

**Genre, Narration, and Meditation in *The Death of Klinghoffer***

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## ABSTRACT

*The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991), which has been equally criticized as “trivial trash” and a “sad solace of truth,” is an intricate work that chronicles the events of the 1985 hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* cruise ship. However, because of untraditional dramaturgical choices made by the co-creators John Adams, Alice Goodman, and Peter Sellars, the story has been largely interpreted out of historical context and therefore heavily denounced since its premiere. This study is an attempt to recontextualize *Klinghoffer*, and to consider it within the historical and stylistic traditions with which it engages. Instead of the traditional operatic narrative, this opera employs multiple layers of narration to convey the plot, where aria-driven mimetic drama is juxtaposed with allegorical choruses and retrospective accounts of the hijacking. This model nods more to the oratorio and Passion tradition than to a traditional opera, which elevates the events to a higher place, one in which meditation, reflection, and remembrance can flourish. *Klinghoffer*'s genre-blurring quality is achieved and permissible through its unique position within the postmodern era, in which self-reference and historical acknowledgment are key. The resulting disjunction, evident in the narrative layers, genre juxtaposition, and musical language, is dramatically appropriate to the work, as it reflects the overall chaos and confusion of both the events and the turbulent history to which it belongs. Through the musical and generic historical references, and in the relevance and urgency of the subject matter, *Klinghoffer* interacts with the past while calling for action and meditation in the present, pointing to an uncertain and ever-changeable future.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
LOOKING BACK: ADAMS' PATH TO OPERA	4
LOOKING WITHIN: CHARACTER CREATION & NARRATIVE LAYERING IN <i>KLINGHOFFER</i>	9
LOOKING DEEPER: ALICE GOODMAN'S LIBRETTO	20
GENRE: EXPECTATIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS	28
THE PASSION ACCORDING TO JOHN ADAMS	32
CHAOTIC REFLECTION AND THE POSTMODERN OPERA	46
EVENHANDED ORIENTALISM	54
OPERA ON STAGE AND SCREEN: PETER SELLARS VS. PENNY WOOLCOCK	75
<i>KLINGHOFFER</i> AS MEDITATION	79
APPENDIX A: SYNOPSIS OF <i>THE DEATH OF KLINGHOFFER</i>	82
APPENDIX B: CONSTRUCTION OF SCENES	84
APPENDIX C: OPENING CHORUSES	85
BIBLIOGRAPHY	87

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## GENRE, NARRATION, AND MEDITATION IN *THE DEATH OF KLINGHOFFER*

A “meditation,” “trivial trash,” a “sad solace of truth,” and “an exploitation”: *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991) has provoked strong denunciations and commendations in the short time since its premiere.<sup>1</sup> John Adams, together with librettist Alice Goodman and stage director Peter Sellars, delved into a fraught political arena with their choice of subject matter for their second collaborative opera. Based on the 1985 hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* cruise ship by four members of the Palestine Liberation Front, the title of the work refers to the hijacking’s single victim, a 69-year-old wheelchair-bound Jewish-American passenger named Leon Klinghoffer.<sup>2</sup>

*Klinghoffer* has enjoyed inordinate attention from the media because of its controversial topic – most recently, the Metropolitan Opera’s production of the work in the autumn of 2014 incited protests and scathing accusations of anti-Semitism from many Jewish Americans and pro-Israeli groups such as the Anti-Defamation League. This response to the opera largely neglects to address the foundation of *Klinghoffer*’s identity as an artistic work, problematizing and denouncing bits and pieces of the libretto’s language instead of focusing on the monumental feat of musical and dramatic synthesis that the work represents. This following analysis of *The Death of Klinghoffer* is an attempt to refocus the lens and redirect discussion towards its dramatic and musical identity – not to take the work out of its necessary sociopolitical and religious context,

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<sup>1</sup> Quotes from Tom Sutcliffe, *Believing in Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 205; Elena Park, “John Adams Speaks Out About Art in a Time of War,” *Andante*, Nov. 2001; Anthony Tommasini, “John Adams, Banned in Boston,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2001; Lisa and Ilsa Klinghoffer, “*The Death of Klinghoffer* an injustice to our father’s memory,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 19, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> For a full synopsis of *The Death of Klinghoffer*, see Appendix A.

but to view it as working within the geopolitical framework as an artistic opportunity for reflection.

Dramatically and musically, *Klinghoffer* stems from many historical and stylistic traditions, and attention to historical context is crucial to fully exploring the collective qualities of the work. The first consideration presented will be the creators' backgrounds and philosophies, as an understanding of their artistic development and identities will aid in examining the work as a whole. As we will see, John Adams' musical development and his compositional fingerprint are pivotal to understanding the work's construction, as is Alice Goodman's mysterious and obscure poetry, which is woven into the mimetic action and commentary of the work. The dramaturgical choices made by the creative team furthers *Klinghoffer's* complexity, as the story is delivered in such a way that refuses to cheapen the true events with the frivolity and entertainment of a storytelling narrative typical of historical opera. Instead, the narration is split into several different layers, so that the characters in the drama exist on one mimetic plane, while retrospective monologues and allegorical choruses comprise two alternate narrative spaces. Nods to genres outside the operatic context serve to elevate the events to a higher place, one in which meditation, reflection, and remembrance can flourish.

The intricate and multi-faceted generic identity of *Klinghoffer* is at the heart of this study, as the work has never fallen comfortably within the framework of opera, or how audiences typically conceive of it. Though *Klinghoffer* retains operatic characteristics such as the grand-scale staged performance, continuous singing, a discernable linear plot, and orchestral accompaniment, its similarities to the operatic genre do not extend much further. Instead, the work is served better by conceiving of it as

a composite of several other genres as well as opera, including Handelian oratorio and the Passions as standardized by J. S. Bach. The genre-focused analysis included this study is not to determine an ultimate generic identity of *Klinghoffer*, but rather to acknowledge the extent of its historical influences and provide possible interpretations for the creative team's choices.

That this work defies simple classification within the usual musical generic framework blurs the audience expectations for its identity as an artistic work. Though many audience members and reviewers question *Klinghoffer*'s merits as a "good opera" due to its references to other genres and the confusion of traditional linear narration, the work's unique position within the postmodern era allows for these historical references and plays on tradition. Works of the postmodern aesthetic tend to experiment with temporality and history within a framework of light-hearted pastiche. Though *Klinghoffer*'s ultimate intent transcends the satirical nature of postmodernism, the work is easily interpreted as "postmodern" through an analysis of the work's internal incongruity and historical reference. The disjunction evident in the inner workings of the opera – apparent even in the musical language and narrative devices, along with its genre juxtaposition – is dramatically appropriate to the work's subject, as it reflects the overall chaos and confusion of both the events and the turbulent history to which it belongs. In the musical historical references, and in the relevance of subject matter inherent in the plot, the work interacts with the past while calling for action and meditation in the present, pointing to an uncertain and ever-changeable future.

## Looking Back: Adams' Path to Opera

Any discussion of Klinghoffer must begin with John Adams' compositional personality so as to provide a framework through which we can identify the relative inventiveness or normalcy of his second opera. Adams, generally regarded as one of the most famous living American composers of the "classical" tradition, speaks in a musical language that expands through genres and seeps through stylistic boundaries. Influenced equally in childhood by Mozart, Benny Goodman, Sibelius, and Duke Ellington, Adams' beginnings saw him performing clarinet with the village orchestra, conducting, and already composing small works (witness his *Suite for String Orchestra*, premiered when he was thirteen)<sup>3</sup>. His Harvard undergraduate education in the late 1960s impressed upon him the strict dichotomy of a John Cage or Pierre Boulez school of composition. Adams, though not fully secure with either school of thought, tended towards Cage, drawn by his "New Age humanism" and "genuinely American and utterly original" compositional identity.<sup>4</sup> Adams' awareness of music occurring in the "vernacular" vein (i.e., contemporary pop, rock, jazz, etc.), which he cites as pivotal to the creation of his young musical identity, was a large factor in his taking the Cageian route. According to Adams, Boulez and other European serialists demonstrated an "absolute deafness to popular music," the same music that he views as a "wellspring" of genuine inspiration.<sup>5</sup>

Following his oft-romanticized move west to the San Francisco Bay area in 1971, Adams found himself increasingly disenchanted with his Cage-influenced philosophy,

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<sup>3</sup> Alex Ross, "The Harmonist," in *The John Adams Reader*, ed. Thomas May, (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006), 34.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas May, "John Adams Reflects on his Career," in *The John Adams Reader*, ed. Thomas May, (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006), 9-10, 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

realizing his need for the emotional expressivity that Cage's music inherently denies.<sup>6</sup> He found glimmers of this expressive nature in the musical language of minimalism, and retrospectively notes the precision and "enchanted" nature of Steve Reich's *Drumming* (1974 performance).<sup>7</sup> Adams' incessant rhythmic pulsations, now an essential fingerprint to his works, draws from minimalism; the style of Reich and Glass is seen as one of the largest stylistic influences on Adams' musical career. However, the mechanical repetition and overly discernable structures in minimalist compositions were unsettling to Adams, and his denial of these offending elements is evident in much of his mature work.<sup>8</sup>

The beginning of Adams' mature output is generally pinpointed with his 1977 composition *Phrygian Gates*, a distinctly minimalist piece, characterized by the dearth of events, pattern repetition, and hypnotic quality found in many pieces by Reich and Glass. *Phrygian Gates* and several subsequent pieces propelled Adams to be labeled a strictly minimalist composer, or a sort of next generation of such, by many active music critics of the late 1970s and 1980.<sup>9</sup> Yet from the start, Adams' output sought a language whose capabilities expanded beyond procedure, and through which drama and expressivity could flourish. The "weird bondage to the old baroque doctrine of the affections" of minimalism, in which only one emotion can preside in a single musical composition, ran counter to Adams' compositional intent.<sup>10</sup> His discomfort with the minimalistic obsession with gradual progression and process can actually be heard through *Phrygian Gates* and its companion *China Gates* (1977), wherein extended sections of characteristically

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 13-14

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 14. These critiques were specifically directed at Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*, which, Adams notes, "disturbed me."

<sup>9</sup> See Michael Walsh's feature of "The Minimalists" in *Time Magazine*, 1983, in which Adams was featured alongside Reich, Glass, and Terry Riley.

<sup>10</sup> May, "John Adams Reflects," 22.

minimal music in a certain tonal/modal area (e.g., Lydian) shifts rapidly into another (Phrygian), in an allusion to the immediate shift of an electronic switch circuit (“gate”). Though quite an early pair of compositions, shadows of Adams’ style are made quite clear through these two works – an insistence on rhythmic pulsation and a propensity for immediate shifts in affect.

These two musical attributes are the foundation for his first opera, *Nixon in China*, premiered in 1987 at the Houston Grand Opera, with libretto and direction by the same creative figures as *The Death of Klinghoffer*. *Nixon*, given its historical position as the piece written immediately prior to *Klinghoffer*, provides an interesting lens through which one can view Adams’ evolving musical language. The work dramatizes Richard Nixon’s trip to China in 1972 and is commonly classified as a “minimalist opera” in the vein of Glass’s Portrait Trilogy. The enormity of the subject matter, in itself a huge source of global tension and paired with the controversial characters within the plot (painted as neither all-good nor all-evil, heroic or villainous, but simply American and Chinese, human and flawed), lends itself well to the unlikely language of Reich and Glass. The minimal aesthetic employed throughout *Nixon* works to create a vast and vaguely ungrounded atmosphere, which correlates well to the enormity of the Nixon narrative and the larger-than-life quality of its characters. Minimalism has the ability to create calm or agitation equally through its repetition and sense of pulse, and the dichotomy between those two affects is pivotal within this work – either the characters are attempting to create one or alleviate the other. At the center of *Nixon* is the expression of the divide between what the media sees (or, as it were, what the media is allowed to see), and the situation in its actuality. This may be interpreted as another mirror of the

minimalist calm/agitated spectrum; that is, that events communicated and sensationalized through the media tend to be misinterpreted as one or the other.

Adams' minimalist language can be heard immediately from the initial chorus, as a crowd of Chinese military forces, together with Premier Chou En-lai, await the landing of Nixon's presidential aircraft. A soft and hypnotic rising A-minor scale in the strings seems to embody specifically what Adams is referring to with his oft-quoted quip regarding "those Great Prairies of non-event" of minimalism.<sup>11</sup> Constant rhythmic pulsation and a gradual thickening of texture defines this introduction, as Adams adds punctuated countermelodies, a slow climbing woodwind line, and increased activity in the bass. The chorus ("Soldiers of heaven hold the sky") follows many of the same tenets of Glass's minimalist operas, with all members singing in unison to begin, then breaking into homorhythmic harmony, generally moving in parallel motion, throughout which the rising A-minor scalar ostinato continues.

Throughout first section of the opening chorus, the vocal lines are generally unmelodic, settling on a reciting pitch rather than delivering a lyrical phrase. This syllabic and inexpressive setting functions dramatically to reflect the text, which is, disconcertingly, a series of sayings from Mao Zedong's Little Red Book. As such, the minimalist style creates a symbolic reading of the entire situation: an unsettlingly normal yet agitated calm before the storm of revolution, which suddenly rebels via a long-awaited shift in instrumentation. The "gate" between the two parts is abrupt, the familiar A minor scale leading immediately into a pointillistic rhythmic pattern in the high winds. The chorus setting, which has gradually evolved into consonant yet austere harmonies

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Bernard, "Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality in Recent American Music," *American Music* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 117.

throughout the opening section, now devolves back into unison recitation, unsettlingly rhythmic and off-beat in juxtaposition. In typically Adamsian fashion, this shift corresponds excellently with the dramatic intent of Goodman's (and Mao's) text, evoking the undercurrent of mantra-like intensity behind the subjective words "The people are the heroes now," in stark contrast to the previous line from Mao's book, banal in its normality ("Roll up straw matting after use").

While the use of quick shifts in affect for emotional and text expression are evident in *Nixon* and continue to be a largely characteristic feature of Adams' vocabulary, oftentimes the musical language used has a higher and more global purpose; witness Nixon's Act I Aria "News, News, News, News," which speaks to the immensity and importance of the momentous handshake between he and Chou En-lai. As in the opening chorus, Adams includes a minimally textured orchestral sound as background to Nixon's extended monologue; the composer himself has likened the orchestra in this moment to something of a ukulele sound, strumming as accompaniment to a more prominent vocal line superimposed above it.<sup>12</sup> The text of this aria is presented in fragments and offset rhythmic shifts, repeated at length and, notably, not quite sensibly (see the opening word, "News!," repeated twelve times before continuing on to "has a," repeated four times itself before completing the entire phrase, "News has a kind of mystery").

Repetition, as seen here in the text, is in itself a minimalistic technique, however jarring it is to hear in an operatic context; the effect is more of a stutter rather than a repetitive minimalist cell. This choice of musical language lends an interesting gloss on Nixon as Adams perceives him as a character. It is unclear whether he should be

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<sup>12</sup> John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction* (New York: Picador, 2009), 144.

perceived as an over-excited sensationalizing politician whose intent is to draw out every press-worthy moment, or as an over-thinking, rational, and meditative figure. However the aria is interpreted (Adams has stated that Nixon should be produced with enormous subtlety, lest the too-familiar characters become cartoons), the musical language is firmly within the minimalist style, underscored by the overtly tonal and triadic score. Adams has gone so far as to describe his language and orchestration in *Nixon* as “Technicolor... perhaps inspired by the primary colors of our American political campaigns,” and cites Glass’s *Satyagraha* as a direct influence on certain parts of the score.<sup>13</sup>

### **Looking Within: Character Creation & Narrative Layering in *Klinghoffer***

Adams regards the musical language of *The Death of Klinghoffer* as “the dividing line, the watershed” in his musical output, in which his works became “less monolithic, [and] ultimately more melodic.”<sup>14</sup> His minimalistic style shifts towards what has been deemed the “post-minimalist” tradition – that which clearly carries the influence and ideals of minimalism, but does not subscribe to the same musical characteristics (examples of this include *Klinghoffer* and much of the remainder of Adams’ output of the 1990s to present).<sup>15</sup> The shift from his original minimalist opera to a “post-minimal” work such as *Klinghoffer*, while some may describe it as a maturation of sorts, appears to be intentional and expertly tailored to the emotional and narrative content of each libretto, as if the themes and text inherently demanded such a musical sound.

Additionally, Adams has noted that *The Death of Klinghoffer* began “a period of harmonic and contrapuntal experimentation” in his compositional career, and the time

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 141, 144.

<sup>14</sup> John Adams, Rebecca Jemain, and Anne Marie de Zeeuw, “An Interview with John Adams,” *Perspectives of New Music* 34, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 89.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard, “Minimalism,” 113.

between *Nixon* and *Klinghoffer* is generally seen as transitional, as Adams took time to scrutinize and reassess his style and techniques.<sup>16</sup> The result of this development is largely evident in multiple ways, not least of which is Adams' treatment of, and the interaction between, his vocal melodies and the role of the orchestra. As a professed orchestral composer, Adams' first foray into opera found him crafting "vocal writing [that] could strain the limits of even the most talented singer," and often his sung melodies are permitted to soar above the orchestra, creating a strict stratification (see the allusion to ukulele strumming in "News, News, News," above).<sup>17</sup> Premonitions of *Klinghoffer* counterpoint can be heard towards the end of *Nixon*, where, as Adams has stated in interview, "the instruments somehow emerge out of the orchestra and deign to develop their own personality.[...] There is much more complicated counterpoint in the last scene, and this is the jumping off point for the next opera."<sup>18</sup>

It should be briefly noted that one of the greatest attributes of Adams' vocal music in *Klinghoffer* lies in the meticulous detail of rhythm in regards to text expression. His settings compel the characters to suddenly get lost in thought, take a moment to conjure their next word, and follow syllabic stress and quickness of syntactically unimportant words.<sup>19</sup> This is an especially surprising interaction with the libretto given Adams' setting of *Nixon in China*, where the minimalistic tendencies of Nixon's declamation that "News has a kind of mystery" renders the text all but hidden and hindered by its subservient

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<sup>16</sup> "John Adams on Slonimsky's Earbox," last modified 2015, accessed April 3, 2015, <http://www.earbox.com/slونimsky-s-earbox/>; Alexander Sanchez-Behar, "Counterpoint and Polyphony in Recent Instrumental Works of John Adams," (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2008), 1.

