

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The study aimed to locate the lacuna between cultural history and musicology in order to understand processes of affect and meaning in Boer vocal music. By using music notation to assess these aspects, a new dimension is added to the history of the war. The vocal music serves as a powerful building block to the past and also highlights the fact that music is not merely a form of leisure or entertainment: it is central to the very formation of human societies and as such cannot be ignored.

7.2 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question on which this thesis was based was:

Is it possible to locate the lacuna that exists between cultural history and musicology, in order to assess processes of affect and meaning in vocal music as a vehicle for understanding the Boer psyche and the circumstances they had to face during the Anglo-Boer War?

In order to answer this question effectively it is necessary to look at:

- ❖ research strategies employed
- ❖ questions linked to the research question.

7.2.1 Research strategies employed

As was stated in Chapter 1, the pursuit of answers to the research question was best served by employing qualitative research methods that reflect the phenomenological paradigm. By conducting qualitative research, an in-depth

understanding of the Boers was gained. The phenomenological paradigm was primarily directed towards understanding of individuals in terms of their own interpretations of reality, as well as the understanding of society in terms of the meanings that people ascribe to the societal practices in that society.

Primary sources were thus of great importance for this study because they have the power to recapture the atmosphere of that time and best reflect the Boer response to situations. Two kinds of primary sources were especially valuable, namely:

- ❖ diaries
- ❖ hand-notated vocal music and holograph songbooks.

Diaries assisted in giving the researcher an insight into the experiential world of the Boer and were thus an indispensable vehicle towards an understanding of the cultural-historical aspect of the war. Entries in diaries are the writer's reality and capture what really happened in their everyday lives, incorporating the context in which they operated, as well as their frame of reference. Allport (cited in Babbie and Mouton 2001:301) speaks of the diary as the document *par excellence* because in it "the author sets down only such events, thoughts and feelings as have importance to him: he is not so constrained by the task-attitudes that frequently control the production of letters, interviews or autobiography."

Notated Boer vocal music and holograph songbooks were also important because they were a concrete form of expressing Boer war experiences and as such proved that "[m]usic is an activity central rather than peripheral to people and society" (Shepherd & Wicke 1997:3). An examination of this notated music was invaluable from a musicological viewpoint as well as for allowing the lyrics to be interpreted in melodic configurations that could be equated with particular moods, emotions and cultural meanings. The role of vocal music in situations of duress was aptly expressed by Flam, a Jewish inmate of the Lodz Ghetto during World War II: "Singing helped to focus the individual's despair, anger, and hope; it expressed the dream, the fantasy of escape; it served to submerge the individual into the group and thus dilute his or her suffering" (Flam 1992:170).

7.2.2 Questions linked to the research question

Before the research question could be answered, careful consideration was given to other questions that could lead to a viable answer.

7.2.2.1 *Does the axiom that declares music possesses a power or powers that can produce effects on the human psyche, society and civilisations exist?*

Research highlighted the fact that over many centuries people *believed* in the power of music although there was no scientific evidence to confirm these beliefs. Examples were given which emphasised the belief in the powerful effect of music upon human character and morals. Many saw music as having the power to exert an influence of either a negative or a beneficial nature on man and “thereby to make or break entire civilisations” (Tame 1988:14). These beliefs are important but are of no value if there is no evidence to support them.

Research highlighted the fact that modern scientific instruments now exist, not only for verifying, but for measuring the effects of music on the body and its functions. This has resulted in many studies directed towards demonstrating what had previously only been believed; that music is able to influence the human psyche and body. Two examples, namely music therapy and music in education, were highlighted in order to substantiate the theory that music is a fundamental power.

The findings about the power of music were important for answering the research question because they provided insights into processes of affect and meaning in music.

7.2.2.2 Does an understanding of the experiences of the Boers during the war lead to an understanding of the role of their vocal music?

In order to answer this question the research sought to highlight the experiential world of the Boers from a cultural-historical perspective, which could help to conceptualise experience. Historical facts alone would serve no purpose towards answering this question. A thick description was thus used, which evokes emotions and feelings in the reader, and inserts history into experience. It also establishes the significance of an experience or the sequence of events for the person or persons in question, “and captures the meanings and experiences that have occurred in a problematic situation” (Denzin 2001:162).

This approach allowed for some insider perspectives of the Boer people that could be helpful in understanding affect and meaning in Boer vocal music. This is corroborated by Philip Tagg (1991:144), who states that “a viable understanding of culture requires an understanding of its articulation through music as much as a viable understanding of music requires an understanding of its place in culture.”

Chapter 3 alone could, however, not put forward concepts capable of explaining the attraction of vocal music for the Boers, and whether it appears to have had an influence over them. A lacuna was thus identified which had to be addressed before coming to viable conclusions which would help to answer the research question.

7.2.2.3 Could the lacuna between cultural history and musicology be addressed by assessing the affect and meaning of the sounds together with the lyrics of the songs?

