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Out of Many, One Voice: A Fundamental Map to Performing Shirley J. Thompson's Opera—Women of the Windrush

Danielle Rosann Watson

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OUT OF MANY, ONE VOICE: A FUNDAMENTAL MAP TO PERFORMING
SHIRLEY J. THOMPSON'S OPERA—*WOMEN OF THE WINDRUSH*

by

Danielle Rosann Watson

A Doctoral Project
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Sciences
and the School of Music
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Committee:

Dr. Kimberley Davis, Committee Chair
Dr. J. Taylor Hightower
Dr. Joseph Brumeloe
Dr. Edward Hafer
Dr. Jonathan Yarrington

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ABSTRACT

Women of the Windrush, composed by Shirley J. Thompson, is a mono-opera for soprano, film, and chamber orchestra. Thompson uses *Women of the Windrush* to rewrite history and effect change in the way women are portrayed in opera—from weak characters to heroic figures. As a woman composer of African descent faced with discrimination from an early age and coming from a history of women who were not recognized as composers within their time, Thompson is progressively being recognized for her contributions to the body of music literature, nationally and internationally. Concerning her works, there is little to no record of scholastic documentation, nevertheless, Thompson has made her music accessible through written compositions and successful performances of her works. This doctoral project seeks to promote women composers, particularly, to feature the significant contributions of Shirley J. Thompson—a pioneering composer.

The project provides biographical information on the composer, discusses her compositional style and influences, gives details on the social context and history of *Women of the Windrush*, and an interpretation of its text and music. Alongside examining the music and text, performance recommendations on characterization, use of language, and vocal delivery are provided. The overall intention of this doctoral project is to guide readers, especially curious musicians, in learning, teaching, and performing *Women of the Windrush*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express heartfelt gratitude to my voice professor and chair of my committee, Dr. Kimberley Davis, for her mentorship and unwavering support in completing my doctoral project. Special thanks to the rest of my committee for challenging me and believing in my work. Profound appreciation to Professor Shirley J. Thompson for composing this important work, and to soprano Nadine Benjamin for her astounding rendition of the opera; both your support and insight made a world of a difference. To my dear friends, family, and support team, notably, Dr. Gonzalo Aguilar, Amoyo Bryan, and Dr. Byron Johnson – I extend my sincerest gratitude for your listening ear and valuable input. Above all, my journey would not have been successful without God guiding me through the process.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my mother, Marjorie McKinley, for working tirelessly to ensure I receive the best education and for her endless support towards my craft. She has always been my number one fan, and her presence in my life has served as an epicenter. I am forever indebted to her as I aspire every day to accomplish greater things for her.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BBC</i>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<i>MBE</i>	Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire
<i>OBE</i>	Officer of the Order of the British Empire (The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire)
<i>SATB</i>	Soprano Alto Tenor Bass
<i>UK</i>	United Kingdom
<i>USA</i>	United States of America
<i>USM</i>	University of Southern Mississippi
<i>WWII</i>	World War II

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Women of the Windrush, a mono-opera by Shirley J. Thompson, is composed for soprano, film, and chamber orchestra. In this opera, four women from the Caribbean all relate their experiences of arriving and settling in England during the Windrush period.¹ The Windrush period (late 1940s - early 1970s) began when the Empire Windrush sailed to Jamaica to recruit workers for the purpose of rebuilding England after World War II². The perspectives of these four women—a cricketer’s wife, a student nurse, a concert pianist, and a new bride—are revealed in the film portion of the opera where they tell individual stories about their Windrush experience in between scenes of the opera. The music portion is crafted in such a way that it carries you through an array of emotions where the four women’s stories are heard as a unified thought through the voice of the soprano.

A woman of sheer brilliance and originality, Shirley J. Thompson is conceived to be the first European woman of African descent to have composed and conducted a symphony. Not only is she a British-Caribbean composer, but Thompson is also a violinist, conductor, writer, artistic director, filmmaker, cultural activist, educator, and historian.³ Thompson’s eclectic compositional style embodies modernism and minimalism where the abstract and the pictorial, the international and the national, the

1. “Women of The Windrush,” University of Liverpool, accessed January 27, 2023, <https://thetungauditorium.com/events/women-of-the-windrush>.

2. Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 6.

3. “About Shirley J. Thompson,” Shirley J. Thompson, accessed January 2023, <https://shirleythompsonmusic.com/pages/about/>.

serious and the entertaining, commingle easily.⁴ Her work has been recognized and commissioned for royal engagements, particularly, in 2000, she was commissioned to compose a large-scale work to commemorate the Queen's Golden Jubilee held in 2002. Recently, Shirley J. Thompson was commissioned by King Charles III to compose music for his Coronation, along with other leading composers in England.

Background and Significance

Thompson has more recently embarked on a project called *Heroines of Opera* where she cultivates a series of chamber operas that highlight iconic women in history. This innovative project provides an avenue for this female composer to rewrite history and focus much of her work into raising awareness of unacknowledged black women in history. Thompson uses *Heroines of Opera* to not only promote black women in history but also to effect change in the way women are portrayed in opera—from weak characters or femme fatales to heroic figures. *Women of the Windrush* is one such opera that emerged from *Heroines of Opera*. An immediate descendant of the Windrush generation, Thompson dedicated *Women of the Windrush* to her mother.

Music over the years has played a pivotal role in promoting change, and uniting people and cultures. Shirley J. Thompson, with whom I can relate in many ways, uses her music, particularly the *Heroines of Opera* project and her opera *Women of the Windrush*, as a platform to promote cultural understanding and to advocate for women, especially women of African descent. On the other hand, as a woman composer of African descent, Thompson faces her own challenges. Historically, women were not recognized as

4. Olive Lewin, "Thompson, Shirley J(oy)," Grove Music Online, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.44867>.

composers. On the contrary, women composers today are increasingly being recognized for their contributions to the body of music literature and there is an effort made to feature compositions by women on the main stage more often. There is little to no record of scholastic documentation of Thompson's works, nonetheless, Thompson has made her music accessible through written compositions and successful performances of her works.

Purpose

This doctoral project seeks to promote women composers, particularly, to feature the significant contributions of Shirley J. Thompson. The project will also raise awareness of Thompson's music, especially her chamber opera *Women of the Windrush*. Additionally, this research will peer into the mind of the composer, document her thought processes on the music and serve as a reference point for future scholarship. This project will also answer the following questions:

1. What are the vocal demands, imposed by the music and/or melodic line, that should be applied to effectively perform this opera?
2. What recommendations could one apply towards effectively meeting the above demands?
3. How can an informed performance of this opera help with character development and vocal gesticulations?
4. Are there musical liberties that could be explored by the performer?

5. Is the social atmosphere the same today for the Windrush generation? And are there any elements in the text, harmony, or melody that comments on the social atmosphere then and now?
6. Are there any Caribbean musical elements hidden in the music of the opera?

There are two scored versions of the opera: one for soprano, film, and chamber orchestra, and another for soprano, film, and piano. This project will explore the version for soprano, film, and piano. The overall intention of this doctoral project is to guide readers, especially curious musicians, in learning, teaching, and performing Thompson's opera.

Methodology

An interview was conducted with the composer, Shirley J. Thompson, providing essential biographical information, to glean insight on her compositional style and influences. The interview further ascertained the inspiration behind composing a single cast opera, using one voice to represent several voices. Information on the historical and socio-cultural aspect of the opera was also gathered from articles, documentaries, books and recordings. Alongside examining the music and text of each scene in the opera, performance recommendations on characterization, use of language and vocal delivery are provided.

CHAPTER II – SHIRLEY J. THOMPSON

A Portrait of the Composer

“There’s a point where music goes beyond its stylistic boundaries and becomes music that is shared, as a shared experience. It becomes about our universal experience as humanity.” – Shirley J. Thompson ⁵

A woman of sheer brilliance and originality, Shirley J. Thompson is conceivably the first European woman of African descent to have composed and conducted a symphony. Born of Jamaican parents in London on January 7, 1958, Thompson is today one of the leading composers in England. Not only is she a British-Caribbean composer, but Thompson is also an established violinist, conductor, writer, artistic director, filmmaker, cultural activist, educator, broadcaster, and historian.⁶

Around the age of five, Thompson described the sounds of a piano as magical.⁷ The compelling sounds of the piano drew Thompson to explore the instrument herself and later led her to pursue academic and professional endeavors in music. Growing up in a bi-cultural environment—Jamaican culture at home and the British influence at school—Thompson experienced the best of both worlds until the issue of discrimination arose. At the age of ten, she was denied the opportunity to attend prestigious schools

5. “Shirley J. Thompson OBE: Music for His Majesty,” interview by Sophie Rashbrook, *PRS for Music*, May 5, 2023, <https://www.prsformusic.com/m-magazine/features/shirley-j-thompson-music-for-his-majesty>.

6. “About Shirley J. Thompson,” Shirley J. Thompson, accessed January 2023, <https://shirleythompsonmusic.com/pages/about/>.

7. “Prof. Shirley J. Thompson OBE Interview | Identity & Aesthetic: Five British-Caribbean Composers,” interview by Clifton Harrison, February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzTqBlGfbdk&t=429s>.

because of her skin color.⁸ Despite this unfortunate period in her life, Thompson overcame the odds. From 1976 to 1979, she studied musicology (music and modern history) at the University of Liverpool.⁹ In pursuit of her music career, Thompson achieved high-level commissions and multiple awards. In 2018, she was awarded Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for her services to music, at Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's New Year Honours Awards. In 2019, she was awarded a Professorship of Music at Westminster, becoming the first person of African descent to be made a University Professor of Music in Europe. She is now head of composition and performance at the University of Westminster.¹⁰

8. "Prof. Shirley J. Thompson OBE Interview | Identity & Aesthetic: Five British-Caribbean Composers," interview by Clifton Harrison, February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzTqBlGfbdk&t=429s>.

