
Stage manager	Eugène Prinsloo
Orchestra	Johannesburg Music Initiative
Concert master	Irene Tsoniff
SHICCHI CAST	
Buoso Donati	Michael Dungelo
Zita	Zanele Gumede
Rinuccio	Rheinaldt Moagi
Gherardo	Raymond Tyack
Nella	Loveline Madumo
Gherardino	Delsy Mooki
Betto di Signa	Dikgang Mantoro
Simone	Paul Madibeng
Marco	Thabang Senekal
La Ciesca	Teresa de Wit
Gianni Schicchi	Linda Zitha
Louretta	Bongiwe Madlala
Maestro Spinelloccio	Obakeng Molepe
Ser Amantio di Nicolao	Jonathan Boinamo
Pinellino	Itumeleng Tladi
IL BARBIERE CAST	
The Narrator	Tobie Cronjé
Figaro	Jonathan Boinamo
Count Almaviva	Khotso Tsekeletsa
Dr Bartolo	Linda Zitha
Rosina	Teresa de Wit
Don Basilio	Paul Madibeng
Berta	Loveline Madumo
Soldiers	Dikgang Mantoro Thabiso Masemene Rheinaldt Moagi Obakeng Molepe Thabang Senekal Itumeleng Tladi
Notary	Michael Dungelo

Lucia di Lammermoor by Donizetti followed later in 2005 at the State Theatre in Pretoria, fully sponsored by Sappi. British conductor, Jeremy Silver, and director Michael Gieleta brought international experience to the ensemble. As there was not a suitable young singer for the leading role, Hanli Stapela was asked to sing the role of Lucia. Kaiser Nkosi

who was singing in Germany at the time, was invited as guest artist for this production. Linda Zitha and Dewald von Solms, who had proved themselves successful in previous productions such as *Rigoletto*, *La Bohème* and *Madama Butterfly*, further added to the growing success of BTE soloists.

Table 6: *Lucia di Lammermoor* cast (State Theatre)

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR	
Performance dates in the Opera, State Theatres: 21, 23, 25 & 28 September 2005	
Conductor	Jeremy Silver
Director	Michael Gieleta
Assistant to the director	Madeleen Engelbrecht
Technical co-ordinator	Vanessa Nicolau
Conceptual design	James Macnamara Design (Original design: Andrew Botha)
Costumes co-ordinator	Bronwen Lovegrove
Lighting	Declan Randall
Repetitor	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel
Choreographer	Vanessa Nicolau
Stage manager	Rosemary Richter
Props master	Andre Cordes
Fight sequences staged by	Rachel Barlow
Orchestra	Chamber Orchestra South Africa
Concert master	Denise Sutton
Chorus	Black Tie Opera Chorus
Chorus master	Mathilda Hornsveld
CAST	
Normanno	Rheinaldt Moagi
Enrico Ashton	Linda Zitha
Raimondo	Kaiser Nkosi
Alisa	Zanele Gumede
Lucia Ashton	Hanli Stapela
Sir Edgardo di Ravenswood	Dewald von Solms
Arturo Bucklaw	Khotso Tsekeletsa

2006 was a prosperous year for the BTE as they were able to produce four opera vignettes, namely Puccini's *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly* and *Don Pasquale*, as well as *L'elisir d'amore* by Donizetti. According to visiting opera director of these Vignettes, Michael Gieleta "[t]he singers have grown so much since *Lucia di Lammermoor* the previous year, that the next logical step is for them to visit Europe" (Mfeka, 2006:20). According to Boshoff (2006:25) "all the vignettes mentioned were accompanied by the COSA, conducted by Alexander Fokkens".