<sup>17</sup> John Adams with Andrew Porter, "*Nixon in China*: John Adams in Conversation," *Tempo* 167 (Dec. 1988): 29; Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 142.

<sup>18</sup> Adams with Porter, "*Nixon*," 28.

<sup>19</sup> Adams and Penny Woolcock discuss this detail-oriented text setting in the additional material available on the DVD of the 2003 rendering of *The Death of Klinghoffer*. Adams notes that the singers, though initially uncomfortable with the rhythmic precision needed for accurate delivering of the text, came to appreciate Adams' intention of mimicking more natural speech.

function to the music. However, no longer confined to the two-dimensional “Technicolor” music and characters of *Nixon*, Adams’ focus on rhythmic vocal writing to mimic speech serves to humanize the characters of *Klinghoffer*. Perhaps this may be a reaction to the often cryptic and esoteric tendencies of Goodman’s text, which benefits from a more humanistic rendering of characters through subtle shifts of harmony and rhythm.

To mirror his nuanced and extremely character-tailored text-setting, Adams’ musical construction of *Klinghoffer* relies much more heavily on choice instrumentation and assigning melodic and affective qualities to the orchestration, which adds another layer of musical interplay for particular characters. Perhaps most obvious is the usage of obbligato melodic lines, which is so prominent that it sparked Michael Steinberg, in his liner notes of to the work’s recording, to label the Captain’s initial aria (“It was just after 1:15”) as “really a duet, chiefly for voice and oboe.”<sup>20</sup> In this selection, the Captain and the oboe intertwine each other in an intensely Bachian manner, a nod to the overt Passion-like construction of the work as a whole, to be discussed below. The oboe comes to the forefront in the Captain’s silence, and lessens in rhythmic and melodic complexity when he continues. The similarities between their melodic contours almost give the impression that the oboe is a continuation of character, a manifestation of psyche (Ex. 1). Obbligato instruments are inserted throughout the score, often to enhance a character in a similar way – the Swiss Grandmother embodied by fluttering, unsettled flutes, for example, or Mamoud’s brooding bassoon arabesques.

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Steinberg, “*The Death of Klinghoffer* (1990-91),” in *The John Adams Reader*, ed. Thomas May, (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006), 132.

The Captain's initial aria is accompanied not only by the obbligato oboe, but an incessant arpeggiation in the strings, so subdued in dynamic and timbre to almost be

The musical score is divided into four systems, each representing a different section of the aria. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 69$ . The key signature is one sharp (F#).

- System 1 (Measures 1-6):** The voice part (CAPTAIN) begins with the lyrics "It was just af-ter one fif-teen; I was a-wake,". The piano accompaniment features a constant arpeggiated pattern in the right hand and sustained chords in the left hand. A synth part is also present in the upper register.
- System 2 (Measures 7-12):** The voice part continues with "but ly-ing down— as I had spent a sleep-less night be-fore we docked that". The piano accompaniment continues with the arpeggiated texture.
- System 3 (Measures 13-17):** The voice part has a short rest, followed by "Thought, the". An obbligato oboe part enters in measure 13, playing a melodic line. The piano accompaniment continues.
- System 4 (Measures 18-22):** The voice part resumes with "sail-or's con-so-la-tion, is sure-ly the night's a-nal-y-sis of the im-pres-sions of the". The piano accompaniment continues with the arpeggiated texture.

At the bottom of the page, the text "VSR 188" is printed.

Ex. 1: Captain's first aria, "It was just after 1:15"; obbligato oboe and voice "duet"

imperceptible. While it would be simple to label the arpeggio as just another manifestation of Adams' classic need for rhythmic pulse, the usage of the figure echoes the characters' need for emotionality and human shape: it begins, calming and consonant, by outlining an F-sharp minor chord, but grows increasingly more dissonant and chordal as the Captain starts ruminating on the horrific events ("Good and evil are not abstract there"). "It was just after 1:15" is awash in registral and timbral variety, layering an ethereal high melody and a low, static pedal point on either side of the strings' arpeggiation. This texture is used almost exclusively to evoke the ocean (debatably in itself a character, though most immediately personified through the Captain in this opening aria).

This sonority – expansive, mysterious, and often harmonically ambiguous – expectedly returns in the Ocean chorus, which closes the first scene of Act I. As in "It was just after 1:15," a pedal point accompanies the more expressive vocal line, though here the chorus's text and setting is much less conversational, and more removed from the narrative space ("Is not the ocean itself its past?," they muse, which forces the audience into a rather jarring new space, given the Captain's text immediately preceding this chorus – "I will let you choose the sandwiches I eat," which is now completely trivialized). The rhythmic pulse intrinsic in the arpeggiation motion of the first aria, though it appears in most of the Captain's subsequent music as well and is most obviously interpreted as the ceaseless motion of the waves, is notably absent in this chorus – owing perhaps to the non-mimetic nature of the number and the choruses at large, which exist outside the narrative space.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See the quick rocking fifths in the Captain's "I have often reflected," and a more hesitant rhythmic pulse in "Mrs. Klinghoffer, please sit down,"

Creation of character became a significant and enjoyable facet of the compositional process as Adams broke into the operatic world with *Nixon*, where he asked himself, “What kind of music would best describe the psyche of Richard Nixon?”<sup>22</sup> Oftentimes, his characters manifest through genre, and it seems a similar question is being posed for each role in *Klinghoffer*, no matter how small.<sup>23</sup> Each of Adams’ characters is assigned a distinct musical personality within the mimetic and narrative space, tailored specifically to their personality and narrative function.

Adams’ method of suturing a musical style to a personality is glaringly apparent in two of his narrators, the Austrian Woman and the British Dancing Girl. The former, whose single recollection is layered throughout the latter part of the Captain’s “I have often reflected,” tells of her experience – terror-stricken and starving, she remained locked in a bathroom for the entirety of the four-day siege. It is assumed that the Austrian Woman is older from her text, “Even if one were going to die / one would avoid the company / of idiots. During the war / I felt the same,” conveying that she was both alive during the war and was old enough then to remember her own reflections at the time. As such, Adams notates for her character to act solely through *Sprechstimme*, a technique most closely associated with the Second Viennese School, a mirror of the Austrian Woman’s nationality and generation.<sup>24</sup> The effect of this stylistic choice is multifaceted; the *Sprechstimme* technique serves as a creation of character, but also further delineates

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<sup>22</sup> Adams, *Hallelujah*, 140-1. In reference to *Nixon*, and the eponymous character especially: “I found I loved creating character through my choice of harmony and rhythm.”

<sup>23</sup> Adams, *Hallelujah*, 141. “White big-band music from the Swing Era,” it appears.

<sup>24</sup> One can also read a certain amount of implied anti-Semitism into the Austrian Woman’s words (“one would avoid the company / of idiots,” i.e., the Jewish passengers on board), as wryly acknowledged by Adams in his interview with David Beverly. Note also the irony of her speaking in a musical language of Schoenberg, “a Viennese Jew whom this woman probably would have loathed.” Quote from John Adams, interview by David Beverly, “Klinghoffer and the Art of Composing,” October 25, 1995, accessed April 4, 2015, <http://www.earbox.com/klinghoffer-and-the-art-of-composing/>.

the differences between the Austrian Woman and the Captain; his music remains staunchly melodic and oceanic, even while layered with her antiquated musical narration. Their musical juxtaposition highlights their narrative disjoint as well, as layering of *Sprechstimme* and melody amplifies the inconsistent past and present tense statements of the two characters. The Austrian Woman, clearly recalling the hijacking through the use of her retrospective past tense, therefore serves as a counter to the Captain's present tense soliloquy to Mamoud, creating an increased jumbling of time, affect, and style.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the most stylistically foreign musical excerpt in Klinghoffer belongs to the British Dancing Girl, whose recollection aria is the only one of its kind in Act II. Coming immediately off of Rambo and Klinghoffer's tumultuous encounter and Klinghoffer's subsequent comforting of his wife, the music shifts from a slow halo of strings to pop-like synth chords, quick and flirtatious. Seemingly taken from the tradition of bubblegum pop, the British Dancing Girl rattles on, accompanied by flutes and synthesizers, even acquiring a catchy electric bass line, a tambourine, and female backup singers, whose entrance behind the text "An American" transforms her bold statement ("but this was war, something they failed to comprehend") into something of a pop chorus. Her vocal line, though almost consistently diatonic (indeed, triadic) within phrases, shifts dizzyingly between unrelated major keys, the first eight lines of text exploring four different tonal areas (C, A-flat, G, B-flat). The late 1960s bubblegum pop inspiration is comically obvious, her music evoking Tommy Roe's hit "Dizzy" with its

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<sup>25</sup> Adams has noted his excitement about the interplay of past/present tense that came from layering sections, specifically the Swiss Grandmother and the First Mate (see "Klinghoffer and the Art of Composing"). Here, the Captain's monologue has the effect of a recollection ("I have often reflected") while actually being firmly in the action, which lessens the intensity of the temporal disjoint.

sudden key shifts, the background synth chords in the verses of “Sugar, Sugar” by the Archies emanating from the aria’s rhythmic accompaniment.

Adams has stated, “the British Dancing Girl is very faithful to the real person. We had a taped transcript of an interview with her. You can almost hear the gum clicking as she rambles on and on,” which perhaps instigated the inspiration behind her seemingly out-of-place genre.<sup>26</sup> Despite the frivolous stylistic features of her music, she seems to be an embodiment of street-smart characters; Goodman has said that she based the text on “my very smart stepdaughter,” and Michael Steinberg’s liner notes for the Nonesuch CD recording credits the Dancing Girl on having “a good nose for the people and events around her.”<sup>27</sup> Steinberg further notes that her scene reads as a comic intermezzo, intensifying Klinghoffer and Rambo’s interaction and setting the stage for Omar’s grimly impassioned monologue that follows.

Adams’ characters, with their sung declamations and musings, are thus laden with naturalistic personality and vulnerability, satisfying the composer’s need for emotional expression in his works. Adams’ prescription of affect through *Klinghoffer* works in much the same manner as in *Nixon* or even *Phrygian Gates*, with a slow incessant build leading to a surprisingly abrupt shift. This technique is employed in multiple layers within *Klinghoffer*’s structure, both between numbers (or, rather, choruses and patched-together monologues, as no part of the work besides the chorus numbers is quite conceived as an individual set-piece) and within scenes. Expansive oceanic soundscapes of Mamoud’s dreamy aria give way without warning to the bombastic Night Chorus to close Act I, and the first scene of Act II explores a puzzling series of non-sequiturs

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<sup>26</sup> Adams with Beverly, “Klinghoffer and the Art of Composing.”

<sup>27</sup> Rupert Christiansen, “Breaking Taboos (Portrait of Alice Goodman),” in *The John Adams Reader*, ed. Thomas May, (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006), 253; Steinberg, “Klinghoffer,” 138.

through Rambo's gleeful abuse, the Klinghoffers's tender exchange, the British Dancing Girl's flighty bubble-gum banality, and Omar's unsettling proclamation of faith and devotional altruism, culminating in the glittering innocence of the Desert Chorus.

The musical placidity embodied by the Ocean, the Swiss Grandmother, Mamoud, and – at times – the Captain and the Klinghoffers, coupled with the work's propensity for sometimes violent explosions of energy (Molqi, Rambo, British Dancing Girl, the Night, Day, and Hagar choruses) is largely appropriate to the work in both a narrative and dramaturgical sense. Though the juxtaposition of such opposed affects does not follow a traditional linear narrative (in which the music would, presumably, reflect the intensity of rising action and a climax), it does enhance the characters that Adams has created, ascribing an energy to each one and providing a gloss to their respective textual identities. Furthermore, the unprepared and unresolved shifts in musical character reflect the anxiety and chaos of the events of the hijacking, self-reflective in its audience manipulation.

Mirroring the fluctuations of energy inherent in the text and its musical setting, the narrative structure and temporal makeup of *Klinghoffer* is forcibly split into separate but overlapping concepts. The juxtaposition of the timed and the timeless, and an interplay between action and retrospection, result in three distinct narrative layers which we may understand through the established poetic and representational modes of Aristotelian and literary critique. The first strata of this narration manifests as the traditional operatic drama, showing events happening in real time, such as Mamoud's dreamy aria "Now it is night," and Klinghoffer's "I've never been a violent man," This

layer is mimetic in nature, imitating the events onstage in a purely representational manner.

However, *Klinghoffer* also employs the diegetic mode, where narration becomes the main vehicle through which to tell a story.<sup>28</sup> The recollection of characters' experiences aboard the *Achille Lauro* serves as this second layer: see the Captain's "It was just after 1:15," and the flighty "I must have been hysterical" from the British Dancing Girl. The third layer appears in the choruses, who embody a certain timelessness and ambiguity in narrative function. Though these sections stand outside the mimesis, they do not directly narrate the story in the same way that certain characters do, interview-like. Instead, the *Klinghoffer* choruses are posed as a commentary and are suspended in frozen time. Presumably steeped in some mode of diegesis through its reference (if not interaction) to the internal mimesis, the choruses inhabit an ambiguous narrative and temporal space. All three of these multiple temporalities are all shuffled among each other within *Klinghoffer*, often shifting from one narrative layer to the next without break or ceremony; every scene (Prologue excepted) has at least one section each of action, retrospect, and chorus commentary (See Appendix B).

The libretto, its narratively disjointed sections as the real reason for the work's lack of continuity, speaks to the multiplicity and chaos of the events, a representation of a communal confusion. However, despite the common alternation between narrative spaces, the action- and recollection-based sequences tend to concentrate towards one or the other in each scene. If we conceive of the work as a whole (and momentarily ignore

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<sup>28</sup> "Diegetic" here is used in the classical sense to imply "narrative," as opposed to the contemporary usage in film and theatre studies, where "diegetic music" would refer to music or sound in the actual story (e.g. a boombox or telephone ring that one sees in action). See Karol Berger's comprehensive discussion of poetic modes in his article "Diegesis and Mimesis: Poetic Modes and the Matter of Artistic Presentation," *The Journal of Musicology* 12, No. 4 (Autumn 1994): 407-433.

the out-of-narrative chorus numbers), the general construction of the libretto shifts steadily from retrospection to action. While this may seem counter to the experience of the characters involved in the hijacking (who only recall their experiences after the fact), this reversal strongly reflects the experience of events as perceived by the rest of the world at the time. Media representation, the primary way of conveying such news-worthy material, would have followed this same trajectory; as no one was aware of the happenings on the cruise ship in real time, the world (or the audience, as it were) is required to wait until, bit by bit, it is possible to piece together the events from such recollections. Only then does the story come into full focus, blossoming into exchanges between the Captain and the Palestinians, a portrait of the Klinghoffers, and the inevitable death.

Reporting and newsreels come to mind in *Klinghoffer*'s insistence on recollection. The characters who have the opportunity to report do so in a manner akin to an interview or a police questioning. We see characters giving exact times (Captain: "It was just after 1:15"); remembering specifics as they are questioned (Captain: "As I believe now, one detail awakened my anxiety."); accounting for whereabouts (Swiss Grandmother: "So we strolled for a while around the deck..."); speaking directly to someone (British Dancing Girl: "But, you know..."; "Then, guess what?"); and speculating (First Officer: "It must have ricocheted."). Each character who recalls only does so once, adding to the sense that these are simply interviews being readied for review and archival, and together they comprise a collection of fragmented accounts of the hijacking, never to be fully understood in its complex entirety.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The Swiss Grandmother technically appears two times in the opera, but it is assumed via textual continuity that her account is cohesive ("My grandson Didi, who was two" begins her narrative; "So I said

As antithesis, the choruses – each one historical, timeless, and biblical in its own way – treats the event not as a report, but rather as an allegory. Though an isolated incident, the *Achille Lauro* hijacking is depicted as representative of the ever-present conflict between the Muslims and the Jews (to be discussed further in reference to the oppositional Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians, and Chorus of the Exiled Jews). This blurring of past and the present, an ancient conflict mirrored by contemporary events, is furthered by the choruses’ identity as situational commentators; reminiscent of a Greek chorus, these ensembles create an additional layer of elevated meaning. The relationship between the choruses and mimetic characters can be explored further through analysis of Alice Goodman’s libretto, which provides an additional conceptual framework within which we may explore *Klinghoffer*.

### **Looking Deeper: Alice Goodman’s Libretto**

Alice Goodman and John Adams’ meeting and their subsequent collaboration, *Nixon in China*, was orchestrated by Goodman’s former Harvard classmate and theatrical *enfant terrible* Peter Sellars, after Adams’ request for a “libretto by a real poet,”<sup>30</sup> Goodman’s wide breadth of poetic knowledge and her talent for developing elegant texts informed the writing of her first libretto, and the result lifted the characters of *Nixon* “out of the ordinary and onto a more archetypal plane.” Adams has lauded her natural propensity for evoking the vernacular American language and her consistent couplets, both of which are evident in her text for *Klinghoffer* as well.<sup>31</sup> However, the transition from the satirical, minimalistic style of *Nixon* to the grand religiosity of *Klinghoffer*

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to my grandson” continues it, after a break), and is simply split by Adams for dramatic effect and potential for layering. As evident in the libretto, Goodman created the Swiss Grandmother’s account as a full entity.

