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THE LIFE AND LEGACY

OF

HAROLD DAVID (HAL) SHAPER

(1931–2004)

by

Diane Breetzke Mertens
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SOUTH AFRICAN COLLEGE OF MUSIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

FEBRUARY 2008

Supervisor: Dr M Bezuidenhout
DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:________________________________________

UCT Student Number BRTDIA003
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents an account of the life and work of the South African lyricist Harold David (Hal) Shaper (1931–2004).

The wealth of archival material that the project has uncovered is due to Shaper having meticulously kept most of his correspondence, diaries, song-writing drafts and autobiographical notes, as well as newspaper cuttings and magazine articles pertaining to his career. This study aims to provide an insight into his life and his hitherto largely unknown achievements, before the relevant documents are lost or dispersed.

Shaper’s family roots stem from Jewish persecution in eastern Europe. His mother was born in Poland, and his father in England, of Russian immigrant parents. His parents both came to South Africa in the early 1900s in search of a better quality of life. This background, and his parents’ meeting in Cape Town, are detailed in Chapter One. Chapter Two describes Shaper’s early years, which were spent in the Cape Town suburb of Muizenberg, and it was here, at the age of fourteen, that he decided that he wanted to be a songwriter. Even while studying in Cape Town to be a lawyer, he confidently and determinedly set about achieving his song-writing ambitions.

Chapter Three follows Shaper’s move to London, and his development as a lyricist, which resulted in his working with some of the foremost artists and composers of his generation. He also wrote the lyrics for several successful musical theatre productions. These are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

After a very successful song-writing and business career overseas, Shaper returned to South Africa in 1992, when the political climate had begun to change. His considerable contribution to the artistic life of post-apartheid South Africa is explored in Chapter Five. His creation of a South African version of La Bohème, which he called La Bohème: Noir, helped ensure the continued survival of opera at a time of political change, when the relevance and cost of this art form were being questioned. Shaper was also instrumental in locating the long-lost burial record and grave of Enoch Sontonga, the composer of Nkosi sikele' iAfrica. This, too, is described in Chapter 5.
While he was living and working in England, Shaper founded his own music publishing company, the Sparta Florida Music Group Ltd, which he expanded to include song production and recording. Chapter Six gives a brief overview of his business interests.

The dissertation ends with a conclusion which summarises the most important achievements of the life and legacy of Hal Shaper, and the events and people that shaped it.
Introduction

1 Background

When considering a research topic, I wanted to examine a unique and underexposed subject, preferably one with a South African background and a catalogue of work that needed to be researched and recorded. As I have the authorisation and support of the family of the internationally acclaimed South African songwriter, Harold David (Hal) Shaper (1931–2004) to research and document his life and work, this appeared to be a unique opportunity for a valuable study.

I am extremely grateful to the Shaper and Cohen families to have been allowed unlimited access to Shaper’s comprehensive collection of music, letters, books, research, diaries and memorabilia. When starting this study I had no concept of the abundance and scope of material that I would discover. I have built up Shaper’s life story from these diverse sources, as well as through interviews with his family, friends and colleagues. It has been a privilege and a fascinating study to witness Shaper’s youthful confidence, his incredible drive and determination to succeed, his wonderful successes and also his great disappointments and the frustration of having to abandon projects which had taken months, sometimes years, of work. This research is the first record of this unique South African’s life, and his contribution to the world of twentieth century popular music.

2 Literature review

Published material on Shaper appears mostly in a number of music encyclopaedias (Larkin 1997: 463; Lissauer 1991: 760; Tyler 1998: 369) and newspaper articles (interviews, reviews and obituaries) (examples: The Star 1978; Cape Times 2004a). There is also information on the Internet, although some of this contains inaccuracies. A number of resources were consulted to provide details of the reasons for the increase in the Jewish immigrant

1 See for example http://www.guardian.co.uk/obituaries/story/0,3604,1159812,00.html, which incorrectly states that Shaper’s mother was born in a ghetto (Cohen interview, 1996). See also http://www.jerrygoldsmithline.com/spotlight_biography_preview.htm, which states that Shaper was the son of South African immigrants to England.
population to South Africa at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly regarding their living conditions in Cape Town. Very little material exists dealing with the history of the Jewish community in Muizenberg — an important era in South African Jewish history, and Shaper’s autobiographical memoirs provide additional insights into this generation.

Most of my literary research is based on Shaper’s own writing, as he was a prolific writer and correspondent throughout his life. The incredible wealth of archival material that this project has uncovered is due to Shaper’s meticulously keeping most of his correspondence, diaries, song writing drafts, autobiographical notes and newspaper and magazine articles pertaining to his career. He even kept a scrapbook of his school days and early song-writing successes. Shaper’s sister, Joan Cohen, has also preserved much of the personal family correspondence, and allowed me access to this information. Shaper started to write an autobiography, but it was incomplete at the time of his death. With his keen sense of humour he recorded a number of amusing and interesting episodes in his song-writing career. He also kept a diary for the latter part of his life, and some of his entries provide useful insights into his work and his future plans and projects, particularly as regards the La Bohème: Noir production.

Cyril Ornadel, the composer with whom Shaper worked extensively, has just published his autobiography (Ornadel 2007), which contains detailed accounts of his collaborations with Shaper. He has been very supportive and was happy to answer my queries regarding their work together.

3 A brief synopsis of Shaper’s achievements

3.1 His career

Shaper started writing songs for the big ballad singers in London in the mid-1950s. His first major hit occurred in 1962 with ‘Softly, As I Leave You’, his English lyrics for an Italian melody that was then recorded by popular singer Matt Monro. It became a huge international hit and a modern classic. Thereafter many great singers, including Frank Sinatra, Bing

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2 For example, in the University of Cape Town’s Kaplan Institute, only one article was to be found on the history of the Jewish community in Muizenberg, viz. Chesler’s article in Jewish Affairs (Chesler 2003: 41–43).
Crosby, Elvis Presley, Engelbert Humperdink, Tom Jones, Barbra Streisand, Shirley Bassey, Mario Lanza, Elton John, Julie Andrews and Elaine Page recorded his songs.\(^3\)

The success of ‘Softly’ gave Shaper the financial security to set up his own music publishing business, Sparta Music, in 1964. He contracted other songwriters, including The Moody Blues and David Bowie. A number of Jamaican artists also signed with Sparta Music and Shaper played an important part in the early success of reggae music, co-writing ‘The Israelites’ with Desmond Dekker who took this song to No. 1 on the British charts in 1969. Shaper also contributed to UB40’s hit ‘Kingston Town’. Business interests did not detract from Shaper’s love of song writing, and his success ranged from the lyrics for the protest song ‘No Tears for Johnny’ in 1960 to the disco hit ‘El Bimbo’ in 1975 (Cape Argus 2004; Sunday Times 2004).

In the 1960s, Shaper branched out into stage work, a form that had always fascinated him, his most successful creations being in collaboration with Cyril Ornadel. Shaper and Ornadel were awarded the British Academy Award for Best Musical in 1975 and 1976, for *Treasure Island* and *Great Expectations* respectively (Ornadel 2007: 252, 263).

Shaper also wrote lyrics for the sound tracks of over 70 major feature films, among which the most famous were ‘It’s a Long Road’ from *First Blood* (1982) and ‘Free as the Wind’, the theme song from *Papillon* (1973). He worked with some of the most famous film composers of this era, including Michel Legrand, Francis Lai and Jerry Goldsmith (Shaper n.d. (c)).

Shaper’s love for and fascination with songwriters and their craft was evidenced in his encyclopaedic collection, entitled *The Great Songs and Songwriters of the Twentieth Century*, which was published as an Internet website book. He was still working on this catalogue right up until his death.\(^4\)

---

\(^3\) Shaper wrote the lyrics for their songs. When he started working at Robbins Music, a large part of his work was to write English lyrics for French and Italian hit songs, mostly sentimental ballads, which were very popular at the time (Shaper, Susan, e-mail, 2006). Occasionally he would write the music for a song, but once he began to work with talented composers, this happened only rarely.

\(^4\) The Internet address of this site was http://www.themusikmakers.com/musikmakers/Shaper/Songwriters/htm, but it is no longer active in its entirety. The site elicited enthusiastic support from Shaper’s song-writing colleagues as the following e-mail from Ornadel illustrates: ‘I have spent the afternoon browsing through the Hal Shaper collection and found it to be the most monumental experience of my life. I am humbled beyond words at the enormity of your endeavour and proud beyond words to have been able to collaborate with you...
3.2 *Shaper’s contribution to post-apartheid South Africa*

When Shaper returned to South Africa in 1992 he became very involved in the artistic life of the new South Africa. It was due to Shaper’s research that the lost grave of Enoch Sontonga was found in 1996, and he contributed to Mandela’s Heritage Day speech of that year. Shaper wrote the tribute ‘A spark of God’s own light’ which is engraved on Sontonga’s memorial gravestone.

Shaper also wrote the libretto for *La Bohème: Noir*, a version of Puccini’s opera set at the time of the 1976 Soweto uprising. It was staged in Cape Town in 1997 and in Johannesburg the following year.

Shaper contributed two songs to the annual Yiddish song festival in Cape Town. The first of these, written in 2002, was a ‘take-off’ of ‘Those Were the Days’⁵ – harking back nostalgically to his youth in Muizenberg – and the other, ironically very humorous, was ‘The Ten Tap Dancing Rabbis from Minsk’⁶, which he wrote while desperately ill, completing it the day before he died (Cape Times 2004b).

4 *Research objectives*

The unique opportunity of exploring Shaper’s handwritten autobiographical notes, diaries and the many original letters and documents collected by him and his family have allowed me to preserve and record them before they were dispersed or lost over time.

As Shaper worked overseas for a large part of his life, most South Africans are not aware of the extent of his song-writing career, nor of his considerable involvement in the international music industry. The main aim of this project has therefore been to inspire an appreciation of all that Hal Shaper achieved, through a review of his heritage and upbringing. The work includes an exploration of the historical background of the Shaper family, which illuminates the difficulties faced by immigrants in Cape Town at the beginning of the twentieth century. The material on Muizenberg adds to the preservation of the memory of its dynamic Jewish

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⁵ Lyric in Appendix.
⁶ Lyric in Appendix.
community. Shaper’s remarkable contribution to post-apartheid South Africa has also been documented in this dissertation.

This document could lay the basis for future researchers who might wish to consider Shaper from a critical viewpoint, be it philosophical, aesthetical or music historical. My own view is, however, that his work, because of its nature, does not warrant any detailed analysis or artistic assessment. Shaper wrote popular lyrics for a commercial industry driven very largely by financial interests. Nevertheless, he was a highly respected and creative lyricist – Charles Segal\(^7\) considers him ‘one of the great lyricists’ (Segal interview, 2008) and, in his autobiography, Cyril Ornadel described Shaper as ‘a highly intelligent craftsman…a perfectionist’ (Ornadel 2007: 254) and rated his adaptation of *Cyrano de Bergerac* as ‘a truly memorable set of poetic lyrics worthy of any professional musical’ (Ornadel 2007: 314). The songs Shaper wrote live on in the popular culture of the day, and their success in a highly competitive industry deserves respect and recognition.

\(^7\) A composer who has had a very successful career in the music industry in South Africa and internationally. Shaper credits Segal with discovering his talent as a lyricist. This is described in more detail in Chapter 2.
Chapter 1

Early history of the Shaper family

1 Introduction

The story of Hal Shaper’s rich contribution to South African music begins in the nineteenth century pogroms\(^1\) in Poland, and the gold and diamond rush to South Africa in the late 1900s.

Shaper’s story is part of the wider picture of the many immigrants from Eastern Europe who arrived in South Africa with few personal possessions but with a great will to survive and to succeed through sheer hard work. Life was difficult for most Jewish settlers, often separated from family members who would join them only later. Nevertheless, they adapted themselves to their new circumstances without abandoning their culture and tradition.\(^2\) While one of their major purposes was always to give their children a good education in order to improve their prospects, most of these immigrants and their children developed a deep love of and loyalty towards South Africa.

This chapter investigates the origins of Jewish immigration to South Africa, focusing on the story of Shaper’s parents’ arrival in Cape Town.

2 The political persecution of Jews in Europe

In January 1795 the rulers of Russia, Prussia and Austria signed a treaty which completed the partitioning of Poland that had begun twenty years before. As a result, thousands of Polish

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\(^1\) The word ‘pogrom’ derives from the Russian word ‘pogromit’ meaning to break or smash or conquer. Its usage became common after anti-Jewish riots swept Southern Imperial Russia (modern Poland, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova) in 1881 and 1882, after Jews were falsely accused of the assassination of Tzar Alexander II. ‘Pogrom’ became the term used to describe the organised massacre of an ethnic group. (Klier & Lambroza 1992: 5).

\(^2\) Richard Newman (2004) depicts this period as being very important in the history of Cape Town Jewry. He describes the resentment felt by English Jews towards the Eastern European Jewish immigrants, and tells how, during the First World War, these groups integrated into a community. This is of interest in the Shaper history as Shaper’s mother came from East European Jewry, and his father’s family were English Jews.
Jews suddenly became citizens of a Russian Empire in which their rights were severely restricted (Thomson 1976: 30). The Jewish community became an object for special, restrictive legislation. The most important restriction and one of the first enacted under Empress Catherine II, was that Jews were not permitted to move out of the areas in which they lived – primarily in partitioned Poland. These areas developed into the infamous ‘Pale of Jewish Settlement’. In addition, Jewish boys were subjected to military conscription for twenty-five years (Klier & Lambroza 1992: 5).

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a general increase in violence towards Jews in Russia – in part because Jews were perceived to be supporters of the revolutionary movement. Whenever there was general political instability or anti-revolutionary activity, the Jews presented a weak and poorly-defended target. The pogroms of 1881–1882 had claimed relatively few victims but, in the period of revolutionary struggle towards the end of the century, the number of fatalities rose into the thousands. In the April of 1903 the Jewish community in Kishinev, Bessarabia was attacked. This traumatic massacre activated fearful memories of the 1881–82 pogroms. The government of Nicholas II did not understand that Kishinev was not an isolated incident but a symptom of social and economic tensions festering in European Russia. By not sternly condemning the incident, and by its half-hearted approach to prosecuting pogromists, the government – perhaps deliberately – encouraged future pogroms. Lambroza describes an incident in Lodz – where Shaper’s mother was born – in June 1905, a clash between pro-revolutionary demonstrators and authorities which lasted three days, leading to the deaths of 561 people, 341 of whom were Jewish (Klier & Lambroza 1992: 191–210).