Table 7: *Tosca, Madama Butterfly, Don Pasquale* and *L'elisir D'amore* casts

FOUR OPERA VIGNETTES	
Performance dates in the Drama, State Theatre: 21, 24, 26 & 28 May 2006	
TOSCA MADAMA BUTTERFLY DON PASQUALE L'ELISIR D'AMORE	
Conductor (Donizetti operas) Conductor (Puccini operas) Director Assistant to the director Technical co-ordinator Set design Costumes design & co-ordinator Lighting Repetitors Stage manager Props master Orchestra Concert master Chorus Chorus master	Graham Scott Alexander Fokkens Michael Gieleta Madeleen Engelbrecht Vanessa Nicolau James Macnamara Design Lindy Grindlay, assisted by Bronwen Lovegrove Simon King Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel Louis Botha Mariette Buys Michael Mokwena Chamber Orchestra South Africa Denise Sutton Black Tie Opera Chorus Mathilda Hornsveld
TOSCA CAST	
Floria Tosca Mario cavaradossi Baron Scarpia Spoletta A Sacristan Sciarrone Ceccare Angelotti	Loveline Madumo Stéfán Louw Linda Zitha Rheinaldt Moagi Monde Masimini Dikgang Mantoro – 21 May Itumeleng Tladi – 24 May Thabang Senekal
MADAMA BUTTERFLY CAST	
Cio-Cio-San Lt Pinkerton Sharpless Suzuki Goro Kate Pinkerton Dolore	Bongjiwe Madlala Dewald von Solms Linda Zitha Teresa de Wet Rheinaldt Moagi Salome Geertsema Dartagnan September
DON PASQUALE CAST	
Don Pasquale Dr Maletesta Norina Ernesto Notary	Monde Masimini Jonathan Boinamo Tanya Tait Khotso Tsekeletsa Thabang Senekal

L'ELISIR D'AMORE CAST

Adina	Louette Johnston – 26 May Yollandi Nortjie – 28 May
Nemorino	Khotso Tsekeletsa
Belcore	Dikgang Mantoro
Dulcamara	Obakeng Molepe
Gianetta	Yollandi Nortjie – 26 May Louette Johnston – 28 May

Full opera productions of *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Mascagni and *Il Pagliacci* by Leoncavallo were performed with international Italian conductor, maestro Carlo Franci, later in 2006. BTE soprano Bongiwe Madlala was replaced by Hanli Stapela due to illness, Tina Mene from Cape Town and South African tenor Gerhard le Roux – residing in Europe – were all invited to sing in this production of *Cavalleria*. Maestro Franci's musical refinement gave a solid foundation to a polished, successful season (Boekkooi, 2006:9). In an interview with the *Sunday Times* Franci, mentions that

[t]here is much to fall in love with at the Black Tie ensemble – a strange marmalade of inexperience mixed with experience, age mixed with youth. Yes, there is a platonic form of what music should be. We can work with artists of different materials. They might be further or closer from the ideal but there is something extra that each one brings – perhaps spirit, maybe breathing - but that gives the performance its life (Burnett, 2006:16).

Table 8: *I Pagliacci* and *Cavalleria Rusticana* casts

I PAGLIACCI & CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA	
Performance dates in the Opera, State Theatre: 8, 10, 13 & 15 October 2006	
Conductor	Carlo Franci
Director	Michael Gieleta
Assistant to the director	Madeleen Engelbrecht
Technical co-ordinator	Vanessa Nicolau
Set design	James Macnamara Design
Costumes co-ordinator	Bronwen Lovegrove
Lighting	Declan Randall
Repetitors	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel Johan Botes
Stage manager	Dawn Harvey
Props master	Michael Mokwena
Orchestra	Chamber Orchestra South Africa
Concert master	Denise Sutton
Chorus	Black Tie Opera Chorus
Chorus master	Mathilda Hornsveld
I PAGLIACCI CAST	
Canio (Pagliaccio)	Gerhard le Roux
Nedda (Colombina)	Hanli Stapela
Tonio (Taddeo)	Linda Zitha
Peppe (Harlequin)	Khotso Tsekeletsa – 8, 10, 13 Oct Thabiso Masemene 15 Oct
Silvio	Jonathan Boinamo
CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA CAST	
Santuzza	Tina Mene
Turiddu	Dewald von Solms
Alfio	Linda Zitha
Mamma Lucia	Zanele Gumede
Lola	Teresa de Wit