<sup>30</sup> Adams, *Hallelujah*, 135.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

proved difficult for Adams and Goodman alike, their joint compositional default of dramatic irony rendered inappropriate by such a sensitive topic.

Ultimately, Goodman delivered her libretto to Adams in sections – the allegorical choruses were written first, starting with the Choruses of the Exiled Palestinians and Jews, and only then was the remainder of the drama fleshed out with the mimetic and diegetic layers.<sup>32</sup> A cursory glance at the poetic tone of the two libretti can reveal the shift from *Nixon* to *Klinghoffer*, the latter intensified by months of thorough research on the religious histories of Israel and Palestine, and the increasingly ceremonial tone that the subject matter demands.<sup>33</sup> On a structural level, the libretto follows an oratorio-like template as discussed above, using seven choruses as pillars for the opera’s narrative and almost entirely eschewing dialogue, while obscuring traditionally dramatic events (including the eponymous act) in the tightly controlled dramaturgy of a Greek tragedy.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, rather than classic operatic aria/duet/trio/ensemble/chorus options, *Klinghoffer* is primarily based around a series of monologues. The resulting work is relatively static, encompassing the untraditional dramatic pacing discussed above.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, the most appropriate operatic tradition that *Klinghoffer* can be compared to is the Baroque opera seria, with its chains of static arias.

Despite Goodman’s reliance on deeply personal monologues as the primary method of communication in *Klinghoffer*, the libretto’s dramatic development of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>33</sup> “Research is for the birds,” Goodman is quoted as saying; despite this, she read newspaper clippings of the event and Captain de Rosa’s memoirs for factual information. For more poetic inspiration, she read much of the Koran, Joseph Conrad’s essays, and also selections from Byron, “because he is the only English-speaking writer who wrote ‘Orientalist’ poetry and did it well.” Richard Dyer, “*Klinghoffer* librettist revels in the power of words,” *Boston Globe*, September 1, 1991.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Ewans’s book *Opera from the Greek* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007) further discusses the structural and dramatic intent of the Greek tragedy, and its effects on the operatic genre.

<sup>35</sup> Refer again to Appendix B for an outline of the structural sequence of the work.

characters is vague and elusive, focusing more on the poetic evocations and imagery than any linear trajectory of events or players. The resulting text is one of subtlety and allusions, speaking of biblical characters like friends and waxing poetic in spite of the hijacking's urgency. Critics have suggested that perhaps the libretto is too obtusely "over-written," if the purpose is to reach audiences in an easily accessible manner, and that the density of information delivered by the libretto is at times opaque. Furthermore, reviewers often noted that Goodman's almost constant use of such grand poetic imagery seems unnatural at times, especially during the action-based narratives, during which metaphors and allusions would presumably be hard to come by.<sup>36</sup> However, Goodman's declamation that the work is intended as "a drama on many levels, which unfolds in a spiritual landscape and offers itself as an evocation, an illustration, a meditation on life and death" makes clear her intention of providing a historical contemplation rather than a dramatization of terrorism, which her libretto undoubtedly accomplishes.<sup>37</sup>

The drama as a whole, shifting from mimesis to recollection to timeless commentary, blurs the audience's sense of time and constantly toys with the binary of the everyday and the legendary. This large-scale structural elevation is mirrored, fractal-like, in Goodman's technical construction of text, as she blends tenses, archaic and modern vocabulary, and varied poetic styles into an interwoven libretto that perfectly embodies the complexity it attempts to depict. One review praises Goodman's astounding sense of negative capability, the refusal to project a single point of view – instead, her words melt

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<sup>36</sup> John Ginman, "Opera as 'Information': The Dramaturgy of *The Death of Klinghoffer*," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14, no. 1 (2004): 53-55. One must remember that the operatic genre generally involves a certain level of suspension of disbelief.

<sup>37</sup> Dyer, "Klinghoffer librettist." Ginman also theorizes that the work's contemporary and postmodern nature contributes to the relative accessibility of the work, given the current access to recording technology through which mass distribution and re-listening is possible. He also cedes the point that such great works as *Tristan und Isolde* and *Moses und Aron* also embody this density of information. Ginman, "Opera as Information," 54.

into differing perspectives and exist comfortably in uncertainty.<sup>38</sup> Her narrative, therefore, is the “secret source of power” behind *Klinghoffer*, its sense of pacing and creation of equally eloquent characters standing as the basis of the musical and directorial choices.<sup>39</sup>

Goodman’s poetic background has no doubt methodically informed her stylistic choices, and the way in which she distinguishes between temporalities and characters draws from multiple poetic traditions. Her persistent poetic form throughout *Klinghoffer*, as mentioned, is the couplet. However, Goodman’s couplets are not necessarily strict in their metric construction, and instead focus more on the abstract pairing of two lines with an end rhyme. Though the traditional form of the couplet is “closed” (in which each couplet is self-contained as a sentence within the larger verse, their clauses confined to one line each), Goodman’s couplets defy that traditional structure. Instead, she feels equally free to construct shortened phrases within one line as to use enjambment to elongate one sentence across five lines:

*First Officer:* The engines cut out. Then, surprise!  
The bell began to ring. I was  
Bringing our guns and shells up from  
Their special closet by the gym  
And longing for my thirty-eight  
When the thing tripped. Hell’s bells all right.  
[...]  
They said, ‘We fired into the floor.’  
It must have ricocheted. The poor  
Bastard got moved to the sick bay  
Under my supervision. I  
Missed hearing what the Captain said  
To the assembled multitude[.]

Goodman’s end rhymes tend to be elusive, hidden within prosaic sentences and only evident through the written libretto with its line breaks. Many of the rhymes used in

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<sup>38</sup> Dyer, “*Klinghoffer* librettist.”

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Quote by Goodman. “Reading is a creative act, and everything that goes into the making of an opera is a reading of the words.”

*Klinghoffer* are thus rendered as functionally internal, a subtlety appropriate to the work's nuanced atmosphere. Furthermore, the rhymes that Goodman creates are what are known as "poor rhymes," relying almost exclusively on one common sound; here, Goodman often uses alliteration of the final consonant sound ("surprise" / "was") or assonating vowel space ("bay" / "I") rather than more traditional "sufficient" or "rich" rhymes.<sup>40</sup>

Goodman's text for the Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians and *Klinghoffer's* Aria of the Falling Body demonstrate a full formal departure from the work's standard couplet paired rhyme schemes (AA BB CC, etc.). Instead, they employ an alternate rhyme scheme (ABAB CDCD, etc.) that folds into stanzas, adding an intensified level of formality to each of those numbers (see below, the rhymed "creation / dissolution" as an inherent couplet rhyme, with an internal "God / magnified").

*Klinghoffer's Body:*     May the Lord God  
                                  And His creation  
                                  Be magnified  
                                  In dissolution

*Exiled Palestinians:*   Let the supplanter look  
                                  Upon his work. Our faith  
                                  Will take the stones he broke  
                                  And break his teeth

In contrast, the Chorus of the Exiled Jews is executed in a more prose-like style; this serves to exacerbate the differences between the two opening choruses, and also mirrors the more modern language of the libretto:

*Exiled Jews:*    When I paid off the taxi, I had no money left,  
                                  and, of course, no luggage. My empty hands shall  
                                  signify this passion, which itself remembers.

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<sup>40</sup> Clare Cavanagh et al., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics, Fourth Edition*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1190.

Critics who have delved into the libretto find this disparity between the opening choruses to be “worrying,” and that in the more structured verse of the Palestinians lies an inner painting of heroicism.<sup>41</sup> While surely a valid interpretation, these critiques fail to mention that poetic treatment of the Jewish characters’ monologues later in the work do not follow this construction. The free verse evident in the Chorus of Exiled Jews is therefore more appropriately interpreted as a poetic reflection of the metaphorical timelessness and atmosphere of melancholic relaxation conveyed through the text.

*Exiled Jews:* Let us, when our lust is exhausted for the day,  
recount to each other all we endured since we  
parted. There is so much to get through, it will  
take until night. Then we shall rise, miraculously,  
virgin, boy and bride.

If anything, the Chorus of the Exiled Jews is most poetically related to the remaining choruses, arguably the most elevated aspect of the work because of their biblical language and allusion to oratorio. Unlike the Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians, these choruses do not follow any clear poetic structure: unmetered, unrhymed, and using lines of unequal length, they stand outside the possibility for clear poetic association or interpretation, which only adds to their timeless and commentative affect. Instead of these traditional poetic devices, Goodman relies solely on the sounds of the words themselves to communicate the poetic affect, crafting highly differing atmospheres for each chorus. Consider the soft, shapeless fluidity of the Ocean Chorus, with its imbalanced emphasis on the lingering resonances of “s,” “m,” and “l”s:

Here is a semblance of the first man;  
sinewy, translucent, thick with life,  
superficially violent, inwardly calm.  
his pulse beats in his ears. He is secretive;

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<sup>41</sup> Ruth Sara Longobardi, “Re-producing *Klinghoffer*: Opera and Arab Identity before and after 9/11,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 3 no. 3 (August 2009): 281-283.

entrenched in his side, the sacred parasites.

In contrast, the Night Chorus insists on the more violent “k,” “t,” “f” and “j” sounds:

Is not the night restless for them?  
Smoke detectors and burglar alarms  
go off without reason, the taped voice  
unwinds in the widow’s backyard.  
No one bothers to look up from his work.  
Elijah will return, the Jews believe,  
the Antichrist condemn, The Messiah  
judge; the dead, the wicked and the good  
[...]  
I am afraid for myself, for myself, for myself.

The free verse of these choruses feels, in a sense, more modern and naturalistic, an embodiment of the divine world objectively viewing its people senselessly controlled by rhyme and meter. The archaic forced structures of epics and legends, while important to humanity’s collective history, here seem to act only as a hindrance to a higher understanding.

The mimetic characters themselves, the Klinghoffers and the hijackers, embody that humanity in *Klinghoffer*. Interestingly, these principal characters are strikingly similar in terms of their poetic construction, as they are both written in Skeltonic verse.<sup>42</sup> In this poetic form, meter tends to be dipodic (two stresses per line, varying number of unstressed syllables) and line length is irregular, but lines must be short. The rhyme scheme is more free than a couplet – while end rhymes are still necessary, they do not have a set number of recurrences, and can therefore be written as couplets or continue rhyming for more than two lines.<sup>43</sup>

<i>Molqi:</i>	Give these orders.	a
	Nobody stirs	a
	A limb: passengers,	a

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<sup>42</sup> Dyer, “*Klinghoffer* librettist.”

<sup>43</sup> Cavanagh et al., *Princeton Encyclopedia*, 1309.

Servants and sailors,	a
All remain calm.	b
Tell them there is a bomb	b
In the engine room.	b
If we are betrayed	c
The ship will explode	c
And you will be dead.	c

That both the Klinghoffers and all four hijackers have text in Skeltonics is less a commentary on their respective connections or differences in character, and more their belonging to a certain temporal space: “These are the characters for whom this is the moment,” Goodman has said, while the other characters “have the privilege of recollection,” and therefore speak in longer lines (see the Captain’s narratives, or the recollections by the Austrian Woman and the British Dancing Girl).<sup>44</sup> One can also use this interpretation to further understand the language used in the opening two choruses – the Palestinians, with their recent temporal markers (“nineteen forty-eight”) and future-oriented vengeance, speak in shorter lines, evident of their urgency. In contrast, the Jews focus more on past events, memory, and narrative (“which itself remembers”; “I have forgotten...”; “She was brought up on stories of our love”); they are therefore easily interpreted as a collective character who has had the opportunity to craft memories and anecdotes replete with metaphor and the wisdom of retrospection.

Goodman’s text serves to, in Adams’ words, “[bring] the entire experience... up to a much high level of discourse.”<sup>45</sup> The irony of giving an archaic treatment to such a modern news-saturated catastrophe, instead of relying on the expected sensationalist banalities, was intentional but not satirical – the unexpected interplay between media-centered expectations and the religiosity of the work is intended to transcend, resulting in

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<sup>44</sup> Dyer, “*Klinghoffer* librettist.”

<sup>45</sup> Adams with Beverly, “Klinghoffer and the Art of Composing.”

a work that is ceremonial, meditative, and retrospective. However, this rejection of expectations inherent in the textual treatment of the work is superficial when compared to the genre-defying nature of the work as a whole, and inspecting *Klinghoffer* within larger generic frameworks may prove helpful in understanding its dramatic genesis and artistic objective.

### **Genre: Expectations and Classifications**

If we momentarily ignore the politically outraged responses that *Klinghoffer* has provoked, much of the critique of the work comes from its defiance of traditional operatic expectations. As mentioned above, the traditional operatic structure is constructed primarily on a mimetic model, basing plot on interactions between characters and using outside events or characters' emotions to propel the narrative's trajectory. Reflection as a dramatic tool is traditionally enclosed within emotive arias, only used as a window into a character's soul, as opposed to a commentary on religion or life outside the narrative (though it should be noted that the typical opera devotes a great deal of time and music to these moments of emotional reflection). Extravagance and exaggeration, cornerstones of the operatic tradition, are embodied both musically and through production. Lengthy multiple-act construction, grand themes and characters, full-force orchestras, and virtuosic singing all combine with the visual aspects of detailed sets and costumes to create this indulgent genre. Furthermore, the world of suspended disbelief associated with opera is one to consider in reference to *Klinghoffer*; oftentimes operatic storylines tend towards the overly coincidental, ridiculous, or melodramatic, where death, tragic love, revenge, and *deus ex machina* is commonplace. Though intended to be elevated to

allegory, *Klinghoffer*'s identity as an opera based on true events automatically marks it as outside the traditional norms.<sup>46</sup>

The broadest definition of opera as a synthesis of arts – music, poetry, drama, dance, visual – is undoubtedly an appropriate label to *Klinghoffer*, but it is in the detailed conventions of the genre that we find our expectations unmet. As a operatic dramatization of a highly emotionally and politically fraught affair, one would assume there would be more dramatic escalation and emphasis on the actual death of Klinghoffer, placing the incident as an isolated event where all the events before the act propel the action directly to it (as in Richard Strauss's *Salome*, where action is motivated by and towards the beheading and kiss of Jochanaan, or even Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, where the final descent into hell is nothing more than a culmination of all his odious deeds). One can almost read the second act of *Klinghoffer* as a typical romantic opera, dramatizing the tragic death of a beloved character, the final scene a swansong for the deceased's lover before their ultimate actual or metaphorical death by broken heart (*Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La bohème*). However, the highly personal *Klinghoffer* affair is taken out of the standard operatic linear trajectory and drastically recontextualized. Through its emphasis on retrospective history, the opera is thrust into a higher plane of sociopolitical discourse through narrative layering. While the audience sees the story unfolding, the characters recollect with the knowledge of what has already happened; choruses embody all layers of time through their delivery of ancient background information and prospective fortune telling.

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<sup>46</sup> This is, of course, ignoring dramatizations of true events found in long-gone histories, such as Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*, and various other works found in the opera seria and Grand Opera traditions. *Nixon* was the first largely successful work to characterize figures still alive at the time of the premiere.

The *Klinghoffer* choruses are the main propulsion away from the operatic genre – though obviously steeped in the operatic tradition, the function of these ensembles is fundamentally different. In the traditional operatic sense, the choruses act either as direct commentary on actions (“*O giusto cielo!*,” the horrified onlookers cry in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*) or as collective embodiments of peoples (“*Va, pensiero*,” mourn the homesick Hebrew Slaves in Verdi’s *Nabucco*). Though remnants of these traditions are evident in *Klinghoffer* (especially the opening choruses of Palestinians and Jews, echoing Verdi’s Hebrew Slaves), largely the choruses act as commentative forces completely outside the narrative, much like a Greek Chorus. Embodying primordial history (Ocean: “Here is the semblance of the first man”), the immediate past (Day: “What became of that woman...?”), the present (Desert: “Rain falls on the earth where no man is”), or the future (Night: “Elijah will return”) – and, even more often, switching tenses and narrative space within themselves – the choruses are enigmatic, timeless, and objective. It is significant that the audience is never aware of who the chorus is meant to represent; they are cast as elemental, outside religion and humanity, a singing embodiment of symmetry and oppositions that transcend human subjectivity or agency. Never mentioning specific characters or even political happenings, the mythic biblical nature of these numbers calls to mind the genre of oratorio, much more didactic and meditative in its intent than its frivolous cousin of opera.

Oratorio, a rich genre encompassing many different traditions, contains several parallels to *Klinghoffer* and its dramatic construction, specifically when compared to those composed by Handel.<sup>47</sup> Oratorios are historically sacred, often based on scriptures

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<sup>47</sup> Handel’s vast output and variety of oratorios and the richness of the oratorio genre throughout music history both contribute to the unavoidable generalizations necessary of this discussion. It would be amiss

from the Old Testament, and call for reflection via religious texts. Lacking in the operatic flamboyancy of costuming and staging (due to their original generic function as a mode of dramatic presentation during Catholic penitential seasons), the genre of oratorio is inherently more static and somber in atmosphere, taking its cues from the moralistic and pious biblical themes of the text. This stasis is intensified by oratorio's primary vehicle of storytelling, the solo aria. When multiple reflective arias are strung together, flanked by recitatives and choruses, the resulting narrative is largely lacking in character interaction, inhibiting dramatic progression in the operatic sense. Therefore, the drama tends to rely more on variety through contrast rather than dramatic events, and a sudden shift in mood is the primary dramatic catalyst of this sacred genre. This aesthetic of contrast is echoed on a smaller scale as well; the textures between and within choruses vary, as do the vocal registers within a scene.<sup>48</sup>

*Klinghoffer* closely echoes the sacred tone and dramatic construction of the standard high Baroque oratorio, down to its aria-based narration, lack of dialogue, and use of jarring *non sequiturs* for dramatic effect. Even the attention placed on the pacing of vocal registration is evident, particularly significant in a work with so many male voices. The first act breaks up the masculine action-sequence narration with female retrospectives, and if the male characters are not cast as differing voice types (Molqi, tenor; Mamoud, baritone), they embody different affects (Mamoud, idealistic baritone; Captain, factual and dutiful baritone). The overall moralistic aesthetic of the oratorio, though, is effectively delivered through the choruses, whose didactic function in the

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not to acknowledge the flexibility of dramatic presentation and narration in some of Handel's works as well. Several of his works fall somewhere on an operatic/oratorio continuum (such as *Acis and Galatea*), and many of his opera seria are inherently less operatically dramatic than, for example, the *Messiah*.

