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MARK MARRINGTON

Denis ApIvor and his contribution to British opera and ballet

Denis ApIvor died in Robertsbridge, East Sussex, on 27 May 2004, aged 88. My objective here is not to offer a full appreciation of his achievement but to provide some insight into his contribution to British opera and ballet between 1947 and 1966, with especial regard to his operas Yerma and Ubu Roi.

DENIS APIVOR was born near Dublin in 1916, of what may be most appropriately described as Anglicised Welsh parentage. He spent the first 17 years of his life in a state of national flux, residing for various lengths of time in Caernarfon North Wales, Oxford, Hereford and Aberystwyth before finally settling in London in 1934. Such displacement may go some way towards explaining the apparent chameleon-like musical personality of the composer, and in particular his refusal to be tied in stylistic terms to either a Welsh or English outlook. Indeed, a thorough acquaintance with ApIvor's output reveals that, if anything, there is a consistent leaning towards developments on the European mainland, rather than in Britain.

From an early age music played an important role in ApIvor's life, although from his parents' point of view it was never intended as a potential career. His musical education began at Christ Church Oxford with a chorister's scholarship in 1925 and continued at Hereford Cathedral School between 1926 and 1933. He received excellent training during these years in piano, organ and later the clarinet, becoming highly proficient on all three instruments. Guided tuition in composition was unavailable, however, and instead ApIvor made his own investigations through studying the scores of others and devouring such tomes as Berlioz's *Treatise on instrumentation*. An early obsession was the composer Peter Warlock, whose schizophrenic musical deviations between the jovial and the melancholy were replicated in ApIvor's songs of the 1930s. Subsequent important influences, dating from ApIvor's first years in London (where he had relocated at his parents' instigation to train in medicine), were Delius, Van Dieren and Busoni, whose works he became familiar with through concert performances and the enthusiastic study of scores. It was also during this period that, through fortuitous contact with Warlock's close friend Cecil Gray, ApIvor received his first and only composition lessons. Gray generously paid for short periods of tuition with Patrick Hadley and Alan Rawsthorne, and also introduced ApIvor to Constant Lambert. Neither Hadley nor Rawsthorne seems to have made a great impression, although it is possible to discern an influence of Rawsthorne's peculiar approach to harmony in at least three of ApIvor's works of the 1940s.¹ Lambert on the other hand was a revelation, introducing ApIvor to jazz, through his *Rio Grande*, and European cosmopolitanism through his book, *Music ho!*.

1. The Concertante for Clarinet, Pianoforte and Percussion op. 7 (1945), Sonata for Violin and Pianoforte op. 9 (1946) and Concerto for Pianoforte and Orchestra op. 13 (1948).

Evidence of ApIvor's inclinations towards the theatrical may be traced to his earliest compositions, in which he was repeatedly drawn to literature as a stimulus to his musical imagination. Between 1933 and 1939 he produced over 30 solo songs, with texts drawing upon 15th-century mysticism, 16th-century love poetry, bawdy lyrics, 19th-century gothic poetry and the literature of the British *fin-de-siècle*. In musical terms, such texts provoke the exploration of a broad psychological panorama, at the heart of which is an intuitive and highly adaptable late Romantic chromatic style. ApIvor's remarkable choral-orchestral setting of TS Eliot's *The hollow men*, completed under Rawsthorne's guidance in 1939, marked a decisive break with song-writing and offered the opportunity to experiment on a broader dramatic canvas. In this five-movement work, ApIvor, through an innovative self-styled language of interval symbolism, brings the predicament of Eliot's dilapidated protagonists vividly to life. There is much more than mere text setting here. Each movement is a stage in what is essentially a cynical re-working of the journey of Gerontius – a distinctive musical landscape within which the spiritual hopes and fears of the hollow men are laid bare. The last movement in particular provides a remarkable and poignant depiction of the end of life.

The advent of World War II brought most compositional activity to a standstill for ApIvor, with his medical skills now beginning to take priority over the musical. Indeed medicine was to remain a persistent thorn in ApIvor's vocational side for much of his career. Of the few works of significance to emerge from this difficult period is ApIvor's first opera, *She stoops to conquer*, begun in 1943 and completed in 1947, with a libretto by the composer after Oliver Goldsmith.² This marked something of a retreat from the compositional experiments of the 1930s, with the composer instead investigating the stylistic characteristics of the 18th-century number opera, as Stravinsky was to do in his slightly later *The rake's progress*. Here, the darkly cynical dissonance of *The hollow men* gives way to a simple tonal style, couched within the forms and devices of the operatic masterpieces of Mozart and Rossini.³ The work was eventually submitted to the Arts Council for performance during the Festival of Britain in 1951, but was unsuccessful, and since then further opportunities for staging have not arisen.