The BTE was not able to produce opera for the next two years, due to difficulties in funding for a single production and concentrated efforts on school productions through outreach projects. However, they conceptualized their own concerts such as a tribute to Mario Lanza, a concert with music by Andrew Lloyd Webber and an Edwardian soir ee which were all semi-staged. The Royal Bafokeng Holdings started to sponsor the development project in 2003 and, in 2009, decided to sponsor the production of the operetta, *The Merry Widow (Die Lustige Witwe)* by Leh ar. Neels Hansen, who retired in 2007, was still involved in a part-time capacity with certain producing aspects. He directed the opera together with conductor Christopher Dowdeswell. The production offered audiences an unexpected twist by re-inventing the context of the operetta as an imaginary African state within Paris (Holden, 2009a:58). Former Incubator trainee, Goitsewang Lehobye (soprano) shared the principal role with Bongwiwe Madlala who felt excited about being the first black South African to do the role of *Hanna Glawari* (Diko, 2009:88).

Table 9: *The Merry Widow* cast

OPERRETA: THE MERRY WIDOW	
Production performed at the South African State Theatre, Opera Theatre: 10, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 21 June 2009 Production Sponsored by the Royal Bafokeng Holdings	
Music Original book and lyrics English translation Performed by arrangement with	Franz Lehár Victor Léon and Leo Stein Christopher Hassall Glocken Verlag Limited, London
Conductor Director Assistant conductor & additional orchestra arrangements Choreographer Set & costume designer Original concept Musical advisor to the singers English coach Repetitor Lighting designer Sound design Costume coordinator	Christopher Dowdeswell Ralph Lawson Eddie Clayton Mark Hawkins Sarah Roberts Neels Hansen Mimi Coertse Paul Browning Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel Willem Luitingh Simon King Richard Smith from Sound Harmonics Bronwen Lovegrove
Technical coordinator Assistant to the director Stage manager Orchestra Leader Chorus Chorus master	Vanessa Nicolau Thamsangqa Mazwai Sarah Hill The Black Tie Ensemble Orchestra Camelia Onea The Black Tie Opera Chorus Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel

CAST	
Hanna Glawarie	Bongiwe Madlala (10, 13, 14, 19, 21 June 2009) Goitsewang Lehobye (12, 17, 20 June 2009)
Count Danilo	Dikgang Mantoro
Baron Mirko Zeta	Sello Sebotsane
Valencienne	Tanya Tait (10, 14, 17, 20 June 2009) Louette Johnston (12, 13, 19, 21 June 2009)
Camille de Rossilon	Matthew Overmeyer
Njegus	Malcolm Terrey
Cascada	Itumeleng Tladi
Rauoul de St Brioche	Rheinaldt Moagi
Pritschitsch	Linda Zitha
Praskowia	Loveline Madumo
Bogdanovitsche	Thabang Senekal
Sylviane	Nonhlanhla Yende
Kromow	Obakeng Molepe
Olga	Lizeka Gceba

During the World Soccer Cup in 2010, hosted by South Africa, the BTE performed an Edwardian soir ee for Continental International in order to ensure further sponsorship. However, two opera vignettes, namely *Norma* by Bellini and *Orfeo ed Euridice* by Gluck, were sponsored by the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF) and staged in a simplistic manner. Manager Arnold Cloete and newly-appointed director Marcus Desando directed the vignettes and all future productions.

Table 10: *Norma* cast

OPERA VIGNETTE: NORMA	
Performance on 25 April 2010 production done in collaboration with UNISA Music Department, production sponsored by The Oppenheimer Memorial Trust and the Gauteng Provincial Government: Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation.	
Music and Dramatic Advisor	Mimi Coertse
Coach and accompanist	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel
Director	Arnold Cloete
Costume coordinator	Bronwen Lovegrove
Assistant to the director & stage manager	Thabang Senekal
Sub-title operator	Madeleen Engelbrecht
CAST	
Norma	Loveline Madumo
Adalgisa	Goitsewang Lehobye
Pollione	Tshepang Wolf
Clotilde	Caroline Nkwe
Children	Rethabile Madumo Ofentse Thaba