9. Ibid.

10. "Professor Shirley Thompson's Women of the Windrush Opera Tours the UK for the 75th Anniversary," News, University of Westminster, June 22, 2023, <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/news/professor-shirley-thompsons-women-of-the-windrush-opera-tours-the-uk-for-the-75th-anniversary>.



Figure 1. Professor Shirley J. Thompson OBE.

Figure 1 showing Shirley J. Thompson with her OBE award for services to music after an investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace, London, April 3, 2019.¹¹ (Shirley J. Thompson, London, photography by Victoria Jones/Alamy Stock Images, 2019).

Writing music started as a hobby for Thompson. For the fun of it, Thompson would write music for friends who played a variety of instruments.¹² Thompson is now composing considerably. Her output as a composer includes works for symphonies, ballets, operas, concertos and works for ensembles, as well as music for TV, film, and theatre.¹³

11. “Professor Shirley J. Thompson receives OBE,” Ivors Academy News, accessed April 2024, <https://ivorsacademy.com/news/professor-shirley-j-thompson-receives-obe/>.

12. “Prof. Shirley J. Thompson OBE Interview | Identity & Aesthetic: Five British-Caribbean Composers,” interview by Clifton Harrison, February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzTqBlGfbdk&t=429s>.

13. “Shirley J. Thompson, Composer,” interview with Frances Wilson, September 18, 2018, <https://meettheartist.online/2018/09/18/shirley-j-thompson-composer/>.

Compositional Style and Influences

According to Shirley J. Thompson in an interview hosted by Clifton Harrison¹⁴, her compositional style is diverse, however, her intent is to always compose lyrical lines for the voice and instruments. In her initial stages as a composer, Thompson likened her writing to the second Viennese school of composers, aligning with composers such as Schoenberg, Berg and Webern. However, after studying at the master's level at Goldsmiths, University of London, otherwise known as Goldsmiths' College (1980, 1982–4), her writing transformed into a more lyrical sound as she was now engulfed in the Eastern-European style. Today, Thompson's compositional style is perhaps best described by Jamaican author, musicologist, and teacher, Dr. Olive Lewin (1927 – 2013):

Thompson's style shows an eclecticism, typical of the later 20th century, in which modernism and minimalism, the abstract and the pictorial, the international and the national, the serious and the entertaining, commingle easily.¹⁵

Thompson has created her unique sound blueprint that embodies minimalism, post serialism, fragments of lyrical lines, and elements from contemporary styles such as soul, rhythm and blues, reggae, and hip-hop. Thompson uses spoken word and film in her works to highlight the story told in a more direct form.¹⁶ Her wide experience of writing for film and television gives her concert music a sureness of effect and originality with

14. "Prof. Shirley J. Thompson OBE Interview | Identity & Aesthetic: Five British-Caribbean Composers," interview by Clifton Harrison, February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzTqBlGfbdk&t=429s>.

15. Olive Lewin, "Thompson, Shirley J(oy)," Grove Music Online, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.44867>.

16. "Prof. Shirley J. Thompson OBE Interview | Identity & Aesthetic: Five British-Caribbean Composers," interview by Clifton Harrison, February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzTqBlGfbdk&t=429s>.

small, sometimes unconventional ensembles.¹⁷ She founded The Shirley Thompson Ensemble comprised of her own collaborative instrumental soloists, singers, dancers, and visual artists. This ensemble inspired her to create trailblazing compositions which “seamlessly integrate contemporary classical music orchestration with improvisation, as well as fusing contemporary popular music and world music styles.”¹⁸

As one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary music in England,¹⁹ Thompson thrives to push the boundaries of a perceived form of music and for this reason, her works are usually ground-breaking. “Everything I’ve done [in music] has been quite avant-garde and radical, and out of the box really,”²⁰ Thompson posited in an interview with UK journalist of *The Guardian*, Tobi Thomas. For the concert stage, Thompson has proven compositions that incorporate video imagery and contemporary dance, which as a result, through her originality, has made her a “leading exponent of music performance with multi-media.”²¹ For instance, Thompson has pioneered the rise of a new form of opera that involves multi-media.

17. Olive Lewin, “Thompson, Shirley J(oy),” Grove Music Online, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.44867>.

18. “About Shirley J. Thompson,” Shirley J. Thompson, accessed January 2023, <https://shirleythompsonmusic.com/pages/about/>.

19. “Women of the Windrush by Shirley J. Thompson,” English National Ballet, July 2023, <https://www.ballet.org.uk/event/women-of-the-windrush/>.

20. Tobi Thomas, “Shirley Thompson: how the brilliant Black composer beat the system that shut her out,” *The Guardian*, November 15, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/15/shirley-thompson-how-the-brilliant-black-composer-beat-the-system-that-shut-her-out>.

21. “About Shirley J. Thompson,” Shirley J. Thompson, accessed January 2023, <https://shirleythompsonmusic.com/pages/about/>.

Thompson constantly aspires to compose operatic works that are based on untold and meaningful stories in history, rather than the typical fictional or mythical stories. Her music is purposed to deeply move the affections of the audience with its unique and striking qualities. In an interview with classical violinist, educator, and influencer, Esther Abrami,²² Thompson shared that she aims to compose music that is entertaining, interesting, moving and engulfed with much feeling. Thompson also described to writer and opera dramaturg, Sophie Rashbrook, her perspective on music:

For me, there has only ever been good music, or less good music. Even when I went to study at university, I wasn't aware that I was going to study "classical" music as such. I try not to distinguish too much between different styles – I personally listen to all kinds of music, and it's always about the quality.²³

Thompson's mother is an inspirational and supportive figure in her life who encouraged her to pave her own path and be the best in whatever she puts her mind. Artistically, she pays high respect to Nina Simone, Maya Angelou, Florence Price, and other groundbreaking women in history. Thompson learned, early in her professional career, to listen to and use the blueprints of the works of other inspiring musicians and composers as a guide to finding her unique contribution to the creative world.²⁴

Composing for the Queen and King of England

22. "Women In Classical Episode 3 with Shirley Thompson OBE," interview by Esther Abrami, March 24, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvzjJRotPyE>.

23. "Shirley J. Thompson OBE: Music for His Majesty," interview by Sophie Rashbrook, *PRS for Music*, May 5, 2023, <https://www.prsformusic.com/m-magazine/features/shirley-j-thompson-music-for-his-majesty>.

24. "Women In Classical Episode 3 with Shirley Thompson OBE," interview by Esther Abrami, March 24, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvzjJRotPyE>.

Monumental achievements in her music career includes writing for the Queen and King of England. In 2000, she was commissioned to compose a large-scale work to commemorate the Queen's Golden Jubilee held in 2002. For the Queen, Thompson composed the musical story of London encapsulating one thousand years within the framework of a five-movement symphony entitled *New Nation Rising: A 21st Century Symphony*. It depicts the life of the capital city from pastoral idyll to the Industrial Revolution, reflecting on World Wars I and II and finally turning into a celebration of London as a cultural melting-pot.²⁵ This symphony is comprised of 200 performers including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, choirs, solo singers, a rapper, and dhol drummers.²⁶ *New Nation Rising* later became the framework for the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics. Shirley J. Thompson, along with other leading composers in England, composed music for the Coronation of King Charles III held on May 6, 2023.

25. "Shirley J. Thompson OBE: Music for His Majesty," interview by Sophie Rashbrook, *PRS for Music*, May 5, 2023, <https://www.prsformusic.com/m-magazine/features/shirley-j-thompson-music-for-his-majesty>.

26. "About Shirley J. Thompson," Shirley J. Thompson, accessed January 2023, <https://shirleythompsonmusic.com/pages/about/>.



Figure 2. Shirley J. Thompson and King Charles III.

Figure 2 showing Shirley J. Thompson presenting the then Prince Charles with one of her CDs at The Powerlist at Clarence House, March 1, 2022.²⁷ (Photography by Stuart C Wilson/Getty Images, 2022).

Other works

Thompson has more recently embarked on a project called *Heroines of Opera* where she cultivates a series of chamber operas that highlight iconic women in history. These compositions include a solo singer, narrator, dancers, chamber orchestra, and multi-media. This innovative project provides an avenue for this female composer to rewrite history and focus much of her work into raising awareness of unacknowledged black women of the past. Thompson uses *Heroines of Opera* to not only promote black

27. Tobi Thomas, “Shirley Thompson: how the brilliant Black composer beat the system that shut her out,” *The Guardian*, November 15, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/15/shirley-thompson-how-the-brilliant-black-composer-beat-the-system-that-shut-her-out>.

women in history but also to effect change in the way women are portrayed in opera—from weak characters or femme fatales to heroic figures.²⁸

Women of the Windrush is one such opera that emerged from *Heroines of Opera*. Other opera works currently in this series are: *Sacred Mountain: Incidents in the Life of Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, and *The Woman Who Refused to Dance*. Additionally, Thompson has composed opera works such as: *A Child of the Jago*, *Spirit Songs*, *Love Scream*, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.²⁹

28. “Prof. Shirley J. Thompson OBE Interview | Identity & Aesthetic: Five British-Caribbean Composers,” interview with Clifton Harrison, February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzTqBlGfbdK&t=429s>.

