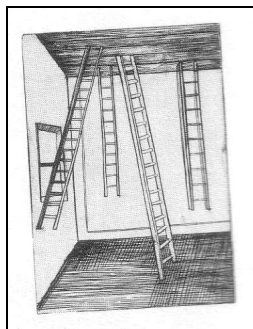


DWELLING STRUCTURE  
AN OPERA IN 8 TIME USE EPISODES



PRESENTED BY  
CHAMBER MADE OPERA

2011

## DWELLING STRUCTURE AN OPERA IN 8 TIME USE EPISODES

TEXT BY CYNTHIA TROUP, FOR MADELEINE FLYNN AND TIM HUMPHREY

*Dwelling Structure: An Opera in 8 Time Use Episodes* is a site-specific project, developed with reference to the home of composers and sound artists Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey, 157 Westbourne Grove, Northcote, Victoria—for performance in the living room at this address. The structure of the work is freely based on the list of ‘seven final household outputs’ that is the framework for Duncan Ironmonger’s 2009 study of data from Australian time use surveys and accounts of household production. The outputs are as follows: accommodation; meals; clean clothes; child care; transport; volunteering and education. The opera also includes an additional ‘episode’—an unforeseen (and incalculable) disturbance, or ‘Interruption’, which occurs after the first four sections.

Aside from the ‘Interruption’, each section of the text is composed as a simple prose poem of sonic events and found fragments, in which any narrative momentum is at best implicit. The sounds mentioned are offered as identifiable, if not familiar ‘sounds of life’ for contemplation—and in a spirit of juxtaposing sounds that might carry associations with different psychological perspectives, and different eras. All are intended merely as suggestions for a broad contrapuntal design, with no restriction whatsoever on any possible additions, omissions, conceivable durations or combinations. Moreover, while a certain eloquence of acoustical properties has been assumed for the site, a key role is presumed for indistinct and indescribable sounds and musics; however, the text makes no attempt to refer to these.

The ‘Interruption’ is represented by the thumbnail news report titled ‘Songs Outside Rechabite Hall’, discovered in *The Argus* newspaper (18 September 1929). While this material is clearly a story in itself, it is included without supposing that it will be presented to the audience as a discrete journalistic account. As with all of the other text materials and images, there is every scope to inventively abstract this episode, or to ‘illustrate’ it aurally, for example, as if ‘overheard’ from beyond the back fence at 157 Westbourne Grove.

Except for the sudden, even jarring change to and from the ‘Interruption’, a motif marking the transition from one ‘time use episode’ to the next could be effective. On imagining the sculpture by Neil Thomas in the living room, a proposed sound to serve this purpose is that of hinges turning.

Where words are quoted from the piano and song scores in *The Rechabite Harmonist. A Collection of Odes, Hymns and Melodies*, if the song lyrics are pre-recorded or otherwise made audible in performance, any omitted word indicated by an ellipsis [...] should be hummed.

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The following text borrows variously from these sources:

- . Discussions with Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey in their home.
- . Discussion with Neill Thomas, and study of the sculpture created by him for the opera, a structure that includes collaged pages of text torn from books, such as a story book and a recipe book.
- . [no author named] *The Rechabite Harmonist. A Collection of Odes, Hymns and Melodies, Compiled for Adult and Juvenile Rechabite Gatherings* (Manchester: Office of the Order, 1891).
- . [no author named] ‘Songs Outside Rechabite Hall’, *The Argus* [Melbourne morning daily newspaper published 1846–1957], 18 September 1929, page 10.
- . [no author named] ‘Star of Northcote Centenary Celebrations May 23rd–June 5th, 1976’, and ‘Star of Northcote 217 100 Years of History’, *The Rechabite*, 1 June 1976, pp. 167–170.
- . Coad, Richard, *Facts and Fragments, Original and Select [...] Consisting of Sketches of Temperance Sermons, Speeches, Poetry, Anecdotes, Readings, and Touching Bits. Very Suitable for Gospel Temperance Army Meetings, Bands of Hope, Good Templar Lodges, and Fireside Readings* (London: Sydney J. Saunders, 1882; second edition 1888).
- . Ironmonger, Duncan, and Faye Soupourmas, ‘Estimating Household Production Outputs With Time Use Episode Data’, *Electronic International Journal of Time Use Research*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2009), pp. 240–268.
- . Ironmonger, Duncan S., ‘The Household Economy: A \$90 billion Industry’, Research Discussion Paper No. 10 (1987), Centre for Applied Research on the Future, The University of Melbourne (27 pages).
- . <http://meteor.aihw.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/270125> [METeOR Metadata Online Registry, accessed 19 February 2010].
- . <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/BEB053CE25B02FE5CA25720A000FAC42?opendocument> [2901.0 - Census Dictionary, 2006 (Reissue), accessed 19 February 2010].