<sup>48</sup> Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 50.

classic oratorio defines the genre. *Klinghoffer's* choruses, if not expressly instructive, definitely belong to the oratorio tradition in their demands, necessitating a certain reflection from their listeners from the very start. Each opening rhetorical question (“Is not the ocean itself their past?”) creates an active intellectual engagement with the audience, as does the overtly religious language, and the concept of polarities inherent in the choruses’ titles. The Hagar Chorus, occupying a literal central position in *Klinghoffer* between Acts I and II, interacts with the history of the oratorio even more pertinently. It addresses the story of Hagar and Abram, taken from Genesis 21; this tale is almost an origins myth in its own right, as it can be interpreted as an allegory for the division of the Abrahamic line into Arab and Jewish nations. However, the primary inspiration for *Klinghoffer's* dramatic construction comes from a specific oratorio tradition even more fundamentally steeped in religious ceremonial aesthetic – that of the musical retelling of the Passion, specifically those completed by J. S. Bach.

### **The Passion According to John Adams**

Critics have not failed to notice, nor the co-creators to acknowledge, the influence of Bach’s Passions in *Klinghoffer*. In fact, the Passions stand as the one genre to which Adams and Sellars consistently reference as a model. “...I do think that it’s very obvious that the parallel between the Bach Passions and any number of sacred oratorios is quite evident to anybody that takes the time to look at it,” Adams has said in interview.<sup>49</sup> Goodman conflictingly states that “contrary to what many critics have suggested, the Bach Passions were never my model – they may have been John’s,” though she does refer to the work as a “semi-secular oratorio.”<sup>50</sup> The most apparent similarity stands in the

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<sup>49</sup> Adams with Beverly, “Klinghoffer and the Art of Composing.”

<sup>50</sup> Christiansen, “Breaking Taboos,” 253.

structure of the work, with its large choruses, few soloists, and the retrospective narrative quality. Interwoven throughout *Klinghoffer*, several of the characters take on a functional and collective Evangelistic identity through their narrative recollection, communicating the facts as though reading from a sacred text.

The general trajectory of the plot and its dramatic construction further links the two narratives. In *Klinghoffer*, we are taken through familiar plot points such as the arrest, trial, mocking, “crucifixion,” and death of the hero, albeit all occurring within the second act. Notably, through this stated association of *Klinghoffer* to the Passions, an undeniable connection arises between Leon Klinghoffer and Jesus, who both embody a sacrificial lamb. Adams has even acknowledged this connection explicitly, stating that, “I saw him [Klinghoffer] very much as a sacrificial victim and his murder was not all that different from the crucifixion that is at the heart of the Bach Passions.”<sup>51</sup> The subject matter led scholar John Ginman to describe *Klinghoffer* as a “religious opera, both in the sense that the roots of the problems that underpin its action are grounded in faith, and in that it is less concerned with events themselves than with their ethical and metaphysical implications,” thus providing rationale for the Passions (among other works) to serve as basis for the work’s dramaturgical structure.<sup>52</sup>

Bach’s Passions, in addition to the aforementioned similarities to *Klinghoffer* in their allegorical and narrative characteristics, are also similarly dramatically expressive, putting the needs of the story and the text at the forefront of the work.<sup>53</sup> Despite a long tradition since Bach’s time of musical dramas being used for almost everything but

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<sup>51</sup> Park, “John Adams Speaks Out.”

<sup>52</sup> Ginman, “Opera as Information,” 52.

<sup>53</sup> Christoph Wolff, “Musical Form and Dramatic Structure in Bach’s Saint Matthew Passion,” *Bach* 19, no. 1 (1988): 6.

narrative integrity (for just one example, see the flimsy plots of the *bel canto* era, designed merely as vehicles for *fioritura* acrobatics), Adams returns to Bach's practice of music as rhetoric, but now employs it as a mode of presenting the complexities of a controversial topic, not as a tool for religious exploration and devotion. As such, the work is constructed not as a specific compilation and order of arias, ensemble numbers, and choruses that will together present the most entertaining or crowd-pleasing performance, but explores how the narrative as a whole comes together into something more cohesive, meditative, and didactic.

Whereas Bach's Evangelist plays the role of narrator throughout his Passion settings, an omniscient storyteller guiding the listener through his account, the choral and solo interjections belong to the narrative itself and are separated from the Evangelist through their place within the diegesis. Though the Evangelists' relationships to their gospels, as their authors and creators, are functionally different than any relationship between the characters and the events of the Klinghoffer affair, some parallels can be drawn between the role of the Evangelists and the multiple "narrators" of *Klinghoffer*. The characters who exist outside the narrative space, in some future locality – the Captain, the Swiss Grandmother, the British Dancing Girl, and others – share the same narrative purpose as the Passions' Evangelists, providing dramatic continuity, recounting events after the fact, embodying some all-knowing foreboding, and effectively becoming the "authors" of the event through their implied interaction with the media.<sup>54</sup> Neither Bach's Evangelists nor the *Klinghoffer* "narrators," however, are impartial or objective in the traditional narrative sense. Indeed, the emotional involvement inherent in the Passion

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<sup>54</sup> This connection is furthered, if superficially, by the simple fact that these modern "Evangelists" are never specifically named, as Leon and Marilyn Klinghoffer and the hijackers are, much as one never hears Matthew named or referred to as anything besides "The Evangelist" in the *St. Matthew Passion*.

Evangelists' narrations is amplified in *Klinghoffer* through its dramatic rendering of, effectively, the narrators' personal hostage stories.

Unlike the Evangelist's monolithic authorial voice, the narrative perspectives of *Klinghoffer*'s collective Evangelists provides the audience with multiple complex perspectives on the events, a metaphorical commentary of the difficulties inherent in providing a single voice of truth to a situation so laced with contradiction and opposing perspectives.<sup>55</sup> This jumbling of perspectives contributes to an overall forced decentering of the work's narrative. To borrow the concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* from Berthold Brecht, the audience is denied the opportunity to fully identify with one character or "side" subconsciously, because *Klinghoffer* lacks a single consistent narration; instead, the audience is coerced into making that choice of identification consciously, else they must exist uncomfortably in the acceptance of all viewpoints.<sup>56</sup> Through the narrative disjunction and character portrayal, this last choice appears to be the ultimate goal of the *Klinghoffer* creators – to allow a meditative space in which one can exist uncomfortably in the co-existence of highly divergent ideologies and factual representation.

This meditation is only heightened by the choruses, which are often cited as one of the significant connectors between *Klinghoffer* and the Passions, both in their prevalence and dramatic intent. On a superficial level, the grand scale of the Passion and its choruses – often using double choirs, extensive layering, and full-forced instrumentation, – is mimicked throughout *Klinghoffer*, especially in the Act I choruses, Ocean and Night.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, the chorus numbers in Bach's Passions tend to frame

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<sup>55</sup> Ginman, "Opera as Information," 54-55.

<sup>56</sup> John Willett, ed. and trans., *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 91-99.

<sup>57</sup> Wolff, "Form," 7.

the main action (see the opening and closing movements of each of the two parts), and are placed at culmination points or endings of location-specific scenes.<sup>58</sup> This placement is similarly implemented in *Klinghoffer*, with a pair of choruses to begin the work, and a chorus concluding each scene in Act I. Act II begins in much the same way, opening with the Hagar Chorus, and each scene closes with a choral reflection as well.

The largest anomaly in comparing *Klinghoffer*'s chorus structure with that of the Passions comes at the very end of the opera – instead of a reflective or summative chorus (which, given the earlier structure of choruses to close scenes, is almost certainly expected by the listener at this point), the work ends with a brief scene between the Captain and Marilyn Klinghoffer, in which the latter is told of her husband's death. The absence of a concluding chorus offers the last word to the widow, both humanizing her and spotlighting her grief, letting her plight speak as a representative result of the historical background: "If a hundred / People were murdered / And their blood / Flowed in the wake / Of this ship like / Oil, only then / Would the world intervene. / They should have killed me. / I wanted to die." The choice to end the work with a devastating solo instead of a reflective chorus was presumably a decision that came later in the process, as Goodman's libretto, as published in the Nonesuch liner notes, actually includes a closing stanza of text sung by "All," following Marilyn's monologue:

*ALL:* We are through with pleasure for the night; we have  
put aside ambition and the pride of our hearts. We  
have turned our faces towards the dark, and our hope.  
You have known our desire, nothing is hidden from you.  
Oh God, raise your hands in our defence.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-15. Chorales at culmination points can be seen through their various functions. To use *St. Matthew Passion* as an example, Movement 10 ("Ich bin's, ich sollte") places the chorus at a climactic moment, amplifying the dramatic tension following the question "Herr, bin ich's?" ("Lord, it is I [who will betray you]?"), while Movement 25 ("Was mein Gott will") acts more as a reflective break in the narrative, dwelling on the will of God.

The original model of this closing chorus – especially given its vague direction to be sung by “All” – does mimic the final chorus in the *St. Matthew Passion*, down to its inclusive forces (Chorus I and II together, in the *Passion* – bridging the Daughters of Zion and the Faithful, the Jews and the Christians) and the use of specific linguistic cues that convey its plea. None of the *Klinghoffer* choruses refer as consciously to their group performing forces as this final stanza is: whenever a chorus text presents the rare first-person subject during the course of the work, it represents the chorus coming together into a singular embodiment of emotion (Night: “I am afraid for myself”) or representing one metaphorical soul (Jews: “I was like a soldier...”). Instead, this final chorus is obvious in its group mentality, bringing all the opposing forces (Jews and Palestinians, characters and narrators) together in a bizarrely cooperative text, striking in its hopeful vulnerability. Likewise, the closing number of *St. Matthew Passion* also embodies the collective “we,” calling to a divine “You” (“*Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder / Und rufen dir im Grabe zu,*” “We sit down with tears / and call to You in the grave”), portraying a democratization of ideologies and a common ground of grief.<sup>59</sup>

That *Klinghoffer* ultimately ignores this final text is presumably the work of Adams (Goodman has alluded to his frequent cuts of her libretto in interviews, with not a small amount of derision). Apparently it was decided that the most effective dramatic message would be delivered by Marilyn Klinghoffer alone, and that her anguished and personal closing text, in itself delivering a challenge to the world (“only then would the world intervene”), was appropriate to close a work that operates on such a global scale.

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<sup>59</sup> The addressed “You” of this final *Klinghoffer* text could also be interpreted in a non-divine sense, and instead seen as a plea towards the audience through breaking the fourth wall. Though the associations are slightly different – calling to mind Puck’s final monologue in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, rather than the *St. Matthew Passion* – a vulnerable appeal to humanity seems to be at the core of this final chorus excerpt.

Eschewing a final chorus also avoids the practice of doling out a moral or singular emotion to be forced upon the audience (such as in the Passion, wherein the collective grief is palpable and unavoidable); in this way, the Brechtian alienation aspect factors into *Klinghoffer* once again, forcing the audience to experience Marilyn's grief from the outside, and decide for themselves whether that emotion is the culminating message of the work. Ultimately, and despite there being no didactic culmination of a chorus sending the audience on their way, Adams' expressive vocal writing and Goodman's heart-wrenching text ("I grieve / As a pregnant woman / Grieves for the unseen / Long-imagined son") provides an indisputable instruction for how the audience should be feeling.

Additional details, smaller in scale but no less important, may be found to further link *Klinghoffer* and the Bach Passions – many of these connections are most apparent between the opening chorus of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, a poetic text by Picander, and the pair of choruses that begins *Klinghoffer*. The first chorus of Bach's work ("Kommt, ihr Töchter") acts as an exposition, setting the scene for the Passion story to unfold, and also establishes a pair of allegorical figures – the Daughter of Zion (generally interpreted as personification of the city of Jerusalem) and the collective group of the Faithful. In this movement, a double-chorus structure is used to evoke the conversation between the Daughter of Zion and the Faithful, the structure of which follows a quick repeated sequence of "imperative – question – response" that encompasses the opening section almost in its entirety.<sup>60</sup> This dialogue structure is used often throughout the

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<sup>60</sup> Richard D. P. Jones, *The Creative Development of Johann Sebastian Bach, Volume II: 1717-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 184.

Passion, but only when referencing these two allegorical characters; in the non-dialogued chorus numbers, one may interpret the double choir simply as Chorus I and II.<sup>61</sup>

*Klinghoffer* may also be understood using many of the same parameters, using the opening pair of choruses, Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians and Chorus of the Exiled Jews, as individual comparisons to “Kommt, ihr Töchter.” As in the *St. Matthew Passion*, these choruses serve to provide narrative exposition, and also provide a sort of large-scale conversation – or, the situation as it were, a lack thereof – between the two collective groups. The clear divide between the two choruses (amplified even further if one considers the deleted Rumors scene, originally inserted between the two opening numbers) makes it very plain that the intent of these choruses is *not* to communicate with each other, but simply exist in juxtaposition – in fact, each musical facet between the two seems to further the distance between them. However, the presence of dialogue within each chorus, if not between them, expresses a conscious nod to the Passion structure and its allegorical characters.

The Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians is split into two sections; the first is comprised of unison female voices (“with a pure childlike voice,” according to the score) and a sparse accompaniment, set to the first four stanzas of Goodman’s libretto. The main feature of this section lies in its highly melismatic nature, specifically on the final word of the line “I see in my mind’s eye / A crescent moon,”<sup>62</sup> The crescent moon, historically a symbol of Islam, immediately labels this chorus as Palestinian, and the musical arabesques, though stated by the composer as not taken from any characteristically

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<sup>61</sup> Wolff, “Form,” 16.

<sup>62</sup> This long melismatic passage also recalls the extended melisma in “Kommt, ihr Töchter,” furthering the allusions to *St. Matthew Passion*.

Middle Eastern scales, lend a lilting exotic quality to the melody.<sup>63</sup> The extended melisma serves a dual purpose of emphasizing the lone word “moon” while simultaneously eradicating its textual meaning, associating the Palestinians with a preverbal stratum of primitive beings, conscious since before the advent of modern language. The moon, while symbolic of Islam, also has historical associations in the Western culture with cruelty and irrationality (“lunatic”) and the mysterious other, embodying concepts such as femininity and the exotic through its sensual nature. The Palestinians’ subtle exoticization, to be discussed further below, contributes both to the general affect of the opera, but also echoes the stereotyped portrayal of the Jews in Bach’s Passion settings.

The second section (“Of that house, not a wall”) immediately creates a different Palestinian character – increasingly rhythmic, detached, and turbulent, during which the male voices are added and all four parts are set in homorhythmic harmony. The section closes with a strong repeating statement: “We thank / the only God,” before the final stanza “Let thy supplanter look / Upon his work. Our faith / Will take the stones he broke / And break his teeth” concludes the chorus in harmonically abrasive violence. The present tense language and future promise of vengeance force this second section of the Palestinian chorus out of the mysterious and exotic timeless narrative space of its first segment; it is unclear where in the narrative this ruthless threat exists, but the language implies a closer connection to the story itself, a foreshadowing of dramatized violence.

The implied mimetic quality of this section, coupled with its extreme texture and bombastic harmonies, recalls the *turba* chorus tradition used to portray the crowds in *St. John* and *St. Matthew Passion*. However, in an interesting shift of ideological events,

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<sup>63</sup> Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 155-6.

Bach's Passions generally use *turba* choruses to evoke crowds, specifically of Jews, clamoring for Jesus's death (this has been used as the basis of many anti-Semitic readings of these works, specifically *St. John Passion*)<sup>64</sup>. To use this type of chorus to represent the Palestinian voices is an interesting musical choice on Adams' part; coupled with the exoticism of their textual and musical identity, it is clear that we are to view the Palestinians as the stereotyped "Other," while the Jews take on the role of the Passion Christians, effectively becoming the Westernized culture with whom the audience identifies.

These two sections, though presented sequentially rather than vacillating back and forth, may be read as embodying the same allegorical characters present in Picander's text of the first chorus of *St. Matthew Passion*, the Daughter of Zion and the Faithful. If we interpret this connection as a speculatively subtle linkage between *Klinghoffer* and Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Goodman's text to the Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians paints two Palestinian identities that could also collectively be interpreted as these two respective allegorical figures. The "Daughter of Zion," generally interpreted as a personification of the city of Jerusalem or its people, as presented in the Old Testament (Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion"; John 12:15: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion"), may be read between the lines of the opening text to the Palestinian Chorus ("My father's house was razed / in nineteen forty-eight").<sup>65</sup> On the surface level, the female voices and reference to a parent suggests a daughter as speaker, which provides a factual basis for such a reading. However, the historical references through the precision of the year strengthen, if not solidify, this connection to Jerusalem: "1948"

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<sup>64</sup> See Michael Marissen, *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism, and Bach's St. John Passion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>65</sup> Jaap Dekker, *Zion's Rock-Solid Foundations* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 269-270.

could harken to the 1948 Palestine War, during which Israeli and Arab-Palestinian forces fought to control land and establish fair partitions. A large part of this warfare focused on the city of Jerusalem, to which both nations still claim rights; therefore, the temporally rooted reference to the holy city suggests an additional tethering to both Jerusalem and the Passion tradition, enhancing the Palestinians' sense of loss and homelessness upon the Israeli raid, and strengthening this interpretive connection between Goodman and Picander's libretto.