3 Molly Shaper

In his memoirs, Shaper describes his grandparents’ emigration to South Africa as ‘a wonderful story of adventure, courage and determination’.³ His mother Molly’s birth

³ Shaper started to write an autobiography, which he hoped to get published. His autobiographical notes are undated and were handwritten. Shaper outlined eighteen chapter headings but completed only the first two chapters: ‘Muizenberg’ and ‘Growing up and family’. The notes have been verified or, in some cases, corrected by his sister, Joan Cohen. Hereinafter they are referred to as ‘Shaper n.d. (b)’.
certificate\textsuperscript{4} shows that she was born on 20 April 1899 in Lodz, Poland, as Malka Gieczynskiega. Her parents’ names appear as (father) Yakoba Hersca Gieczynskiega and (mother) Sura-Dwojra Margulska\textsuperscript{5}. This was Shaper’s grandmother, Sarah, who was born in 1871 in the village of Alexandora, a small town near Lodz. While living in Lodz in the late 1800s, she met and married Jacob, and together they raised four daughters, Polly (Pearl), Fanny, Shaper’s mother Molly, and Leah (Cohen interviews, 2005–6).

As a result of the repressive legislation and the violence against the Jewish community, Yakoba, now Jacob, decided the time had come to escape the constant threat and terror that beset the Jews. His brother Avrom Motka Gieczynskiega had already immigrated to Cape Town, and in 1900 Jacob left his wife Sarah and his daughters in Poland and came to South Africa, which had been reported by his brother to be a country of sunshine and opportunities for a better and unrestricted life. Having settled into employment as a delivery man, working for his brother who owned a grocery store, Jacob sent for his wife and family, who arrived in 1901 (Cohen interviews, 2005–6). This is very typical of the pattern of Eastern European Jewish immigration (Feldman, 1984). The surname Hersca Gieczynskiega was modified to Harris, possibly partly due to the animosity and anti-Semitism which the new immigrants aroused in the local population (Bickford-Smith, 1987).

The family barely had time to rejoice at their reunion when tragedy struck. Within six months Jacob, only twenty-eight years old, was killed in a bicycle accident in Oranjezicht. He died as a result of the brain damage sustained when he hit a pole.\textsuperscript{6} This tragedy plunged Sarah into a terrible dilemma. She was a young Yiddish-speaking Jewish widow with four little daughters living in a totally foreign country. In this state of poverty and despair she gave birth to her

\begin{footnotes}
\item[4] Full details of birth certificates are given in the References section.
\item[5] According to a document obtained from Joan Cohen in April 2006, the Margulski/Margolioth family tree can be traced back to the fifteenth century (Margolioth n.d.).
\item[6] In an e-mail received on 12 December, 2007, Shaper’s niece Hilary Meyer clarified the confusion which surrounded her great grandfather’s date of arrival in South Africa and the date of his death. ‘While in Cape Town recently, my cousin and I discovered the truth about Sarah’s husband’s death which was in 1901 and not in 1904 as we were told… My grandmother Molly (Malka) always told us that she was four when she came to South Africa, and she was, but she was born in 1897 not 1899 as she changed her birth certificate to give herself another two years. This confused us all so we never knew the truth of when Jacob died as we always thought he died in 1904 and at that time we could not find the record. I remembered as a young child, Molly telling me her ‘big secret’ but later she denied it.’
\end{footnotes}
last child, a fifth daughter whom she named Tilly. Sarah Harris set up house with her little girls in King’s Building in Canterbury Street in District Six⁷, which was part of the Jewish quarter of the time (Friedman 1989). Bickford-Smith (1987) describes District Six of 1900 as part of a ‘lower’ class residential belt with its population coming from all over the world, including several thousand Jews from Tsarist Russia. The residents were mainly small shopkeepers, artisans and labourers living together in close proximity. District Six at the beginning of the century may have been poor, but it was a vibrant and cosmopolitan community (Bickford-Smith 1987).

The close-knit Jewish community helped Sarah open a small grocery shop in which her daughters could assist her. The photograph shows Sarah Harris (Gieczynskiega), with her daughters and her brother Elia Ellis, outside the shop. The writing above the door says ‘M. Harris’ – it was Sarah’s ‘gift’ to her daughter Molly, who helped her run the shop (Meyer e-mail, 2007). Shaper records in his memoirs that his grandmother, reading and writing Polish and Yiddish fluently, became a letter-writer, composing letters home on behalf of her fellow refugees, many of whom could neither read nor write. Because of her dreadful fear of Europe, returning to Poland was not an option for Sarah. Moved by her plight, her brother, Elias Ellis, came out from England to help her (Cohen interviews, 2005–6). He was an experienced wheelwright, and on his arrival in Cape Town he opened up a blacksmith and wheelwright shop alongside the Benkeinstadt Building in the Jewish quarter. Here he would repair hansom cabs and mend cartwheels. Opposite the blacksmith shop was

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⁷ District Six was one of the main settlement areas for the poorer Jewish immigrant community (Feldman 1984: 4). Feldman includes the population figures of the 1904 Cape Colony census, which state that 8114 of the colony’s 19 509 Jews lived in Cape Town.
the Jewish bakery, Tocker and Lanskowsky. The Jewish community would come here on a Friday to make 'cholent', a type of carrot stew, so that they would not have to cook on the Sabbath (Meyer\textsuperscript{8} 1989).

The leather-work required by Ellis for his cabs was provided by J Woodhead and Sons who had their tannery in Sir Lowry Road opposite the early morning market. This firm still exists, in Caledon Street, and the Woodhead Reservoir on Table Mountain is named after its eccentric founder, Sir John Woodhead, who was mayor of Cape Town four times between 1886 and 1897. When Victor Friedman married Sarah Harris's eldest daughter, Pearl, Elias Ellis suggested that Victor take over the business, which Elias was leaving to return to England. It was then about 1920 and, remembering the London barrow-boys, Elias also suggested to Victor that he start making hand-carts. Thus the first Cape hand-carts were manufactured. Victor Friedman bought a building in Newmarket Street from where he would hire out hand carts to the fruit and vegetable hawkers on their way to the market in Sir Lowry Road, in the place where the Good Hope Centre now stands. By the end of the Second World War almost every hand cart and horse-drawn vehicle used for trading at the Salt River market was owned by Victor Friedman (Friedman 1989; Meyer 1989). His forge and equipment is housed today in the Josephine Mill in Newlands, in memory of Pearl and Victor Friedman, and reminds us of the struggles of earlier immigrants to become established citizens of a developing South Africa.

4 Jack Shaper

Hal Shaper’s father was born Jacobe Shapere\textsuperscript{9} on 5 February 1883 at 91 Pimblett Street in Manchester, England\textsuperscript{10}, the fourth child of Joseph and Hannah Shaper who had both

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\textsuperscript{8} Thérèse-Marie Meyer (born Bertha Friedman) was Sarah Harris’s granddaughter. It is of interest that her brother Jack, the eldest son of Pearl and Victor Friedman, became a Catholic priest. He achieved notable success as an author and won many prestigious literary awards (using his religious name, Pater Elias). He lived on Mount Carmel in Israel (Sunday Express 1971).

\textsuperscript{9} Birth Certificate of Jacobe Shapere. A clerical error somehow occurred in Jacob's birth certificate, and the 'e' appeared at the end of the surname – and, apparently, of his first name too.

\textsuperscript{10} The 1881 British census describes the inhabitants of 91 Pimblett Street as Joseph (28) and Hannah (Annie, 25) Shaper, birth place Russia, and children Ester (3), Abraham (2) and Lewis (3 weeks).
originally emigrated from Odessa, Russia (Cohen e-mail, 2007). Jacob (Jack) followed his father’s profession and became an apprentice jeweller and gem cutter (Cohen interviews, 2005–6).

Jewish emigration from England to South Africa increased rapidly after the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley in the 1870s (Reader 1998: 491–500) and of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 (Feldman 1984: 7). Some of the ‘English’ Jews who immigrated to South Africa are described as English because on the way from Eastern Europe they had spent some time in England and acquired English-sounding names as well as English mannerisms (Saron & Hotz 1955: 59–60). After the Boer war ended in 1902, fired by tales of gold and diamonds and fortunes to be made in this expanding corner of the British Empire, Jack Shaper boarded a boat from Liverpool and landed in Cape Town in 1904, having paid the immigrant fare of £10 for the passage that took four weeks at sea. After the grime of industrial England, the beauty of Cape Town completely overwhelmed Jack Shaper (Shaper n.d. (b): 7). Nevertheless, he headed for the diamond fields of Kimberley as quickly as possible, believing that it was only a matter of time before he struck it rich. This pattern was characteristic of Jewish immigration to South Africa at that time (Hermann 1930: 249). Jack was to be sadly disappointed. He found the diggings ‘rough, tough, bloody and murderous’ and soon made his way to the goldfields of Johannesburg. (Shaper n.d. (b): 7).

Shaper recalls his father telling him that when he arrived in Johannesburg he found a shanty town ‘bustling with tents and filled with prospectors and claims staked and contested with the fist and the bullet’. It even seemed rougher than the diamond fields. Jack settled into the more secure future of diamond cutting and lived in Johannesburg until he was about 27, by which time all illusions about making his fortune had faded away. Life must have been very difficult for Jack Shaper as the Rand economy entered a full-scale depression in late 1905,
and thousands of workers in support industries lost their jobs (van Onselen 2001: 337). His mind turned back to Cape Town and the impelling impression it had made on his arrival in South Africa. He decided that this was where his future lay. Thus it was in Cape Town that Shaper's parents met, and in 1924 they were married\textsuperscript{11} in the Great Synagogue in the Gardens (Shaper n.d. (b): 8).

\textsuperscript{11} Marriage certificate of Jacob Shaper and Molly Harris (Malka Gieczynskega).
Chapter 2

The beginnings of Hal Shaper’s musical career

This chapter begins with a description of Shaper’s childhood in Muizenberg and goes on to describe the early musical influences in his life, which developed into the writing of his first songs, and a stage production, before his departure for London in 1955.

1 Muizenberg

Hal Shaper was born in Cape Town’s seaside suburb of Muizenberg, on 18 July 1931\(^1\), the third child of Jack and Molly Shaper.\(^2\) In his memoirs, Hal’s descriptions of his birthplace express a deep emotional attachment to Muizenberg that never left him. In one of several nostalgic recollections, he refers to Sir Francis Drake’s description of False Bay as ‘the fairest cape in the circumference of the earth’\(^3\) and concludes that he has yet to find a place he loves more. Shaper says:

Muizenberg is about 16 miles south of Cape Town. It is tucked into the northwestern corner of False Bay which lies against the foot of a mountain that spreads into Table Mountain and the string of ranges called the Hottentots Holland. It is a circumferential of mountains where, in the centre, like a cabochon button, is Seal Island, and the Indian Ocean which finally sweeps past Cape Agulhas a few miles to the east and the final southernmost tip of Africa. (Shaper n.d. (b): 1)

By the 1920s Muizenberg had become a favoured place of settlement for Lithuanian, Estonian, Polish, Latvian and Russian Jews (Cross 1988: 33, 74–79). Shaper recalled that

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\(^1\) Birth Certificate of Harold Davis Shaper.

\(^2\) Shaper’s oldest sibling, Joan Cohen, worked for many years as a journalist, reviewing children’s books for the Cape Times, and later became well-known as an antique and art dealer in Cape Town. His older brother, Gerald, became professor of Epidemiology at Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine at the University of London, and is an international expert on Tropical Diseases.

\(^3\) Although Drake is often credited with this statement, it was actually written by Francis Pretty in his book The famous voyage of Sir Francis Drake into the South Sea and therehence about the whole globe of the earth, begun in the year of our Lord 1577 (Eliot 2001).
everywhere one looked were the fathers, mothers and children of the same great trek ‘from a grey Europe’, many still conversing in Yiddish, while a first generation of South African children grew up with very little understanding of their parents’ background or the influences on them (Shaper n.d. (b): 5). Many years later Hal Shaper visited Lodz, the birthplace of his mother, where ‘it all seemed so strange, so foreign, so far away from the spectacular and dramatic beauty of the Cape’. He wrote to his mother about this visit, saying that to move from Lodz to Muizenberg must have been ‘like being transported from hell to heaven’ (Shaper to mother, 1968).

Worden (Worden et al 1999: 41) comments that since the 1880s Muizenberg had been a popular location for mining magnates, but it was only after the railway reached the coast in 1882 that vacationers were attracted there from inland South Africa. Every summer holiday season Jewish people flooded down from Johannesburg to the ocean, resulting in central Muizenberg being dubbed ‘the new Jerusalem’ (Worden et al 1999: 41). The many hotels of this small seaside suburb were jammed with Jewish visitors (Chesler 2003: 41) – Muizenberg was a very popular holiday destination for the Jewish community. Chesler describes how ‘in the rocky pools along the mountain fringes children would search for sea shells, the favourite being sea eggs and Venus ears, and try to catch tiny fish with small shrimping nets or cupped hands. However,’ she continues, ‘the miles of white sand fringed with curling waves along the curve of the bay toward Cape Hangklip, many miles in the distance, offered the greatest pleasure to the largest number of people’ (Chesler 2003: 41).

Due to the scarcity of material on this period of Muizenberg history, Shaper’s own impressions of the summer holiday season are included here. His recollection of the old pavilion is detailed:

The centrepiece of all activity in Muizenberg was the pavilion. It had a series of elegant steps up to the foyer where on either side were ticket boxes. To the immediate right, as you faced it, was a Milk Bar where a dozen or more swivel stools circled around a marble counter. Behind the counter was a world of

4 Muizenberg (and other Cape Town) families owned bathing boxes for changing and showering, and often rented them out to visitors for the season. These boxes ‘sat in two distinct rows, facing the green-blue surf of the Indian ocean of False Bay’. They can still be seen today.
milkshakes, ice creams, fruit parfaits and banana splits and the Milk Bar was one of the pleasures of the old pavilion. Inside the pavilion, the manager’s office stood on the left, where he kept a bottle of healing solution for any unfortunate who was stung by a bluebottle. The corridors of the pavilion were parquet floored and swept around the theatre. To the right they ran down to the old Balmoral Beach and to the left, past numbers of coin slot and pinball games, to the Snake Pit which was the local name for the most popular beach at Muizenberg. The Snake Pit was a writhing melee of nannies, babies, children, young girls and boys and their deck-chained parents. (Shaper n.d. (b): 9)

One can cite the informal separation between Jews and Christians in Muizenberg as an example of the Cape Town gentile community’s anti-Semitism in the 1940s (Worden et al 1999: 126). (As late as the 1950s and ’60s, Sunrise Beach in Muizenberg was often referred to by non-Jews as ‘Christian beach’.) This is significant as Shaper remembers that Jewish children were kept apart from children with doctrinal differences, thus the Jewish boys belonged to the Second Muizenberg Jewish Scout Group, the First Group being Christian (Shaper n.d. (b): 10). Chesler remembers that at the Muizenberg Girl’s High School a marked distinction was made between the Christian and Jewish pupils in that at the daily morning assembly, when prayers were said, Jewish girls had to recite psalms to each other in the classroom. Thereafter they were made to file into the assembly and stand behind the headmistress while she read the notices for the day. ‘And so we faced hundreds of eyes that stared back at these strange creatures who continued to deny the true faith’ (Chesler 2003: 43).