29. “Scores For Sale & Hire” Shirley J. Thompson, accessed January 2024, <https://shirleythompsonmusic.com/scores-for-sale-hire/>.

CHAPTER III – WINDRUSH GENERATION

Who were they, why they came, and what have they become?

The Empire Windrush sailed to Jamaica at the behest of the British Government, to recruit workers for the purpose of rebuilding England after World War II.³⁰ June 22, 1948, saw the beginning of the *Windrush* era – a period that encountered a significant surge of Caribbean settlers in England, and continued through to the 1970s. These settlers are now called the *Windrush generation*, a term derived from the ship. The Empire Windrush ship arrived at Tilbury Docks with 482 Jamaicans on board (see Figure 3), never to imagine this was the beginning of a perilous journey. English author, Andrea Levy, in her article “This is My England,” describes her parents’ awe of England and how the British population was less than welcoming despite the urgent need for extra laborers in the aftermath of WWII:

But they soon found that they were foreigners in England, and this shocked them. The things they thought of as quintessentially English—manners, politeness, rounded vowels from well-spoken people - were not in evidence. They suffered bad housing—by no means the plight of black people alone in those post-war days: the signs in windows read "no niggers, no dogs, no Irish." My dad faced incredible hostility when looking for somewhere to live because of the colour of his skin. He had a job with the post office. My mum, a trained teacher in Jamaica, had to sew to make a living here. She worked in sweat-shops with other foreigners—Czechs, Poles, Greeks—all fall-out from the war. She had one advantage: she spoke English. And one disadvantage: she was black (or coloured, as we were termed then).³¹

30. Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 6.

31. Andrea Levy, “This is my England,” *The Guardian*, February 18, 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/feb/19/society1>.



Figure 3. The Empire Windrush arriving at Tilbury Docks, England.

Figure 3 showing the ex-troopship Empire Windrush ship arriving at Tilbury Docks from Jamaica, with 482 Jamaicans on board, emigrating to Britain, June 22, 1948.³² (Empire Windrush, England, photography by Getty Image, 1948).

Jamaica was a British colony for over 300 years. Consequently, the Jamaican populace idolized England as their *Mother Country*.³³ Jamaicans were identified as

32. Matthew Wills, “Windrush Day,” June 22, 2023, <https://daily.jstor.org/windrush-day/>.

33. “History of Jamaica,” Embassy of Jamaica, Washington DC, accessed February 2024, https://www.embassyofjamaica.org/about_jamaica/history.htm.

British citizens, they traveled on British passports, and they saw the British empire as one body. Andrea Levy explains the British-Jamaican connection briefly in her article:

Britain was the country that all Jamaican children learned about at school. They sang God Save The King and Rule Britannia. They believed Britain was a green and pleasant land—if not the centre of the world, then certainly the centre of a great and important Empire that spanned the globe, linking all sorts of countries into a family of nations. Far from the idea that he [Andrea Levy's father] was travelling to a foreign place, he was travelling to the centre of his country, and as such he would slip-in and fit-in immediately. Jamaica, he thought, was just Britain in the sun.³⁴

With England seen as the *Mother Country*, the center of one body, and a symbol of freedom and opportunities, Jamaicans took the invitation to help rebuild England without much reluctance. “Many West Indians, heeding the call from the *Mother Country*, unreservedly marshalled their energies and commitment in bold sacrifice to help the UK rise from the ashes of war,” writes ambassadors Guy Hewitt and Kevin M. Isaac in their article “Windrush: The Perfect Storm.”³⁵ The invitation was perceived as the golden opportunity for a better life. Early migrants of the Windrush generation were at the forefront of a significant time in history that changed the face of England, despite their years of discrimination, rejection, and alienation. The “Rivers of Blood” speech by former British Member of Parliament, Enoch Powell, along with the Notting Hill racial revolts instigated by the Teddy Boys, were key moments in England’s history that prove

34. Andrea Levy, “This is my England,” *The Guardian*, February 18, 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/feb/19/society1>.

35. Guy Hewitt and Kevin M. Isaac, “Windrush: The Perfect Storm,” *Social and Economic Studies* 67, no. 2/3 (June and September 2018): 294, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45174762>.

the depth to which the natives tried to suppress, eliminate, and segregate from immigrants of African descent.

Even 70 years later, the Windrush experience still haunts black British immigrants. April 2018 saw the uproar of a *Windrush scandal* which highlighted the fact that despite the many years of living and working in England, the Windrush generation's children and grandchildren were told by the British Government that they were residing in the country illegally due to the lack of authorized documentation.³⁶ They became squatters in a land that benefited from their hard work. Stripped of their human rights and identity, these Windrush settlers were denied jobs, could not travel to see family members, and were threatened to be deported if they could not provide documentation proving their right to stay in England—the same documentation that was either never given or was destroyed by the Government.³⁷ Nevertheless, likened to the fierce rebellion and resistance of their enslaved forefathers, with much toil, sacrifice, and tears, the Windrush generation is still persisting.

The Jamaican national motto, “Out of many, one people,” represents a people of varied races and creeds who lived harmoniously for centuries and as a result has forged a unique Jamaican identity and patriotism.³⁸ This idea of a united nation was the hope of

36. “What Is Windrush Day And Why Do We Celebrate It?” Combat Stress, accessed February 2024, <https://combatstress.org.uk/blog/history-of-windrush-day>.

37. “Windrush Generation: The scandal that shook Britain explained and debated,” Channel 4 News, British Public Broadcast, April 24, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izsLi-FB5Fg>.

38. “History of Jamaica,” Embassy of Jamaica, Washington DC, accessed February 2024, https://www.embassyofjamaica.org/about_jamaica/history.htm.

the Windrush generation as they were tasked to rebuild England. Now, to keep the Windrush generation's legacy alive and to celebrate the diversity of Britain's history, England commemorates their arrival and contributions to the post-war economy through monuments and anniversary celebrations (See Figure 4). Additionally, since the *Windrush scandal*, there has been a proliferation of published literary works, such as poems, non-fiction books, children's story books, and other prose centered on remembering and documenting the contributions and current affairs of the Windrush generation. Movies, documentaries, songs, and operas about the Windrush generation have also appeared in mainstream. Shirley J. Thompson composed the opera, *Women of the Windrush*, to commemorate the Windrush generation, capturing the audacity, courage, success, and beautiful culture of that Caribbean generation.



Figure 4. The National Windrush Monument at Waterloo Station, London, UK.

Figure 4 presenting a view of the National Windrush Monument at Waterloo Station on June 22, 2022, in London, UK, in celebration of the new Windrush Day. Getty Image.³⁹ (National Windrush Monument, Waterloo Station, London, photography by Getty Image 2022).

39. Matthew Wills, “Windrush Day,” June 22, 2023, <https://daily.jstor.org/windrush-day/>.

CHAPTER IV – WOMEN OF THE WINDRUSH

Background and Significance

Women of the Windrush is centered on four women from the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica—a cricketer’s wife, a student nurse, a concert pianist, and a new bride—who all recount their experiences of arriving and settling in England during the Windrush period.⁴⁰ The film aspect of the opera reveals vignettes of the lives of the four women as they tell individual stories about their Windrush experience in between scenes of the opera. From the music’s standpoint, the Windrush women’s voices are heard as a unified thought through the voice of the soprano. An immediate descendant of the Windrush generation, Shirley J. Thompson, dedicated *Women of the Windrush* to her mother. Thompson’s mother played an integral role representing and inspiring the strong black women centering this opera.

The seed of *Women of the Windrush* planted roots in 1991 when Thompson created an award-winning film titled *Memories in Mind*. Working for the BBC as a filmmaker, Thompson embarked on creating this dramatic documentary to highlight the experiences, triumphs, and great achievements of her parents and the Windrush generation.⁴¹ Thompson noted:

I am thrilled that people from the Windrush Generation are at last being recognised for their phenomenal achievements. They helped to build the UK and changed the face of Britain so that it is now the culturally dynamic centre of the

40. “Women of The Windrush,” University of Liverpool, accessed January 27, 2023, <https://thetungauditorium.com/events/women-of-the-windrush>.

41. Shirley J. Thompson, interview by author, Zoom Video Communications, January 19, 2024.

world. I pay tribute here to the Windrush women in particular and their own bravery and ingenuity that I witnessed first-hand.⁴²

Memories in Mind is one of the first productions to commemorate the Windrush generation. It combines several interviews of the very brave and ingenious settlers in the UK who traveled from Jamaica during the 1940s to 1950s.

The *Women of the Windrush* opera re-imagined *Memories in Mind* into a dramatic stage production in 2018. *A Psalm to Windrush: for the Brave and Ingenious* is the first aria sung in the opera. It was firstly commissioned for the Windrush memorial service to celebrate the first Windrush Day on June 22, 2018, and to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Empire Windrush ship's arrival. This aria, perhaps best defined as an anthem, has been performed for several significant events surrounding the Windrush generation including the Unveiling of the Windrush Monument at Waterloo Station (see Figure 4), with the patronage of Prince William.⁴³

The Premiere

Shirley J. Thompson used an elite form of music – opera – to represent Caribbean/Black history, particularly black women in history. The opera, *Women of the Windrush*, was first performed at the Tête à Tête Opera Festival hosted by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts on July 28, 2019, in England. Since then, the opera has made multiple appearances in other countries in Europe. Nadine Benjamin MBE, a British

42. “Shirley J. Thompson, Composer,” interview with Frances Wilson, September 18, 2018, <https://meettheartist.online/2018/09/18/shirley-j-thompson-composer/>.