In order to answer this question, the lacuna had to be located. To achieve this the researcher relied heavily on the theory of Shepherd and Wicke, which feeds cultural theory into musicology “by thinking of music in ways unprecedented within musicology ... the latter becomes a prerequisite for the former” (Shepherd & Wicke 1997:2). This research explored some of the issues raised in Shepherd and

Wicke's theory and at the same time placed these on an empirical base that was focussed on:

- ❖ the environment in which the vocal music was created
- ❖ meaning in the sound and the lyrics of the vocal music
- ❖ hand-notated scores which are a visual analogue of musical sound.

This approach thus deals with the relationship between the meaning in the sounds and lyrics of Boer vocal music as it is dialectically constituted in performance. This is because the analysis of affect and meaning cannot be grounded exclusively in an examination of cultural history or musicology, decontextualised from sound. By doing research in this way, the lacuna was located and identified as an aural void and was addressed by emphasising:

- ❖ sound as a vehicle to articulate a spectrum of unfolding events during the war
- ❖ analysis of the affect and meaning in words of songs.

7.2.3 Does an analysis of hand-notated scores of the Boers lead to an understanding of affect and meaning in their vocal music?

In order to answer this question, the hand-notated scores, which are a visual analogue of musical sound, were analysed. The approach was musicological, but not in the traditional sense of the word, since it precluded a detailed stylistic analysis and aesthetic evaluation. It was linked to cultural history in order to understand the processes of affect and meaning in vocal music. This link was made possible by insights gained from the aural void identified as the lacuna between cultural history and musicology.

7.3 THE RESEARCH QUESTION ANSWERED

By establishing a link between cultural history and musicology it was possible for these disciplines to inform each other and so to establish the fact that Boer vocal music articulated affect and meaning.

The research question was answered because, by identifying the lacuna as an aural void, it was possible to examine Boer vocal music against its cultural-historical background. The aural void thus moved cultural history towards an accommodation with musicology. The vocal music was found to be fundamental to the essential characteristics of the Boer people. It allowed for affect and meaning in vocal music to be recognised as a tool that provided insight into the Boer psyche and the circumstances they had to face during the war.

7.4 VALUE OF THE STUDY

The study established new links between cultural history and musicology by mapping the aural void between these two disciplines. As such, it should be recommended reading for students and professionals in musicology and cultural history studies. It is important for an inter-disciplinary approach, showing how disciplines can inform and enrich each other.

An important aspect of the research was that it promoted an understanding of white South Africans and their circumstances during the war. In Chapter 1, under personal motivation, the researcher recognised the importance of a link between vocal music and cultural history in order to provide polarised societies in South Africa with a potent tool for understanding each other's circumstances. By recognising parallels, as expressed through song, between the experiences of mainly black South Africans during apartheid and white Boers during the Anglo-Boer War, vocal music could become a tool for reconciliation as well as allowing for an appreciation of cultural diversity in South Africa.

This was clearly demonstrated at a concert arranged by the singer, Jennifer Ferguson, in 1993. She attempted to bridge the seemingly gaping differences between white and black South Africans through this concert called *South Africa Love Workshop*, held at Johannesburg's Yard of Ale. Ferguson asked Sibongile Khumalo, the well-known Zulu contralto performer, to sing *My Sarie Marais*, "despite the fact that she has an ardent commitment to black South African identity" (Vinassa 1993:50). According to Ferguson (cited in Vinassa 1993:50) "there was a very excited reaction from the audience who clapped and sang along and who clearly found this song and others to be an unexpectedly powerful cathartic experience for the participants and audience". Sibongile Khumalo observed that "[o]nce I was familiar with the origin of the song, I became aware of the similarities of the black experience, to the emotions expressed by the songwriter of *My Sarie Marais*, about his oppression at the hands of the English. He was fighting for his motherland. History has been so distorted that these things come as a revelation" (Vinassa 1993:50).

This study thus attempts to expand discussion regarding the role of vocal music in the South African context and to open up new avenues of research and understanding.

7.5 CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown that music was not merely a form of leisure or entertainment for the Boers during the war. It was a tool that helped them cope with their circumstances and as such was a vital form of expression. The hypothesis posited in Chapter 1 was thus confirmed. By locating the lacuna between cultural history and musicology, it was possible to assess affect and meaning in the vocal music sung by the Boers. The establishment of a link between these disciplines also allowed for an understanding of the Boer psyche, as Boer vocal music articulated a wide spectrum of personal and communal perceptions and responses to unfolding events.

It is the intention of this thesis to encourage further research, as many aspects of Anglo-Boer War music mentioned in the delimitations of the study, remain outside the domain of the study. It is also important that findings and discussions regarding the war are kept interdisciplinary in order to allow music to take its rightful place as a vital form of human expression. This is stressed by Wilson-Dickson (1992:11): “Music’s power is diverse: it may merely entertain, but it can also excite, persuade, move and cure. It also acts upon its hearers in a number of ways: some react to it simply on an instinctive level, some search for clues about their very existence, others listen for messages about human behaviour.”