Not to be content with just one of Picander's allegorical figures, Goodman may also subtly acknowledge the power of The Faithful, who can be read through the second section of the Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians. An affirmation of faith is woven aggressively into active threats ("Our faith / Will take the stones he broke"), its repetitive verbalism a far cry from the lingering melisma of the Daughter of Zion. Though the Faithful in *St. Matthew Passion* are not nearly as vehement (rather, they lament and spread the word of Christ's crucifixion), the musical setting of this Palestinian section recalls Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* through its typically "choral" texture (i.e., SATB divisi, homorhythmic tendencies, identical text), *turba* identity (again, as discussed above) and staunch homorhythmic motion. In effect, the *Klinghoffer* creators' choice of text and musical style for the Palestinians' chorus may be seen equally as a method of plot exposition and foreshadowing, a nod to the historical tensions surrounding Jerusalem, an acknowledgement of the Passions as influence, and also a way of setting the tone of *Klinghoffer* as a work with largely religious and archaic undertones.

The Chorus of Exiled Jews similarly takes the two characters introduced by the Palestinians – the Daughter of Zion and the Faithful – and exacerbates each one,

especially the former, through an actual dialogue between the male and female voices, more in the style of “Kommt, ihr Töchter,” The enhanced reference to *St. Matthew Passion* through this antiphonal texture is reflected curiously by the Jews’ solemn proclamation “My empty hands / shall signify this passion, which itself remembers”; though perhaps unintentional, the “remembrance” of a “passion” is intriguing, potentially communicating some hidden nod to those aware of *Klinghoffer*’s generic basis. Following this opening remembrance, the tenors literally address the Daughter of Zion by name (“O Daughter of Zion, when you...”), no longer necessitating a Bachian interpretation, but making one starkly obvious. The Daughter is given a voice through a three-part women’s chorus, introduced by the tenors’ “You said,” framing the female voices collectively as one character and representing the personified Jerusalem as tired, old. The penultimate stanza of this chorus does away with all allegory and explicitly compares the female’s body with Jerusalem itself, in essence drawing the metaphor to the forefront (“To me you are a land of Jerusalem stone; / your scars are holy places.”). Though the collective character of the Faithful never quite arises with as much obvious textual or musical vigor as in the Palestinian Chorus, the conversation between the two and the devotion and love apparent through the libretto in the male voices mark them firmly as the Faithful Souls (“Your neighbor, the one who let me in, / she was brought up on stories of our love.”).

Goodman’s use of the Daughter of Zion and the Faithful as allegorical figures in the two opening choruses of *Klinghoffer* (and Adams’ musical setting of her text) deepen the connection with Bach’s Passions. The same biblical language and the position in the work (at the beginning, echoing “Kommt, ihr Töchter”) draw a parallel between the

strictly religious genre of the Passions and the more nebulous (but religious in both subject and tone) generic identity of *Klinghoffer*. Furthermore, the Daughter of Zion and the Faithful function in the same manner in both the Passions and *Klinghoffer*, providing dramatic exposition and setting up a precedent for dialogue. This antiphonal texture, evident in *St. Matthew Passion* through multiple double-choruses that almost always include the two allegorical figures, is prepared (but almost never realized) multiple times throughout *Klinghoffer* in each of the remaining choruses, through the posing of a question to begin each subsequent chorus (excepting the one unpaired chorus in the work, Hagar and the Angel – See Appendix B). Though the questions are generally rhetorical in nature, the initial inquiry to each chorus tends to set up the expectation of a response, in the vein of a dialogue chorus of *St. Matthew Passion* (Ex. 2). That this expectation is constantly denied increases the dramatic tension and signifies that we no longer live in a world with such clear-cut answers, and are instead forced to spend eternity solving the unanswerable.<sup>66</sup>

Ocean Chorus	<i>Is not the ocean itself their past?</i>
Night Chorus	<i>Is not the night restless for them?</i>
Desert Chorus	<i>Is not their desert the garden of the Lord?</i>
Day Chorus	<i>Is not the day made to disperse their grief?</i>

*Ex. 2:* Paired Klinghoffer Choruses & their opening text

Bach’s Passion choruses, often functioning throughout the Passions as allegorical characters or anonymous interjecting crowds, also inhabit a space of commentary. Much like an Aeschylean Greek chorus, in multiple numbers across the Passions the chorus acts

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<sup>66</sup> The anaphoric nature of these opening questions is also notable – as one of the oldest poetic techniques, anaphora is often seen in biblical texts such as Psalms. Though its rhetorical usage is generally one of emphasis, here it seems to be more used to create a sense of continuity between wildly different numbers that stretch across the entire work. Its use here is also vaguely reminiscent of the anaphoric nature of the Four Questions of Passover.

outside of the narrative, pausing time and dramatic development to present a reflection on the current events. These moments are generally portrayed through the insertion of a four-part Lutheran chorale, not necessarily of Picander or Bach's own composition, which increases audience investment in the work – presumably, in performances of the Passions during Bach's lifetime, the congregation would have been familiar with the “popular” chorale tunes and text.<sup>67</sup>

Though the dramatic function of allegorical choruses is drastically different in performance between the Passions and *Klinghoffer*, the latter presents four chorus numbers in a similarly commentative vein: Ocean, Night, Desert, and Day. In direct contrast to the opening two choruses, wherein the singers are identified specifically as members of a certain culture, the text to these more elementally-titled selections is much more vague. First-person pronouns tend to be avoided, and vignettes of figures outside the narrative are described almost omnisciently (“Here is a semblance of the first man”; “Even the man who lies awake”; “The hunters shall go hungry tonight”; “What became of the woman”).<sup>68</sup> An insistence on addressing a symbolic and presumably ever-changing “they” only adds to the inherent ambiguity of these choruses; note again the first line of text in each chorus (Ex. 2). Adams views the choruses' function as “bracket[ing]... isolated from the action,” allowing the audience to “see this event [the *Achille Lauro* hijacking] as part of a vast historical perspective,” much in the way that the Passions' chorales provide a reflective aside.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the inherent focus on polarities in the four paired chorus numbers (Ocean/Desert, Night/Day) are themselves expansions of the

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<sup>67</sup> Wolff, “Form,” 11.

<sup>68</sup> One exception to the general lack of first-person pronouns occurs in the Night Chorus: “I am afraid for myself” – which speaks to necessity of “I” to convey the viscerally personal affect of fear and chaos present in this number.

<sup>69</sup> Adams with Beverly, “Klinghoffer and the Art of Composing.”

opening dichotomy of the Palestinian and Jewish Choruses. There may well be some numerological symbolism in the choice of four paired choruses, as well; groupings of four can be found referenced in the Judeo-Christian and ancient Greek traditions (e.g., Gospels, Four Questions of Passover, temperaments and humors, natural elements), and also in the more natural world (seasons, cardinal directions, the number of weeks in a lunar month), lending an interpretation that is at once inherently sacred and organic.

### **Chaotic Reflection and The Postmodern Opera**

How does one make sense of an opera-turned-oratorio that echoes Bach in its structure, mirrors the contemporary media in its presentation, and addresses a grossly complex sociopolitical event? Opportunities abound for multiple interpretations and intertextual readings in *The Death of Klinghoffer*, and its embodiment of contradictions complicate matters even further: it is an opera that denies mimetic drama, is simultaneously historical and contemporary, and attempts to reach everyone with an archaic and inaccessible text. This is all without consideration of the musical identity – Adams often contrasts musical styles from section to section (or even within numbers). Varying the modes of stylistic discourse adds yet another layer of commentary to each section, while the juxtaposition between them enhances that implied meaning.

The best framework for considering such a work comes in the form of postmodernism, an aesthetic movement of recent years, whose true definition eludes even the scholars most involved with expanding the idea. Lawrence Kramer effectively captures the broadness of the term “postmodernism” in his book *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*, in which he defines the term as “a conceptual order in which grand, synthesizing schemes of explanation have lost their place and in which the

traditional bases of rational understanding – unity, coherence, generality, totality, structure – have lost their authority if not their pertinence.”<sup>70</sup> Music theorist Jonathan Kramer, drawing on literary theorists Fredric Jameson and Jean-François Lyotard, has expanded on the musicological exploration of the concept. His development of taxonomies on musical postmodernism and his writings on temporality and unity in musical works provide a suitable if enigmatic lens through which to view the narrative multiplicity and genre-defying fragmentation of *Klinghoffer*.<sup>71</sup>

Postmodernism has provoked much debate and reflection from contemporary theorists in attempts to define its parameters and apply them to the current culture and artistic zeitgeist. Understandably, many scholars attempt to define postmodernism in opposition to its predecessor, modernism – this manifests in several ways, such as chronologically, as some have tried to pinpoint the shift from modernism to postmodernism (Jameson places this “radical break” in the late 1950s-early ‘60s). Further cataloging of the two aesthetics is generally achieved through lists of dichotomies, such as those crafted by literary theorist Ihab Hassan; some examples include Purpose/Play, Design/Chance, Form/Antiform, Genre & Boundary/Text & Intertext.<sup>72</sup> Kramer takes on the unenviable task of attempting to define postmodern music, creating a list of sixteen general characteristics, including:

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<sup>70</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>71</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Jonathan Kramer’s publications include “Beyond Unity: Toward an Understanding of Musical Postmodernism,” in *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz since 1945: Essays and Analytical Studies*, ed. Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1995), 11-33; “Postmodern Concepts of Musical Time,” *Indiana Theory Review* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1996), 21-62; and “The Concept of Disunity and Musical Analysis,” *Music Analysis* 23, no. 2 (July - Oct. 2004), 361-372. .

<sup>72</sup> Binaries from Ihab Hassan, “Toward a Concept of Postmodernism,” in *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 1987).

- It is not simply a repudiation of modernism or its continuation, but has aspects of both a break and an extension.
- It does not respect boundaries between sonorities and procedures of the past and of the present.
- It challenges barriers between “high” and “low” styles.
- It considers music not as autonomous but as relevant to cultural, social, and political contexts.
- It includes quotations of or references to music or many traditions and cultures.
- It includes fragmentations and discontinuities.
- It presents multiple meanings and multiple temporalities
- It locates meaning and even structure in listeners, more than in scores, performances, or composers.<sup>73</sup>

Obviously, it is rare to find a work that fully encompasses all of Kramer’s theoretical traits, but many contemporary pieces exhibit broader postmodern themes such as plurality, historical reference, and a focus on the audience’s experience rather than compositional intent.

Much of Kramer’s published work has focused on the perceived opposition and blending of unity and disunity in music that exhibits postmodern characteristics. While some sense of unity generally stands as a musical “prerequisite” for modernist composers, in postmodern works it is generally considered more of an option.<sup>74</sup> Kramer proposes an alternate interpretation of musical cohesion: varying degrees of “textual unity” – that is, the structure of the musical work itself, including any large-scale

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<sup>73</sup> Kramer’s full list can be found in his chapter “The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism,” in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, ed. Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner (London: Routledge, 2001), 16-17.

<sup>74</sup> Kramer, “Nature and Origins,” 14.

analyses that may be imposed upon it – and “perceptual unity,” how the work is perceived by the listener, based on their place within a specific cultural and psychological experience.<sup>75</sup> The focus on perception is pivotal considering the postmodern listener, who more readily accepts a musical passage as its own individualized totality rather than within a contextualized whole, and who no longer requires musical (textual) unity as necessary for prescribing meaning to a work.<sup>76</sup> As such, accessibility of musical language is also a common tenet of the postmodern work. Frequent historical allusions ensure familiarity, while stylistic or generic juxtapositions are only jarring to the postmodern listener if a particular style is unfamiliar.

Engaging with external elements is an important aspect of a postmodern work, and often is manifested in musical interactions with history, offered through direct quotation or stylistic gestures.<sup>77</sup> Musical interplay with the past, though evident in other works from previous musical eras as well, is made all the more possible and prominent through the advent and development of recording technology; postmodern listeners has music of other times and other cultures readily at their mental disposal, all with personal understandings and associations. The postmodern composer, therefore, is able to use historical reference of styles and genres to appeal to his listeners in some manner, tailored specifically to the cognitive processes of each audience member. Intertextuality in the libretto manages much the same effect; the wealth of possible stylistic or narrative

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<sup>75</sup> Kramer, “Concept of Disunity,” 365; “Beyond Unity,” 14-15.

<sup>76</sup> Kramer, “Nature and Origins,” 14-15.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 17.

references provides the opportunity for multiple distinctive meanings that differ with each reading of the text.<sup>78</sup>

Because of the multiplicities implied in the postmodern framework, a resulting postmodern work is often chaotic, unstable, and contradictory. And what better way to tell the story of the *Achille Lauro* hijacking? It would be entirely nonsensical to craft a work like this without admitting the inherent pluralities of the situation, which is at once historical and gut-wrenchingly current, reflecting the innumerable viewpoints and opinions regarding the events, uniting religious themes with political reflection and a very real human interest story in a way that not even the American media could possibly conceive. The conglomeration of these circumstantial factors demands that the work interact with religious history and contribute multiple narratives. The fragmentation of music, temporality, and plot heighten the chaos to a level befitting the events.

*Klinghoffer's* rejection of the traditional linear narrative can be read several ways, each following the postmodern impulse to value context over insular absolutes. In 1985, the media forced multiple accounts and interpretations of the *Achille Lauro* hijacking onto the public, hiding data points and creating biases so that a true account of the events, overly complex and too rife with historical baggage, was never told in its entirety.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Other postmodern works that embody similar traits can be found in the Passion genre alone. David Lang's *Little Match Girl Passion* similarly engages with history and intertextuality through his English translation of Bach's *St. Matthew* juxtaposed with a retelling of the Hans Christian Andersen's tale, elevating the Little Match Girl to the status of sacrificial lamb and placing her within the Passion's narrative layers. Tan Dun's *Water Passion* infuses the postmodernity of a Passion-influenced work with a splash of the avant-garde, presenting the gospel with in a multimedia format and using non-Western techniques.

<sup>79</sup> This is not to say that such a rendering of the situation is even possible; in such a politically charged catastrophe, remaining unbiased and covering every detail is essentially unfathomable. Michael Bohn provides a detailed summary of the immediate history leading up the events of the hijacking and the event itself in his book *The Achille Lauro Hijacking: Lessons in the Politics and Prejudice of Terrorism* (2004). As former director of the White House Situation Room under Reagan, one cannot say that Bohn is unbiased or non-ethnocentric in his presentation, but he does cede that "there is no universal set of values in the world that prescribes what is good and what it evil," p. 70.

Sensationalist articles and television news stories reported the events with enraged opinions appropriate to the horrific act, and two made-for-TV movies about the hijacking were filmed within five years.<sup>80</sup> Because of the flurry of media attention and the world's consumption of the news coverage, an attempt at working *Klinghoffer* into a full, accurate, linear narrative would be disingenuous. A work that reflects today's constant bombardment of information, almost none of it fully accurate or impartial, reads as more befitting to this event's place and musical representation in the postmodern era.

However, to depict *Klinghoffer* entirely as a shuffled and biased newsreel would be trivializing (and, for that matter, has already largely been done through its actual media coverage). Adams and Goodman attempt to achieve a higher goal – the entrenchment of the *Klinghoffer* narrative in mythicized history and as allegory for the entire struggle of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. However, the creation of a narrative that both depicts the hijacking and elevates the story to mythic proportions necessitates a certain amount of temporal layering and the inclusion of themes more emblematic than those present in an isolated murder of convenience. The injection of biblical language, particularly that of the Hagar Chorus, serves to contextualize the death of Klinghoffer within the larger framework of social and religious intolerance, forcing the question to be considered without providing answer or conclusion.

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<sup>80</sup> See *The Hijacking of the Achille Lauro* (1989), and *Voyage of Terror: The Achille Lauro Affair* (1990). The first film was broadcast on NBC, and appropriately Hollywoodized; critic Matt Roush wrote that it “amounts to little more than an exercise in suffering.” The 1990 film attempted to portray multiple viewpoints, but in so doing made the Italian captain into a hero and the American officials into cowboys. Much like *The Death of Klinghoffer*, the film did attempt to portray the hijackers as real characters who “felt they were on a mission to help their countrymen,” but often did so in an overly melodramatic manner. Even so, the production team behind the film was accused of pro-Palestinian biases in interviews. From Michael Bohn, *The Achille Lauro Hijacking: Lessons in the Politics and Prejudice of Terrorism* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2004), 113, 119.

Critics and creators alike have described *Klinghoffer* as “a meditation”: its intent is not to depict events or provoke a certain reaction, but rather to contextualize the hijacking in history and initiate a dialogue.<sup>81</sup> As the postmodern techniques of temporal layering and historical referencing are appropriate given the subject matter, so too are the musical references and formal qualities. *Klinghoffer*’s overall structure, a shadow of a Bach Passion, provides a sacred and timeless affect, and its allusions to the Handelian oratorio provides a timeless sense of semi-dramatic presentation and didacticism. However, the stylistic juxtapositions and lack of textual unity within the structure add to the chaotic and multi-faceted nature of the larger narrative. The narrators’ various musical styles are often appropriated from the past as well (see the use of bubble-gum pop and *Sprechstimme* – the ultimate high/low blend), fully entrenching their commentary in different historical eras from the *Achille Lauro* hijacking. While these musical topics do serve a superficial purpose of further illustrating the characters and providing a sense of musical accessibility, the use of older styles also enhances the breadth of historical relevancy in the larger narrative and its demand for sociopolitical meditation.