During the immediate post-war period ApIvor began to take up the thread of his composing career and to construct a new idiom built upon serial principles.⁴ For ten years or so after 1948, ApIvor's style contained an uneasy compromise of serialism and tonality, perhaps closest in ethos to the pre-War Expressionist works of Schoenberg and Berg. Interestingly, this coincided with the period of ApIvor's greatest public success as a composer of works for the stage. He received considerable critical acclaim at this time for his 12-note ballets, *A mirror for witches* (1952), after the story by Esther Forbes,

2. In Oliver Goldsmith: *Poems and plays* (London: JM Dent, 1910).

3. Particular models for ApIvor included Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Mozart's *Così fan tutte*.

4. Learned at second hand from Elisabeth Lutyens's husband Edward Clark, Music Programme Builder at the BBC between 1926 and 1936.

and *Blood wedding* (1953), based upon the tragedy by Federico García Lorca. His second opera, *Yerma*, also derived from a Lorca play, was commissioned by Sadler's Wells in the light of these successes and completed in 1959. This work did not reach the stage, however, although it was broadcast by the BBC in 1961 and 1962.

The theatre works of the 1950s resume the psychological journey begun by ApIvor in *The hollow men*. The two ballets both utilise highly dramatic and disturbing subject matter, which brings forth equally arresting music. The former concerns demonic possession in 17th-century Massachusetts, while the latter deals with the tragic consequences of a blood feud in early 20th-century rural Spain. Both works were composed when the tension between serial and tonal aspects of ApIvor's idiom was at its most pronounced, providing considerable scope for musical expression. ApIvor's particular achievement was to refine the personal language of interval symbolism he had developed in *The hollow men*, in the context of his 12-note investigations. In other words, the interval characteristics of rows are carefully and specifically tailored to facilitate the creation of thematic and harmonic gestures appropriate to the subject matter of the scenario. An individual row thus possesses a kind of leitmotivic significance in the work as a whole, and may be associated with a character, an object or a specific concept. ApIvor also employed his 12-note material in another more functional, rhythm-oriented fashion in his ballets, by deriving ostinato figures from segments of an individual row which are then developed by sequence to generate forceful climaxes. The ballets also heralded a refinement in ApIvor's handling of the orchestra, marked by an increasing association of instrumental texture with specific moods or psychological states. Ex. 1 shows the opening bars of *Blood wedding*. The unison statement, described by ApIvor as a 'guitar cadence', suggests the tragedy of the central characters, while the more lyrical material which follows is associated with the bloodthirsty moon. ApIvor's tragic motto, minus its phrygian descent, has a particular affinity with the famous crescendo on B heard in Berg's *Wozzeck* (Act 3, Scene 2) following Marie's murder.

APIVOR'S SECOND OPERA, *Yerma*, composed between 1956 and 1959, marks the culmination of his early dramatic style. Lorca's tragedy, which has been described by Rupert C. Allen, as 'a prime example of psychological conflicts as created in dramatic form by a twentieth-century imagination',⁵ provides a distinctive and unusual alternative to the texts that were fuelling British opera during this period. The play, which was re-fashioned into a libretto by Montagu Slater, deals with aspects of female psychology specifically in relation to frustrated maternity. In particular, it focuses upon the disastrous consequences that occur when such frustration

5. Rupert C. Allen: *Psyche and symbol in the theatre of Federico García Lorca* (London: University of Texas Press, 1974), p.124.