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5 Biddy Greene, personal communication, January 2008.
2 Early musical influences

In his tribute at Shaper’s memorial service on 13 January 2004, Simon Jocum – a school and lifelong friend – described how Shaper had no formal musical training but taught himself to play the piano by ear (Jocum 2004). As late as 1952 Shaper wrote in a letter to the songwriter Anton de Waal that he could neither read nor write music, and that he paid someone to copy out his songs (Shaper to De Waal, 1952d). This does not appear to be absolutely true as a small manuscript of Shaper’s first draft of ‘Altyd Myne’ (later to become his first commercial success) exists which shows that he could manage to write down a very basic melody without any key signature, but it does illustrate just how rudimentary his knowledge of music was.

Shaper grew up in an era before television, when families and friends supplied their own entertainment and he was exposed to music made in his home. His mother, Molly, or his aunt, Fanny, would play the piano and the families would gather around to sing. Even the family maid, Kitty Adams, was prevailed upon to join in the music making as she was a natural harmony singer, and, said Shaper, ‘the songs took on another texture and the group never sounded as good without her’. Kitty sang in her church group and it was she who encouraged Shaper to join the local synagogue choir (Shaper n.d. (b): 10).

Cantor Goldwasser was the leader of the synagogue choir to which most of the local boys, including Shaper, belonged. He was a ‘silver bearded patriarch from Warsaw who spoke a strange English and a fluent Yiddish’ (Shaper n.d. (b): 10). Shaper remembers a scruffy, unwilling and grubby bunch of boys who were conscripted into service, mainly by not being able to resist showing off. The ‘trials’ for the choir were held at the cheder (school) in Wherry Road. This cheder, known as the Talmud Torah Hall, was also the local theatre – later the venue for some of Shaper’s first stage appearances. Goldwasser fed his choir ‘feffermintz’ and drilled the songs and invocations.
into the boys. Shaper writes that they had no understanding of what they were singing, and that one particular section was so unintelligible that his cousin Stanley substituted his name and address for the Hebrew lyric. This was the only version of the song that they could all remember, and when the High Festival came there was a full choir of little boys all singing ‘Stanley Block, Merwehuis, Henley Road, Muizenberg, koy-desh!’ (Shaper n.d. (b): 10).

The maimed and shell-shocked soldiers of the Second World War who came to convalesce at the Park Hotel hospital made a vivid impression on the Muizenberg community. Shaper recounted in a radio interview with Henry Holloway in 2002 (Holloway 2002) how he would listen to the French songs played for the troops from Canada and France, and would ‘translate’ them for his friends – much to their amazement! Writing these songs was the beginning of Shaper’s realisation that he could create lyrics to fit a melody.

One Saturday afternoon, when he was about fourteen years old, Shaper saw Words and Music at the Empire ‘bioscope’ in Muizenberg. The film was the life story of Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart, and, when he finally emerged from the cinema, Hal Shaper had fallen in love with the idea of being a songwriter (Shaper n.d. (b): 2). When one considers how far removed Shaper was from the important music centres of the world, and that even to find a shop where they sold sheet music and records he had to take a train to Cape Town (Mahlowe 1985: 10), one realises just how ambitious and almost impossible this dream was. This fascination with songs written by the likes of Richard Rogers would also explain the type of music and lyric that Shaper would be drawn to. It was the era of the crooner – Nat King Cole, Dick Haymes and Bing Crosby. In his prose-poem 6 ‘Muizenberg’, Shaper nostalgically remembers: ‘The Jukebox was our daily port of call and songs like “Little White Lies”, “Dance Ballerina, Dance” and “This is a Quiet Town”...were played until the old shellac wore thin’ (Shaper 2002c).

Shaper credits Charles Segal7 with recognising his talent when he was only sixteen (Segal website) and giving him every encouragement (Songwriters’ Guild Council 1977: 16, 17).

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6 See Appendix.

7 Charles Segal was born in Lithuania, in the mid-1920s, and raised in South Africa, which would certainly have made a common bond with Shaper’s family. He was a well-known pianist and a prolific composer – of over
Segal, who was already well-established in the South African music industry, remembers meeting Shaper, playing the guitar, on Muizenberg beach, and immediately recognising that the young man had a special talent. ‘We just clicked,’ said Segal, who went on to introduce Shaper to many influential people (Segal interview, 2008).

Simon Jocum, in his funeral tribute, remembered Shaper composing songs from his early teens, recalling spending hours listening to his compositions and being fascinated by them. Jocum said that Shaper had a love for music and lyrics from an early age and set his future goals with great passion (Jocum 2004).

3 The early songs

After matriculating at Wynberg Boys’ High School in 1949, Shaper decided to enter the legal profession. This seemed to him, and his parents, a more stable and acceptable career than that of a musician. Shaper also enrolled as a naval reservist on 1 July 1949, serving four periods of duty, from 1950 to 1953, during which his efficiency was rated ‘moderate’. He merrily gave his religious denomination as Church of England. Mervyn Smith, a Cape Town advocate, recalls that in 1950 Shaper became an articled clerk at the legal firm Frank Bernadt and at the end of his third year, Shaper changed his articles to Levy, Berman and Boerbaitz (Smith interview, 2006). Shaper told a fuller story:

I put my dreams on hold and decided to study law. I had no sooner registered at Cape Town University than my Dad explained to me that he could not afford to keep two boys at university... and as my older brother was already at medical School... I would have to get a job... I got a job as an articled clerk during the day and with my Dad's help studied via the Rapid Results College to get my admission to the bar through a correspondence course... and made it. (Shaper 2002b)

1000 songs – many of which became traditional South African songs. He was a founding member of the Southern African Music Rights Organisation (Segal website).

8 Service Certificate of Harold David Shaper.
Even as he studied to enter the legal profession, Shaper continued to be inspired by the music of Broadway, the theatre and the movies. Programmes of the South Peninsula Dramatic Society’s productions of 1951, 1952 and 1953 in which Shaper participated are evidence of this (SPDS 1951; SPDS 1952; SPDS 1953). Thus Shaper continued his involvement with amateur shows and worked with local singers.

Shaper was introduced by Charles Segal to Anton de Waal, the musical director of Trutone Africa, and a well-known Afrikaans songwriter (Segal interview, 2008). De Waal helped Shaper with his song ‘Altyd Myne’, which was published by Trutone Africa in 1952 (Shaper & De Waal 1952). In all his early songs, Shaper wrote both the words and the music. He said that he would have continued writing both, but for the fact that when he started to get work as a lyric-writer he was writing with very good composers (Mahlowe 1985).

The extent of Shaper’s confidence and his belief in himself is captured in the letters he exchanged with De Waal. On 17 May 1952, when Shaper was only twenty-one years old, he sent a letter to De Waal expressing admiration for his lyrics and enclosing the manuscript of a song entitled ‘Chait’s Waltz’ that he had written for a local couple’s wedding anniversary. He asked De Waal to consider writing Afrikaans words to the waltz as he ‘would consider it an honour to have collaborated with [him] on any number’ (Shaper to De Waal, 1952a).

De Waal replied with an initially encouraging assessment of the song, calling it ‘charming and effective’ but then proceeded to try to discourage Shaper by telling him that there were hundreds of manuscripts circulating among professional bands, musicians and artists and that success could be achieved only by ‘persistent and thorough plugging’. He concluded by saying, ‘I would be pleased to consider providing lyrics for your song if you would kindly advise me in which practical way you will be able to undertake the plugging of your own number’ (De Waal 1952a). De Waal presumably thought that this letter would make Shaper aware of the difficulties and obstacles an aspiring songwriter faced, and would certainly not have expected the prompt reply he received in which Shaper enthusiastically listed all the musical contacts and friends he would use to promote the song (Shaper to De Waal, 1952b).

Figure 6: ‘Altyd Myne’ - music
De Waal seems to have realised immediately the extent of Shaper’s ambition and determination, as the tone of the following letter was completely different. He addressed Shaper as ‘Dear Harold’, asking that they dispense with the formality of ‘Mr’, and commented, ‘your energy and initiative deserves an immediate reward and enclosed herewith is the lyric for your melody carrying the title “Altyd Myne”.’ De Waal asked Shaper to go through the melody, harmony and words very carefully on the lead sheet as he had transposed it into a higher key, and promised to produce lead sheets and copies for distribution as soon as Shaper had approved the work (De Waal 1952b).

Again, the confidence of Shaper is astounding, when, in his reply to De Waal, he conveyed his delight at the Afrikaans lyric but expressed ‘a tiny tinge of regret in [his] not taking advantage of the close harmony double rime (sic) in the first seven syllables.’ He also did not return the contract which De Waal had sent him, as there were a few essential points that he needed to clear up since they could ‘affect overseas publicity and performance’ (Shaper to De Waal, 1952c).

A later letter (De Waal 1952d) appeared to reveal a certain tension in their relationship, with De Waal severely criticising Shaper’s melody for ‘Altyd Myne’:

Thank you for your letter enclosing the verse for Altyd Myne. I am sorry to dampen your enthusiasm about this verse but it is quite uncommercial, and I suggest you try again. You certainly do not give your lyric writer any chance to say anything in the verse and, furthermore, the last phrase of four bars is simply not commercial. Do end your melody in the fifteenth bar and tie it over into the sixteenth. Make more use of crotchets in order that one may express an idea in the lyric.

Do give consideration to an English lyric as well and, as a tentative suggestion to preserve the same spirit as the Afrikaans lyric, I suggest the title should be ‘Mine Forever’.

Shaper’s reply to this letter, enclosing the English lyrics, is also indicative of his self-belief.

I am sorry that you did not approve the original verse, but I really must add that it has far from dampened my spirits. It would take a flood. However I really must apologise for wasting your time over it, and I shall forward you the revision, or rather new verse in the morning. I promise more crotchets. (Shaper to De Waal, 1952e)
De Waal informed Shaper that an SABC\(^9\) recording was to be made of ‘Altyd Myne’ with Nico Carstens on accordion and Jurie Ferreira as vocalist on the 30 June. He stressed that this was for publicity and not commercial purposes, and asked Shaper to get his friends and family to request that it be played (De Waal, 1952c). Shaper continued to push De Waal to make a commercial recording of the song, but he refused as he felt it would not be successful (De Waal, 1952c). In spite of De Waal’s misgivings, Shaper succeeded in getting ‘Altyd Myne’ played by the well-known London band leader, Carol Gibbons. This success was reported in many local newspapers and magazines, including the Sunday Times (1952), the Cape Times (1952) and Bandstand (Sidelsky 1952).

In February 1953, Shaper reached another early milestone in his career when a number composed by him, ‘Crazy Autumn Weather’, was performed as part of the variety show Summerside Up presented by the Muizenberg Variety Players. This show was performed in Muizenberg, Wynberg and Sea Point and was enthusiastically received (Jewish Chronicle 1953\(^{10}\); Cape Times 1953).

![Figure 7: Summerside Up, Muizenberg, 1953](image)

4 **Harvest Champagne**

In 1955, the year he qualified as an attorney, Shaper staged his first full-scale production, Harvest Champagne, for which he wrote the book, the lyrics and the music – with Charles Segal helping him with some of the songs (Segal interview, 2008). An article in the Cape Times described how a twenty-two-year-old Muizenberg law student had written a large scale musical comedy which was set in Arkansas, in the American ‘South’, with the plot centring around a distillery during the days of the prohibition (Cape Times 1954). The Cape Argus

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\(^9\) South African Broadcasting Corporation.

\(^{10}\) ‘The Jewish National Fund benefited greatly as the result of a performance of Summerside Up… There was a splendidly trained chorus… aside from the fact that the show was a little too long, a most enjoyable evening was spent.’
promoted the production by advising its readers that a musical show of exceptional interest was to have its première at the Muizenberg Pavilion and that the producer, Roscoe Behrmann, and the musical director and orchestrator, Derek Bernfield, had assembled a talented young cast for the performance (Cape Argus 1955a).

Harvest Champagne was produced at the Muizenberg Pavilion on the 13th, 14th and 15th of January 1955, and then at the Weizmann Hall in Sea Point on the 17th and 18th.

The critical reviews must have been an encouragement to the young Shaper. They were most enthusiastic and the Cape Argus reviewer commented that one was impressed not only by the talent of the performers but also by 'their unflagging enthusiasm and good will – qualities that conveyed their own deserved tribute to Mr. Shaper' (Cape Argus 1955b).

The Cape Times critic wrote:

It is very rare to encounter so much new talent as was disclosed in Harvest Champagne, a musical comedy by Harold Shaper... This is what is usually called an ambitious effort – a very large cast, hardly any of whom had had much stage experience, playing in a show whose scope approaches that of the big American musicals... It was therefore only natural that the production lacked the flow, assurance and polish which Mr. Shaper's entertaining musical play requires in order to make its full impact. For Harvest Champagne contains many good things and, when one considers that the young man responsible for its book, music and lyrics has barely reached the age of 22, it merits considerable praise. Its biggest drawback at present is its length – with only one interval it lasts three-and-a-half hours. (Cape Times 1955a)

It was the success of this venture, together with much local encouragement (for example an earlier article by Sidelsky (1953), that gave Shaper the confidence to believe that he had a future as an international songwriter, and later the same year, after being admitted as an attorney by the Judge President, Mr Justice de Villiers on 23 May, he left for London (Cape Argus 1955c). Shaper's departure in June even resulted in a small article appearing in a newspaper saying 'Harold Shaper, young Capetonian lyric writer and composer of light
music, left in the Edinburgh Castle to-day on an extended visit to Britain, the Continent and the United States, armed with letters of introduction to a number of notabilities in show business’ (Cape Times 1955c).