In *Klinghoffer*, this meditation is forcibly superimposed on postmodern values such as media fragmentation and the extended use of technology, and it is here that the work departs from the stereotypical irony and superficiality of many postmodern works. Postmodern culture values lightning fast bursts of information, allowing no time for contemplation, but *Klinghoffer* demands deeper thought, multiple listenings, and personal

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<sup>81</sup> The critics who are not preoccupied with honing in on pro-Palestine or pro-Israel details in the work tend to disparagingly acknowledge its “gray objectivity” (Peter Davis, “Static *Klinghoffer*,” *New York Magazine*, September 30, 1991), asserting that “the opera’s problem is not that it proffers an anti-Semitic agenda, but that it drifts for far too long, indulging too many narrators and avoiding a point of view.” (Justin Davidson, “The Trouble with *Klinghoffer* Isn’t Quite What You Think,” *Vulture*, October 21, 2014)

interpretation. The work was originally conceived and performed as a mixed-media performance, with close-up projections of the singers' faces during their arias, much in the manner of a pop concert or a stadium performance of the Star-Spangled Banner. This directorial choice brings yet another theme into the complex mix – an observation of how television and the media present these kinds of events, and how they manipulatively direct society's visual focus and mental energy.<sup>82</sup> Juxtaposing the televised close-ups with static oratorio-like staging creates a connection between different types of "elevation," as if the characters' rise to contemporary media celebrity somehow equates them with the religious figures of the oratorio, both raised to a higher status through their respective recorded histories.<sup>83</sup>

Kramer's assertion that postmodern music tends to place the interpretational and analytical onus on the listeners, rather than conveying a clear message by the composer, holds true through the reflective *Klinghoffer*. Adams and Goodman weave together blurred boundaries of meaning and multiple layers of realities, all of which struggle to be "right"; the characters exist as pluralities as well, from the multinational hostages with their divergent retrospective narratives to the four distinct personalities of the hijackers. The traditional boundaries of good and evil go the way of the linear narrative, left behind in search of a more complex but comprehensive presentation of material. Even in the more allegorical chorus numbers, Adams and Goodman step aside to allow the choruses to embody mini-meditations in their own right, weaving together into a metanarrative of objective reflection.

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<sup>82</sup> Sutcliffe, *Believing in Opera*, 205.

<sup>83</sup> Lawrence Kramer discusses the use of media in *Klinghoffer* thoroughly in his article "The Great American Opera: *Klinghoffer*, *Streetcar*, and the Exception," *The Opera Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2008): 73-74.

## Evenhanded Orientalism

*Klinghoffer*'s embodiment of objectivity and "evenhanded" presentation of mythicized material, rather than the expected romanticized dramatization of a horrific event, has provoked intense criticism since its 1991 premiere. This is largely indebted to the work's portrayal of the Jewish and Palestinian characters, who are viewed by many reviewers and audience members as, respectively, too stereotyped and not stereotyped enough.<sup>84</sup> Analyzing *Klinghoffer* in context of opera's historical representation of non-Western characters may help to illuminate the cause behind its erratic reception.

Western music, and opera in particular, has historically had a complex relationship with its portrayal of non-Western characters, where musical signifiers and topics were developed and standardized with the intent of representing certain exotic affects or locales. These musical figures and practices came to be largely accepted within the culture of Western music as an effective way of adding drama or flair, and the use of Orientalist representation further defined the archetype of standard Western compositional models through juxtaposition.<sup>85</sup> The practice of portraying the Oriental or "exotic" in music found a strong foothold in the *alla turca* style of the eighteenth century, exemplified by the finale of Mozart's Piano Sonata in A major, K. 331 (*Rondo alla Turca*), and parts of his Singspiel *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, K. 384.<sup>86</sup> The tradition continued throughout the nineteenth century, and operas such as *Aida*, *Samson et Dalila*, and *Turandot* solidified the trend of using "exotic" musical language such as non-

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<sup>84</sup> See Richard Taruskin, "Music's Dangers And The Case For Control," *The New York Times*, December 9, 2001, and Edward Rothstein, "Seeking Symmetry Between Palestinians and Jews," *The New York Times*, September 7, 1991.

<sup>85</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 1-2: "The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience."

<sup>86</sup> Nasser Al-Taei, *Representations of the Orient in Western Music: Violence and Sensuality* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 90-91.

traditional scales, chromaticism, exotic timbres and instrumentation, and dance rhythms to depict non-Western characters.<sup>87</sup>

Orientalism as a cultural practice has come under intense scholarly scrutiny, especially following the publication of Edward Said's pivotal books *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). A founder of postcolonial theory, Said addressed the pervasiveness of Orientalism by defining it as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"; that is, a construct by which Western cultures and peoples exercise their power over cultures differing from their own.<sup>88</sup> In musical depictions of cultural Others, therefore, one finds stereotypes and musical signifiers which strive not to imitate a certain culture's music via veritable musical references, but rather to represent them in a way which will be widely understood as "Other" by the Western audience.<sup>89</sup> By commandeering and appropriating stereotypical musical features of other musical traditions (such as modes, irregular rhythms, double reed instruments) and placing them into a repertoire box of "exotic" tricks, Western composers effectively, if not intentionally, negated the possibility of other cultures to be intellectual or nuanced, and confined the entire non-Western experience to a single musical representation.

The genre of opera, a pinnacle of musical and dramatic representation, was therefore in a prime position to insert exoticizing music and apply it further to dramatic representation through character portrayal and extramusical cultural markers such as

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<sup>87</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the progression of this trend and categorical musical depictions by geographic area, see Derek Scott, "Orientalism and Musical Style," *The Musical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (Summer 1998), 309-335.

<sup>88</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3. Said's definition of Orientalism is most specifically refers to the field of academic study; for Westerners to "know" these exoticized nations is the ultimate domination.

<sup>89</sup> See again Scott, "Orientalism," 326-327. "Whether or not any of the musical devices and processes... exist in any Eastern ethnic practices is almost irrelevant."

costuming and set design. The plot devices and interaction between characters in these operas often made great use of flat, ignorant stereotypes.<sup>90</sup> Depictions of exoticized characters often fall within two strict gendered dichotomies. The violent, barbaric male, using his power for murderous or political authority, was the first Oriental trope that emerged, his ruthlessness depicted by music from the early *alla turca* jannisary style. As the nineteenth century developed, the stereotypical image of the Orient shifted to the mysteriously manipulative female, as Western composers experimented with sensuous chromaticism and risqué operatic plots.<sup>91</sup>

No matter the point in time, these stock characters tended to be culturally inaccurate and overtly stereotyped, obviously problematizing the Western perception of non-Western peoples. That the music was depicted as different, most often by way of being simpler and intellectually lesser, only exacerbated the hegemonic issue. Furthermore, the fictive depiction of broadly generalized far-away lands negates any attempt at accurately portraying non-Western characters or their musical traditions, painting a collective “Orient” as opposed to a more specific nation or culture.<sup>92</sup> Matthew Head delves into these oversimplifications in his book *Orientalism, Masquerade, and*

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<sup>90</sup> These stereotypes were fueled and mirrored by visual and literary movements as well; see the recurring trend of *chinoiserie* throughout European artistic history, Flaubert’s *Salammbô*, and the emergence of translations of *The Arabian Nights* throughout the eighteenth century.

<sup>91</sup> Ralph P. Locke, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East,” in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 109; 129-131. See also Mary Hunter, “The *Alla Turca* Style in the late Eighteenth Century: Race and Gender in the Symphony and the Seraglio,” in the same anthology, 43-73. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the beautiful and submissive Far Eastern woman becomes a common trope, as well, establishing the seductress as belonging to the Middle East.

<sup>92</sup> Locke, “Cutthroats,” 106.

*Mozart's Turkish Music*, citing Said's metaphor of theatrical representation as confining the entire East on stage for the West to consume and "know."<sup>93</sup>

*Klinghoffer*, with its Palestinian hijackers and multicultural passengers, has a plot that would be, historically, more than likely to include exoticized musical language to depict the "non-Western" characters. However, the oversimplification of characters' nationalities denounced by Head and other Orientalist scholars is actually more present in the "Western" characters of *Klinghoffer* than the hijackers. The hijackers' collective Palestinian identity very clearly pits them as the "Other" in this Self vs. Other opposition, but it is the multinational passengers, with whom the audience sympathizes, who all blend together in nationality and musical style. This is excepting, of course, the narrators who are defined by their country of origin with an associated musical portrait, which performs as a subtle internal exoticism, almost tawdry in its obviousness. This practice could also be read as a reflection of the contemporary notion of "The West", which is no longer one large identity, but fragments of smaller national identities within which Westerners can construct archetypes of other Westerners.

Interestingly, we are to identify most with the Jewish characters, who are commonly exoticized in opera. This choice in *Klinghoffer* is not at all unfounded or surprising, given Klinghoffer's identity as a Jewish American and his role as the main "hero" and sympathetic character. However, given the larger political backdrop of the conflict between Palestine and Israel, there seems to be a blanket association with all the *Achille Lauro* passengers and the Jewish faith, while the hijackers are the few who stand for Palestine. While it may have been a necessary dramatic choice to gloss over any

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<sup>93</sup> Matthew Head, *Orientalism, Masquerade, and Mozart's Turkish Music* (London: Royal Musical Association, 2000), 19-21.

passengers' potential Palestinian sympathies (and a savvy and empathetic political one, at that), the division of the characters into a strict oppositional binary does not quite cover the complexities of the situation.<sup>94</sup> It does, however, engage the audience in a sympathetic response to the Jewish passengers, a dramatic device that many critics choose to ignore.

However we interpret the Jewish-associated passengers, it is the comparative treatment of the two groups in *Klinghoffer* that has gained the most media attention. Adams' musical and dramatic treatment of the Palestinians and Jewish characters has come under much judgment since the work's premiere for being overly "evenhanded," as if the horror of the terrorist act allows or even demands a flat Orientalist treatment of the perpetrators. Considering the current literature and discussion surrounding *Klinghoffer*, an analysis of the work would not be complete without a consideration of the Orientalist angle. However, the intent of the following exploration is not to determine or tally "pro"-Palestinian or Israeli tendencies of the work, but rather to inspect the intent and effect of the work's musical dramatization of these events.

Before considering the music and text of the hijackers themselves, let us first remember the structure of the work, which illuminates several ways in which one may find evidences of "sympathy" towards the Palestinian Other, rather than the Jewish/Western characters. Certainly the generic identity of the work contributes to this "evenhandedness"; reporting information without overt judgment is a tenet of the oratorio tradition, while operas tend to be less diplomatic in their plots and character treatment. Furthermore, the order of the opening choruses, the Exiled Palestinians followed by the Exiled Jews, does tend to skew our perception towards the former, both because of its

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<sup>94</sup> One character does mention her own non-Jewish faith. The Swiss Grandmother states, "I am afraid / I thought, 'At least we are not Jews.'"

initial position, and also because of the first chorus's language, which is much more direct and action-based than the words of the Jewish chorus.<sup>95</sup> As a common criticism of the work is the mythicizing elevation of the Palestinian characters as opposed to the more superficial and petty Jewish ones, these two numbers stand as an interesting foil to the rest of the opera in the way that they portray their character.<sup>96</sup> In these choruses, the Palestinians relay events and a desire for vengeance through a *turba*-like setting, firmly entrenched in stark reality, while the Jewish chorus meditates lugubriously, their amorous metaphors piling atop biblical allusions.<sup>97</sup> Considered within the historical role of the operatic chorus, who often collectively embody a stereotypical identity of whomever they portray, Adams and Goodman are establishing a perception of these peoples that is more in line with historical Orientalist operas, creating a relatively barbaric picture (“and break his teeth”) of the exoticized Palestinians, while the Jews speak not of vengeance or retribution, but love and their homeland.

Pitting these choruses back-to-back establishes a culture of diametric oppositions, the Palestinians and the Jews setting a framework for other irreconcilable opposites in later choruses (Ocean vs. Desert, Night vs. Day). While these oppositions in the chorus numbers do provide a certain amount of necessary continuity in a largely incongruous narrative, the subtext seems to present the Palestinian and Jewish cultures in so conflicting a manner as to view them as mutually exclusive as night and day. No one would argue that this reading is unfitting, given the narrative and events of the

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<sup>95</sup> See the opening lines of each chorus: “My father’s house was razed / in nineteen forty-eight / when the Israelis passed / over our street” vs. the more meditative and vague statement of “When I paid off the taxi, I had no money left / and, of course, no luggage. / My empty hands shall signify this passion, which itself remembers,”

<sup>96</sup> See again Taruskin, “Music’s Danger,” and Rothstein, “Seeking Symmetry.”

<sup>97</sup> For full text of the opening choruses, refer to Appendix C

Klinghoffer affair, but the opposition between the two in the Prologue seems to tell the entire story before the drama even begins, with a strongly pessimistic foregone conclusion: this will never be resolved.

Though now we see the choruses as back-to-back, the original conception and first few performances of *Klinghoffer* had an additional scene inserted between them.<sup>98</sup> Originally, this was the place of the infamous “Rumor scene,” in which Alma and Harry Rumor, New Jersey suburbanites and friends of the Klinghoffers, chat with their son Jonathan. As the Rumors griped about cruises and each other to the tune of garish pop-style music, many audience members took the scene to be a trivializing and tasteless caricature of American Jews, citing their bickering language as proof (Harry: “Look at him. What a mensch.” / Alma: “Reagan? What an asshole.”), and taking offense at the focus on materialism (Harry: “This house is full of souvenirs; Coffee pots, tea sets, little cups”), and an unabashed admonishment about bodily functions (Alma: “You spent the day parked in the one clean restroom...”). While there is no outward indication that the characters are actually Jewish, their connection with the Klinghoffers and the use of Yiddish words (“mensch”) was more than enough to cause audiences to draw that unsettling conclusion.

The Rumor scene, placed between the devastating Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians and the Chorus of the Exiled Jews, disrupted any potential for cultural balance by its dramatic placement alone, negating any tribulations and mythicizing opportunities in the latter chorus. Though the balance does come, first impressions are stronger, and the equal treatment of both groups – if, indeed, that is the goal – is much

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<sup>98</sup> The “Rumor Scene” appeared at the Brussels premiere in 1991, and again at the Brooklyn Academy of Music performance later that year. It was cut by the time the 1992 Nonesuch recording was released.

improved with the removal of the scene.<sup>99</sup> Richard Taruskin and others see the removal of the scene as a self-accusation, as if Adams and Goodman are now covering their tracks and admitting that the scene was unseemly. Adams addressed the scene and its deletion in *Hallelujah Junction*, stating, “In truth, I was glad to see it go... [T]he comedy of the Rumor family now seems in retrospect to be inappropriate and served only to obscure the seriousness of the rest of the opera.”<sup>100</sup>

However, the “comedy” of the Jewish characters of the work does not necessarily end with the riddance of the Rumors; the treatment of the Klinghoffers may be read in several different ways, not all positively, as the work simultaneously diminishes and aggrandizes their character. The operatic necessity of a “hero” is set and expected in this genre, cemented through centuries of standardized tradition, and a hero is not what the audience receives from Leon Klinghoffer – at least not in the traditional expectation of a dutiful, righteous, and exalted figure.<sup>101</sup> Instead, we receive Klinghoffer the man, humble, defensive, and human. Klinghoffer does not speak until well into the second act – as if the entire sordid historical stage must be set for its final culmination – when we find him separated from the other passengers, subjected to Rambo’s bullying. And though Klinghoffer may not fit the operatic stereotype of a hero, the words Goodman assigns him are certainly more heroic than most would be, when faced with a man who delights

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<sup>99</sup> Robert Fink takes the Rumor Scene in context of the American Jewish culture of the Reagan-Bush era, stating that Harry and Alma’s satirical self-mockery transcends the initial image of stereotypical and anti-Semitic characters and that its removal is largely detrimental to the work. In “*Klinghoffer in Brooklyn Heights*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17 (July 2005), 203-207. Fink further asserts that “the portrayal of American Jews was offensive and upsetting to New York Jewish audiences because *it reflected perfectly their worst nightmares about their own conflicted identity as Jews back to them*,” 196.

<sup>100</sup> Adams, *Hallelujah*, 164.

<sup>101</sup> Fink, “Brooklyn Heights,” 176, 203.

in violence.<sup>102</sup> “We’re human. We are / The kind of people / You like to kill,” Klinghoffer declares courageously, accompanied by staunch horns and dry, militaristic bass drums. His defiance (some would say false bravado) transcends any lack of outward heroics – is not his humanistic courage the ultimate act of a hero?