Lento ma non troppo
Orchestra

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system shows the Orchestra part in 4/4 time, starting with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and moving through *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, and *p*. The second system introduces the Flute (*Fl.*) with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and the Strings with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The third system continues the orchestral texture with dynamics ranging from *f* to *mf*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Ex.1: ApIvor: *Blood wedding*, opening

6. With regard to the contemporary British context, Lorca's themes of ostracism and character degeneration within the context of a small community link *Yerma* with Britten's earlier *Peter Grimes* (1945), which also sets a text by Slater. Yerma's mental deterioration also finds a parallel in the increasing hysteria and possessiveness of the Governess in Britten's *The turn of the screw* (1954). Another point of contact with *Yerma* in thematic terms is Michael Tippett's opera *The midsummer marriage*

is allowed to fester within an individual, in this case, the lead character, Yerma, who at the end of opera strangles her husband in a fit of momentary insanity. *Yerma* in this respect stands directly in the tradition of such late 19th- and early 20th- century libretti as Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* and Marie Pappenheim's *Erwartung*. An affinity with the German Expressionist tradition is also reflected in ApIvor's music, which is at times reminiscent of Schoenberg's *Erwartung* and, in particular, Berg's *Wozzeck*, in its textural and timbral attitude to the depiction of fluctuating psychological states.⁶ A scene which perhaps demonstrates this influence most readily is found in Act 1, Scene 2, when Yerma, having failed in her

(1952), in which the latter's somewhat involved Jungian theme of individual renewal and integration is reflected in Yerma's ultimately fruitless, search for personal

completeness through the conception of a child. There are in fact strong suggestions of Tippett's exuberant writing for chorus and orchestra in the finale of the

second 'rural' scene of Act 2 of ApIvor's opera, while the former's Ritual Dances find a parallel in the somewhat darker pagan fertility rite of ApIvor's Act 3.

attempts to woo Victor, her childhood sweetheart, begins to hallucinate, imagining that she can hear the cries of a drowning child. Here the texture (ex.2) is comprised of rushing chromatic sextuplets in the strings, an approach which is strongly reminiscent of the drowning music heard in Act 3 of *Wozzeck*.

Taken as a whole, it must be admitted that *Yerma* is an uneven work in stylistic terms, its serially-derived language veering freely between blatant tonality and astringent bitonality, with a consistently atonal environment only becoming more pronounced in the final act. It may be argued in defence of the work however that this unevenness has an important part to play in communicating the psychological development of the opera, the greatest level of atonality coinciding with the point at which Yerma's mental condition is at its most aggravated. It is the work's formal difficulties that are of greater concern and in particular, the problem of making the overtly conversational aspects of Lorca's play move in a dramatic way. Slater's rather obvious translation of the text did not help matters in this respect, his unfortunate illness and death in 1956 preventing the further redrafting and revision that would have made the libretto a more concise affair. ApIvor's approach was, perhaps unadvisedly, to set large passages of Lorca's dialogue, creating extended scenes comprised of small-scale 'episodic' structures – mainly half-numbers and passages of recitative – in which a variety of instrumental textures were employed on a moment-by-moment basis to suggest the changing psychological states of the characters concerned. While the music composed for these scenes was often interesting in itself, the cumulative effect of too much talking was to diffuse the dramatic tension.⁷ Significantly, the most exciting parts of the opera in formal terms are those in which the sectional integration of ideas is most concisely observed, and in which the recitative is at a minimum. Of the most successful parts of the opera in this respect are the gossips' scene of Act 2 and weighty fiesta scene of Act 3, which also incorporates a ballet.

AP I V O R ' S T H I R D O P E R A , *Ubu Roi*, based on the play by the French poet Alfred Jarry (1873–1907) is likely, when it is eventually performed, to be revealed as the composer's most unique contribution to the genre.⁸ Composed between 1965 and 1966, this was the first theatre work to emerge within the context of ApIvor's post-Webern idiom, which he had embraced in 1960 and already applied in various large-scale vocal and orchestral contexts. With this new style, ApIvor had moved a considerable distance from his expressionistic tonal-serial experiments of the 1950s. A period of Jungian analysis in 1959 had led him to 'a revulsion against compromise' and a 'retreat towards the miniature and the epigrammatic',⁹ with the resultant jettisoning of tonal reference and thematic gesture.

7. Despite the fact that such passages are themselves strong in individual musical character.

8. Described by ApIvor in the libretto as an 'Opera Pataphysica in 3 acts'.

9. See Denis ApIvor: 'Autobiography' (unpublished memoir, 1968), p.246.

(♩ = 72)

Yerma

near. Some - where

Strings

pp

near. Like some - one

ff

drown - - - - ing.