Table 11: *Orfeo ed Euridice* cast

OPERA VIGNETTE: ORFEO ED EURIDICE	
Performance on 15 August 2010 production performed at the Brooklyn Theatre. Production sponsored by The Oppenheimer Memorial Trust and the National Arts Council.	
Director	Marcus Desando
Piano & harpsichord	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel Willem Luitingh
Flute	Melissa Hall
Costume coordinators	Bronwen Lovegrove Louisa Raditla
Chorus master	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel
Assistant to the director & stage manager	Thabang Senekal
Surtile operator	Madeleen Engelbrecht
CAST	
Orfeo (Orpheus)	Jonathan Watkins
Euridice (Eurydice)	Bongiwe Madlala
Amore (God of Love)	Louette Johnston
Chorus	Black Tie Ensemble Chorus

In 2011 one vignette, *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Donizetti and two one-act operas, namely *Susanna's Secret* by Wolf-Ferrari and *Amahl and the Night Visitors* by Menotti with guest soprano Antoinette Olivier, were performed at the Brooklyn Theatre. These productions were followed by the last full productions of *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Mascagni and *Gianni Schicchi* by Puccini. Two international artists, conductor Phillip Pointner and the Russian tenor, George Oniani, were contracted for these productions. All productions performed during 2011 were sponsored by NLDTF.

Table 12: *Susanna's Secret* cast

OPERA: SUSANNA'S SECRET	
Performances on 26 & 27 March 2011 production performed at the Brooklyn Theatre. Production sponsored by The National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF).	
Director	Marcus Desando
Repetitor	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel Willem Luitingh
Costume coordinator	Bronwen Lovegrove
Set Designer	Arnold Cloete
Stage Manager	Itumeleng Tladi
CAST	
Contessa Susanna	Caroline Nkwe
Count Gil	Thabang Senekal
Sante (A Butler)	Elias Moss

Table 13: *Amahl and the Night Visitors* cast

OPERA: AMAHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS	
Performances on 30 & 31 July production performed at the Brooklyn Theatre. Production sponsored by The National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF).	
Director	Marcus Desando
Repetitor	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel Willem Luitingh
Flute	Melissa Hall
Costume coordinators	Bronwen Lovegrove Louisa Raditla
LX designer	Sven von Wildenrath
Set designer	Marcus Desando
Costume & set hire	The South African State Theatre
Stage manager	Itumeleng Tladi
Chorus master	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel
CAST	
Amahl	Damien Von Staden/Archie Rhode
Mother	Antoinette Olivier
King Kaspar	Lazarus Molepolle
King Melchior	Elias Moss
King Blathazar	Mziyanda Zitha
The Page	Kagiso Boroko
Shepherds, villagers & dancers	The Black Tie Opera Chorus

Table 14: *Lucia di Lammermoor* cast (Brooklyn Theatre)

OPERA: LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR	
Performances on 27 & 28 August production performed at the Brooklyn Theatre. Production sponsored by The National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF).	
Director	Marcus Desando
Conductor	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel
Repetitors	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel Willem Luitingh
Costume coordinators	Bronwen Lovegrove Louisa Raditla
LX designer	Sven von Wildenrath
Set designer	Arnold cloete
Costume & set hire	The South African State Theatre
Stage manager	Itumeleng Tladi
Chorus master	Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel
CAST	
Lucia Ashton	Caroline Modiba
Lord Enrico Ashton	Thabang Senekal
Sir Edgardo di Ravenswood	Tshepang Wolf
Lord Arturo Bucklaw	Bongani Makhanya
Raimondo Bidebent	Mziyanda Zitha
Alisa (Lucia's companion)	Kathy Neuland
Normanno (a retainer of Enrico)	Kagiso Boroko
Wedding guests	The Black Tie Opera Chorus

Table 15: *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Gianni Schicchi* cast