Another newspaper article, written in June, described Charles Segal travelling to New York in the hope of getting his compositions played by the famous bands there. ‘His song, *I've never loved before*, with words by another Capetonian, Harold Shaper, has been broadcast on television from Los Angeles, with Mr. Segal himself playing the piano, and the tune has also been recorded. Local jazz commentators liked it and told the composer that it might well make the hit parade’ (Cape Times 1955b). This glimmer of international success would certainly have fuelled Shaper’s confidence and determination.

In an article that Shaper wrote for *Outspan* magazine (Shaper 1957) he described how, seventeen months earlier, Cape Town had slipped away from him into the ‘mist of a June evening’ that he would remember all the days of his life. Two weeks later, peering through a porthole into the dawn fog of Southampton harbour, he had his first sight of England. He said he was an unsuspecting Alice stumbling into a glittering Wonderland, and that he knew at once that it would be a long time before he would run again on the powder-sands of Muizenberg, or splash his feet in the shimmering surf of the Indian Ocean. How right his instinct was to prove to be!
Chapter 3

Shaper as lyricist

1 Introduction

This chapter covers Shaper’s arrival in London in 1955, and describes how, after initial difficulties in finding employment, he was offered work as a song plugger\(^1\) for David Toff. At the same time he continued to write songs, and soon started to achieve his first successes. Shortly after winning an Ivor Novello Award, Shaper moved to Robbins Music where his song writing was actively encouraged. There he met and collaborated with many of the influential artists and composers who stimulated his creativity. Due to the constraints of this dissertation, some collaborators have had to be omitted, but the most memorable and important artists – those who had the greatest impact on Shaper’s life and career – are discussed. Some of Shaper’s most well-known lyrics are included in the Appendix.

2 London

In a letter Shaper wrote to his sister Joan in 1959, he described his decision to emigrate:

> I have a light that burns away in my soul, that points the way very clearly...and very often...I was the last away from home and I don’t feel that I left for any reason other than I had a vocation...it called and I followed...there is simply no other direction I can go in, or would want to, even. I would come back if I could do what I must do, but my world is here... I see my way as clearly as the North star...and it is not my conscience that I am guided by... I know as surely as the ice on tomorrow’s pavements that I will not live in South Africa...though I miss it and am proud of it and would fight to protect it and those I care for...and all the people I care for are in Africa, not here. (Shaper to Joan, 1959)

\(^1\) A song plugger worked for a music publisher and demonstrated new songs for potential customers.
Shaper arrived in London in 1955 with nowhere to live, no job and no money. It was not easy to get anyone to take a would-be songwriter from South Africa seriously. He had a return ticket home, but determination and pride persuaded him to cash it in to cover living expenses. He even washed dishes at the Troubadour Café in Earl’s Court for over a year (Mahlowe 1985; Sunday Times 2004). Shaper said that he had a lot of encouragement from South African singer Eve Boswell and credited an old school friend from Muizenberg, Barry Shamzin (who was a success in London’s longest running play, The Mousetrap) with persuading him to take his songs to the publishers in Denmark Street, London’s Tin Pan Alley² (Shaper 1957).

Eventually Shaper persuaded the Denmark Street publisher, David Toff, to employ him as a song plugger.³ This involved taking new material to artists and bands in the hope of persuading them to perform the work. In those days, song plugging was a seven-days-a-week job, and Shaper met many arrangers, singers and orchestra leaders this way. These contacts would prove invaluable when he started to achieve success as a writer (Mahlowe 1985). Shaper worked for David Toff until August 1958, during which time he discovered many writers and performers, including Russ Hamilton (Larkin 1997: 564), one of the first singer-songwriters of ‘pop’ to come out of Liverpool.

Shaper began writing songs using the assumed name of John Harris – his father’s first name and his mother’s surname. This was necessary, as he did not want to be seen to be promoting his own songs (Clayton 1977). The irony of the situation is evident in an article describing one of Shaper’s early song-writing efforts, ‘No One Was There But You’. The David Hughes show-business column in the Weekly Sporting Review stated that ‘the firm of Melcher-Toff now produce a new British ballad which has a rare beauty of its own. This was originally submitted to the BBC’s Our Kind of Music by two unknown

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² See Larkin 1997.

³ It is interesting that many great song writers began their careers as song pluggers. Among these were Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin and George Gershwin (Greenberg 1998: 31; Suskin 1992: 3).
songwriters, Archie Leonard and John Harris. Several BBC producers took an interest in it...incidentally, two of the men exploiting the song for Melcher-Toff are South African born Hal Shaper and Len Taylor’ (Hughes 1956). This achievement was also noted in the *Cape Times* (Cape Times 1956).

In March 1956 Shaper received a letter (Krost 1956a) asking him to consider composing the words and music for a novelty dance that was to be called the ‘Highlife’\(^4\). Three weeks later another letter acknowledges receipt of his manuscript, informing Shaper that it had been accepted (Krost 1956b). Although this may seem rather trivial, it is worth noting, as the Highlife created quite a sensation in London, spawning numerous newspaper articles (Daily Mirror 1957b), and attracting the attention of members of the Royal family (Daily Mirror 1957b; 1957c). It was even tipped to replace the rock and roll craze (Cape Argus 1957). Shaper kept the thank-you letters (Duke of Edinburgh 1957; Princess Margaret 1957; Queen Elizabeth II 1957) sent by representatives of the Royal Family for the copies he had sent them of the music for the Highlife.

Working for David Toff, who was himself a songwriter, was frustrating for Shaper as he was actively discouraged from song writing. Shaper recalls that their relationship was wrecked when he heard one of Toff’s more famous composers playing a tune. Shaper suggested a title for it, which resulted in the composer using Shaper’s lyric. The song was ‘There Goes My Lover’ which won Shaper the 1958 Ivor Novello award for Best Song of the Year (Cape Times 1958; Cape Argus 1958). This was Shaper’s first real achievement as a writer, and as a result his career began to gain momentum (Mahlowe 1985: 10–14).

### 3 Robbins Music

In 1958, because of the friction with Toff, Shaper began to work for Robbins Music, also originally as a song plugger. The CEO of the company, Alan Holmes, and his assistant, Joy Connock, were described by Shaper as being ‘so good with people, so good with songs, so good at matching up writers and artists’ (Mahlowe 1985: 12). This was to prove a very profitable and productive relationship.

\(^4\) The Highlife originated in Ghana, with the female dancer imitating ‘a great lady.’ The main musical feature is the interplay of different-sounding drums and rhythms (Daily Mirror 1957a).
The extent of Shaper's growing career is evident in a letter of 1958 (Shaper to parents, 1958) in which he listed all the projects he was working on. The final paragraphs detail his involvement with 'Volare' star Marino Marini. Shaper described how his boss, Alan Holmes, told him (HDS) that he was about to bring out an album with cha-cha dance music. Shaper reminded Holmes that he had discovered a cha-cha while on holiday in Italy. It was based on a two hundred and fifty year old marching song, sung by Garibaldi's men. After confirming that the melody was in the public domain, Shaper had written commercial words for it and entitled the piece 'Stella! Stella!'. Holmes asked him to show this to Marini, who was represented by Robbins Music in the UK. To Shaper's delight, Marini enthusiastically agreed to record it. 'Stella! Stella!' became a hit song (Record Mirror 1959), and although Shaper did not write the music, he must certainly have had an instinct for discovering a commercially viable melody in a two hundred and fifty year old song!

For Shaper, a highlight of 1960 was his contribution to Diana Dors' record debut (Disc 1960; Melody Maker 1960), for which he wrote the song 'Point of No Return'. He is credited not only as the writer of the lyrics, but also as a co-composer of the music with Derek New. It is apparent how good Shaper was at catering for different types of artists and voices, and tailoring a song to suit someone exactly (Clayton, 1977).
Another of Shaper’s earliest achievements was as a result of Rose Brennan’s request for something to sing on her first solo recording. Shaper wrote the lyrics still credited to ‘John Harris’, for ‘Tall Dark Stranger’, which became a commercial hit in December 1961 (Clayton, 1977). The music was by Marella.

4 Softly, As I Leave You

It was on the 28 November 1961 that Shaper wrote the English lyrics for ‘Softly, As I Leave You’, his most famous song, one that became a classic and which gave him immense prestige in the song-writing industry.

As the head of promotions at Robbins Music, Shaper visited Milan to liaise with the Curci publishing group. Robbins was publishing the songs of Domenico Modugno, one of the first Italian artists in the popular music field to achieve international stardom. Pippo Ricci of Curci introduced Shaper to his in-house arranger Anthony de Vita, who invited him for dinner. That evening de Vita sat down at the piano and played what Shaper thought was going to be a pop song, but instead he had composed ‘what seemed to be three movements of a symphony.’ ‘Softly, as I Leave You’ was the middle piece. This melody appealed to Shaper who took it back to England with him (Shaper n.d. (f)).

Later that summer the song was recorded in Italian, with a text by Giorgio Calabrese entitled ‘Piano’ (meaning ‘quietly’). Shaper was again impressed with the beauty of the tune and left a copy for Matt Monro to listen to. A few weeks later Matt Monro called Shaper, expressed enthusiasm for the song, and asked him to finish the lyric by the next day.

The song consists of only eight lines. Shaper wrote four versions of these, selected the most cohesive, and completed the work in an hour. He credits his Danish girlfriend, Lotte Holm, as the inspiration for the text (Shaper n.d. (f)). In the as yet unpublished biography of composer Jerry Goldsmith, with whom Shaper wrote some of his best lyrics, Goldsmith is quoted as making disparaging remarks about Shaper’s success with ‘Softly, As I Leave You’, saying

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5 Rose Brennan was an Irish singer brought to London by Joe Loss to be a regular singer with his band (Graphic 1959).

6 Lyric in Appendix.

7 Shaper had planned to include his experiences as a songwriter in his autobiography. One of the chapters is devoted to the writing of this song.
that it was merely a direct translation of the original Italian version by Calabrese (Goldsmith website 1). In Shaper’s defence, Calabrese is always credited as the writer of the original Italian text, and, although the atmosphere and poetic sense of the original is maintained with the repeated use of the word ‘softly’ or ‘piano’ as in the original, it is certainly not a direct translation. A major change is that, in Calabrese’s original, the song is sung by the person left behind, and in Shaper’s version it is sung by the person departing.

**Giorgio Calabrese – direct translation**:  
Softly while you go away  
Try, so that your footstep  
Will not wake me  
As you go away.  
Nothing, I ask you nothing  

Today and in the future  
You will be beside me in memory.  
Go, I will not ask you to stay yet,  
But do it softly  
That I will not hear you.  
(Calabrese 1960)

**Shaper:**  
Softly, I will leave you softly  
For my heart would break if you should wake to see me go  
So I leave you softly, long before you miss me  
Long before your arms can make me stay  
For one more hour or one more day  
After all the years I can’t bear the tears to fall  
So softly as I leave you there  
As I leave you there.

The following morning Shaper typed up the song without a title and took it over to the EMI recording studio where George Martin ran through the music with Matt Monro. Shaper worried that the musical gap between ‘soft’ and ‘ly’ was too wide. Johnny Spence the arranger agreed and promised to add finger cymbals to camouflage this. Fearing that the recording of the song would emphasis this gap and make the lyric sound unbalanced and amateur, Shaper dreaded the exposure and the embarrassment (Shaper n.d. (f)).

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8 Direct translation is by Prof LR Nassimbeni.
On the day of the recording session at EMI, Shaper arrived half an hour late as it usually took time to rectify the problems in the score and balance the vocals of the first song. It was a three-hour session, the other songs being by Lionel Bart and Herbie Kretzmer. With twenty minutes of the session left and the other songs completed, George Martin called the session to an end. Shaper said that he ‘went white’ thinking that the opening gap had sounded so appalling that the track had been scrapped. Asking what had happened to ‘Softly’, he was told that they had recorded it in one take.

I sat back and listened to the greatest thrill I have ever experienced – the perfect vocal over the perfect arrangement, perfectly produced, but with one added dimension...Matt had made my eight little lines into a personal and deeply emotional experience. I was overwhelmed by it. (Shaper n.d. (f))

The song was released in March 1962 as Matt Monro’s next ‘A-side’ single and it became Shaper’s business to promote it, still using his pseudonym ‘John Harris’. ‘Softly’ became a

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9 Herbie Kretzmer, a hugely successful international songwriter who wrote the lyrics for Les Misérables, is also of South African origin. He was born in Kroonstad in 1925 and left South Africa in the late 1940s (Larkin 1999: 349). He became a life-long friend of Shaper’s, and is the godfather of Shaper’s son, Jack (Shaper Diaries passim). Shaper gave his grand piano to Kretzmer (Joan Cohen, personal communication).
slow but building hit, finishing as one of the top songs of the year. It was then released and charted in the United States and gradually more and more cover versions appeared – first by Doris Day, then Andy Williams, Brenda Lee and Eydie Gorme.

In 1964, Shaper achieved his dream when the song was released as a single by his favourite ballad singer, Frank Sinatra\textsuperscript{10}. ‘Softly’ was a massive success, then a standard, and today there are over five hundred versions, including a 1975 A-side single by Elvis Presley (Clayson & Leigh 1994).

5 Val Doonican

Val Doonican (Gammond 1991: 161) was another Irish singing star that Shaper worked with extensively. In a radio interview, Shaper related that, long before Doonican became famous for his Val Doonican television show, he would come into Robbins music, sit in the chair opposite him and discuss his act with Shaper.

Joy Connock found a tune by Adolphson and Wolgens that she thought was worthy of lyrics. Shaper said that he trusted her judgement, and wrote an English lyric, which he called ‘Mysterious People’\textsuperscript{11}. Needing someone to demo the song, he asked Doonican to record it but nothing appeared to come of this. Shaper then went to Paris to try to persuade Maurice Chevalier to record the song, thinking that it would suit him perfectly. Chevalier never recorded it, but to Shaper’s astonishment, Doonican used it on his first album, which went gold. Although other artists, including Cilla Black, recorded the song, Shaper thought that Doonican’s version was the most beautiful (Clayton 1977).

6 The Eurovision Song Festival

An event to which Shaper seems to have made a significant contribution was the annual Eurovision Song Contest, which attracted huge public interest each year in Britain and across western Europe. Shaper was involved with the competition from as early as 1961 when the

\textsuperscript{10} Joy Connock had asked Shaper who his favourite ballad singer was. He told her that it was Sinatra. She advised him to write every lyric as if writing for Sinatra, and Shaper said that he would. He carried this advice with him for the rest of his career (Shaper n.d. (f)).