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... a useful fact, like a good sovereign, is never out of date,  
is always passable, and no one objects to receive it  
because others have used it before.

Richard Coad, *Facts and Fragments, Original and Select* (1882)

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1.

The measurement task involves estimating the number of days of accommodation for each accommodation variety and finding the market equivalent rental price for each variety.

*agitato*

Taps turned on hard. Passing traffic, including horses hooves on cobblestones. Wind: through trees and under eaves.

[*The Rechabite Harmonist*, pp. 70–71: ‘Breakers Ahead!’] *And it sank to rise no more. In the countless homes that fill our land are the young, the loved the brave. Upon ruin’s brink how many stand! Are there none to warn and ... .*

Mechanical sounds and carpentry, such drilling and the hammering of nails—as though a stage set is being built. The switching on and humming of fluorescent tubes. A rattle of windows. Inside, from all directions, urgent clatter and movement of ‘looking for something’.

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2.

The accuracy of this procedure depends crucially on whether the market research average market price reflects the same mix of meals and snacks as the mix of types of meals provided by households.

*deciso*

A match lit. A knife sharpened. The 'thud' of the refrigerator door swinging closed. Cutlery scraping on plates. A kettle coming to the boil; a pouring of hot water.

[From a recipe book] *the following mixtures may be used ... from three-quarters of an hour to one and a half hours, depending ... cool slowly, and allow to become nearly cold before turning out ... sugar to taste. Sugar to taste.*

The dragging of wooden chairs on a wooden floor. Sweeping. The folding of an open newspaper. A hard scrubbing, for example with steel wool.

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3.

...(1996) time use survey data as it is currently collected provides 'no clue' on either loads of laundry or number of clean clothes produced in households.

*ostinato come possibile*

Sweeping. The whirl and splashing of an electric washing machine in full cycle. The whine of a vacuum cleaner. From outside a 'snap' of scateurs; the rhythmic squeak of a rope swing.

[One side of a telephone call] *At any rate ... never in all my days ... made no secret of the fact ... his time will come ... any rate ...*

The washing machine grinds and its operation lurches to a halt, suggesting that the washing load is unbalanced, or some mechanical malfunction has occurred.

[*The Rechabite Harmonist*, p. 80: 'In God We Trust!'] *In God we trust! In God we trust! For help and strength In God we trust!*

The tick of a clock. An aeroplane.

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4.

The output of child care is measure in child hours of care, not  
the input hours of parents or other unpaid carers.

*staccato, poi dolce*

A heartbeat. A hobby horse. A school bell ringing in the distance. A ball bouncing.  
Children. Skateboard races. A toy hammer banging. Television. A child crying.  
Scuffing of small feet. Clattering of cupboard doors and toys, including small wheels  
turning.

[From a story book] *When at last there was silence ... .*

A child's erratic clapping. A screech of birds. Sweeping. Quiet whistling.

[*The Rechabite Harmonist*, pp. 70–71: 'Breakers Ahead!'] *... and save. ... Are the  
young, the loved, the brave ... .*

A mechanical music box tune. The creak of a rocking chair.

[*The Rechabite Harmonist*, pp. 108–109: 'The Footsteps on the Stairs'] *For when I  
read, or sing, or play, or join in pleasures sweet ... .*

**attacca**



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5.