Ex.2: from ApIvor: *Yerma*, Act 1, Scene 2

The decision to adapt Jarry's play is both significant and remarkable. ApIvor had come across the text in 1960, in the acclaimed translation from the French by Barbara Wright, a source that eventually provided the basis for his self-constructed libretto.¹⁰ The story itself is a relatively straightforward five-act historical drama in prose form, concerning the antics of the power-obsessed Père Ubu, a tyrant who murders his way to the Kingship of Poland and is subsequently routed by the Russian army.¹¹ The importance of the play lies in the absurd fashion in which this 'plot' is treated. Its dialogue and action are hard-hitting and primitive, comprising numerous outbursts, obscenities, ludicrous skirmishes and brutal murders. Jarry also pioneered various techniques of audience defamiliarisation in his approach to the staging of the work, anticipating the Surrealists and the Theatre of the Absurd. These include the adoption of a single set with a backcloth to replace the lowering and raising of the curtain, with placards being used to inform the audience of a scene's location. Masks were to be worn by the players and costume was to be ambiguous with regard to historical period because this 'better renders the idea of something eternal'.¹² Crowds were in Jarry's opinion a mistake, and were to be represented by individuals, rather than groups.

ApIvor's personal interest in *Ubu Roi* was essentially Jungian in its perspective, focusing upon the mythical and archetypal significance of its lead character, Père Ubu. For ApIvor, Ubu was 'perhaps the purest representation in modern literature of the Jungian 'Shadow', the dark side of the persona, the black, evil, aggressive monster, who lurks in the depths of the human subconscious'.¹³ There is something of a parallel here with the murderous character of Punch in Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy* which was composed at about the same time as ApIvor's opera (1965). The psychological sophistication of Stephen Pruslin's libretto is absent in this instance however; there is no deeper process of Jungian integration to give purpose to the actions of the protagonist. Unlike Punch, Ubu is not ultimately redeemed by his experiences and he simply continues on with his bloodthirsty quest for territory.

Initially, ApIvor saw little operatic potential in Jarry's play because it seemed that the 'constant battle and fighting scenes would be too much to contend with'.¹⁴ It was his increased exposure to contemporary British theatre at this time, however, that brought about a change of attitude. During the early 1960s he took every opportunity to visit the Arts and Royal Court theatres in London, where he was able to see the thought-provoking works of such younger British playwrights as Arden, Osborne, and above all, Pinter. A powerful performance of Boris Vian's *The empire builders* in 1962 also led ApIvor towards the Theatre of the Absurd and the works of Beckett, Genet and Ionesco, which was particularly important from the point of view of his appreciation of the theatrical processes at work in Jarry's play.¹⁵ For

10. Alfred Jarry: *Ubu Roi*, trans. by Barbara Wright (London: Gaberbocchus, 1951; 3rd edn, 1966, repr. 1969).

11. A concise summary of ApIvor's libretto for the opera is contained in Francis Routh: *Contemporary British music* (London: MacDonald, 1972), pp.112–13.

12. See Jarry: *Ubu Roi*, trans. by Barbara Wright, p.x.

13. See ApIvor: 'Ubu Roi: Opera in 3 acts' (unpublished libretto, c.1965), prefatory p.5.

14. See ApIvor: 'Autobiography', p.298.

15. This would have been complemented by his reading of Martin Esslin's classic text on the genre, which is referred to in ApIvor's prefatory notes to the libretto of *Ubu Roi*. See Martin Esslin: *The theatre of the absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).

ApIvor, the advent of all these playwrights provided a welcome injection of reality into British theatre, as he comments in his autobiography:

It was the note of protest, of the absurd and of satire which was so desperately needed, and the break through of the 'human being' in a basic situation – with his mask and defences down, speaking the language of the streets, speaking from an attic, a hospital bed, a bare room or even a dustbin.¹⁶

16. ApIvor: 'Autobiography', p.267.

17. Likely candidates for the latter are Pinter's *The room* and *The birthday party*. ApIvor may also have been spurred on to consider such projects by Humphrey Searle's opera *The photo of the colonel*, based on a story by Ionesco, which had received its first radio and stage performances in 1964.

18. The first performance, in an English translation, took place on 16 January 1963, directed by Ralph Koltai and conducted by Colin Davis.

19. Confirmed in ApIvor, 'Autobiography', p.298. ApIvor was in possession of a heavily annotated copy of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1929), dated 1964.

20. Weill pointed out that *Mahagonny* was to be performed with the 'utmost economy of scenic means and individual expression on the part of the actors' and that the 'music is never in the least illustrative'. See Ralph Manheim and John Willett, edd: Bertholt Brecht: *Plays, poetry and prose, volume two part three* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979).