43. Shirley J. Thompson OBE: Music for His Majesty,” interview by Sophie Rashbrook, *PRS for Music*, May 5, 2023, <https://www.prsformusic.com/m-magazine/features/shirley-j-thompson-music-for-his-majesty>.

soprano who is a strong proponent of under-represented works,⁴⁴ premiered *Women of the Windrush*.

Role of the Soprano and Pianist

Women of the Windrush opera is well suited for a dramatic or lyric soprano, as it was composed with a soprano of high tessitura in mind, however, this soprano must present a level of maturity in order to meet the vocal and dramatic demands of this opera. The work requires a musically astute, technically skilled, and experienced soprano to meet the vocal, harmonic, and melodic requirements written by Thompson. The preferred timbre of the soprano is a bell-like tone that cuts through the sound of a chamber orchestra. The intention of the composer was to create a large-scale work while using small forces to communicate the storyline, which resultantly presented challenges for the composer and would, inevitably, pass these challenges down to the performers. In this case, being mindful of a balance between the singer and pianist is imperative.

Observing the prior performances of this opera, the pianists have been solely feminine befitting the central story of this opera that revolves around women. The pianist is treated as one of the actors, for example, the next-door neighbor of one of the Windrush women. The composer's intention is for the instrumentalists to be a part of the stage drama. Although there is freedom in dramatizing this storyline, the performers should follow the music and score markings as written.

When performing *Women of the Windrush*, the soprano should consider that though it is a single-cast opera, she should bear in mind that she is representing a body of

44. "Nadine Benjamin, Verdi Soprano," Nadine Benjamin MBE, accessed February 2024, <https://www.nadinebenjamin.com/about-nadine>.

women who, while they endured their individual journeys and shared their individual stories, are the product of a universal experience. Performers should seek to walk their audience through that journey from the beginning of the opera to the end.

If the composer did not learn about the history of the Windrush generation, nor witnessed their hardship and mannerisms, this opera would not have been realistic. The composer intends for the audience to experience dramatic realism and so should the performers. Hence, performers must be knowledgeable and sympathetic to the experiences of the Windrush generation to properly perform this music at its highest capacity. There is a given advantage to those performers who may have already experienced how it feels to settle in a new country. Nonetheless, it is recommended that all performers of this opera should learn about the history of the Windrush generation and further lean into the minds of the women, especially the four women in the film aspect of the opera. Watching the film, *Memories in Mind*, will give insight into the four perspectives of authentic women of that time.

The performers must consider that these women are real and genuine, and thus should be portrayed as such in their character development. Performing this opera should not be left only to the imagination, thus, the soprano might struggle with the interpretation of some of the scenes, mainly because she may not have experienced this type of journey. Nevertheless, the soprano can add to her performance through sympathizing with the real stories of these real women. This is not just an idea, or a story based on stock characters; these are real women with real life experiences.

Interpretation of the libretto and music

The libretto portrays a hybrid of Shirley J. Thompson's writings as well as writings of other authors from the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Thompson cleverly handpicked poems by other authors who were either products of the Windrush generation or women who share the tapestry of the Windrush generation. These writings contribute to a storyline that captures a certain sentiment that Thompson intended to communicate. This sentiment embodies grace and dignity, as would the women from the Windrush generation. The spoken word also represents the characters of the Windrush generation and how they would possibly think. The music is crafted in such a way that it carries you through an array of emotions. The soprano's lyrical line combined with Thompson's use of vibrant rhythmic figures and brilliant harmonic language heightens the way in which the storyline is communicated. The frequent use of reoccurring triplets, open fourths and fifths, contrasting textures, and syncopated rhythmic patterns contribute to the striking musical quality of the opera. Examples of these characteristics will be explored later in this chapter. The following will provide a comprehensive study of each scene with detailed interpretation of the libretto and music, and artist recommendations.

A Discussion of the Opera Scenes

Scene 1: A Psalm to Windrush: For the Brave and Ingenious

The audience first hears the voice of Louise 'Miss Lou' Bennett-Coverley, award-winning Jamaican poet, as she recites her poem entitled "Colonization in Reverse." In the manner of an overture, the poem is declaimed as a dramatic monologue, which sets the tone for the rest of the opera. Bennett comments on the droves of Jamaicans who responded to England's call for help. She adds comic relief to the idea of Jamaicans

migrating to England but also sheds light to the foreseeable future of England. England that once exploited the resources of Jamaica is now, in reverse, being exploited by Jamaicans. Chapter III of this document explains the answer to Louise Bennett's critical question at the end of her poem. It asks:

Jamaican dialect

“Dem face de war an dem brave de
worse, but I am wonderin how dem
gwine to stan colonization in reverse?”

English translation

They faced the war and they braved the
worst, but I am wondering how they are
going to stand colonization in reverse?

Continuing Scene 1 of the opera, the soprano, the Windrush woman, enters the stage as she excitedly disembarks a ship and anxiously searches for her family. She firstly utters these words:

“We were invited here! It was the end of the War (WWII) in England. A West Indian contingent had fought for England and she now needed rebuilding. We boarded the Windrush...”

The pianist should begin playing the introduction of the first aria, as the soprano speaks the above words. This nine-bar introduction (see Musical Example 1) consists of quarter note diatonic block chords that presents a steady and progressive march-like sensation. This march-like sensation leads the audience and performers to the beginning of a journey, a drive toward something new on the horizon. As indicated in the score, this aria should be expressed in a stately manner, thus the performers should be bold and majestic in their entrances. The pianist should also be aware that in the scored version for chamber orchestra, the composer sets the music of this aria with triplets in the violin part. These thematic triplets represent the *rolling waves of the Atlantic*, reimagining the waves of the Atlantic Ocean steadily undulating as the Windrush ship sails to England. The pianist could use this knowledge as dramatic motivation to reinterpret waves by steadily moving

the progressing block chords. This introductory interpretation sets the oceanic atmosphere in this scene.

Stately ♩ = 83
Windrush Woman: (speaks) We were invited here! It was the end of the War (WWII) in England. A West Indian contingent had fought for England and she now needed rebuilding. We boarded the Windrush ...

1

Soprano

Piano

♩ = 83

7

S.

f **A**

The ship an-chored forth, the waves stood

Pno.

mf **A**

Musical Example 1 “A Psalm to Windrush” Scene 1, mm. 2-9.

Musical Example 1 showing a nine-bar introduction with steadily moving block chords creating a march-like sensation.

Song Text

The ship anchored forth, the waves stood high.
To the Mother land, we set our sights.
Holding dreams, and hopes, and plans, our heads held high!
And there you were Lord,
Your arms around us,
Your nest held strong so we could learn to fly!
Your house stood strong, so we could learn to fly.

We worked and we toiled to build this land.
To your service we were honour bound.
Through it all we learned to keep your Grace always.
And there you were Lord,
Your arms around us,
Your nest held strong so we could learn to fly.

Your house stood strong so we could learn to thrive.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you.
My soul yearns e'en faints for your courts.
Hear our pray'r Lord,
Look on us with favour.
Hear our Pray'r, Dear Lord!

And now we pass the baton on.
To our children and their children grown.
Holding dreams, and plans and hopes, their heads held high.
And there you are Lord,
Your arms around us.
Your nest holds strong so we can always fly.
Your house stands strong, so we will always thrive.

We thank you and Praise, to you Our Father,
Give Thanks and Praise for evermore.

Style Characteristics

Vocal Range: E₄ to A₅

Song Form: AABA

A Psalm to Windrush is the first aria sung in the opera. The initial setting of this aria was SATB but was then rearranged for solo soprano and piano. Thompson defines this aria as an *anthem*. According to *Cambridge Dictionary*, an anthem is a song that has special importance for a particular group of people, an organization, or a country, often sung on a special occasion.⁴⁵ *Miriam Webster Dictionary* further expounds that the

45. "Anthem," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed January 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/anthem>.

anthem could be defined as a song or hymn of praise or gladness.⁴⁶ Compared to the definition of an anthem, this aria embodies a feeling of excitement, hope, security, and nationalism.

The aria skillfully characterizes the song of a Windrush woman at the start of her journey to settling in England. The text comprises Thompson's own words and prose from the New International Version (NIV) of the Holy Bible, specifically multiple verses from Psalm 84. For example, verse 5 says, "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on a pilgrimage."⁴⁷ Thompson only used the first half of verse 5 in the aria, however, paying attention to the entire verse, and indubitably reading the entire chapter of Psalm 84, the soprano can then relate to Thompson's intentions and inspiration drawn from the Holy Bible, while developing dramatic motivation. Adding to dramatic motivation and emotional intensity, the soprano can connect to the historical fact wherein African slaves, after being introduced to Christianity, found solace in God amidst their suffering. Passing down from generation to generation, this similar pattern is seen when Jamaicans look to God in times of need. Likewise, the words of the aria are sung by the Windrush woman who, heading to a strange land, is calling on God for guidance and protection. It is, therefore, not just an anthem; it is a prayer. A stately prayer sung slowly and steadily.

The harmonic texture which predominantly includes stable, diatonic block chords (see Musical Example 2, blue rectangles) gives the soprano a steady foundation and

46. "Anthem," Merriam Webster Dictionary, accessed January 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anthem>.