OPERA: CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA GIANNI SCHICCHI Production Performed at the South African State Theatre, Drama Theatre: 28&30 September; 2,14 & 16 October 2011 Production sponsored by The National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF).	
Conductor Director Lighting designer Set designer Repetitors Costume designer of <i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i> Costume designer of <i>Gianni Schicchi</i>	Phillip Pointner Marcus Desando Faheem Bardien Nadine van Aswegen Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel Willem Luitingh Bruno Santini Arnold Cloete Marcus Desando
Costume coordinator Technical coordinator Stage manager Orchestra Leader Chorus Chorus master	Bronwen Lovegrove Vanessa Nicolau Leigh-Anne Nanguia The Black Tie Orchestra Leonie Greyling The Black Tie Opera Chorus Susan Steenkamp-Swanepoel
CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA CAST	
Santuzza Turiddu Alfio Mamma Lucia Lola	Loveline Madumo George Oniani Linda Zitha Carina Krüger Kathy Neuland
GIANNI SCHICCHI CAST	
Buoso Donati Gianni Schicchi Lauretta Zita Rinuccio Gherardo Nella Gherardino Betto di Signa Simone Marco La Ciesca Maestro Spinelloccio Ser Amantio di Nicolao Pinellino Guccio	Henry Fondo Thabang Senekal Caroline Nkwe Caroline Modiba Fikile Mthetwa Tshepang Wolf Bongani Makhanya Nomsa Mbatha Donovan Linde Martin Mkhize Ebenezer Sawuli Mziyanda Zitha Elias Moss Kathy Neuland Lesego Moatshe Dikgang Mantoro Kagiso Boroko Henry Fondo

4.5 Change

Although the BTE received sponsorship from the DAC in 2006 and the Lottery in 2010 they were already in debt from previous years' productions and keeping the company running. Funding from the DAC came later than anticipated and left a R900, 000 deficit that left the company unpaid and in dire need of other sources to be implemented for a loan (Cloete, 2013). The DAC funding for the Incubator development scheme was supposed to be R600, 000 followed by R750, 000 and R850, 000 in the three-year span until 2009. However, BTE did not receive the R850, 000. Serious problems arose in 2009 at the time of the production of *The Merry Widow* by Lehár. Funding from the Royal Bafokeng that was meant for the Incubator scheme had to be used for the production. Fortunato Mazzone also mentions his contribution towards the financial situation of the BTE.

In his interview he mentions that he assisted BTE, by taking a private loan of R80, 000 00 on his house (Mazzone, 2013) together with Dawie Chamberlain. When Chamberlain was to be re-paid after a year, he tore up the check. Mazzone (2013) recalls the incident:

And Dawie Chamberlain also donated. He didn't donate, he loaned, because there was some money that was coming in that was owed to the BTE from, ag, one of the big corporate sponsorships for an opera and so we were promised that the money would come in after three months, so it was gonna be a short-term loan. Of course, as it turned out, it took more than a year for that money to come back. Now these were all interest-free loans. I got my money back and unfortunately, you know, I actually needed the money, I put it back into my bond. But when I took the cheque back to Dawie Chamberlain, he tore it up and I thought that was amazing, you know. But the moment the economic crisis came, it actually became a real problem trying to find adopters and certainly the corporate support dried up completely.

In 2010 the BTE received a large funding of R5 million from the NLDTF who had set strict guidelines for how the funding should be used. When the first half of the grant was paid, requirements from the NLDTF had been met in terms of development and outreach work as well as concerts and community performances. When plans for the full opera production were implemented, the second phase of payment was not delivered. The last funding was paid out two months later, after the production had been completed and problems were resolved with huge difficulty. Cloete (2013) is of the opinion that the Lottery is the only institution that has the means of funding opera in South Africa and that planning should be better and states:

I will say it is a good thing, because there's no other institution that can fund a company as well as the Lottery. It is a bit of a problem; you must plan

better; sometimes you must rather stop a project and wait to get the money and then carry on and not just push through and hope.

Further demands for financial support led the BTE to broaden their horizons and extend their repertoire more to include other musical genres. Further demands from corporate sponsors led the BTE to take one of their biggest decisions. Times were changing and, due to entertainment at corporate functions and a younger generation of audiences, the demand for “lighter” programmes had to be considered (Cloete, 2013). Thus the opera genre had to be combined with repertoire from musical theatre and popular music. Eventually audiences preferred not to hear opera at corporate functions anymore and it became increasingly difficult to sustain the BTE artists.

With the economy changing and the big crashes that happened we just couldn't find any funding. It became really problematic to find enough money to sustain the strict “opera-ness” (Cloete, 2013).