21. One further musical interest occupying ApIvor during this period was Erik Satie, specifically the orchestral works *Parade* (1917) and *Relâche* (1923). This is likely to have come about as an offshoot of ApIvor's extensive reading on Jarry and the turn of the century French artistic

Initial attempts to reconcile these experiences with his musical outlook were unsuccessful, however. ApIvor records that he had considered at least two contemporary plays in operatic terms before 1965 – Ann Jellicoe's *The sport of my mad mother* (1958), a story of teddy-boy violence, and an unspecified early play of Pinter – but that 'there were difficulties which I have so far not resolved'.¹⁷ With regard to *Ubu Roi*, it was ApIvor's acquaintance with the Brecht-Weill opera *The rise and fall of the city of Mahagonny* (1929) at Sadler's Wells in early 1963 which suggested a way forward.¹⁸ ApIvor studied the score of this opera in considerable depth, along with that of another Brecht-Weill collaboration, the ballet *The seven deadly sins* (1933).¹⁹ The importance of these works lay, according to ApIvor, in their acquainting him with the technique adopted by one composer in dealing with the problem of operatic satire. This was not a reference to Weill's musical style itself, which was markedly different from the post-Webern idiom being explored by ApIvor during this period. Instead it is an acknowledgement of Weill's musical aims in *Mahagonny* – namely the realisation of the Brechtian concept of the 'epic theatre' in an operatic context. At the heart of this was the rejection of the 19th-century Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* – specifically its organic character and the attendant psychological and illustrative properties of its music – in favour of an ambiguous relationship between music and text.²⁰

From a purely musical perspective Weill's approach would have corresponded with ApIvor's concern at this time to purge his own idiom of its emotional and expressionistic associations. More significant in regard to ApIvor's operatic ambitions however is the correlation of the Brecht-Weill theatrical vision with the attitude of defamiliarisation pioneered by Jarry in his approach to staging *Ubu Roi*.²¹ ApIvor acknowledges this in his opera through the adoption of a number of specifically Brechtian theatrical devices in the service of a Jarry-like effect of audience 'alienation'. His libretto indicates, for example, that 'wherever necessary or possible, good use should be made of a screen with back projection of locations and titles and/or voice

context in such books as Roger Shattuck: *The banquet years* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958). Certainly the absurd intentions behind

these works would have been recognised by ApIvor as sharing an affinity with the Theatre of the Absurd. ApIvor possessed the

following Satie scores, all dated 1964: *Relâche* (Paris: Rouart Lerolle & Cie, 1926) and *Parade* (Paris: Rouart Lerolle & Cie, 1917).

through a loudspeaker'.²² This is derived directly from the projection technique pioneered by Caspar Neher in the Brecht-Weill staging of *Mahagonny*. Another feature borrowed from the Brecht-Weill opera is the one-off use of a megaphone in the final act to announce that Ubu and his wife are 'Toiling across the snows of Livonia'.²³ In line with Jarry's aims, ApIvor also instructs that any scenery and décor employed in the production are to be 'surrealistic' and that the actors wear half-masks on the upper part of the face. ApIvor also contributes to the absurdity already prevalent in the text with a number of touches of his own. In Act 1, Scene 7²⁴ for example, Bougrebas the son of the murdered King Wenceslas is seen to answer a telephone mounted in the wall of a cave, upon which he proceeds to converse with his ancestors in a 'walkie-talkie'-like manner, using expressions such as 'Over and out'.²⁵ Then, later in Act 3, Scene 5, Mère Ubu is seen to use a microphone attached to an echo-box to give Père Ubu a 'dose of the supernatural' while he is sleeping.²⁶

In musical terms an effect of alienation is also built, somewhat automatically, into ApIvor's post-Webern idiom. The opera is generated from a single 12-note row, which, by contrast with the ballet works and *Yerma*, has no intended thematic or symbolic function. Tonal implications are restricted where possible, occurring only in the context of royal ceremony and folk-like celebratory occasion, where the effect is often humorous. There is no sense of organic unity in the work as a whole – one is simply taken from event to event, often at speed. This sensation of fragmentation effectively places the work closer to number opera, rather than Wagnerian music-drama, even though there are no actual set pieces in the traditional sense.