INTERRUPTION

*Songs Outside Rechabite Hall.*

*Outside the Rechabite Hall Northcote on the evening of September 14 Constable McGuinness saw five youths drinking from a bottle, and shouting and singing loudly. At the Northcote Court on Tuesday before Mr. D. Baldy, P.M., five youths—Lawrence Vincent Rooney, Charles Hollowood, Samuel Jones, Henry Gifford, and Francis Hart, all of Northcote—were charged with having behaved in an offensive manner in a public place. They pleaded guilty in defence they said that they were on their way to a dance in the Northcote Town Hall when, hearing an orchestra in the Rechabite Hall, they stopped outside and sang in tune.*

*Each youth was fined £1, in default imprisonment for seven days.*

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6.

The purpose of a trip does not affect the market price, so there is no need to differentiate between trip.

*poco a poco più piacevole*

Jangling coins. The scrape of a laneway roller door. The clink of a heavy bunch of keys. Broadcasting signals and bass rhythms of music. A child crying. A bicycle bell. Brakes screeching. A dog barking. The clang of passing trams.

[*The Rechabite Harmonist*, pp. 44–45: ‘Laughing Chorus’] *Ha, ha, ha! But very, very careful be, and laugh with caution now. For wise men laugh but rarely ... ha, ha, ha, ha! ... Oh!*

Vehicle doors slamming. A sound of trees and only distant traffic. A stopwatch. Cartage, for instance of sporting gear, baskets and glass bottles from a car boot. A cricket game: the ‘crack’ of the wooden bat hitting the ball; the ball in the air; polite applause. A packet of biscuits opened. The same dog barking. Rain beginning to fall. A single frog croaks.

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7.

Thus we are forced back on measuring the input time and valuing that at an appropriate market rate. The rate is \$24.09 per hour ...

*con aria marziale*

An electric urn on the boil. The dragging of wooden chairs on a wooden floor.

[From conversations:] ... *from three-quarters of an hour to one and a half hours, depending ...*

*He got a buffet on a shoulder that would have sent a lesser man reeling across the stage ...*

Knocks on the front door; the door opened and shut again. A shaking of coats and shuffling of belongings; whispering; a clearing of throats.

[*The Rechabite Harmonist*, pp. 46–47: ‘The Temperance Banner’—in rehearsal by a small, mixed choir] *Let us swell the glad sound, send the chorus around. Oh! Shout, for the pledge of our safety is found. ’Tis the Temperance banner, oh, long may it wave ...*

The faint drone of a lawnmower. Church bells. Trumpet practice. Electric light switches flicked to ‘off’.

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8. (AND FINALE)

Hence it is a productive activity although it does not fit within Margaret Reid's third person criterion for production.

*liberamente*

Feet on carpet. Cushions plumped and patted. Wind: through trees and under eaves. A rattle of windows. A match lit.

[*The Rechabite Harmonist*, pp. 70–71: 'Breakers Ahead!'] *And it sank to rise no more. In the countless homes that fill our land are the young, the loved, the brave.*

From upstairs, movement of 'looking for something'; drawers opened, and rifled through. Sighing. The metallic clicks of typing at a computer keyboard. A piling up and opening of books; a closing of books, including the 'thwack' of hasty closing. A pencil is sharpened. Pages are turned.

[*The Rechabite Harmonist* pp. 108–109: 'The Footsteps on the Stairs'] *Yet still I ... pause to hear the footsteps on the stairs ... . The footsteps on the stairs, the footsteps on the stairs, I listen ... .*

A brisk scratching of handwriting.

Abruptly: a train horn, and a garbage truck in the street. Alarm clocks ringing. Carpentry, and the switching on and humming of fluorescent tubes. The 'thud' of the refrigerator door swinging closed. A pouring of hot water. Rattling china. A fanfare.

[As a radio news announcement] *Star of Northcote Centenary Celebrations May 23 to June 5 ... On Saturday evening May 29 the Centenary Dinner was held ... entertainment by ... singer, comedian and impressionist interspersed the toasts in the latter half of the evening ... . The evening closed with the singing of Auld Lang Syne.*

From a great distance, and unsteadily, as though at the dawn close of a great celebration, a party group singing 'Auld Lang Syne'.

END