Adding to Cloete's statement, soloist Teresa de Wit (2014) mentions that “[I] left when the opportunities got too few for me to make a proper living”. This situation created different demands of the classical trained opera singer and, in 2011 the management of the BTE realized that – for the future existence of the company – changes had to be implemented. Mimi Coertse, whose vision still was to further opera, retired from the BTE at the end of 2011. Hansen (2013) explains that

[t]he BTE, like so many other projects started off with a new start for South Africa. All those projects eventually after ten, twelve years later, started to sag and disappear. The BTE is not the only project. I think we must see it in the light of the whole situation in the country. I don't think we achieved what we set out to achieve, because in my mind (and I'm sure in Mimi's mind) we could see real professional opera on stage and hell; we couldn't afford that in a way. I was very grateful we could at that level, the operas that we did, because there was nothing else. I mean, the DAC did make a contribution to the Incubator scheme, but it was not enough to get opera going again.

In response to the changing times at the BTE, Thys Odendaal (2014), critic at *Beeld* newspaper, adds that

[w]ho knows what the future holds? Still, there are many opera students and young hopefuls all over, still studying and trying to make a living, but the future for them looks bleak and grim in the richest province in the country.

In 2012, the BTE changed their name to BTE VOICE (Black Tie Ensemble Vocal Opera One Stop Shop) in order to allow for a more diverse company, featuring two groups of singing, namely a classical singing group and a lighter musical group – enabling them to

still nourish opera while accommodating the demand for other styles. Cloete (2013) justifies the decision by stating that the output is not that important, it is what you put in and give back to South Africans.

I think that the achievement is that it brought a lot of joy to audience members to see the development on stage and see where we are going with this Rainbow Nation. We build an enormous amount of bridges – bridges that are still there (Hansen, 2013).

In context of the Black Ties: yes I think that on an artistic operatic level we came very close to the hopes of 1994. I think for me the BTE was something unique that this country had never seen and I don't think they will ever see it again (Hansen, 2013).

As the investigation about the history of the BTE progressed, it became clear that its origins, the sponsorships they received, as well as their training and development programs, were themes that strongly emerged.

4.6 Summary

During the exploration of the events of BTE in this chapter, I specifically concentrated on staged opera productions because that is what BTE set out to be ... an opera company. However, it is to be noted that they also performed many concerts all over South Africa and internationally in countries such as China, Austria, Nigeria and Zambia - too many concerts to be mentioned as not all were sufficiently documented. Some of these performances were attended by state dignitaries such as Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Kofi Annan and HRH Prince Edward. BTE performed extensively in formal concert halls and theatres, including at informal occasions in venues at conference centres and open-air venues. During some of these performances their repertoire was challenged and extended to the specifics of the occasion. They endeavoured to maintain a high standard of performance which allowed for the Incubator development students to join in at most performances.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 The BTE and opera in South Africa

In Chapter 1, I stated the purpose of this research study as to explore the contributions to opera in South Africa by the BTE. Having collected and analysed data by means of a systematic literature review, as well as by conducting informal interviews with the role-players in BTE and studying the case records (articles from newspapers and magazines and electronic interviews), the following contributions became evident in terms of answering the research questions.

The BTE established a platform for singers to learn about a professional career whilst being paid nominally for their performances. Because of the professional approach that the BTE adopted, they succeeded in maintaining the highest standards and some singers who began their performing with the BTE expanded their careers to other companies in South Africa and internationally. The stable funding of the *Adopt an Artist* scheme ensured further development of such young artists, therefore creating more awareness for the need of stable sponsorship from corporate, private and government sponsors.

The Incubator Scheme has specifically been noted as having led to a significant contribution to the development of young singers within the opera genre. Through this scheme a musical education towards a professional career in singing was provided without financial implications for the singer. Singers from disadvantaged communities were also equipped to give back to their communities eventually, as they were able to utilize their musical literacy skills acquired in this development program. Some of the singers are applying these skills through teaching music and singing and assisting in choral training in their local communities.

Furthermore, through outreach programmes that the BTE conducted, awareness of the opera genre and in a professional music environment was created in broader communities. These included various performances during school tours and performances in recreation centres such as open-air venues. Ultimately the BTE demonstrated the highest level of competence of these young singers in their productions, concerts and outreach programmes.