Generally speaking, there is little opportunity for the audience to become involved with the work in purely musical terms. Moments of extended instrumental writing are infrequent and mainly appear in the context of short introductions to scenes. The orchestral underscore is chamber-like and pointilliste in character and serves to provide a subtle underlying sense of the frequent agitation in the opera. There are however some traditional dramatic devices which function to heighten the atmosphere of absurdity, including the use of string tremolandi to underline Ubu's plotting and mistuned brass fanfares to herald courtly meetings. Some unusual instruments are also included in the ensemble for comical colour, such as the French accordion. Ex.3, which shows ApIvor's treatment of the controversial opening scene of the play, provides an illustration of the composer's musical language and approach to scoring in the work.

Regarding the text setting, ApIvor's writing for solo voice is largely angular, in line with the post-Webern idiom, and essentially parlando in style. Lyricism is rare and when it does occur it is explicitly drawn attention to in the score, as if to place it in inverted commas. For example, Ubu's brief moment of philosophising on the death of Rensky in Act 3, Scene 4 is headed

22. See ApIvor: '*Ubu Roi*: opera in 3 acts' (libretto), prefatory p.5.

23. *ibid.*, p. 65.

24. Indicated as Scene 2 of the second part of Act 1 in the score.

25. See ApIvor: '*Ubu Roi*: opera in 3 acts' (libretto), p.22.

26. *ibid.*, p. 59.

Musical score for the opening of *Ubu Roi* by Denis ApIvor. The score is in 4/4 time and features a variety of instruments and vocal parts.

Orchestral Parts:

- Orch. Tutti:** Starts with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 162$. Dynamics include *ff*, *sf*, *dim*, and *p*.
- Strings:** *pizz. strings* (pizzicato strings) are indicated.
- Tuba:** A Tuba part is shown.
- Woodwinds:** Includes parts for Saxophone (Sax.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), and Bassoon (Bsn).
- Other Instruments:** S.D. (Soprano Drum), W.w. (Woodwinds), Tbn (Trombone), and Vcl (Violin).

Vocal Parts:

- Mère Ubu:** Starts with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 84$. Lyrics include: "LIGHTS UP ON STAGE Ubu f That's a Shyttel", "fine way to talk you blood - y great oaf!", and "Don't give me that sort of talk Or I'll".

Dynamic Markings: *ff*, *sf*, *dim*, *p*, *pp*, *sf*, *p*.

Ex.3: ApIvor: *Ubu Roi*, opening

flat - ten you out, You sill - y old Cow, Mère U - bu I'll do you in!

Cl. W.w. W.w. + brass

sf *ff* *sf* *sf* *sf*

Acc.

a tempo

Sax.

pizz.

p

Ex.3 continued

by the instruction, 'with a sudden absurd sense of false lyricism', while Mère Ubu's impassioned 'melodic' singing from the ship in the Epilogue is prefaced by the statement 'Mère Ubu waxes lyrical'. In contravention to Jarry's original intention the chorus, rather than an individual singer, is employed by ApIvor to represent his idea of the fickle crowd, appearing in the guise of Partisans, Conspirators, Financiers, Judges and so on. Significantly the music allocated to the chorus is deliberately the most conventional and stylised in the opera, employing simple rhythmic figures and homophonic or imitative textures, which in the context of the opera's otherwise abstract style, aptly suggest the banality of Ubu's sycophantic followers.

In *Ubu Roi* ApIvor did not offer anything particularly new to British music in terms of his idiom, which had effectively been overtaken by the experiments of the Manchester School during the past decade. While the opera certainly anticipates in its intensity, the violent, farcical ambience of such dramatic masterpieces as Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy* and Maxwell Davies's

Eight songs for a mad king (1969), it is far removed from their sound worlds. Instead, the real significance of the opera lies in the composer's audacious choice of subject matter for the work, and in his intelligent drawing upon recent developments in theatrical thinking. Perhaps one very specific innovation that can be attributed to the work as a whole is that it achieved, like Weill over 30 years previously, a modern re-interpretation of the 18th-century number opera. The work is the natural culmination of ApIvor's development to this point. His true inclination had always been to conceive dramatically, but on a small scale, as the problems of *Yerma* had demonstrated. Here he had discovered a text which naturally coincided with his musical aims, and as a result he produced a synthesis that should eventually come to be viewed as his most potent contribution to British opera.

The music examples from Blood wedding, Yerma and Ubu Roi are © Susan ApIvor and reproduced by kind permission.

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