\textsuperscript{11} Lyric in Appendix.
song ‘A Place in the Country’, with words by ‘John Harris’ and music by H. Shaberman and T. Page was being sold as sheet music and promoted as ‘featured in the British Finals of the Eurovision Song Contest sung by Brian Johnson’ (Robbins 1961).

In the 1964 competition to decide Britain’s entry for the Eurovision Song Contest, the six songs selected were by Lionel Bart, Leslie Bricusse, Tony Hatch, Mitch Murray, Philip Green, and Norman Newell and Shaper. All the successful entries, including Newell and Shaper’s ‘Beautiful, Beautiful’, were sung and performed by Matt Monro on BBC television on 7 February (BBC 1964: 64). Shaper wrote home to his family in South Africa: ‘Sorry, I didn’t win! Came third, but “I Love the Little Things” got 80 votes to my 20’ (Shaper to family, 1964).

In 1970 the UK final was held at the BBC Television studios on 7 March, with Cliff Richard as the host and Mary Hopkin singing all the songs. Shaper and British composer Cyril Ornadel (of whom more in the next chapter) entered ‘I’m Going to Fall in Love Again’, which came in second. Shaper later said that Ornadel had told him that they should write for Hopkin, but that he hated the song so much that he ‘refused to have anything else to do with it’. Shaper was ‘astonished when it nearly won and went on to sell a million records as the B-side to the winning song’, adding that he should have realised that one must, at times, write for a very commercial market (Hopkin website).

7 Music for film and television

Shaper was involved with writing lyrics for over eighty songs for film scores, which is an incredible achievement.\(^\text{12}\) Some of his best work in this genre was written in collaboration with Academy Award-winning composers Michel Legrand, Jerry Goldsmith and Francis Lai. Shaper’s great ambition of winning an Academy Award himself was never realised.

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\(^{12}\) Shaper compiled his own catalogue of work which lists alphabetically all the songs he wrote, including the names of the composers and performers (Shaper n.d. (c)).
7.1 Michel Legrand

Shaper’s professional relationship with French composer Michel Legrand was particularly important – in the draft of chapters that he planned for his autobiography, one entire chapter was to have been devoted to Legrand (Shaper n.d. (f)). He describes Legrand’s compositions as ‘taking music to places that are almost unsafe to go...writing on the edge of the human ability to sing and his melodies coil and whirl’ (Clayton 1977). Shaper recounts that, while driving through the south of France in 1959, he heard the most exquisite melody on the radio, Legrand’s ‘La Valse des Lilas’. When he returned to Paris he telephoned his friend Nat Shapiro (see Shaper 1971) and asked him who had written this music. Shapiro introduced the two men, and Legrand immediately asked Shaper what he did. Shaper replied that he wrote lyrics, to which Legrand retorted, ‘So do I!’ Shaper said he wondered if they would ever find common ground. Nevertheless Legrand gave Shaper a number of tapes, with instructions to see what he could do with them. One of the melodies he transformed into the beautiful song ‘Paris Was Made For Lovers’ (Clayton 1977).

The extent of Shaper’s collaboration with Legrand is obvious when one looks at the tracks on Legrand’s 1994 album, Paris Was Made For Lovers. The table on the next page shows the credits on the 1994 release of this album (CD: Legrand 1994).

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13 Lyric in Appendix.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Track title</th>
<th>Composer/lyricist(s)</th>
<th>Performer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Windmills of Your Mind</td>
<td>Legrand/Alan Bergman &amp; Marilyn Bergman</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Summer of '42</td>
<td>Legrand</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Still See You</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea and Sky</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Dusty Springfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerto for Cabs</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Street Where They Lived</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Love Begins</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Love In Normandy</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Place In Paris</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Matt Monro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Lovers Never Die</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On The Road</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do You Come Here Often?</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They Simply Fade Away</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Love Ends</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pavanne For People</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris Was Made For Lovers</td>
<td>Legrand/Shaper</td>
<td>Legrand (vocal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The album was produced by Shaper's Prestige Record Company (the formation and history of this highly successful company is described in Chapter 6), and Shaper himself wrote the liner notes. The original soundtracks – which include ‘Paris Was Made For Lovers’ from the 1970 film *Time for Loving*, ‘A Place In Paris’ (Matt Monro) and ‘Sea and Sky’ (Dusty Springfield) – were produced by Shaper and Legrand. However, Shaper later noted that some of the songs had been incorrectly attributed to him. He corrected ‘Concerto for Cabs’, ‘Where Love Begins’, ‘Old Lovers Never Die’ and ‘Do You Come Here Often?’ as having been written by Legrand alone (Shaper n.d. (e)). Shaper added that the mistake seems to have started on the EMI-MFP (1992) cassette *The Music of Michel Legrand and his Orchestra*, and that on the original RCA LP, all the titles are correct (Shaper n.d. (f)).

Shaper made a list of seventeen songs for which he wrote the lyrics, with Michel Legrand as composer (Shaper n.d. (e)):

1. *The Sweet Remembered Faces*
2. *Martina*
3. *The Years of My Youth*
4. *That Very First Affair*
5. *Gavotte*
7. *Siren Song*
8. *The Paris I Love*
9. *There Is A River*
10. *Paris Was Made For Lovers* (theme from the film *A Time for Loving*)
11. *Sea and sky*
12. *A Place In Paris* (from the film *A Time for Loving*)
13. *And The Sea...*
14. *I Still See You* (from the film *The Go-Between*)
15. *Touch The Sun* (love theme from TV series *The Burning Shore*)
16. *On The Road* (from the film *The Lady in the Car*)
17. *Love Is A Carnival*

In a radio interview, Shaper described how, on 17 June 1991, Legrand had sent him a tape and a rough draft of the music for the theme tune of the mini-series *The Burning Shore*, based on the Wilbur Smith book of the same name. The only instruction Shaper was given was ‘Good luck...and somewhere use the word “diamond”’ — to tie in with the South African theme. Rossana Casale recorded the song in Paris, and the series ran in forty-two countries. Shaper said that the lyrics perfectly described how he felt about his homeland, South Africa (Holloway 2000):

*I never dreamed this could be*

*This paradise on earth*

*Of sunlight and mountain*

*Of river and rainbow*

*Where I’m lost in the wonder of sky and sea...*

In the 31 January entry in his diary for 2000, Shaper reflected on what working with Legrand had meant to him:

I listen to Michel’s extraordinary music and feel I am in another world – what an exceptional man...there really is no one quite like him – he was my best musical experience – his music always created my best efforts...in a world of ‘doof-doof’ he remains a wonder...is there still room for a melodist of his stature and imagination...I wonder? (Shaper Diaries)

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14 Shaper did manage to squeeze in the word ‘diamond’ – right at the end of the song – see Appendix.
7.2 Jerry Goldsmith

Another composer with whom Shaper developed a special working relationship was the American Jerry Goldsmith. According to Shaper’s account in his autobiographical notes, Goldsmith was not the easiest composer to work with. Shaper describes him as a ‘pure composer’ whose deepest affection was reserved for music, devoting many chapters of his autobiographical notes to descriptions of writing with Goldsmith for the film industry. They illustrate just how much tension and pressure there was in getting a song approved by everyone concerned, engaging just the right artist to sing it, and then making sure that the song was properly promoted.

When they met, Goldsmith, who was about two years older than Shaper, had just written the theme music for the popular television series, *Dr. Kildare*. Shaper thought that it would be a good idea to turn the instrumental piece into a vocal song and get the star of the production, Richard Chamberlain, to record it. He adapted the music and wrote the lyrics and the song was sent to Goldsmith – who rejected it outright. Goldsmith then went away on holiday and forgot about the proposed song. The publishers got busy, and without consulting Goldsmith again, adapted the song and got another lyric, written by Hal Wynn. This was a huge success, and Goldsmith returned from holiday to find that his song was in the top five in the pop charts. Shaper then had to promote the Richard Chamberlain record with someone else’s words, which he felt was adding insult to injury (Shaper n.d. (f)).

This encounter did have a positive side. In 1967, Joy Connock, Shaper’s mentor at Robbins Music, suggested that he work with Goldsmith on the songs for the film *Sebastian*, starring Dirk Bogarde and Lili Palmer. Goldsmith described meeting Shaper, and said that he was ‘immediately charmed’ (Goldsmith website 1). His daughter, Carrie Goldsmith, in her notes for his as yet unpublished biography writes:

> Hal Shaper, the son of South African immigrants to England (sic), was for all appearances the quintessentially urbane, swinging Londoner when Dad first met him in 1967. Hal epitomized a mod, British bachelor with a fair impression of a BBC accent, hip clothes from Carnaby Street and Kings Row, and a string of beautiful girlfriends. (Goldsmith website 1)

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15 Shaper became close friends with many influential Londoners, including Vidal Sassoon. Sassoon’s autobiography includes a description of an incident that happened while he was on holiday with Shaper in Israel – with Sassoon ending up at a board meeting in his underpants! (Sassoon 1968: 148–151).
Shaper related the differences he experienced in their working routines. He felt that, for Goldsmith, musical composition had an austere mystery at which one worked in silence and alone, in a manner quite unlike the constant and boring repetition of song writing, which was accompanied by frequent differences of opinion with ‘non-musical voices mutilating the smokey (sic) air, with an insufferable idea that sounded only fractionally more intelligent than it looked’ (Shaper n.d. (f)). In the Carrie Goldsmith biography, Jerry Goldsmith is described as experiencing fear and insecurity when faced with a blank piece of paper – of feeling that nothing he wrote was ever good enough, and that he had no real talent (Goldsmith website 1). This perfectionist and ultra-critical personality would have been challenging to work with.

The first song that Goldsmith and Shaper completed for *Sebastian* was ‘Comes The Night’\(^\text{16}\), and Shaper wrote that he was relieved to have come up with something that Jerry admired. ‘Comes The Night’ was recorded by Anita Harris and was an immediate success. Shaper recalled that they were able to write their second song very quickly, a rock and roll number needed for a live sequence. It was called ‘Hey There! Who Are You?’ and was greeted with enthusiastic approval by the producers. Shaper said that he hated the song, and could not believe that two grown men ‘in full possession of their faculties ever conceived and wrote such a banal song’ (Shaper n.d. (f)).

\[\text{Figure 18: Sheet music of ‘a banal song’!}\]

Shaper also collaborated with Goldsmith in the Steve McQueen and Dustin Hoffman film *Papillon* (1973), based on the life story of Henri Charrière. Shaper had met Charrière and entertained him in London, so when, several years later, Goldsmith needed lyrics for the theme song of the film at short notice, Shaper was very familiar with the story. In a radio interview (Holloway 2000) Shaper told how Goldsmith flew to London and gave him a

\(^{16}\) Lyric in Appendix.
recording of the music. He completed the lyrics in two hours, and Goldsmith flew back to Hollywood that night. The resulting ‘Free As The Wind’\textsuperscript{17} was a hit single for Engelbert Humperdink, Jerry Vale and Andy Williams. This Goldsmith score was nominated for an Oscar for ‘Best Music, Original Dramatic Score’ in 1974 (Halliwell 1994: 824).

Goldsmith had been contracted to write the score for \textit{The Cassandra Crossing} (1976), a Lew Grade film starring Kirk Douglas, Richard Harris, Sophie Loren and Anne Turkel. Goldsmith was to conduct in Rome, and Shaper was to write the lyric for one song at the end of the film, to sum up the picture and play it out. After Shaper arrived in Rome, Goldsmith told him that the director, George Cosmatos, did not want the song. ‘At that time,’ Shaper wrote, ‘I still thought that I would be standing on the Academy Awards podium for that song, or any other!’ (Shaper n.d. (f)). The problem seemed to be that Anne Turkel was singing a song early in the picture, and neither she nor her husband Richard Harris wanted another song sung by another person to distract from her performance. While sharing a taxi with Cosmatos, Shaper thought that he had better discuss the dilemma:

‘Jerry tells me you’re not awfully keen to have the extra song in the film,’ I opened. ‘Lew wants it,’ George offered, ‘But I’m not so sure. Besides I’ve got problems and another song is...well...I don’t need it.’ He shuffled and turned away and sat staring silently out of the window. It was obvious he didn’t want to be in that taxi with me, or discussing the song at all. ‘Look George,’ I said, ‘I personally don’t care whether you want the song or not, or if it’s in or out. I am being paid to write one song, so you might as well tell me what the song is supposed to be about, as Lew sees it.’ George looked somewhat surprised and said, ‘The song should sum up the film – you know – wrap it up. People are fleeing everywhere and there is death and destruction and misery, but the song, it is like their requiem – a voice that comments on their plight, which is the universal plight of people manipulated and destroyed by machines and Gods and governments and policies.’ He then added soberly, ‘Write it, but I don’t want it anyway.’ He stared back into the night. I felt at least the ice was broken. (Shaper n.d. (f))

\textsuperscript{17} Lyric in Appendix.
Goldsmith had already composed the theme for the song, and Shaper listened to it before going to bed. He wrote that the following day the lyrics started to take shape:

*It's all a game...*

*The meaning of things...*

*And no-one knows who pulls the strings.*

After completing the song, which he titled ‘It’s All a Game’, Shaper took it to Goldsmith, who approached the lyric with his usual caution. Shaper said that in the beginning this had troubled him, but that he had realised that Goldsmith was a steady and well-balanced professional who would only accept things slowly. ‘It had taken me a lifetime to realise that my own instant enthusiasm needed tempering and by now I was accustomed to Jerry’s pace’ (Shaper n.d. (f)). After spending the rest of the morning on the song, Goldsmith declared himself satisfied and said that if any song went into *The Cassandra Crossing* it would be that one. Shaper never finished his autobiographical account of ‘It’s All a Game’, but Goldsmith was right, and Shaper’s lyrics were included in the film (Goldsmith website 2).

Shaper related that the writing of ‘We’re Home Again’ for the film *The Boys from Brazil* (1978) starring Laurence Olivier and Gregory Peck had been a nightmare. When Goldsmith first mentioned that Shaper might do the lyric, two lyrics had already been rejected in the United States, and Peter Phillips of EMI Music had brought in three of his own lyricists, regardless of the fact that Shaper was to work on lyrics for the melody. Shaper wrote that his ‘stomach fell through the floor’ on being told of the situation. Philips told him that, as it was ‘only a two line song’, whoever came up with the opening lines would get the job (Shaper n.d. (f)). Shaper’s reaction:

A ‘2-line song!?’ Dear God protect us from these Creative Pronunciata. It was a remark of such profound ignorance, I could scarcely credit having been subject to it.