Goodman characterizes the Klinghoffers through an insistent focus on the “small things,” a choice that is frequently criticized as belittling and superficial. “I should have worn a hat,” Klinghoffer says to his wife after his brutal interaction with Rambo. Shortly afterwards, Marilyn Klinghoffer rhapsodizes about the merits of hip replacements to her fellow passengers; their normalcy connects them retroactively to their petty friends the Rumors. Robert Fink has led the academic discussion of character portrayal in *Klinghoffer*, exploring the facets of representation that may have contributed to the overwhelming backlash following the American premiere at Brooklyn Academy of Music in September of 1991. The small things, Fink argues, are what make Leon Klinghoffer anti-heroic and, by extension, anti-operatic – but they also stand at the heart of the opera, celebrating the ordinary acts of love (“M., let’s see you smile”) and morality (“We both / Have tried to live / Good lives”) as a drastic counterpoint to the hijackers’ fumbled but self-aggrandized mission.<sup>103</sup>

However, Leon Klinghoffer’s “small things” are largely eschewed in the text of his final swan song, *Aria of the Falling Body*, which lends a mythicized quality to the events of his murder. More akin to the meditative and reflective chorus numbers, his aria

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<sup>102</sup> At this point, the audience is unaware of the violence and brutal tendencies of Rambo – the hijacker’s response to Klinghoffer’s monologue (“You are always complaining”) make his violent tendencies quite clear, and the *British Dancing Girl*’s narrative immediately following names him specifically as the one to be afraid of in the moment (“when... Rambo came, nobody laughed / He slapped a few people around / A bit, and shouted that he’d send / Us all to hell”). In retrospect, according to her, “men like that aren’t ever up to much,”

<sup>103</sup> Fink, “Brooklyn Heights,” 205-207.

avoids any first-person narrative or even text that might indicate that is it Klinghoffer himself singing. Instead, the text sung by Klinghoffer's Body (as indicated in the libretto) is elevated and contextualized within a grander scheme, offering commentary on urban post-war deterioration instead of his own now-finished life. Describing decrepit "good furniture" left out in the rain, and noting the obliviousness of the previous owners to its state, Klinghoffer comments obscurely on forced exile and the destructive effects of apathy:

Whose things these were  
None of the damage  
Water nor fire  
Not any outrage

Reported there  
Came to their notice  
As if secure  
In the Lord's justice

Empty-handed  
But not hurriedly  
They were minded  
To go far away

To go away  
Not to take action  
And so decay  
Followed defection

Klinghoffer's comments on this furniture could be used with almost no changes to be a reflection on the state of his own body, its murder and deterioration unnoticed by the passengers, unseen by his loved ones, purposelessly vandalized and left behind. Labeled as a *gymnopédie* and carrying the affect and historical implications of Erik Satie's similarly named piano pieces, a graceful 3/4 meter creates the image of bodies through space, mirroring the symbolic motion of Leon Klinghoffer's dance double in the staged

production.<sup>104</sup> The most pronounced musical fingerprint of this *gymnopédie* lies in the orchestration, embodied by a slow-moving and atmospheric lamentation in the high strings.

This “aureole” of ethereal strings, evocative of a halo, can also be found surrounding Jesus’s music in the *St. Matthew Passion*, and this connection has not been lost on critics. In fact, many of the scathing reviews of *Klinghoffer* have discussed the problem of pro-Palestinian leanings and “sympathy” in the work through the lens of Bach’s musical language, harkening to the Passion structure that Adams and his creative team so consciously borrowed from.<sup>105</sup> However, these critics (Richard Taruskin, most prominently) seem to ignore the halo surrounding Klinghoffer’s Body or, even more notably, Marilyn’s final aria and the painful culmination of the entire work (see Ex. 3). Instead, they focus on the use of high dreamy strings in Mamoud’s first aria, or the Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians, where the strings are both affectively appropriate and much less associated with the characters than with the setting – it is hardly out of place to dream of scoring high strings for such nocturnal and atmospheric statements as Mamoud’s “Now it is night,” and the Palestinians’ melismatic “moon” (Ex. 4).

If anything, the setting of the Bachian “aureole” relates most strongly to the characters when there is no apparent atmospheric demand for it; Adams could have easily composed a stronger or more ominous musical finale to *Klinghoffer* or set Aria of the Falling Body with low sonorities more evocative of the depths of the Mediterranean, both

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<sup>104</sup> Satie’s *Gymnopédies* are generally thought to evoke images of Greek antiquity, specifically the graceful movements of gymnasts’ nude bodies engaged in dance or exercise. The etymological derivation and the term’s musical associations are discussed comprehensively by Erik Frederick Jensen, “Satie and the ‘Gymnopédie,’” *Music & Letters* 75, no. 2 (May 1994): 236-240. Interestingly, the *gymnopédies* were mislabeled for some time as part of Satie’s output of “furniture music,” adding an additional – if most likely coincidental – layer to the furniture metaphor in the *Klinghoffer* *gymnopédie*.

<sup>105</sup> See Taruskin, “Music’s Dangers,” and Fink’s response in “Brooklyn Heights.”

226

M.K.

— in the wake of this ship like oil, on-ly then would the world in-ter-vene. They should have killed

T  
B

230

M.K.

me. I want-ed\_ to die. I want-ed\_ to die.

*mf* *mf* *mp* *pp*

VS B 188

Ex. 3: Marilyn Klinghoffer's string halo, end of the opera

57

S  
A

moon

*sempre*  
(con 8ba)

Ex. 4: Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians; contextually appropriate high strings

of which would have been more dramatically appropriate. However, Adams' setting of the halo in these instances seems to be, if not referentially intentional, suggestive of a

higher reading of these dramatic moments.<sup>106</sup> Robert Fink has eloquently rebutted Taruskin's accusations in his article "*Klinghoffer* in Brooklyn Heights," also noting the string halo surrounding Klinghoffer's gallant attempts at cheering up his wife after Rambo's assault ("I should have worn a hat").<sup>107</sup>

Adams and Goodman's portrayal of the *Klinghoffer* hijackers is difficult to generalize, as they create a different personality for each one based on historical accounts of the true events and the need for character dramatization. In fact, the differentiated depictions of the hijackers as "real people" seem to be at the heart of many of the work's critiques. Character and personality begets sympathy, one could say, and to portray a terrorist through such a tender and artistic medium such as opera is tantamount to providing support of his actions.<sup>108</sup> To consider the work on a larger level, we must also think about the characters within the realm of a true story: their role as terrorists. The *Achille Lauro* affair still fresh in many peoples' minds even today, inherently marks them as "bad" to the audience (especially an American audience), and Goodman and Adams' portrayal of them as the antagonists is obviously enforced through the factual happenings of the hijacking. *Klinghoffer* does not try to excuse the action through any means, but its treatment of the hijackers as characters at all is shocking to many.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Adams has not commented on the presence of the halo of strings in *Klinghoffer*, and whether any of the instances were intended as a reference to Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.

<sup>107</sup> Fink, "Brooklyn Heights," 177-181. Klinghoffer's simple statement here further connects him vaguely to the Passions, the image of a hat conjuring Jesus's crown of thorns.

<sup>108</sup> See again Taruskin, "Music's Danger." Andrew Tommasini, in his 2014 *New York Times* article "Toward a Truth That Defies Precision" praises the work in its musical revealing of inner characters, which Mitchell Cohen promptly tears apart in his 2015 review of the opera for *Jewish Review of Books*, "Going Under With Klinghoffer": "[O]f course art and especially music have unusual capacities to explore inner lives and grievances. The difficult question is: What are the implications when talented artists tweak history for political reasons?" Alex Ross cuts right to the quick in his 2001 review of the work, "Dept. of Raw Nerves: Hijack Opera Scuttled," noting that "The opera infuriated some listeners... because the librettist, Alice Goodman, let the terrorists speak for themselves." (*New Yorker*, November 19, 2001).

<sup>109</sup> See an interesting discussion of *Klinghoffer* by Edward Said in his book *Music at the Limits* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 134-6.

The hijackers' text is largely eloquent, and the way in which Goodman creates a backstory and motivation for each character swiftly denies any classic expectation of a flat, barbaric trope of antagonistic terrorists. Giving them words and song at all places the terrorists on relatively equal footing as the passengers, even though Adams and Goodman dispute the claim that they attempted to make the work "evenhanded" with their treatment of the characters.<sup>110</sup> The inflammatory statements Goodman unapologetically assigned to the characters (Rambo: "America / is one big Jew"; Molqi: "We are not criminals / And we are not vandals / But men of ideals"), while undoubtedly uncomfortable for audiences everywhere to hear, are nonetheless characteristically appropriate and serve to heighten dramatic tension in a work where much of the plot's natural tension is removed through the structural and narrative treatment.

The Palestinians, singly focused on their own "self-mythologizing" form of retaliation and viewing themselves as part of a larger divine scheme, naturally are given text that mirrors that visceral need (Omar: "My heart will break / If I do not walk / In Paradise / within two days") and seeks to find an explanation, if not an excuse, for their actions (Mamoud: "...Almighty God / In His mercy showed / my decapitated / Brother to me."). Goodman offers no hidden commentary on her choice of text for the characters, and as problematic as reviewers have perceived this alleged imbalance, one cannot deny that it would be inherently out of character to give exclusively elevated text with religious undertones to a passenger on a cruise ship, when religion or philosophy does not offer any clues to their primary dramatic motivation. Critics, true to form, also tend to ignore

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<sup>110</sup> Adams, *Hallelujah*, 165. Adams addresses the positive reviews of his "evenhanded" opera with puzzlement, stating, "Neither of us [himself or Goodman] was trying to parse out judgment in equally measured doses... What I emphatically did *not* do was tally up the number of bars assigned to one side or the other."

the sublime text of Klinghoffer's Aria of the Falling Body ("May the Lord God / and His creation / Be magnified / in dissolution") and the hijacker Molqi's persistently matter-of-fact nature ("We are / Soldiers fighting a war"; "These people must have food.") when arguing this point.

Adams sets much of the music for the four hijackers in a manner that, when contrasted with the Western characters, indeed places them as Otherized roles – however, any use of musical signifiers is subtle and often has more to do with emotional or situational intensity than any character's particulars. Musical signifiers of Orientalism tend to be difficult to discern with Adams' music because of his language's developed qualities. Oftentimes he works within modal or unconventional tonal areas, and within the context of his extensive orchestration techniques, there is little sense in branding a passing *cor anglais* or castanets as a strong signal of exoticism. Even the rhythmic insistence seen throughout the *alla turca* style is in itself characteristic of much of Adams' entire output, and juxtapositions of lush Romantic lines with more energetic sections, historically associated with East's unpredictability and weaving interplay between violence and sexuality, are also one of his hallmarks.<sup>111</sup>

That being said, several musical features of the hijackers' characters can be analyzed with potential "exotic" undertones, differentiating them from the passengers' identities. Adams views himself as primarily an orchestrator, and his extensive instrumental forces are put to good use in painting his characters.<sup>112</sup> Obligato instrumental lines are a common thread throughout the work, and Adams often uses quick double-reed figures and melodic lines to accompany the hijackers' music. In Mamoud's

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<sup>111</sup> See Scott's laundry list of Orientalist devices; "Orientalism," 327.

<sup>112</sup> Adams with Porter, "Nixon," 29.

first dreamy aria, “Now it is night,” the bassoon’s rapid chromatic turns echo Mozart’s *Rondo alla Turca* and the range of the instrument mirrors Mamoud’s baritone, effectively identifying the commonly exoticized instrument as an musical manifestation of his inner psyche (Ex. 5). The bassoon becomes even more insistent and agitated as Mamoud divulges his personal story (“I used to play with guns”), suturing the instrument even more with his character and, by extension, his backstory, which tells a representative tale of the victimized Palestinian, trained in violence through necessity.

The image displays two systems of a musical score. The first system, starting at measure 65, features a vocal line for Mamoud (labeled 'Mam.') and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "but I love these songs \_\_\_\_\_ whose stor-ies are all the same.\_\_\_\_". The piano accompaniment consists of a bassoon part (labeled '(Bsn.)') and a piano part. The second system, starting at measure 69, continues the vocal line with the lyrics: "Lov-ers... A time of part-ing. \_ For him death in a war,". The piano accompaniment continues with the bassoon and piano parts.

**Ex. 5:** Mamoud’s bassoon obligato, sinewy arabesques

Notably, in Mamoud’s escapist musing, “Those birds flying above us,” he is accompanied only by sustained chords in the strings. Lifting the audience out of the violent narrative, his text in this passage wishes for a pacifistic life of the bird, unencumbered by “desire/or need of war” or the sense of belonging to a specific nation; through the lack of bassoon, the instrumentation likewise lifts him away from his own exoticized country. Mamoud’s rhapsodizing is an interesting choice by Goodman, as this

arioso section tends to almost mirror the allegorical choruses in its textual construction. “Doesn’t the earth belong to them?,” he sings, only to be answered a few moments later by the Night Chorus’s characteristically structured question, “Is not the night restless for them?”. The clarity of the subject “them” shifts from direct to metaphorical, but the usage of the same syntactical construction is evident, connecting Mamoud to the Greek-style choruses in a way that is somewhat surprising treatment for an antagonistic character.

437  $\text{♩} = 150$  MOLQI *agitato*  
 Give these or - ders.  
*f furioso*  
 VSB 188

*Ex. 6:* Molqi’s first entrance; *furioso* descent in strings

In contrast, Molqi’s primary affect is agitation; chaotic lightning strikes of strings generally usher in his music (Ex. 6), either acting as ostinato or accompanied by a more intense rhythmic one. The writing for his strident tenor range is quick and jagged, often leaping intervals of a fifth or more on emphasized words, and dissonant brass stingers punctuate his violent text. As the unspoken leader of the terrorists, established through his practical exchanges with the Captain and the simple fact that he initiates the hijacking, his music tends to stand as representative of the collective terrorist group, and several musical figures are indeed presented by Molqi and taken up by the other hijackers later. Assigning musical figures that only appear with those four characters is exoticization in a sense, to be sure, as Adams is marking the hijackers’ music with atypical features that are absent from the more neutral discourse of the Western characters. The simple musical differentiation of the two groups, hijackers and

passengers (and the audience’s identification with the Jews/passengers), ties to our historical and cultural idea of different as fearsome and, by extension, lesser.

Adams establishes a chromatic musical figure through Molqi’s music, a leap of a major third followed by a quick half-step slip down to the minor third, which can be found in many of the hijackers’ arias (Ex. 7). Though Adams’ vocal writing is often rhythmically and melodically intricate to mimic dramatic natural speech, the insistence with which this small figure is found in the score should not be discounted as coincidental. The history and conditioned interpretation of these intervals allows for an overtly unsubtle reading of this tiny figure as a musical representation of the interplay between good and evil. The initial presentation of a major third perhaps represents the hijackers’ perception of their own virtuous intent, and the ultimate resolution to the minor third the destructive result. Furthermore, and similarly conspicuous, the chromaticism inherent in this figure calls to mind the sensuous “exotic” scales and arabesques typical of Western music intending to evoke Middle Eastern locales and colors.

The image displays two musical excerpts from a score. The first excerpt, starting at measure 462, features a vocal line with the lyrics "This is a dem-on -" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a melodic line with a chromatic figure: a major third leap followed by a half-step slip down to a minor third. The second excerpt, starting at measure 466, features a vocal line with the lyrics "stra - tion ac - tion for lib-er - a - - tion:" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part continues the chromatic figure, showing the major third leap and the half-step slip down to the minor third. Both excerpts are in 3/8 time and use a key signature with one flat.

Ex. 7: Molqi’s major/minor third slip, “liberation”

248

Omar  
\_ be the word in your mouth. Your pil - grim-age: lie

T  
Ah

B  
Ah

VSB 188

*Ex. 8:* Major/minor slip in Omar’s aria, “word in your mouth”; “pilgrimage”

This figure is present in both Omar and Rambo’s passages as well (Ex. 8), but these two characters are musically related more to each other than the other two hijackers. Much of this relationship is structural – neither Omar nor Rambo appear until the second act, after both Molqi and Mamoud have had at least two appearances each, more in connection with the logistics of the hijacking itself. Conversely, Omar and Rambo interact more with the passengers, and this slow shift from the retrospective expositional function of Molqi, Mamoud, and the Captain to the mimetic scenes of Omar, Rambo, and the Klinghoffers mirrors the gradual recollection-to-action motion of the work.

Rambo’s words (“You are always complaining”) are brutal and vicious, and the discomfort felt from hearing text such as “America is one big Jew” is only exacerbated by Adams’ unsettling musical portrait. Multiple orchestral layers, none of which seem to fit together, underscore Rambo’s hateful words – a languishing contrabassoon recalls

Mamoud's obbligato instrumentation, while a shrill rhythmic synthesizer stacks chord clusters one pitch at a time. This cacophony clashes against rhythmically offset claves and timpani, and the effect is one of supreme anxiety, even before Rambo starts to sing. A male chorus manifests as Rambo's inner consciousness, and their insistent commands echo his own desperate need for violent domination ("Go on! Kneel! Beg! Beg me!" they cry, on unpitched shouts). The second half of his diatribe ("Are you English?") replaces his representative chorus with low brass, doubling his vocal line exactly, adding gravity and masculinity while covertly associating him with Molqi's dissonant trumpets.

Omar, whose one aria is separated from Rambo's only by the British Dancing Girl's recollection, is the youngest hijacker and therefore set as a mezzo-soprano. Casting him as a trouser role adds a certain amount of confusion to the staged production, as there are no dialogue or costuming cues to indicate the specific role of this new character.<sup>113</sup> As in Rambo's aria, a wordless chorus underscores the number, starting as a female group and gradually folding in the tenors and basses, atmospheric in intent to begin, but becoming a more violent and interjecting force. Percussive "clicks" (evocative of finger-snaps), which were initially presented in the previous scene as an unnervingly rhythmically constant presence underneath Molqi, Mamoud, and the Captain's exchange ("Come here. Look," culminating in "Now we will kill you all") surface below Omar's aria as well. The clicks are exclusively associated with the hijackers, and the static rhythmic gesture evokes the steady tick of a clock, preemptively bringing the tension of time into the plot ("Every fifteen minutes, one more will be shot," Mamoud states in the next scene). Here, the timbre of the percussion is similarly hollow, but the rhythmic

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<sup>113</sup> This choice also causes a bizarre cognitive dissonance in the Penny Woolcock's 2003 film version, wherein a male actor lip-syncs to a female voice. Adams and Woolcock reflect on the choice in the DVD's bonus materials, addressing the mezzo writing as Omar's "inner soul,"

gesture and its relaxation into a rolled major chord in the harp suspends the action, effectively stopping time for Omar's reflection.