47. Psalm 84:5 (New International Version).

constancy, the same way the Windrush woman's faith holds her steadfast on her journey. The composer also created waves in the melodic line as its pitch levels progressively rise and fall. In Musical Examples 2 and 3, pay attention to rising pitch levels indicated by the pink circles on key words: "ship...forth...waves...mother...land...set...dreams...heads." As the composer has highlighted these words with an intensifying ascending line, the soprano's voice must also accommodate this ascension with the building connectivity of her vocal resonance. Intermittently, the composer introduces secondary chords, for example, on the words "to the," and "holding," indicated by the green rectangles in Musical Example 2, to create the impression of a shift or greater intensity, but eventually takes the listener back to the original key. Also notice the orange circles indicating the shift in dynamics from forte to fortissimo—an intense increase in volume. Then to complete the movement of the wave, the melodic line descends on the words, "and there you were Lord," representing the fall of the wave (see Musical Example 3). This melodic descent also presents a sense of calm and comfort that the Lord, in this context, provides. The general melody of the aria is simple and lyrical; therefore, the soprano could use these intense shifts in the harmonic language, and the progressive ascent and descent in the melodic line to amplify her vocal resonance through the key words that then propel her communication.

7 *f* **A**
S. The ship an-chored forth, the waves stood
Pno. *mf*
13 *f* *ff*
S. high. To the Mo - ther land, we set our sights. Hol-ding dreams, and
Pno. *mf* *f*

Musical Example 2 “A Psalm to Windrush” Scene 1, mm. 10-18.

Musical Example 2 showing the steady movement of block chords with accentuated shifts, rising pitch levels in the wave-like melodic line, and changing dynamics.

19 *mf* Tenderly *f* 3
S. hopes, and plans, our heads held high! And there you were Lord, Your arms a -
Pno. *mf* **B**

Musical Example 3 “A Psalm to Windrush” Scene 1, mm. 21-23.

Musical Example 3 demonstrating the fall of the wave-like melodic line.

Scene 2: The Long Line...The Tapestry is Mine

The Windrush woman is by her bedside in scene 2, as she tries to keep warm and starts to doubt her decision to migrate to England. Here she posits, “It’s so strange here. Did I do the right thing in leaving my country?”

Song Text

The long line
Of blood and family ties.

An African countenance here,
A European countenance there,
An American cast of cheek,
An Asiatic turn of eye,
And the tongue’s salty accommodation.

The tapestry is mine!

All the bloodstained prints,
The scattered links,
The grating strands of crinkling hair,
The black persistent blooming,
blooming.
The tapestry is mine!

Style Characteristics

Vocal Range: F#₄ to B₅

Song Form: Binary

The aria in scene 2 begins with an introductory section that somewhat resembles a recitative—a type of vocal writing, normally for a single voice, with the intent of mimicking dramatic speech in song.⁴⁸ With sustained chords in the accompaniment, the soprano has the freedom to adjust the rhythmic figures and speed in accordance with what best suits her commune. The singer must also pay attention to the text painting used for the phrase “long line” (see Musical Example 4). Longer note values are assigned to

48. Dale E. Monson, Jack Westrup and Julian Budden, “Recitative,” Grove Music Online, 2001, <https://doi-org.lynx.lib.usm.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.23019>.

“long line” and thus the soprano should further elongate the vowels to make an exaggerated point, especially since the composer indicated “Ad lib” in this section. The soprano may think of using her voice as a *trumpet call* in this introductory section as she makes her declaration.

The musical score shows a Soprano (S.) and Piano (Pno.) duet. The Soprano part is in 4/4 time, marked 'Con moto' with a tempo of 76. It begins at measure 114 with the instruction 'Legato mp' and 'Ad lib'. The lyrics 'The long line' are written under the notes, which are elongated to span multiple measures. The Piano part (Pno.) is in 4/4 time and features a reggae-style bass line with a prominent 'one drop' pattern. The piano part is marked 'mp'.

Musical Example 4 “The Long Line...The Tapestry is Mine” Scene 2, mm. 114-9.

Musical Example 4 illustrating text painting “long line” with extended note values.

This scene introduces Jamaican flare in the rhythmic structure. The aria constitutes musical elements from Reggae music, a popular music of Jamaican origin, subtly integrated into the piano figures (see Musical Example 5). The reggae beat adds rhythmic intensity, color and vibrance to the music. This reggae pattern is a recurring motif that reinforces the main thematic element of the words—the tapestry/the bloodline. The singer passionately reiterates “The tapestry is mine,” as the recurring motif follows.

157

S. ——— ne!

Pno. *mf*


161

S. *mf* All the blood - stained prints

Pno.

Musical Example 5 “The Long Line...The Tapestry is Mine” Scene 2, mm.158-61.

Musical Example 5 illustrating a recurring reggae beat pattern.

For an audio example of syncopated rhythmic patterns in a typical Jamaican reggae song, similar to the rhythmic pattern in Musical Example 5, click the following sound icon: 


The binary structure constituting the form of this aria, a common technique used in Jamaican Folk music, gives two verses with the primary melody and a refrain that return after each verse. There are also syncopated rhythms throughout this aria, which resemble Jamaican folk rhythms. An example of the syncopated rhythmic pattern is shown in Musical Example 6. The pianist must place emphasis on the beats indicated with an arrow in Musical Example 6, so that the syncopation is exaggerated and stays true to the composer’s intentions. On the other hand, these syncopated rhythmic patterns will prove challenging to the soprano in finding her melodic entrances but instead of

viewing these rhythms as a deterrent, the soprano should use them to motivate communication of the text. For the sake of flow and connection, the vocalist is encouraged to learn the movements of the piano part to further help solidify precise melodic entrances. Since her entrances do not land on the downbeats, the soprano could also count sing her part against a metronome while learning her line.

The image shows a musical score for Soprano (S.) and Piano (Pno.). The Soprano part is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are "coun-te-nance there" and "An A-". The Piano part is in treble and bass clefs with the same key signature. It features a complex, syncopated rhythmic pattern. A blue box highlights a section of the piano accompaniment, and blue arrows point to specific notes within this section. The measure numbers 136 and 137 are indicated at the top and bottom of the score.

Musical Example 6 “The Long Line...The Tapestry is Mine” Scene 2, mm. 137-8.

Musical Example 6 showing syncopated rhythms likened to that of Jamaican folklore rhythmic patterns with stress points indicated by the arrows.

For an audio example of syncopated rhythmic patterns in a typical Jamaican folk song, similar to the rhythmic pattern shown in Musical Example 6, click the following sound icon: 

In addition to the exotic make-up of this aria, there are melodies built on a pentatonic scale—a basic scale used in Asian musical traditions. Musical Example 7 presents a melodic line built on an F# minor pentatonic scale in the aria. Furthermore, the bassline in Musical Example 7 is based on the B-Dorian mode anchored with open 4ths and 5ths in the left hand of the accompaniment. This setting presents an exotic sound, connecting the music to the text. Performers should focus on being precise with these

exotic pitches and rhythmic patterns, not only to meet the standards of the music but to highlight the rich cultural colors that the music represents.

167 =

S. *f*

The gra-ting strands of crink-lingg hair

Pno.

Musical Example 7 “The Long Line...The Tapestry is Mine” Scene 2, mm. 168-9.

Musical Example 7 illustration of the melodic line built using the F# minor pentatonic scale and mm. 167-8 showing the B-Dorian modal chords anchored with open 4ths and 5ths in the left hand of the accompaniment.

When one thinks of the word “tapestry,” what comes to mind? It’s colorful, it’s big and bold, it’s rich in history, it’s woven pieces. *Brittanica Dictionary* defines tapestry as something made up of different things, people, colors etc.⁴⁹ In this instance, it appears that Thompson’s tapestry is referring to a bloodline—the bloodline of the Windrush generation. This aria takes the Windrush woman back to her roots and emphasizes her bloodline—a long line of blood and family ties. The aria further points out some aspects that make up the Windrush woman’s tapestry: African, European, American, and Asian countenances; blood-stained prints and scattered links (longsuffering vs freedom); the

49. “Tapestry,” *Britannica Dictionary*, accessed January 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/tapestry>.

crinkled and coarse hair strands of the African slaves. Here, the singer outlines what comprises this richly crafted tapestry. A deeper understanding of its character informs the singer of the aria's dramatic integrity. Also, the exoticism enwoven in the music of the aria brings to life the diverse nature of the Windrush woman.

In Musical Example 8, the audience hears the soprano repeating the words “The tapestry is mine,” occurring at the end of each verse. It exudes a firm and proud affirmation. It's a reiterated statement that comes in the form of an immense declaration, especially coupled with a dynamic marking of fortissimo and the driving repeated eighth notes. This reiteration is likened to another *trumpet call* in the aria, somewhat comparable to the introductory section. The singer should feel the ache and long suffering of her ancestors, while at the same time, feel a rush of pride for the colorful culture she represents as she adds her piece to the tapestry and continues the legacy of the bloodline.

The image displays a musical score for Musical Example 8, featuring a soprano (S.) and piano (Pno.) part. The score is divided into two systems, starting at measures 148 and 152. The soprano part is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The piano part is written in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature. The soprano part includes the lyrics: "tion The Ta-pes-try is mi - ne, The" and "Ta-pes-try is mi ne, The Ta-pes-try is mi - ne, The Ta-pes-try is mi". The piano part features a driving, repeated eighth-note pattern in the right hand, with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic marking. Green arrows and a circled 'ff' highlight specific musical features in the soprano part, including a triplet of eighth notes and a series of eighth notes.