That Wednesday morning at 5 a.m. I settled down with a clear mind having found a piece from ‘the way of the sufí’ which crystallised my sense of direction. The lines came from a poet who had died thousands of years ago and simply said ‘Sanctuary lies ahead of you, and the enemy, behind. Go forward and you will succeed. Sleep and you will die.’

... by 4.00 in the afternoon the lines of lyrics had cleared into a fairly cohesive whole and I called Jerry to say I was ready to see him.
He played the song through poker-faced as always and said, ‘I like it.’ The following day Jerry took the lyric in to Peter Phillips who now had a handful of other lyrics. An hour later, Jerry called me to say that Peter had given my lyric his approval...with reservations. Those reservations resulted in a total of seventeen rewrites of two lines in the bridge before the song assumed final form. (Shaper n.d. (f))

Shaper had been correct in his scepticism of a two line song! A fine performance of ‘We’re Home Again’ by Elaine Page ensured the success of the song and Shaper wrote that he and Goldsmith listened to the final mix with ‘a glow of achievement and relief’ (Shaper n.d. (f)).

The complete catalogue of songs that Shaper wrote with Goldsmith also includes ‘Melissa’ and the theme song ‘Justine’ from the 1969 film of the same name, ‘The World That Only Lovers See’ from The Most Dangerous Man in the World, also known as The Chairman (1969), and ‘It’s a Long Road’ from the 1983 Sylvester Stallone film First Blood. Goldsmith died of cancer on 21 July, 2004 (Goldsmith website 2).

7.3 Francis Lai

Shaper seemed to have a special affinity for working with French composers, and he wrote the lyrics for a number of successful songs with Francis Lai, who composed mainly for film. In 1970 Lai won an Academy Award for the musical score of Love Story – a year in which Shaper worked extensively with him as lyricist for the music of the film The Games. They wrote a number of songs for this film: ‘From Denver to L.A.’, ‘Warm Summer Rain’ and ‘This Lovely Night’. Elton John released ‘From Denver to L.A.’ as a single in the United States in 1970 (Halliwell 1994: 414; Lai & Shaper 1969).

In the early 'seventies Shaper and Lai continued their collaboration with the films Smic Smac Smoc (1971) and The Legend of Frenchie King (Les Pètroleuse) (1971), for which they wrote the title song, ‘The Legend of Frenchie King’, as well as ‘Prairie Woman’ and ‘La Vie Parisienne’. In 1994, Shaper’s Prestige Record Company released Great Love Themes, an album of Lai’s songs, which included ‘Happy New Year’, ‘Love In The Rain’ and ‘Intimate

Figure 19: Shaper with Francis Lai, May 1981
Moments’, for all of which Shaper had created the lyrics. Shaper also wrote the liner notes in which he described Lai’s music as so distinctive, unique and engaging that it seems ‘to have been plucked out of the air of Paris’ (CD: Lai 1994).

In a radio interview, Shaper reminisced about writing ‘La Vie Parisienne’\(^{18}\) with Lai, and said that he remembered it particularly well (Clayton 1977). When Shaper started to write his autobiography, he included extracts from this song as an introduction, which he later deleted.

I wrote those words for a musical film in 1971, starring Brigette Bardot and Claudia Cardinale. The song was sung by Micheline Presle playing the part of a distressed gentlewoman now running a bar in Texas, reminiscing about her younger and more innocent days in Paris. The director, Guy Cazaril, had told me quite clearly the song he wanted in the scene and who was to sing it. I knew that ‘little town’ very well. It was largely my own story and the song came easily to a melody already written by Francis Lai’.

*That little place where I was born, that no one knows*

*Is still a place that people leave*

*And no-one ever goes*

*Except maybe to die there*...(Shaper n.d. (f))

The Francis Lai Song Book contains two other songs with lyrics by Shaper: ‘This is me’ (an adaptation of Francoise Dorin’s ‘C’est Ton Nom’) and ‘Princess of the “Little P”’ (Lai 1972).

### 7.4 Star Wars

Shaper rated his involvement with *Star Wars* (1977) as a deep and wounding disappointment. After seeing a preview of the film, Shaper thought that the musical themes written by John Williams might make a good popular song. Roy Featherstone at MCA Records agreed with Shaper, and it was suggested that Shaper should write the lyric and submit them to Herb Eiseman at 20\(^{th}\) Century Fox Music in Los Angeles. Shaper said that he expected nothing to result because the film was regarded as such an important picture that it would be impossible to proceed without every clearance and authorisation. To his surprise and delight, he was informed that, with the exception of four lines, his text was acceptable to 20\(^{th}\) Century Fox, and he received written authorisation to proceed with the song.

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\(^{18}\) Lyric in Appendix.
A deal was made with MCA Records. Mike Berry was brought in to produce the record and the group Lips Inc. were engaged to sing. Shaper thought that they had produced a tremendous package, which was completed with the addition of Sir Alec Guinness’s voice saying ‘May the force be with you’ to give it a real connection to the film. The master tape was handed in to a very positive reception at MCA. This recording was broadcast when Shaper was invited by Brian Willey to appear on the BBC ‘songwriters’ programme with Peter Clayton – introduced as ‘the voice, the songs and the story of Hal Shaper’ (Clayton 1977). The last track on that programme was the lyric version of the theme tune of Star Wars. Shaper enthusiastically promoted the film, which opened in London on 27 December 1977, describing it as ‘absolutely extraordinary’ (Clayton 1977).

Shaper’s dream of a Star Wars Oscar was snatched away when George Lucas, the producer of the film, refused to authorise the music department of 20th Century Fox to release the song. Shaper said that he felt as if he had been ‘kicked in the groin’. It was especially difficult for Shaper to accept this after all the time and effort spent on the recording, and the fact that everything had been in place for a world wide release (Shaper n.d. (f)). Shaper was left with a permanent sense of disappointment about what might have been (Holloway 2002).

7.5 Unexpected successes

In the August 2000 radio interview with Holloway, Shaper was asked if any song he had written had become a major success when he least expected it. He said that he had written the song ‘Interlude’ for the film of the same name (1968), which he thought was as dreary as the picture. Timi Yuro recorded it on the soundtrack, and Shaper was amazed that the song stayed in the film. About ten years after Interlude closed, Siouxsie and Morrissey stumbled upon the song, recorded it, and it became a huge hit in America and Europe. Shaper said he found that baffling (Holloway 2000).

Another unexpected success spanned different generations of music. Shaper had written the song ‘Tell Her You Love Her’ with Stanley Myers for Sinatra to sing in the film Otley (1968). Three decades later, Jarvis Cocker, the songwriter for the British group, Pulp, asked Shaper’s permission to add his own thoughts to the song. This was released as ‘The Trees’ on their 2001 album We Love Life (Holloway 2001).
8 Barbra Streisand

It was due to Shaper's collaboration with Legrand that in 1965 he was given the opportunity to work with Barbra Streisand on her new album Je m'appelle Barbra. Streisand had just become a major star in America due to her success on Broadway in Funny Girl, and was making the album with Legrand who asked Shaper to fly to the United States to work on some of the lyrics.

This experience was one that Shaper never forgot, as Streisand was such a perfectionist, 'suspicious, bristling and so difficult to please'. Shaper had written the lyrics for 'Martina' and, at the recording session, Streisand turned to him and said 'I don't relate to this line!' Shaper recalled that he was appalled, because the line she had put her finger on 'was the pinning line between everything that had happened before and all the structure of rhyme and rhythm that happened afterwards.' He turned and told her, 'Hold on a minute, there's something you don't understand,' to which she replied 'No, no sonny, there's something you don't understand. If you don't change it and change it now, I'm not going to sing it!' Shaper said that he had visions of millions of copies of the song going up in smoke, and whipped out a pencil and wrote another six lines instantly. Streisand looked at them carefully, crumpled them into a ball and then sang the line as originally written (Clayton 1977). The Je m'appelle Barbra album, which, apart from one song composed by Streisand, is based entirely on the compositions of French popular composers with added English lyrics, was released in 1966 (CD: Streisand 1966).

9 Shaper's creative processes and working method

Shaper described his creative method in a letter to his sister (Shaper to Joan, 1959). He explained that he had an Italian musical-comedy item to work on for the next day, called 'Domenica, sempre Domenica' (Sunday, always Sunday). Shaper wrote that he had 'cracked the story-line open' and was calling the song 'The Bells of Rome'. He was going to base the song on an old legend that he heard in Italy, involving the bells of Gianicolo, San Angelo and Santa Maria. He wrote:

19 Lyric in Appendix.
I hope to translate the idea into a shape will not take more than a few hours... I work best after two a.m. as you probably know, and it is only the thought...the idea that is difficult...the rest is pleasure, pain, triumph and despair in pro rata doses, where I am, for a while, lost in my own world...and very happily. (Shaper to Joan, 1959)

Figures 20 and 21 show some of Shaper’s ‘work in progress’. These pages are repeated, at approximately full size, in the Appendix.

Shaper’s song writing came between the generations of the ‘Golden Age’ songwriters such as Cole Porter, the Gershwins and Johnny Mercer and the newer schools of Lennon and McCartney, Randy Newman and Simon and Garfunkel. These later artists composed the lyrics and music as a single creation – it was their song, and no-one else was involved. Peter Clayton described Shaper as belonging by character and discipline to the earlier era, because he supplied lyrics, on demand, to the music industry – often for them to commercialise as they saw fit. He never settled for a permanent arrangement with a single composer in the ‘Rodgers and Hammerstein’ mould.

Shaper was primarily a lyric writer, although occasionally, when particularly inspired, he did write both words and music. It is the composer who generally receives the credit for a
successful song, and the integral contribution of the lyricist is often overlooked (Clayton 1977). Shaper never wrote a song that was known only in one definitive recording. On the other hand, he said that it never occurred to him that he could not write a lyric for a particular melody. Joy Connock would ask for lyrics to be prepared for a specific melody by a particular time and Shaper became accustomed to turning up with lyrics on a due date (Clayton 1977).

In a later BBC radio interview, Shaper described ‘the youngsters’ he grew up with in London – Don Black, Elton John, Herbert Kretzmer, Les Reed, Lionel Bart, Cyril Ornadel and George Martin – as the ‘bridge between the old world of ballads and the new world of the youth and rock rebellion.’ Shaper described himself as a music-child of the ’sixties and ’seventies – the era from which emerged John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones, the Moody Blues and David Bowie. ‘We were in the right place at the right time. It was a great roller-coaster ride and I loved it’ (Thomas 2000).

Shaper’s tendency to compose long narratives with a wistful quality is evident in songs such as ‘The Years of My Youth’\(^\text{20}\), written with Legrand, and first recorded by Jack Jones:

\begin{quote}
Somewhere the years of my youth lie inside me
Growing old like mellow wine.
I shed no tears for my youth, none that blind me
They’re behind me now
Where those sad times will never find me.
I have the loves of my life to remind me
That the whole wide world was mine.
I am at peace with all that surrounds me
And the joy of these autumn days still astounds me.
\end{quote}

\(^{20}\) Complete lyric in Appendix.
Shaper’s description of a child’s world in ‘Mysterious People’\(^{21}\) is captivating and poignant. In this Val Doonican hit song, Shaper writes understandingly of lost youth, nostalgia and loneliness:

\[\textit{Children are people} \]
\[\textit{Who live in the land} \]
\[\textit{Made of raindrops and pebbles and puddles and streams.} \]
\[\textit{Solemnly watching a twig as it sails} \]
\[\textit{On a clear crystal pool to an island of dreams.}\]

Shaper described his creative process as another world, of people who lived inside him, who would emerge and tell him their stories. He always felt that the words lay inherently inside the melody, one only had to find the outlet and the song would just spill out (Clayton 1977). He said his eyes became ‘almost microscopic when looking at syllables and phrasing, inflections and the highs and lows of notes’, adding ‘You tend to look at music as almost the infrastructure of something into which words are going to be built.’ He had once told a composer not to argue with him about the tune that he had written because he knew it better than the composer did. When the composer asked how this was possible, Shaper responded that he had had hours to examine the structure of the melody and that he felt that there should be extra notes in certain places to balance out the interior of it because ‘it’s on those fractions that sounds hang and those trigger effects that make songs sound so casually interesting’ (Clayton 1977).

Shaper always worked neatly: one large drawing block for each year with small, tidy, pencilled lyrics. He could, if necessary, work very fast, and even occasionally composed a song while he was asleep, as in an incident described to Peter Clayton. Shaper had been at a dinner party at which one of the guests talked a lot about Tom Jones. Shaper said that at the end of the evening he was so suffused with Tom Jones that at 3 o’clock in the morning he shot out of bed, having seen in his dreams Jones performing with great vigour a song called ‘Momma Married a Preacher Man’\(^{22}\). Shaper rushed downstairs and wrote down the lyric for the whole song as quickly as possible. The music was added by Les Reed. There have been

\(^{21}\) Lyric in Appendix.

\(^{22}\) Lyric in Appendix.
many versions of this song, including hits by Frankie Stevens and Dusty Springfield, but Tom Jones turned it down! (Clayton 1977).

10 Musical theatre

A large part of Shaper’s creative life was devoted to the musical theatre. This art form captivated him from his early beginnings in Muizenberg, and it must have been particularly satisfying for him to see his lyrics dramatised on stage. In spite of numerous disappointments and obstacles, Shaper persisted in his quest to write an internationally successful musical, and even extended his work to include the libretto for an opera. This tenacity and passion for his profession lasted until the very end on his life, and is described in detail in the next chapter.
Chapter 4

The Musicals

1 Introduction

One of Shaper's greatest ambitions was to write a show for the musical theatre that would enjoy long seasons in the West End and Broadway. He devoted enormous amounts of time and energy to this end, with varying results. Although some of his musicals were sensational hits to start with, garnering prestigious awards and making big profits, they have not become part of the standard musical repertory. The emergence, in 1972, of Lloyd-Webber as the leading writer for the musical theatre (Larkin 1999: 380), his affiliation with pop-music and his ground-breaking revolutionary productions made Shaper's works, which followed in the tradition of Rodgers and Hammerstein, seem rather dated. Shaper tended to choose subjects from classical literature such as Jane Eyre, Great Expectations and Treasure Island, which possibly had a limited appeal for current audiences. Nevertheless, Shaper's musical works do represent a significant achievement in a notoriously difficult and unpredictable field.