The main research question to this dissertation is:

WHAT CONTRIBUTION HAS THE BLACK TIE ENSEMBLE MADE TO OPERA IN SOUTH AFRICA?

Through themes and patterns that crystallized in Chapter 4 it has become evident that through outreach, development, performances and job creation, the BTE made an impact toward contributing to the opera genre in South Africa in its eventful existence of twelve years. This is evident through the sub-questions:

- through the foundation of a past opera history in this country the *origins of BTE* was established; and
- the company *developed* through their training programmes.

5.2 Suggestions for further studies

The initial purpose for this study was to explore the contribution to opera by the BTE. However, through the research process certain matters regarding this exploration were highlighted as factors that cannot be denied as having been obstacles in the management of the BTE. It is very clear that funding and sponsorship play a major role in the development of young singers and an aspiring opera company. It is imperative that public awareness of this genre should help sustain the future of opera by means of funding through corporate sponsorship. A brief historical view of opera in South Africa shows that the lack of funding has always been an issue. The high costs involved in staging opera have always been a threat to this genre. Government and private sponsors can contribute towards establishing opera companies in South Africa where the emphasis is on training and development of young singers and educating audiences. Only then can singers really get exposure and give back to the public instead of leaving the country. A lack of sustainable funding means that the growth of an opera company is hampered and therefore cannot ensure the visions as set out to create employment.

Another suggestion would be to research the career development of singers who developed into professional artists locally and internationally through the BTE and to determine what contribution they might offer in the future to aspiring singers in South Africa. Young singers in South Africa are constantly looking for role models in opera and are starting to look up to the newer generation of South African singers such as Pretty Yende, Elza van den Heever, Vuyani Mlindi, Johan Botha, who have been fortunate to

pursue international careers. As in the past, many South African singers such as Sidwell Hartman, Bongani Thembe and Lionel Mkwanazi returned eventually to South Africa and made an impact in the development and training of the new generation of singers. Whilst these singers admittedly were not involved with the BTE as performing artists, it is hoped that in the future, singers previously from the BTE and who are at present building their careers internationally, would return to South Africa and contribute towards the opera training of local young singers.

5.3 Conclusion

Neels Hansen is known to quote the libretto of the musical *Camelot* (Lerner, 1960): “Don’t let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment known as Camelot”. The intention of this quote is to allude that the BTE was as ideal a phenomenon as Camelot was perceived to be an ideal place. However, just like Camelot, the BTE was temporary and inevitably transient.

Through continuous research into the well-being of developing singers and all musicians one could create awareness at all levels of society, from the private to the government sectors, for providing stable jobs within the performing arts, especially music. There are a number of empty theatres in South Africa that, with the necessary sponsorship and awareness from all sectors of the society, could be utilized. These sponsorships should also involve job creation. The BTE tried in their mission to train and give exposure to young singers; training and exposure which in the long run could ensure sustainability and longevity to the opera genre in South Africa. However, a lack of sustainable funding meant that the growth of the company was severely hampered and could not sustain the vision of creating employment for the singers whom they trained.

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ADDENDUM A: LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWERS



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Contact details of study leader

Prof HM Potgieter
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Cell: 082 877 1866

Researcher Antoinette Olivier

Student no 24307017

Cell 082 478 2163

Title of study: **Exploring contributions to opera by The Black Tie Ensemble: a historical case study**

Dear.....

You are invited to participate in a research project aimed at investigating the history and development of The Black Tie Ensemble. I hereby ask for your kind permission to conduct an interview in which your responses to questions relevant to the topic of the study can be recorded. You may decide to withdraw at any stage should you wish not to continue with the interview.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign this letter as a declaration of your consent.

I,....., give permission that my responses to the interview may be used for the purpose of research in music education. I am fully aware of the nature of the study. I may withdraw at any time and my participation is voluntary. I understand this research is for the development of music in South Africa.

Participant:.....Date:.....

Researcher:.....Date:.....

ADDENDUM B: DVD

The inserted DVD contains a collage of selected music and promotional news clips (1999-2011) relating to various performances and outreach programmes of the BTE as well as the Incubator development scheme. Furthermore it includes selected interviews with the founders and members of the BTE.