Musical Example 8 “The Long Line...The Tapestry is Mine” Scene 2, mm. 149-54.

Musical Example 8 showing the recurrent “The Tapestry is mine” declaration.

Scene 3: Mama

In Scene 3, the Windrush woman aimlessly paces around her bedside as she experiences bouts of homesickness. “It has been a week! I wonder how my mother is getting on back at the house. I miss her so much,” the Windrush woman utters.

Song Text

Mama

Style Characteristics

Vocal Range: F#₄ to E₅

Song Form: Through-composed

The wistfulness this aria conveys should be embodied by the performers. In this scene, the Windrush woman is missing her mother and in response to that feeling, she cries “Mama”—the only word that the soprano sings. The composer sets the aria so that the soprano’s voice is the first thing heard. Interactions between the piano and voice in this scene should remain light, however, with each repetition of the word “Mama,” a progressive rise of passion and intensity should ensue. The ascending treatment of the melodic line (see Musical Example 9) should help motivate this rise in passion and intensity. Observe that the composer sets a gradual crescendo in the dynamic markings at the repeat of each “Mama” amplifying the ascension. For this aria, the voice of the soprano should personify a child-like cry with a penetrating tone, piercing through the room.

The image shows a musical score for a soprano (S.) and piano (Pno.) part. The soprano part is on a single staff, and the piano part is on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The soprano part starts at measure 199 with the lyrics 'Ma - ma'. The piano part begins with a series of chords. The soprano part is highlighted with a green box, showing an ascending pitch level and increased dynamics (p, mf, f) intensifying the word 'Mama.'

Musical Example 9 “Mama” Scene 3, mm. 200-2.

Musical Example 9 showing ascending pitch levels and increased dynamics intensifying the word “Mama.”

In silence, the soprano sings her first two notes and then swiftly summons the piano to her company. In the first half of this aria, the composer sets up a *call and response* pattern between the singer and the pianist (see Musical Example 10); It is as though the pianist is epitomizing the mother in question. Here, the soprano and pianist can take the moment to interact with each other dramatically. The soprano is longing for the company of her mother and in an effort to comfort her, the pianist responds on behalf of the mother. Note that the eighth rests between each iteration of “Mama” are not all breathing rests. The soprano should be careful not to clip the ending vowel by closing the mouth but to leave the mouth open at the release of the [a] vowel. When a breath is taken (e.g., after the second “Mama”), the inhalation should be silent.

The image shows a musical score for a scene. The top staff is for the voice (S.) and the bottom staff is for the piano (Pno.). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The vocal line starts at measure 192. The first three measures of the vocal line are highlighted with blue boxes and contain the lyrics 'Ma-ma'. The piano accompaniment has three measures corresponding to the vocal line, each highlighted with a green box. Red arrows point from the vocal line to the piano accompaniment, indicating a call and response pattern. The piano accompaniment is marked 'mf' and 'simile'.

Musical Example 10 “Mama” Scene 3, mm. 193-5.

Musical Example 10 explaining *Call and Response* pattern between the singer and the accompanist.

Though the shortest aria in the opera, it carries the heaviest feeling. This yearning to be in the presence of her loved ones could make this Windrush woman turn back to her home country but her determination to make it work in England upsets that idea. In the second section of this aria, the audience will hear the harmonies wrap around the melodic line. The small fragments in the piano part now become elongated, connected chordal movements as opposed to the call and response pattern as illustrated in Musical Example 10 above. The piano plays a more supportive role to the voice, as if the mother is now walking with her daughter. Musical Example 11 illustrates the *walking effect* of the harmonic language as it supports the melodic line. Note that there are no rests in the piano accompaniment and there is a repetitive descending appoggiatura-like bass pattern, curating the continuous movement pattern of the *walking effect*.

203

S.

mf

Ma ma

f

Ma-ma

Pno.

f

mf

Musical Example 11 “Mama” Scene 3, mm. 204-7.

Musical Example 11 showing the *walking effect* pattern.

The dynamics of this aria are detailed and everchanging for both the piano and soprano parts. The performers should pay close to attention to the composer’s intentions as the aria takes the audience through an ‘eb and flow’ of varied pitch levels and dynamics. Even though “Mama” repeats multiple times, the soprano should mirror the varied dynamics in her dramatic presentation to help eliminate monotony, as did the composer in her setting of this music.

Scene 4: I Have Crossed The Ocean...

The resilience of the Windrush woman is tested as she is now searching for job opportunities but is constantly rejected. She proclaims, “Things were easier in many ways back home, where I lived in a nice house and knew everybody.”

Song Text

I have crossed the ocean,
I have lost my tongue.
From the root of the old one,
A new one has sprung!

Style Characteristics

Range: B₄ to A₅

Form: Through-composed

The piano part plays a more dominant role in scene 4. There is an extended prelude and postlude in the piano part which sandwiches the singer's four lines. Thompson indicates that in this scene the pianist should play expressively. The prelude starts with only the left hand playing in the piano part. In keeping with the dynamics of the aria, the pianist should exploit the syncopated rhythms presented in the bassline, wherein the stronger beats are on the second half of the downbeat and the second half of the second beat as indicated in Musical Example 12. Note that in the bassline there is also the *walking effect*, the same piano figures that appeared in scene 3. In this instance, the *walking effect* shows up in the form of an ostinato in the bassline throughout the aria. The *walking* ostinato reinforces the illusion that the journey continues, as though transporting the audience through a transitioning phase towards the next scene.

212 *f* **Expressively** = 115

S. Ma - ma

Pno. *f*

*Windrush Woman (speaks): Things were easier in many ways back home,
 218 where I lived in a nice house and knew everybody...*

S.

Pno. *simile*

Musical Example 12 “I Have Crossed The Ocean...” Scene 4, mm. 215-23.

Musical Example 12 illustrating the *walking effect* in the form of an ostinato. The arrows indicate suggested stress points.

Even though the soprano sings only four lines, the challenge of this aria is that it requires a soprano with the range and skill to sustain a very high tessitura. The soprano should be careful in how she shapes her vowels and sounds her consonants, so that the result does not compromise tone quality and intelligible words. The following suggestions will help the soprano achieve intelligible words with a bright tone: a lengthening of the nape, dropped jaw for open and elongated vowels, quick and energized

consonants to help propel the vowels, and a glottal onset applied to the words beginning with a vowel.

The singer's first line, "I have crossed the ocean," instantly channels our minds to traveling, but what does her second line, "I have lost my tongue," mean? According to Samson Mwita, the phrase could be interpreted as the individual has lost their mother-tongue and has adopted a new language.⁵⁰ The soprano could, therefore, motivate this scene with the expressions of a Windrush woman crossing over the ocean to settle into a new land and who has now adapted to a new culture—a new language—"From the root of the old one, a new one has sprung." The prevailing emotions in the aria are pensiveness, uncertainty, and perhaps even guilt—hence, the high tessitura. Thompson, like Poulenc, uses pivotal pitches that rest within the passaggio of the soprano to reveal instability. The Windrush woman is experiencing something new, a change in mindset, a cultural transition, which brings about that feeling of uncertainty or guilt, contemplating if this is a good thing or should this transition be unsolicited. The soprano could use these emotions to inform her vocal nuances and cultivate a mature tone quality. The poem, written by Grace Nichols, is entitled *Epilogue* (2010). Grace Nichols is a Guyanese poet who is also a settler in the UK during the latter part of the Windrush era, 1977.⁵¹ A biproduct of the Windrush generation, Grace Nichols is yet another poet handpicked by Thompson to echo the stories of these women in the opera.

50. Samson Mwita, "Analysis of the Poem *Epilogue*," Samwitason Academy, accessed February 2024, <https://samwiterson.blogspot.com/2018/05/analysis-of-poem-epilogue-grace-nichols.html>.

51. "Grace Nichols," Writers, British Council Literature, accessed February 2024, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/grace-nichols>.

Scene 5: Oh! Good Morning World

Scene 5 embraces a transition, a new sentiment—an optimistic feeling. The Windrush woman looks forward to better days in England. She is determined to stay and make things work despite the circumstances.

Song Text

Oh! Good morning world.
Winter's cold breath approaches.
Yes, yes I'm alive.
Winter's cold breath approaches.
Yes, yes I'm alive.

Bare-armed trees tussle,
November wind chills,
The sky applauds watching.

Oh! Good morning world!
Yesterday's karma relived.
I lie awake dreaming.

Style Characteristics

Range: F[#]₄ to G[#]₅

Form: ABA

Oh! Good Morning World is driven by the thematic triplets that represent the *rolling waves of the Atlantic* mentioned in scene 1. From the *walking ostinato* in scene 4 to the *rolling waves*, we see a transition in mood as the journey continues. These thematic triplets appeared in the violin part referred to in scene 1—the start of the Windrush journey. Now, the *rolling waves* theme appears in the piano part. These triplets were composed in such a way that they keep the music spritely moving in between the vocal lines giving a driving sensation, while the vocal lines are accompanied by sustained chords in the piano figures (See Musical Example 13).

363 *f* *mf*
S. Bare-armed tress tus - sle No - vem - ber wind chills
Pno. *f* *mf*
368 *f* *mp*
S. The sky ap - plauds wat - ching
Pno. *mp*

Musical Example 13 “Oh! Good Morning World” Scene 5, mm. 363-71.

Musical Example 13 highlighting the thematic triplets before and after the vocal line, and sustained chords supporting the vocal line.