In his autobiographical notes, Shaper described the failure or lack of success\(^1\) of a musical as a huge disappointment and a deep and wounding blow:

Musicals are the most throwing-together of diverse talents and occupations imaginable and the chances of their success in any event are pitifully small. Since World War II, it would be hard to think beyond a handful of British musicals that have made an international success. And of that handful you would be pushed to think beyond Jesus Christ Superstar, Oliver and Stop the World. They are also very expensive to stage, and consequently hard to find producers for. (Shaper 1977)

2 Jane Eyre: Monty Stevens

In a letter, which must have been written early in 1960, Shaper described how he came to be involved with the young composer Monty Stevens (Shaper to parents and Joan, 1960).

\(^1\) This was the case with Great Expectations.
Stevens had been approached to write a score to the book *Jane Eyre* and asked Shaper if he would be interested in writing the lyrics. Shaper was very hesitant at first as he felt that the subject was too dull. He also had little confidence in Steven's ability as a composer and in their capacity to work together for any length of time. Against his better judgement, Shaper committed himself to a project that would turn out to be frustrating and discouraging. Roy Harley Lewis, a film writer, was contracted to write the book with Shaper.

*Jane Eyre* was a show that drained Shaper, eventually being rewritten twenty-one times. In a letter to his family, Shaper complained that he was still a fortnight behind schedule on *Jane Eyre*, but added, ‘for the sheer sake of my soul must finish the damn thing. I can honestly say that the sight, sound and mention of her dismal name practically gives me an outbreak of nerves. This show should be another *Oklahoma* and would still register no emotion in me other than relief at having finished it!’ (Shaper to Joan and mother, 1961).

*Jane Eyre* opened on the 13 June 1961 at the Theatre Royal, Windsor. The production starred Diane Todd as Jane Eyre and Terence Cooper as Rochester, with orchestration and musical direction by Anthony Bowles. It proved to be a triumphant success, even attracting royal attention, as the following reviews reveal.

A review in the *Slough Express* of 23 June 1961, headlined with ‘*Jane Eyre* goes well with music’, and continues:

*Jane Eyre*, a new musical, is winning praise at the Theatre Royal, Windsor where it is being produced for the first time. It received the accolade of Royal approval last week when it was seen by the Queen and members of the Royal family...this cannot be said of many stage productions so early in their careers. What the authors, Roy Harley Lewis and Hal Shaper, have done is to take the bones of the sombre story and shape round them a Cinderella-like story of a young governess who finds her Prince Charming under the forbidding exterior of Rochester. (Slough Express 1961)

Don Wedge of *Billboard* wrote:

Lionel Bart’s *Oliver* was the first really successful British stage musical for many years. Now the spotlight of the search to find its successor has swung down Tin
Pan Alley itself... Hal Shaper of Robbins Music, and Monty Stevens, formally with Mellin Music, have combined with film writer Roy Harley Lewis to write a musical version of Charlotte Brontë’s great romantic novel... There seems little doubt that it will come to the West End in due course... The Shaper-Stevens combination has produced an exceptionally good collection of songs... the try-out at Windsor is going through all the agonies of cuts and re-writes... ‘I loved the songs’ the Queen told the composers when she went back stage to meet the cast. Princess Margaret expressed equal delight and asked where she might be able to get copies of the score. (Wedge 1961)

Shaper was guardedly delighted, and wrote to his sister Joan:

You must wonder what has been happening to me. All very exciting and now at last very good. The show is coming to the West End: unless we are very unlucky it could be a tremendous success. The critics have been saying that it knocks Fair Lady and Oliver sideways and though this is hard to believe personally – I was at the closing night last night where the company had to take nearly TWENTY curtain calls (nine is considered in the hit category) and could have stayed singing and taking bows all night. (Shaper to Joan, 1961)

In spite of Shaper’s frustration with the production, the reviews were very enthusiastic and it was one of the biggest successes the Theatre Royal had in close on a thousand productions. Donald Albery and Bernard Delfont bought the musical for the West End (David 1961). Sadly for Shaper, Albery and Delfont fell out, but continued to hold the show under the producing contract for a year, by which time, as no one else had been able to produce it, its opportunity was missed (Shaper 1993/94).

A rather long gap followed before an amateur theatrical society in Hornsey staged the musical in 1966. The local newspapers carried many very positive reviews of the production, the only reservation being the length of 180 minutes (Barnett Press 1966). Once more, Shaper and Stevens hoped that a London management would see the show and decide to produce it in the West End. It seemed that this ambition was finally to be realised when Bernard Delfont again decided to acquire the musical for the London stage (Finchley Press 1966). In January 1967, Shaper wrote that the production contracts for the West End production had been agreed with Bernard Delfont, but this was to prove yet another disappointment (Shaper to Joan, 1967).
In a letter, written just before *Jane Eyre* reopened at the Windsor Theatre in 1973, Shaper recounted the history of this musical.² He described himself as having been a young man full of enthusiasm when it had opened twelve years previously to great success and acclaim – yet it never made it to the West End.

In 1969 the production was mounted at the Charlottetown Summer Festival in Canada. A local paper described it in glowing terms:

*Jane Eyre* opened the 1970 Charlottetown summer festival and was enthusiastically received. This provincial capital city was named after George III's queen, but it was Charlotte Brontë's town for nearly three hours Monday night. *Jane Eyre...* has been set to music and cheered with some added comic characters and some bright choreography, all of which delighted a capacity audience on the opening night... There was a standing ovation. (Guardian 1970)

Shaper wrote that the show was beautifully staged and broke box office records. As a result of this success, the show toured Canada in 1970 but the production was becoming more American and further away from its Yorkshire roots. Consequently, when the show played in the huge O'Keefe Centre in Toronto in 1973, it failed, and the chance of international success was lost.³ Shaper felt that the show had never been the proper success it might have been:

I have screamed at it a thousand worrying nights...for twelve years now *Jane* has been there...like an uncomplaining but sickly wife...giving me a few moments of real pleasure interlaced with years and years of bedside attention. Well, you bitch, get up and walk or drop dead... I am just about done with you! (Shaper to mother; 2 July 1973)

*Jane Eyre* did however continue to attract interest. In 1985 a New York producer, Michael Conant, who produced the musical off Broadway in a showcase production in 1986,
contacted Shaper. This resulted in meetings with a number of theatrical producers but they seemed unable to get the major directors or stars necessary for a big production (Shaper 1993/94). In 1998 there were discussions about taking the musical to Australia in a new production. Shaper then described *Jane Eyre* as being in its thirty-seventh unsuccessful year! (Thomas 2001) Perhaps his early misgivings were justified, and he would have done well to heed his professional instinct.

3 Cyril Ornadel

In 1962 Shaper met the British composer Cyril Ornadel, who would prove to be his greatest and most successful collaborator. Ornadel was musical director for several important London musical productions and resident musical director at the London Palladium from 1956–57. He also specialised in recording work, and wrote a number of minor musicals and many film scores in the 1960s and '70s (Gammond 1991: 440). It was Ornadel who instigated the meeting: having heard ‘Softly As I Leave You’ on David Jacobs’ early morning BBC radio programme, Ornadel was struck by the beauty of the lyric and resolved to track down the writer. He telephoned Shaper and invited him to dinner.

Ornadel said that they got on extremely well, and he gave Shaper a tune of his to see if he could come up with a lyric, and Shaper in turn gave him the lyric for ‘How Do You Tell Her?’ and asked him to compose the music for it. They met again five days later in Ornadel’s dressing room at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane where he was musical director for *My Fair Lady*. Ornadel played Shaper his composition, telling him that he had a problem with the end of the lyric and that he would like it changed. Ornadel remembered that Shaper hated his setting of the lyric, and wanted the melody altered, and stormed angrily out of the room. It was to be five years before they collaborated again (Ornadel 2007: 198).

In 1967 Ornadel was working with Norman Newell as the musical director of a recording of Israeli songs with the Israeli actor Topol, who was starring in the London production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. Shaper had submitted some lyrics to Newell to be used on the recording, which were dismissed, according to Ornadel, in ‘a vicious and destructive manner’. Ornadel said that he felt very angry about this. Shaper telephoned him a few days later and suggested that they try writing together again, and this call Ornadel portrayed as ‘one of the most important phone calls of my career’ (Ornadel 2007: 226–227).
This time there were no problems and a close relationship was forged. Ornadel and Shaper started to collaborate on a permanent basis, their first song together being ‘Far from the Madding Crowd’ which was recorded by Dick Haymes (Ornadel 2007: 226–227). However, in the entry in Shaper’s diary in December 1996 he describes reading a draft of Ornadel’s autobiography on a visit to Israel to write The Prince and the Pauper: ‘Reading Cyril’s biography did nothing for my spirits either, as much that he has written is wrong and his version of the Norman Newell meeting with me is unkind and wrong. Perhaps I have re-seen things in my own re-write of events, but I don’t think so.’

In spite of Shaper’s sensitivity about this incident, Ornadel’s autobiography is very positive about Shaper’s talent and about the experience of working with him. Ornadel described Shaper as ‘the most tenacious man I have ever known...who never gives up on a project he believes in’ and as ‘a serious, creative, highly intelligent craftsman...a perfectionist who wrote and rewrote a score many times over’ (Ornadel 2007: 245, 254). The Prince and the Pauper was the last musical that Shaper fully completed, but it was never performed.

3.1 Tam O’Shanter

Shaper and Ornadel’s first collaboration was to have been a film musical based on the life of Robert Burns and called Tam O’Shanter. They put a tremendous amount of time and effort into this project, which was eventually abandoned without having been performed. One of the problems seems to have been that they were initially unable to find a suitable writer for the book (Shaper to Ornadel, 1968). Ornadel then asked Shaper to write the book as well as the lyrics (Ornadel to Shaper, 1970), and Mel Ferrer, the Hollywood actor and ex-husband of Audrey Hepburn who turned rather unsuccessfully to directing (NNDB website), agreed to produce the film (Kansas City Times 1971; Dateline America 1971). The project was not helped by the fact that other people were also working on the life of Burns as a musical at the same time (Shaw to Ferrer, 1971). According to his correspondence, Shaper eventually asked Wolf Mankovitz to write the book for Burns. Mankovitz finally killed the project when he informed Shaper that he did not think that any of the basic material they had written could be
used at all and that he would be unable to work within the restrictions of the project (Mankowitz to Shaper, 1972). Instead of being offended by this letter, Shaper seemed to welcome its honesty in his reply to Mankowitz:

I understand completely that it is impossible for you to write any show where there are restrictions imposed on you in the sense of a half-book which never really got off the ground anyway.

And so, thinking it over very carefully and very honestly, and very officially as it were, I would like you to know that I am delighted to divorce that dragging old bitch who has given me a bad time for more years than I care to tell you.

Also, I have long suspected that the inherent faults in my approach to the show were directly responsible for the score not emerging as freely as it should. (Shaper to Mankowitz, 1972)

3.2 Treasure Island

As Shaper was already working on Treasure Island with Ornadel, abandoning Burns, even after the enormous amount of research and work he had put into it, must have been a relief. Treasure Island appears to have been a much easier creative process. Shaper had decided to write the lyrics for this musical after having met Sir Bernard Miles at the Mermaid Theatre (Clayton 1978). Shaper asked Miles if he would be doing the play Treasure Island that year as it seemed to have become a Christmas tradition. Miles replied that he had done it for so many years he would prefer not to do it again. He then asked Shaper if he thought it would make a good musical, as he himself had always thought so. Shaper agreed that it could be a great musical and it was from these small beginnings that Treasure Island was conceived.

Shaper first mentioned working on Treasure Island in a letter dated February 1969 (Shaper to Joan, 1969), but it was not produced until December 1973. Shaper described his work on
*Treasure Island* as a ‘lovely experience’ (Clayton 1978) and that he was ‘so happy with the show’ (Shaper to Joan, 1973). This was a complete contrast to the agonies he had endured while working on *Jane Eyre* and trying to complete *Burns*. His account of creating the show with Ornadel illustrates this:

Cyril Ornadel and I got together and punched out, I think, most of the songs for the show over one weekend. I know at one stage I was about five songs ahead of him. I was upstairs really toiling away at it and I would hear Cyril thumping away in the lounge and every time he came up with something that I knew was absolutely right, I’d go dashing downstairs and say ‘don’t change a note of it, it’s perfect.’ (Clayton 1978)\(^4\)

*Treasure Island* opened at the Mermaid Theatre, London, on 17 December 1973 and ran until 2 February 1974 (Time and Tide 1973). It starred Bernard Miles as Long John Silver and Spike Milligan as Benn Gunn, which would have contributed to the show’s success. Another positive factor would have been the song-sheet provided so that the audience could join in the choruses. Some of the reviewers were, however, not totally convinced that adding music had enhanced the original show, but they did acknowledge that the audience would enjoy it, as evidenced in these reviews in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Financial Times*:

Cap’n Bernard Miles and his yo-ho-hoing shipmates have this year turned ‘Treasure Island’ at the Mermaid into a musical romp which embellishes R.L. Stevenson’s marvellous yarn with a dozen songs... No embellishment was perhaps needed. What the play loses in dramatic tension, however, it makes up for in hearty rumbustiousness. (Daily Telegraph 1973)

The music has affected Josephine Wilson’s production which...has acquired a decidedly pantomimish look... I must confess to liking my *Treasure Island* straight. I thought Hal Shaper and Cyril Ornadel’s songs held up the vital action and were not really a good substitute for the lost tension... There was no sign that any of the children present were anything but highly gratified.’ (Financial Times 1973)

The show was so successful that in 1974 Shaper and Ornadel were dual winners in the Ivor Novello Awards presentation of the Songwriters Guild of Great Britain. *Treasure Island* won

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\(^4\) In his autobiography, Ornadel remarks that all lyric writers have a tune in their heads when they are writing, but that it is rarely good enough to use. The exception to this was Shaper’s tune for the *Treasure Island* number ‘Cheese’, which Ornadel thought perfect for the lyrics, realising that he would not be able to compose anything better. They agreed that it would be sensible to incorporate it into the score (Ornadel 2007: 245).
the awards for the best theatrical production and the top published score (Rand Daily Mail 1974). In 1974 the original cast recording was released, and twenty years later re-released as a compact disc (CD: Ornadel & Shaper 1994).

Over the following ten years Treasure Island was performed all over England at Christmas time. In 1982 George Walker produced a video film version for cable television in America, starring Bernard Miles in his original role of Long John Silver. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Alexander Faris, who also orchestrated the score, recorded the music on the soundtrack (Ornadel 2007: 289). Encouraged by their success, Shaper and Ornadel decided to continue working together.