At this point in the work, the British Dancing Girl has just had her retrospective say in which she perceptively describes Omar as "extremely nice," but who "would do for at least one / Passenger" (cf. Rambo, who was outwardly violent but who "[wasn't] ever up to much."). In much the same progression, Omar is presented as a character who becomes increasingly disturbed and violent throughout his aria. The harp and female chorus (not to mention his own rather unthreatening mezzo identity) create an air of piousness to begin, but slight shifts in rhythmic intensity and vocal quivers permeate the aria as it develops (Ex. 9). Adams' musical vocabulary has been well developed by this

229

Omar  
can. — Let the tent — of your ex - ile —

S  
— Ah — Ah — Ah — Ah —

A  
— Ah — Ah — Ah — Ah —

T  
— Ah — Ah — Ah — Ah —

*poco a poco crescendo*

*sva.....*

*sva.....*

**Ex. 9:** Omar: rhythmic horns and vocal melisma, gaining violent intensity

point in Act II, and many of the sonorities have been connected to a character or a soundscape of sorts; we hear bits of the British Dancing Girl in a flirty agitated flute part

(“Lie down”) which recalls her praise of him, and dissonant synthesizer passages and an exact instrumental doubling act as a throwback to Rambo and his brutal force. For example, when he sings “O Holy Death,” Omar’s instrumental doubling shifts from instrument to instrument, but retains the sonic quality of a vaguely synthesized oboe or flute, a modernized musical exoticization.

His violence realized (“My soul is / All violence. / My heart will break / If I do not walk / In Paradise / Within two days.”), his wish for martyrdom in place, Omar’s aria concludes with stalwart major chords in the horns, sequencing chromatically upwards, a lovely bit of disconcerting text-painting, yearning for the Paradise he so desperately wishes to reach. Robert Fink uses Omar’s aria as the cinching pillar of his disbelief regarding the sensationalized reception of *Klinghoffer*: “Does anyone serious think that when the young fanatic Omar cries out... we are supposed to admire him? To want to *be* like him? Yes, he’s into the big things – God, Faith, Country, and Sacrifice – and that’s why his ‘soul is all violence.’”<sup>114</sup>

### **Opera On Stage and Screen: Peter Sellars vs. Penny Woolcock**

Though the text and its musical setting have been the focus of this discussion and many of *Klinghoffer*’s reviews, the work truly would not exist without the creative input of director Peter Sellars, whose tasteless joke that the creative team’s next work after *Nixon* should be called *Klinghoffers Tod* immediately took hold. Sellars has become well known in the operatic circuit through his experimental treatments of classic operas (his productions host *Don Giovanni* in the drug-ridden back alleys of New York, and play *Giulio Cesare* as an American president abroad), playing off his belief that “opera should

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<sup>114</sup> Fink, “Brooklyn Heights,” 207.

be a challenge to the audience.”<sup>115</sup> These modern settings of historically fixed pieces speak to Sellars’ focus on the interplay between historical and temporal context, with the surprising purpose of “emphasizing opera’s inclusiveness... finding a common ground and collaborative space.”<sup>116</sup>

In *Klinghoffer*, Sellars’ inclusive intent translated to neutrality and abstraction in stage direction. Avoiding any defining costumes or makeup, the singers and dancers were visually equalized in a sea of muted pastels and neutrals, armed only with a large scarf, which they could interpret according to the scene; props were kept to the bare minimum.<sup>117</sup> The difficulty of identifying characters visually was only emphasized by the fact that many of the singers performed multiple roles; in the original production, Alma Rumor and Omar were sung by the same mezzo, and one singer portrayed all three of the female recollection roles. The set, designed by George Tyspin, was an abstraction in itself, a four-story steelframe grid meant to vaguely suggest an immense ship with its gangways and cables. Adams relates that “depending on the lighting, [it] could also look like an oil refinery at night, a mosque, a spaceship, or a cage,” while Sutcliffe interprets the set further, suggesting that it could also represent “the rigid ideological frame controlling the characters.”<sup>118</sup> Immense projection screens hung from the set, providing distinctly unoperatic close-ups of the singers’ faces, painting emotion and song while their dance double contributed yet another layer of complexity to the visual aspect, a

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<sup>115</sup> Sutcliffe, *Believing in Opera*, 197.

<sup>116</sup> Peter Sellars and Thomas May, “Creating Contexts: Peter Sellars on Working with John Adams,” in *The John Adams Reader*, ed. Thomas May, (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006), 243.

<sup>117</sup> John Adams, “The Birth of *The Death of Klinghoffer*,” *Harvard Magazine*, September-October 1991, 42.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*; Sutcliffe, *Believing in Opera*, 205.

smaller figure replete with stylized motion.<sup>119</sup> The choreographed movements generally served to mimic and intensify natural gestures and motions, perhaps offering a broad commentary on the potential for epic events in the everyday.<sup>120</sup>

The effect of these combined directorial choices seems to severely vary depending on each audience member's individual experience, and critics generally land on one side of a very divided opinion: whether the stage direction's serves to elevate the work to allegorical status even further, or contributes nothing but an increased unfriendliness to the audience. The abstract staging enhances the oratorio-like quality of *Klinghoffer* and elevates the drama to a historical meditation. That it does so at the expense of the audience's expectation of traditional operatic action seems to be irrelevant: the work was neither conceived nor implemented with a standard operatic narrative, nor is the purpose to provide a dramatic retelling of the events.

Despite the static theatrical intent of *Klinghoffer*, a dramatic retelling is exactly the purpose of Penny Woolcock's 2003 adaptation of the opera, created for British television station Channel 4. This drastic shift in medium, stage to screen, called for an equally radical directorial change, and the resulting film is much more steeped in realism than any staging of *Klinghoffer*, as Sellars was vehemently opposed to Goodman and Adams' idea for a "Bermuda-shorts production."<sup>121</sup> Rendering a film version of *Klinghoffer* necessitated a more cinematic treatment of the previously static monologues, and Woolcock took advantage of the filmic medium's increased opportunity for character development and historical reference. News footage from the Holocaust accompanies the Chorus of the Exiled Jews, and Woolcock creates characters – a little Palestinian girl, a

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<sup>119</sup> Wendy Lesser, "An Artist For Our Time," *The Threepenny Review* 53 (Spring 1993): 30-31.

<sup>120</sup> Sutcliffe, *Believing in Opera*, 205.

<sup>121</sup> Christiansen, "Breaking Taboos," 255.

young Jewish couple – whose stories are heart-wrenchingly told solely through visual narrative during the Prologue, only to weave them unexpectedly into the present story (the exiled Palestinian girl becomes Mamoud’s mother; the Jewish couple, now elderly, crouch on the deck of the ship as hostages). Klinghoffer’s death is no longer hidden and stylized, but we see him shot point-blank, a bullet-hole in his head as he floats through the Mediterranean to the tune of his *Gymnopédie*. Adams explicitly states, “[Woolcock’s] film version of *The Death of Klinghoffer* was more provocative than the Sellars stage version” in his book *Hallelujah Junction*, identifying her vivid depictions of violence as more dramatically effective than Sellars’ “ritualized gesture.”<sup>122</sup>

What Woolcock’s *Klinghoffer* loses in its translation to film is its ceremony; multiple choruses had to be cut, including the largely symbolic Hagar Chorus, and the audience’s perspective is undoubtedly more focused on the retelling of events rather than the meditative aspect of the stage version (“Film isn’t good at abstractions,” Woolcock tells us in the supplemental material of the DVD). However, the use of historical film clips perpetuates that archaic and metaphoric contextualization, safeguarding the work’s original reflective nature while still appealing to the less philosophical opera consumers. Furthermore, the seamless nature of film – no set changes or intermissions necessary – softens the effect of the musical and stylistic juxtapositions, allowing the viewer to be caught up in the emotions of the work, rather than the construction, though seeing live opera singers on screen with an exceptionally realistic set does demand a certain mental shift from the viewer.

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<sup>122</sup> Adams, *Hallelujah*, 166-7.

Woolcock's film adaptation of *The Death of Klinghoffer* is the most accessible version of the work, its DVD format undoubtedly reaching a larger audience than any rendering of the staged version could. Entrenched in the postmodern ideal of audience accessibility, the film can be read as a logical progression of *Klinghoffer*'s original aesthetic intent – to start a difficult dialogue, forcing rumination and historical reflection on its viewers. As the film projects a tidier and more digestible package than Sellars' original staging, with less intrusive stylistic juxtapositions and enhanced drama, the audience comes away from the work with a more organized set of schemata to interpret the pluralities still evident in the musical and narrative aspects.

### ***Klinghoffer* as Meditation**

Though it is unlikely that *Klinghoffer* will be freed from its notorious labels in the near future, its continued performance speaks optimistically about its staying power, despite its label as an obstinate black sheep of the operatic genre.<sup>123</sup> One cannot help but imagine that it is because of its controversy that the work is so intriguing to opera companies – not as a function of wanting press or the possibility of being denounced for anti-Semitism, but because *Klinghoffer*'s intrinsically sensitive subject matter speaks to the importance of its message. Would the work, with its qualities of stasis, disjunction, and higher-level meditative intent, be as effective at starting a national conversation if the topic was not innately inflammatory? Would a conversation even need starting? The sociopolitical relevance of *Klinghoffer* obviously still rings true twenty-five years after its premiere, if the protests at the Metropolitan Opera are any indication. Would that those denouncing it as sympathetic to one side or the other would deign to sit in on a

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<sup>123</sup> The most recent performances of *Klinghoffer* are by the English National Opera in 2012, Long Beach Opera in March 2014, and the Metropolitan Opera in October-November 2014.

performance, only to realize that “sympathy” is not the purpose of the paired allegorical choruses, the reflective *Gymnopédie*, or even Omar’s unsettling desire for a Holy Death.

Stepping out of the operatic genre is the main vehicle through which *Klinghoffer* transcends the realm of the performative mimetic space, leaving behind a conventional narrative and the expectation of taking a single point of view. This generic denial and the subsequent mixture of oratorio and Passion traits, portrayed structurally in its narrative layering, textually through biblical allusion, and dramatically in its stasis, serves as a mythicizing agent, playing off the established conventions of these sacred genres to enhance the overall affect. Postmodern juxtaposition and complexity, jumbling narrative space within multiple poetic and musical styles, makes the work imminently up-to-date while remaining rooted in the most historically fundamental artistic traditions. The practice of subtle exoticism in portraying both the Jewish and Palestinian characters further interacts with past musical traditions, all while turning the mirror onto the audience. What are we to do when neither side is presented as entirely heroic? What is my knee-jerk personal interpretation of the characters? How do I reconcile that within my larger sociological context? What angles have I not considered, as an audience member, as a consumer, as a global citizen?

Perhaps the consistent string of rhetorical questions that introduce the four elemental choruses is a reflection of how one should interact with this work, always questioning oneself (“Is not...?,” the choruses constantly wonder), and keeping the options open (a potential answer: “I believe it is, but it could be otherwise”). Posing questions to the infinite future, looking to the past for answers, realizing that the stories told and the histories lived have led (impossibly, inconceivably, inevitably) to one’s

immediate present – this is the place to which *Klinghoffer* leads us. From here, may we join Goodman’s final and unrealized chorus in the potential for a more balanced and meditative future: “We have put aside ambition and the pride of our hearts. We have turned our faces towards the dark, and our hope.”

## APPENDIX A: Synopsis of *The Death of Klinghoffer*

On board the Italian cruise liner *Achille Lauro* in October 1985 on a 16-day circuit of the eastern Mediterranean.

### **Prologue**

Chorus of Exiled Palestinians

Chorus of Exiled Jews

### **Act I, Scene 1**

The cruise liner *Achille Lauro* has been hijacked just a few hours out of the port of Alexandria, where a large group of passengers disembarked for a tour of the pyramids. Those remaining on the ship are the old, the very young, those desiring a rest amid the comforts of a floating hotel, the crew and service staff. The hijackers are an unknown number of young Palestinian men. Not until much later is it discovered that there are only four of them. Their purpose is not clear. Their actions, however, are definite. A waiter has been shot in the leg. The ship's engines have been shut down. The first officer has a gun against his head. Passengers, who had gathered in the dining room for lunch, are transferred to the Tapestry Room, which is more easily guarded. Americans, Britons, and Jews are identified. The Captain urges calm.

Ocean Chorus

### **Scene 2**

The Captain is on the bridge, guarded by the teenager Mamoud. Mamoud tunes in to various local radio stations. He sings of the night, of his love for this music, and of his memories. The Captain confides his thoughts on the nature of travel. (One passenger, an Austrian woman, has locked herself into her stateroom, where she will remain for the next two days.) Just before dawn a bird lands on the ship's railing, almost at the Captain's elbow. He starts. Mamoud rebukes him.

### **Act II, Scene 1**

It is 11:30 am. The *Achille Lauro* awaits permission to enter the Syrian port of Tartus. The air corridor is deserted, as is the sea-road. Americans, Britons, and Jews have been moved on deck to the Winter Garden, which is the only place a helicopter might hope to land. Leon Klinghoffer's wheelchair cannot be lifted onto the platform, so he sits a little below the others. There is no shade. Differences between the Palestinians are becoming clearer, as is their isolation from their commanders. Molqi, the leader on board the ship, has not revealed his orders. Everyone is on edge. One Palestinian torments some of the passengers. Another, Omar, invokes the holy death he longs for. Mamoud believes that their radio contacts have betrayed them. Omar and Molqi fight. Molqi wheels Klinghoffer away.

Desert Chorus

**Scene 2**

Klinghoffer is shot. Mrs. Klinghoffer, sitting on the deck in wretched discomfort, has no idea her husband is dead. The Palestinians announce the murder to the Captain. He must inform the authorities on shore and let them know that other hostages will die. He considers it his duty as Captain to sacrifice his life for the others. Molqi decides that no further killing is necessary. During the ensuing radio negotiation the Captain assures Abu Abbas, among others, that no one has died. It is thus agreed that the ship will proceed to Cairo, where the Palestinians will be allowed to disembark. As the ship begins to move, Klinghoffer's body is thrown over the side. It will drift ashore in Syria.

Day Chorus

**Scene 3**

The *Achille Lauro* has docked in Cairo and the Palestinians have disembarked. The Captain calls Mrs. Klinghoffer to his cabin and breaks the news of her husband's death. She will not be consoled.

—Alice Goodman, in The Metropolitan Opera program, 2014

## APPENDIX B: Construction of Scenes

### Prologue

Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians	<b>Chorus</b>
[Rumor Scene, deleted]	[Action]
Chorus of the Exiled Palestinians	<b>Chorus</b>

### Act I, Scene i

Captain, “It was just after 1:15”	<i>Recollection</i>
Swiss Grandmother, “My grandson Didi”	<i>Recollection</i>
First Officer, “The engines cut out”	<i>Recollection</i>
Molqi, “Give these orders”	Action
Swiss Grandmother, “So I said to my grandson”	<i>Recollection [cont.]</i>
Mamoud & Captain exchange, “We are sorry for you”	Action
Ocean Chorus	<b>Chorus</b>

### Act I, Scene ii

Mamoud, “Now it is night”	Action
Captain, “I have often reflected”	Action
Austrian Woman, “I kept my distance”-	<i>Recollection</i>
Mamoud, “These birds flying”	Action
Night Chorus	<b>Chorus</b>

### Act II, Scene i

Hagar Chorus	<b>Chorus</b>
Molqi & Captain exchange, “Come here. Look”	Action
Klinghoffer, “I’ve never been a violent man”	Action
Rambo, “You are always complaining”	Action
British Dancing Girl, “I must have been hysterical”	<i>Recollection</i>
Omar, “It is as if our earthly life”	Action
Desert Chorus	<b>Chorus</b>

### Act II, Scene iii

Marilyn, “My one consolation”	Action
Molqi, Rambo, Mamoud, Captain exchange	Action
Klinghoffer, “Aria of the falling body”	[Meditative Action]
Mamoud, “It’s over, it’s done”	Action
Day Chorus	<b>Chorus</b>

### Act II, scene iii

Captain, “Mrs. Klinghoffer, Please Sit Down”	Action
Marilyn, “You embraced them!”	Action

## APPENDIX C: Opening Choruses

Chorus of Exiled Palestinians:

My father's house was razed  
In nineteen forty-eight  
When the Israelis passed  
Over our street.

The house was built of stone  
With a courtyard inside  
Where, on a hot day, one  
Could sit in shade

Under a tree, and have  
A glass of something cool.  
Coolness rose like a wave  
From our pure well.

No one was turned away.  
The doorstep had worn down:  
I see in my mind's eye a crescent moon.

Of that house, not a wall  
In which a bird might nest  
Was left to stand. Israel  
Laid all to waste.

Though we have paid to drink  
Our water, and our wood  
Is sold to us, we thank  
The only God.

Let the supplanter look  
Upon his work. Our faith  
Will take the stones he broke  
And break his teeth.

Chorus of Exiled Jews:

When I paid off the taxi, I had no money left,  
And, of course, no luggage. My empty hands  
shall signify this passion, which itself remembers.

O Daughter of Zion, when you lay upon my breast  
I was like a soldier who lies beneath the earth  
of his homeland, resolved.

You said, "I am an old woman. I thought you were dead.  
I have forgotten how often we betrayed one another.  
My hide is worn thin, covered with scars and wrinkles.  
Now only doctors gather at my bedside, to tell what  
the Almighty has prepared for me.

A woman comes in to keep the place looking occupied."

Let us, when our lust is exhausted for the day,  
recount to each other all we endured since we  
parted. There is so much to get through, it will  
take until night. Then we shall rise, miraculously,  
virgin, boy and bride.

To me you are a land of Jerusalem stone;  
your scars are holy places. There, under  
my hands, the last wall of the Temple. There  
the Dome of the Rock. And there the apart-  
ments, the forest planted in memory, the  
movie houses picketed by Hasidim, the military  
barracks, the orchard where a goat climbs among branches.

Your neighbor, the one who let me in,  
she was brought up on stories of our love.

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