Like the sunrise, we see a clear direction of where the Windrush woman wants to go with her life. The title, *Oh! Good Morning World*, already insinuates a newness—a fresh awakening. In this transitional mood change, the soprano should burst with the feeling of optimism and faith, believing that everything will pan out as desired. The burst of optimism will reflect a bright timbre in the voice, as though replicating the sun. Even though the poem speaks of “winter” and “wind chills,” it is with such crispness that the Windrush woman basks in her faith and looks towards a bright, unclouded future. At the end, the soprano sings “I lie awake dreaming,” with her last note sustained over three bars (see Musical Example 14). As the Windrush woman daydreams, the *rolling waves* thematic triplets in the piano accompaniment carries her as she continues her journey.

The soprano can allow the vocal line to float above the *rolling waves*, creating an atmospheric sensation of a boat steadily caressed by the oceanic waves while calmly floating into the abyss.

The image shows a musical score for Soprano (S.) and Piano (Pno.) from measures 384 to 387. The Soprano part begins at measure 384 with the lyrics "wake_ drea - ming_". The melody is simple, with a long note in measure 385. The Piano accompaniment starts in measure 385 with a series of triplet chords in the right hand and single notes in the left hand, marked with a *mf* dynamic. The piano part continues with these triplet patterns, marked with a *cresc.* (crescendo) in measure 387.

Musical Example 14 “Oh! Good Morning World” Scene 5, mm. 345-7.

Musical Example 14 showing the thematic triplets representing the *rolling waves* of the Atlantic and the soprano line above floating.

Scene 6: Underneath These Skies So Precious...

Optimism is still on the horizon as the Windrush woman gaily walks through her local park. In this scene, the weather reminds her of home in Jamaica, as the fresh air pleasantly greets her.

Song Text

Underneath these skies so precious,
We together make our journey.
Over hills and gentle waters,
We find the troubles and we all find joy!

Underneath these skies so pleasant,
We are one with all around us.
We are blessed beyond all measure.
We are loved today and always.

Ah____

Crackling leaves under foot.
Sun shining through the whispering
trees.
Oh, how I love days like this!
Let it last forever more.
Let it last forever more.

Birds dancing here, dancing there.
They have no care of what tomorrow
may bring.
Show me the way little bird.
Let your sweet song touch my heart,

through and through.
Let your sweet song touch my trembling
heart.

Let us all live well today!
Let us dance to the beat.
Let us all sing your sweet song!

Underneath the skies so precious
We together make our journey.
Over hills and gentle waters,
We find troubles and we all find joy.

Underneath the skies so precious,
we are one with all around us.
We are blessed beyond all measure.
We are loved today and always.

Ah_____

Let us shout and praise,
We are here today.
Let us sing, let bells ring.
Beneath these skies, LET'S SING!

Style Characteristics

Range: E₄ to A₅

Form: AABAB

Penned by Shirley J. Thompson, this poem harvests the memory of home in Jamaica. It depicts the idyllic beauty of the rural countryside in Jamaica—from the hamlets, roaming cows, gentle waters, and marshes of the fields, to the hummingbirds and swallowtail butterflies of the air. For this scene, the soprano should entertain a calm, mild and contemplative sentiment. The “Ah” line shown in Musical Example 15, should be sung by the soprano with a bright tone and much freedom, coupled with an innocent, child-like interpretation. Here, as the soprano remembers her home, she is happy and carefree.

421

S.

Ah

Pno.

424

S.

Ah

Pno.

29

Musical Example 15 “Underneath These Skies So Precious...” Scene 6, mm. 422-6.

Musical Example 15 highlighting the child-like innocent “Ah” line, over bird-like piano figures.

As one of the longest arias in the opera, it is one that is often used on the recital stage due to its simplicity and its ability to stand alone without the need for context. Though it is composed with simple and catchy lyrical lines, the soprano should pay close attention to the word changes within the repeated melodies. The soprano should also try to avoid monotony by considering varied, expressive vocal applications to the repeated melodies. As illustrated in Musical Example 16, Thompson interchanges between forte and mezzo-forte dynamic markings within each A-section of the aria. The B-sections are sung with much more intensity, as hinted by fortissimo dynamic markings. Utilizing these changing dynamic markings indicated by the composer is a good start to developing varied expressions in the aria.

447

S. *mf* Birds dan-cing here, dan-cing there

Pno. *mf*

450

S. *f* They have no care of what to-mor-row may bring. *mf* Show me the way lit-tle

Pno.

Musical Example 16 “Underneath These Skies So Precious...” Scene 6, mm. 448-52.

Musical Example 16 indicating the changing dynamic markings that adds variety to repetitive melodies.

Technically speaking, the aria challenges the soprano's range, owing to the octave leaps that extend from the lower register to the upper register. Applying a lifted and bright tone to the pitches in her lower register as though she is still singing in the upper register (i.e., use of head resonance in the lower register) will help the soprano sing these octave leaps successfully and efficiently. The soprano should never underestimate this aria because even though it may appear easy on paper, she can easily run out of fuel coming towards the end—comparable to a Mozart aria. The ending requires an intense sound (fortissimo dynamic marking) with syllabic pitches that live within a high tessitura, shown in Musical Example 17. It is encouraged to find sections within the aria to reserve energy or to recharge in aid of a brilliant and intelligible ending. It is also optional for the soprano to sing up to a B₅ on her last word, “SING,” rather than the G₅ depicted in measures 511-512 in Musical Example 17.

Musical Example 17 “Underneath These Skies So Precious...” Scene 6, mm. 506-12.

Musical Example 17 showing the aria's ending line that sustains high pitches, with arrows indicating an optional B₅ on the last word.

Scene 7: *Think of Our Country's Glory*

“Imagine that we came here as British citizens, but we have been treated like dogs! Remember, we have as much right to be here as anyone else! We fought hard for this country - my father, my uncles, my brothers,” utters the Windrush woman at the beginning of this scene as she surpasses her current struggle.

Song Text

Think of our country's glory.
All dimm'd with Afric's tears.
Her broad flag stained and gory.
With the hoarded guilt of years!

Think of the frantic mother,
Lamenting for her child.
Till falling lashes smother.
Her cries of anguish wild.

Think of the pray'rs ascending.
Yet shriek'd, alas! In vain,
When heart from heart in rending
Ne'er to be join'd again.

Shall we behold, unheeding,
Life's holiest feelings crush'd?
A woman's heart is bleeding,
Shall woman's voice be hush'd
(whispered) *Hush'd Hush'd*

Oh, no! by ev'ry blessing
That Heaven to thee may lend.
Remember their oppression,
Forget not, sister, friend.
Think of your country's glory!

Style Characteristics

Range: E^b₄ to G₅

Form: AABA

Elizabeth Margaret Chandler (1807 – 1834) is the author of *Think of Our Country's Glory*. Chandler was an American author who became the first female writer in the United States of America to make the abolition of slavery her primary theme.⁵²

52. “Think of Our Country's Glory,” All Poetry, accessed February 2024, <https://allpoetry.com/poem/11892029-Think-of-Our-Country-s-Glory-by-Elizabeth-Margaret-Chandler>.

Chandler's poem brings back memories of slavery and how the slaves fought for their freedom, fought for their country. It brings us back to our roots and what contributes to who we are today. It also comes in the form of a message to the audience, one that provokes the audience and causes them to contemplate. The soprano can take on the role of a preacher who, with the power of her words, can change the lives and mindset of members of the congregation. The soprano should apply much richness and power to her tone as she experiences painful memories while channeling the strength of her ancestors. Even though England alienates her, she is going to remain resilient, as did the slaves of the past.

Think of Our Country's Glory challenges the soprano's range and musicianship, as there are wide leaps and phrases that have little to no support from the piano accompaniment. Thompson sets the A-sections of this aria with longer note values in the melodic line, some melismatic phrases, and octave leaps. The B-section is set with little to no support from the piano accompaniment, curating an augmented declamatory-like approach to the phrasing. For this reason, the soprano should aim towards acquiring solid knowledge of the melodic line and a good ear, independent of the piano accompaniment.

The harmonic language, in particular, is concentrated with chromatic progressions. The chromaticism gives the impression of *sighing chords* that creates a crying sensation—tears falling—as the song develops. These *sighing chords*, as shown in Musical Example 18, populate the entire aria except for the B-section. The pianist can imagine or recreate the ancestral tears as these *sighing chords* are played to complement the singer's commune. At the same time, the soprano should stress the first note of the sixteenth mordent to place emphasis on the text.

523

S. All dimm'd with A - fric's tears. Her

Pno.

Musical Example 18 “Think of Our Country's Glory” Scene 7, mm. 523-26.

Musical Example 18 illustrating *Sighing Chords* recreating tears and arrow indicating the stress point in the melodic line.

Scene 8: A Hymn To The Morning

A Hymn To The Morning introduces a refreshing and resolute feeling. The Windrush woman is giving thanks that she is surviving the migration experience, as she sings this aria. Here, she exudes a content demeanor which speaks for itself.

Song Text

Attend my lays,
Ye ever honour'd nine,
Assist my labours,
And my strains refine;
In smoothest numbers
Pour the notes along,
For bright Aurora
Now demands my song.
For bright Aurora now demands a song.
Aurora hails and all the thousands dies
Which deck thy progress
Through the vaulted skies:
The morn awakes, and wide extends her rays
On ev'ry leaf the gentle zephyr plays;

Ye shady groves,
Your verdant gloom displays.
To shield your poet from the burning day:
Calliope awakes the sacred lyre,
While thy fair sisters fan the pleasing fire.
The bow'rs the gales the variegated skies
In all their pleasures in my bosom rise.
See in the east th'illustrious king of day!
His rising radiance drives the shades away.
But Oh! I feel his fervid beams too strong,
And the scarce begun, concludes th'abortive
song.

Ah___Hmmm___

Harmonious lays the feather'd race resumes,
Dart the bright eye, and shake the painted
plume.

Style Characteristics

Range: D₄ to B^b₅

Form: ABA

The poem was written by Phillis Wheatley (1753 – 1784), who was born in West Africa. At an early age, she was shipped to America to start working as a household slave for the Wheatley family.⁵³ Wheatley's extraordinary capacity to learn was soon discovered by her master. At that point, the young girl was relieved of most of her domestic responsibilities for an education in liberal arts. Around age twelve, Wheatley began publishing her poems and soon after her fame spread across the Atlantic.⁵⁴ Her book of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), made her the first African American and the third American woman to have published a literary work.⁵⁵ Despite the fame and pioneering accomplishments, Phillis Wheatley endured much hardship and poor health when she was emancipated from her master. She suffered debt, the loss of two infants, racism, and sexism, all leading to an early death at the age of 31. Figure 5 shows an image of Phillis Wheatley in her writing element.

53. "Biography," Phyllis Wheatley, accessed February 2024, <https://philliswheatley7c.weebly.com/biography.html>.

54. Stephanie Sheridan, "Phillis Wheatley: Her Life, Poetry, and Legacy," National Portrait Gallery, accessed February 2024, <https://npg.si.edu/blog/phillis-wheatley-her-life-poetry-and-legacy>.

55. Ibid.



Figure 5. A Portrait of Phillis Wheatley.

Figure 5 showing a portrait of Phillis Wheatley in her writing element by an unidentified artist.⁵⁶ (Smithsonian Institution, National Portrait Gallery, 1773).

Knowledge of the author's journey and understanding why Thompson handpicked Wheatley's poem will better help to inform the singer on how to approach this aria. The Windrush woman can relate to the poet's struggle to make a life away from her homeland and thus, the soprano should embody that sentiment as she interprets this aria on stage. Wheatley's poem is left to the performer's subjective interpretation but the underlying

56. Stephanie Sheridan, "Phillis Wheatley: Her Life, Poetry, and Legacy," National Portrait Gallery, accessed February 2024, <https://npg.si.edu/blog/phillis-wheatley-her-life-poetry-and-legacy>.

story of the Windrush experience remains grounded. Nevertheless, the poem is inspired by the sight of nature and its demeanor at the dawn of a new day. The poet alludes to a “bright Aurora” and the “illustrious king of day,” which she describes as the sun in all its glory. The rising sun demands a song—*A Hymn to the Morning*. Centered on the dawn of a new day, *A Hymn to the Morning* is a song of hope and a bright future, however, it is also ancestral and spiritual. The poem mentions the “honour’d nine” which, as Wheatley mentions the goddess’s name Calliope, refers to the nine Greek goddesses, otherwise known as Greek muses of the arts.⁵⁷ Wheatley calls on the gods to help her as she toils under the sun. Consequently, paired with the awakening sun and nature’s reception, the Greek spirits thrive to motivate the morning song. Furthermore, Wheatley goes on to speak, literally, that the sun’s radiance drives the shades away and kills thousands under its pelting beams but, metaphorically, one can interpret the hailing sun as buoyant hope that eradicates the darkness of the past and persistently inspires a brighter future. The Windrush woman and her ancestors are the epitome of what the sun in this poem represents—persistence and resilience.

The soprano ends the aria with the innocent and light-hearted “Ah” and the comforting sound of a warm hum (see Musical Example 19). Additionally, Musical Example 19 shows another setting of the *walking effect* piano figures implemented in scenes 3 and 4 of the opera. The *walking* theme in the last scene dominates the

57. Bethany Williams, “The 9 Muses: Inspiring Art Since the Age of Heroes Began,” The Collector, accessed February 2024, <https://www.thecollector.com/the-9-muses-greek-mythology/>.

accompaniment of the aria, permeating towards the end giving the impression that even though the opera has ended, the Windrush journey continues.

The image displays a musical score for two systems. The first system starts at measure 684. The vocal line (S.) begins with a rest, followed by a half note G4, and then a half note F#4. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) consists of a continuous eighth-note pattern in the right hand (G4, A4, B4, C5) and a similar pattern in the left hand (F#3, G3, A3, B3). The second system starts at measure 686. The vocal line (S.) begins with a rest, followed by a half note G4, and then a half note F#4. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) continues the eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand. The score is marked with a dynamic of *mf* (mezzo-forte) and includes the vocalizations "Ah" and "Hmmm".

Musical Example 19 “A Hymn To The Morning” Scene 8, mm. 684-88.

Musical Example 19 showing the *walking effect* piano figures continue towards the end of the opera, with the light-hearted “Ah” and warm hum in the vocal line.

Characterization and Use of Language

Looking through the lens of the composer and gleaned her intentions for *Women of the Windrush*, dramatic realism is crucial. The whole concept of the opera is centered on authentic women from the Windrush generation; thus, the performers should aim to embody the characteristics of the Windrush women, particularly the women featured in the film aspect of the opera. The above discussions of the opera scenes tied together with studying the stories, mannerisms, and beliefs of the real Windrush women will contribute to character development, further resulting in dramatic realism. Nadine Benjamin, the soprano who premiered the opera, shares her take on character development when performing *Women of the Windrush*:

It was about me creating a character for myself that could tell a story the audience would relate to...it was right in front of them, it was tangible. It's almost like the ladies on the film talk and then I respond to them on stage. What I have noticed from my last performance was the audience's reaction. People said, "I just felt like this was my story," and so it was really important to perform it as honestly and authentically [as possible]. The main thing for me was recognizing my parents' and grandparents' journey...When I stepped inside the shoes of these women, I recognized that it was quite a universal story of migration.⁵⁸

The film aspect of the opera combines interviews of the four authentic Windrush women. It moves the story of the opera just as the typical recitatives in conventional classical operas. Additionally, the film provides a backdrop scenery, added dramatic effect, and dramatic motivation for the performers. The performer can use the film to inform their characterization from the beginning to the end of the opera.

58. Nadine Benjamin, "Music Matters," interview by Sara Mohr-Pietsch, on BBC 3, June 17, 2023, 00:12:12, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001mtyd>.

A Jamaican dialect should be used by future performers in spoken sections, as the background of the four authentic Windrush women in the film are of Jamaican heritage. The director of a typical play or movie would instruct any actor to take on the speech patterns of the character they are portraying. Consequently, performers from any background should be willing to equip themselves with the necessary assets in representing the make-up of a Windrush woman to successfully execute the intentions of the composer.

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

Women of the Windrush is a universal story—one of settling in another country. People of all ethnicities who have migrated to settle in another country could perform this opera, with equal understanding. The work itself can be adapted for other related occasions. Primarily, the Windrush experience is a journey of resilience and identity. Windrush women tell their individual stories and in response, the soprano sings about their shared experiences, thus the title of this project: *Out of Many, One Voice*.

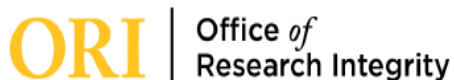
Our beliefs contribute to authenticity. The performers must believe this storyline to portray its emotional and dramatic authenticity. The story behind the music is essential to creating a connection to the music itself. The story is affirmative. It has depth and gravity that grounds the music. Consequently, for the music to resonate with the artistes and the audience, the performers need to know the innerworkings of the music. The opera is very communicative and thus the soprano should make sure to know the linkages in between the story. Additionally, performers of the opera should be musically astute and technically skilled to meet its demands. The soprano should be careful not to overload her voice at the beginning, as there are several massive scenes later in the opera.

Women of the Windrush starts with the thrilling Windrush journey, calling on God for strength and favor, as the music takes the performers and the audience steadily and progressively over the Atlantic Ocean towards England. Doubt and nostalgia are introduced early in the opera but then eradicated by fervent reminders of the long line of ancestors who prevailed through the hardest times. At the center of the opera, a shift in mood calls for a fresh awakening that sparks optimism and innocent joy. Lastly, a

resolute feeling permeates the end of the opera where the soprano sings a light-hearted “Ah” and a warm hum—a comfort in knowing rather than hoping.

The purpose of this doctoral project was to expose more people to this significant time in history and to the prolific works of the composer, Shirley J. Thompson. She created this music to commemorate the Windrush generation, capturing the audacity, courage, success, and beautiful culture of that Caribbean generation. Shirley J. Thompson is the biproduct of her own opera, *Women of the Windrush*, and continues to promote women of African descent through her music platform.

APPENDIX A – IRB Approval Letter



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February 15, 2024

To The Institutional Review Whom It May Concern,

Acting on behalf of The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board, in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University guidelines, I have reviewed the following project and have determined that review by USM's IRB is not necessary.

Principal Investigator: Danielle Watson

Graduate Dissertation: "Out of Many, One Voice: A Fundamental Map to Performing Shirley J. Thompson's Opera – Woman of the Windrush"

Date Submitted: February 15, 2024

Formal IRB review is not required in this instance, as the project does not meet federal or institutional definitions of "human subjects research."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Samuel Bruton", is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Samuel V. Bruton

Director of the Office of Research Integrity

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