3.3 Great Expectations

In 1975 Lew Grade’s ATV television company was making a musical version of Great Expectations. At the last minute they decided that they did not want to use the score they had commissioned, and Shaper was asked to write new lyrics for the production. He declined, but this inspired him with the idea that it would make a very good stage musical (Ornadel 2007). Bernard Miles, who was currently starring in the second successful run of Treasure Island at the Mermaid Theatre, was very enthusiastic about the project (Rand Daily Mail 1974).

Shaper then went to see John Mills, who had played Pip in the 1946 David Lean film of the novel, and told him that he was going to write the part of Joe Gargery, the blacksmith, for him. Mills was charming, and promised to listen to the music when it was finished, but then forgot all about it (Ornadel 2007: 254).

In June 1975, the score of Great Expectations was completed. Bernard Miles then informed Shaper and Ornadel that he was too busy to even think of a production until December 1976. This was infuriating for them, as they had spent six months working on the score. Shaper then contacted John Mills, who remembered him only vaguely, but he promised to listen to the music.
before he travelled abroad for his next film. After hearing the first few songs, Mills got very excited and asked, ‘Where is my eleven o’clock song?’ He then explained that he meant the hit song that he would sing at the end of the show. Ornadel played him ‘At My Time of Life’ after which Mills proclaimed, ‘I’ll do it.’ Shaper and Ornadel were thrilled to have secured such a star for their cast (Ornadel 2007: 256).

*Great Expectations* opened at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford on Christmas Eve 1975, starring Moira Lister, John Mills and Lesley-Anne Down. A glowing review hailed the show as a ‘magnificent creation’:

There is no doubt about it, the musical version of *Great Expectations* is a magnificent theatrical creation. Hal Shaper and Trevor Preston have taken the panoramic vision of Dickens’s novel and, like juice from a grape, they have squeezed its essence into a compact dazzling form. The string of memorable songs with lyrics by Hal Shaper and music by Cyril Ornadel are neatly integrated into a plot which retains the basis of the original while casting away many of its complexities. (Unnamed newspaper 1975)

Although the review stated that *Great Expectations* would transfer to the West End after completing its run at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, this never happened (Ornadel 2007: 259). This must have been a huge disappointment to Shaper. The show did, however, move to the Theatre Royal in Brighton, and thereafter to the Richmond Theatre in Surrey (Ornadel e-mail, 2007).

Although the review quoted above is fulsome in its praise, Shaper and Ornadel were obviously not satisfied with certain aspects of the show. After the opening there were major cast changes, ten minutes were cut from the running time, some of the songs were re-scored and three were cut completely (Ornadel 2007: 257). The various problems in the production must have been resolved, and on 20th April, 1976, *Great Expectations* moved to the O’Keefe Centre in Toronto, Canada. Here the show also received a positive review (Toronto Sun 1976).

Shaper and Ornadel became the first artists to win the Ivor Novello Award for two successive years when they received it again for best musical for *Great Expectations* in 1975/76 (The

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5 Efforts to obtain the source of this review from Ornadel have been unsuccessful.

In spite of the enthusiastic reception, *Great Expectations* languished unproduced until it was revived at the Liverpool Playhouse in December 1989. Once again the reviews were glowing. *The Daily Post* asked 'Why the Dickens haven't they revived this musical before? It boasts a great story, colourful characters and a musical score that delightfully underscores the action' (Daily Post 1989) while according to the *Wirral Globe* the musical that had won the Ivor Novello Award for best musical in 1976 had maintained its appeal for the audience of 1989 (Wirral Globe 1989). The musical was also produced at the York Theatre in Sydney, Australia in 1992 (Pollack website).

It was to be another six years before *Great Expectations* was revived yet again, in 1998, this time in Arlington, USA, by the Interact Theatre Company. The company's Artistic Director, Catherine Flye, decided to stage the show, tracked down Ornadel in Israel and Shaper in South Africa, and flew them to Washington to help stage the show. A review in the local newspaper lavished praise on Flye's production and labelled the whole show 'a joy' (The Review 1998).

*The Washington Post* headlined 'Great Expectations: fulfilled!' and continued by reporting enthusiastically that 'this British Academy Award-winning musical has a book that punches in the original author's robust and dramatic novel', and mentioning that the 'score is particularly satisfying' (Washington Post 1998). Another positive review appeared in the weekly, *The Connection* (Connection 1998).

In February 1999, Shaper had negotiations with Rodney Phillips at The Baxter Theatre in Cape Town to mount a production of *Great Expectations*. The director was even settled as David Matheson, and the conductor as George Michie (Shaper to Phillips 1999a). On 5 March Shaper sent an enthusiastic letter to Phillips confirming dates and changes to the orchestral scoring (Shaper to Phillips 1999b), but on 12 March a third letter informed Phillips that 'our London management have decided to go ahead with this musical on a worldwide commercial basis and have advised us that they would prefer to invest in that direction' (Shaper to Phillips 1999c). Thus Cape Town never had the opportunity to experience this show, and it was not produced in London again either.
4 Geoff Morrow: Jingle Jangle

An interesting aspect of Shaper's character is that he kept detailed records not only of his successes, but also of his failures. In 1982 Shaper teamed up with Geoff Morrow to write a musical, *Jingle Jangle*, which opened at the Shaw Theatre in Euston Road, London, on 22 November 1982, starring Norman Wisdom (Evening Standard 1982). This project seems to have been a total disaster, as this review shows:

Even if judged purely as a sketch for a musical, *Jingle Jangle* has a long way to go before it should be allowed anywhere near the professional stage. Written by Geoff Morrow and Hal Shaper, a pair of highly respected tunesmiths, one can only say that it is a pity they are not booksmiths as well, for the plot puts one in mind of Hollywood 'B' movies of the forties or, even worse, of a prewar British picture conceived as a vehicle for somebody like Jack Buchanan. (The Stage 1982)

In his notebook, Shaper described his feelings:

*Jingle* has been a resounding public failure and a professional disaster. I should never have allowed the show to proceed without taking an interest in every aspect of its production...the result was under-rehearsal to the point of stupidity – it was a night of such haunting horror that I am still embarrassed by it, weeks later – I feel quite awful about it all. I feel I wrote such a good lyric score with Geoff – we were so close even with all the mistakes – why even seek to blame anyone – it was simply a series of continuing mistakes and miscalculations that are now part of history – but I feel empty of chances – I wonder how or if I could ever get another musical going (or who with) after this one. (Shaper 1982)

5 David Reeves: Cyrano

Although failures such as *Jingle Jangle* did not deter Shaper from writing musicals, bad luck, frustration and breech of trust continued to plague him.

In November 1993, Shaper met with David Reeves, an Australian composer, for discussions to decide if Reeves's score for a musical *Cyrano* – based on the Cyrano de Bergerac story – was ‘possible’ – as Shaper wrote in his diary. Shaper took a month to absorb Reeves's existing score and then committed himself to eight months of non-stop work to complete the lyrics for the show. Working with Reeves appears to have been a nightmare for Shaper as this diary entry shows:
I could cheerfully murder Reeves. I compose the theme to 'Womans Work' – play it in bass C minor below middle C to give it a sense of dark drama and despair – and he goes and records it above middle C with a spinet! NEVER AGAIN. (Diary, 29 August 1994)

Shaper and Ornadel had written a children's musical, also based on 'Cyrano de Bergerac', in 1990 (Ornadel 2007, 314). Although four of its songs have the same titles as the songs in the later production, the lyrics Shaper created for Reeves were all new. (Ornadel e-mail, 2008).

On 13 September 1994, Shaper met with David Matheson, the prospective producer, and Alistair Cockburn, the Assistant General Director of the Cape Performing Arts Board, and it was decided to present three concert versions of Cyrano in the Nico Malan Opera House between 20 and 25 March 1995, with an option to stage a first production in the theatre for five weeks from 14 August to 16 September (Diary, 13 & 16 September 1994). On 21 September Shaper was delighted to hear officially that the Cyrano concerts would be staged in Cape Town, with a symphony orchestra, on 16, 17 and 18 March 1995, with a negotiated option for a first full production in early 1996 (Diary, 21 September 1994).

On 2 October, Shaper left for Brisbane for the concert versions of Cyrano. To Shaper's distress, Reeves had used his original score, which contained many of the words and lines that Shaper had discarded. Shaper felt that this lessened what he had written and recorded. In spite of Shaper's fears, the opening on 11 October went better than expected or hoped for and Shaper described it as 'not a disgrace' (Diary, 2–3 October 1994).

Shaper pressed ahead with the plans to perform Cyrano in Cape Town, in spite of continuous problems working with Reeves, whom he regarded as the most unpleasant composer he had ever worked with (Diary, 13 November 1994). Reeves started insisting on keeping his own lyrics, as he preferred them to Shaper's. This resulted in a bitter clash between the two men, with Shaper telling Reeves that if he persisted in insisting on being the lyricist, Shaper would call off the Cape Town concerts (Diary, 23 January 1995). When Alistair Cockburn realised the extent of the friction between Shaper and Reeves, the concerts were all cancelled. All that remains of this collaboration is the CD Cyrano the Musical. (CD: Prestige Records 1994).

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6 Now Artscape.
After all the work and emotional energy that Shaper spent on this show, he must have been devastated: "The good ship "Cyrano-Reeves" was fuelled by ego, driven by ego and sunk by ego. It was always doomed by time and distance and subject matter and it is a first for me. The first show I have ever been involved with that never reached the stage. In this case it never reached completion...thus it ends with a whimper...not even a bang’ (Diary, 23 January 1995).

6 Conclusion

None of Shaper’s musicals developed a momentum of their own in the manner of Lionel Bart’s Oliver. This would have been Shaper’s dearest wish, and he felt that he had failed to fulfil his greatest ambitions for theatrical recognition. Shaper specifically recounted this disappointment in his memoirs:

When Great Expectations for all its success on tour in the U.K. and Canada, failed to make the West End, the effects on me were inwardly traumatic. We had everything going for us; brilliant Johnny Mills, a star cast with Moira Lister and Lesley-Anne Down, recordings by Bing Crosby of My Time of Life and Children, and an Ivor Novello award for the best theatre score of 1975–1976, and yet for all that was right with the musical, the money was never seen on the stage where it counted; in the sets and orchestra to give it the gloss that this particular musical needed, and when Canada was over, so was the show. Doubt gnawed at my confidence endlessly. I asked myself over and over how much of it was due to me.

Fail with a play and life goes on. Fail with a musical and life still goes on, but in a more public way. The costs are trumpeted around the industry in glee and the composers and the authors are told to get themselves to the nearest leper colony, as quickly as possible, and beg admission. (Shaper n.d. (f))

It is worth noting that even Lloyd Webber and Rice had attracted negative criticism from the British press for Jesus Christ Superstar, although the album had sold so well in America that it had become one of the best selling albums of all time. Before the opening of Evita Lloyd Webber doubted that they would be fairly judged:

There’s no doubt about it, the English musical establishment gives absolutely no encouragement to the musical. Indeed, they seem to display a positive resentment toward any new writer who emerges in the musical theatre... For example, take
the shit that was poured on Lionel Bart when he wrote *Oliver* – the press went out of their way to suggest that all the tunes were pinched. And when it turned out a huge commercial success, they then attacked Bart personally. Every so often an English musical talent comes along which is definitely capable of going on and being developed – but this country doesn’t have a tradition of musical theatre. So it’s quite hard to make any progress here: and it’s not always possible to uproot oneself and go off to America where they respect the musical. When a new musical opens here, you never see in the press any encouragement for the composer. It’s usually ‘Oh Lord, another Disastrous British Musical’. (Staveacre 1980: 183–184)

As has already been mentioned, Shaper’s musical output suggests that he was stuck in the rather dated Rodgers and Hammerstein mould, and that he kept trying to emulate Lionel Bart’s success in *Oliver* (1960) – instead of embracing the freer, more modern pop and rock musicals such as Galt MacDermot’s *Hair* (1967) and Lloyd Webber’s *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* (1968), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971), *Evita* (1978) and *Cats* (1980) (Larkin 1999). The musicians he chose to work with also composed in the traditional style, and, apart from Orndel, were not the most musically creative or gifted. This would naturally affect the longevity of the work. Undoubtedly, Shaper was working in a very challenging and competitive industry, and his tenacity, enthusiasm and passion for this art form and for the theatre contributed enormously to the considerable success he achieved at the time.

An amusing story that Shaper enjoyed relating was when ‘a couple of youngsters tried to persuade [him] to employ them. [He] listened very carefully and threw them out.’ Their names were Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. Years later, Shaper bumped into Lloyd Webber, who immediately asked him whether he had decided yet about their jobs. Shaper humorously retorted that he was still thinking about it! (Shaper 2000).

In 2002 Shaper submitted the never-performed *The Prince and the Pauper* to obtain his Master of Arts degree in creative writing from the University of Cape Town (Shaper 2002a). The last musical that Shaper ever worked on was one he planned to write on the life of Nelson Mandela (Diary, 3 February 2002). Some songs were written for this project, but a production did not materialise.

It is possible that Shaper felt frustrated by the superficiality and artistic limitations of musicals, and longed to work on truly great musical compositions such as the Puccini opera,
La Bohème. His South African adaptation of this opera, *La Bohème: Noir*, was an important part of Shaper's work in his latter years and consumed much of his time and energy. Despite its initial success, it was to prove totally draining and frustrating to him. A detailed description of this project is included in the following chapter.
Chapter 5

Shaper’s contribution to post-apartheid South Africa

1 Introduction

After the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, Shaper decided to return to South Africa in 1992 (Shaper n.d. (a)). Upon his return he involved himself in the new political and artistic life of the country, making some very memorable contributions to its development and history. Among the more light-hearted was a song written about Jonty Rhodes, in Afrikaans, which featured on the humourous cricket compact disc *The Bowled and the Beautiful* released by EMI in 1999 (CD: EMI 1999).

2 Enoch Sontonga

One songwriter who captured Shaper's imagination was the composer of the new South African national anthem, Enoch Sontonga (c.1873–1905). This hymn, *Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrica* was not only loved and sung throughout South Africa, but had also attained popularity in several other African countries and is also the national anthem of Tanzania and Zambia (Shaper & Walker 1996; Uechwe 1996).

According to an article in *Drum* magazine, it was the sight of the 1995 Springbok rugby team clearly unable to sing the words of the new national anthem that inspired Shaper to find out more about its virtually forgotten composer (Drum 1995). Shaper organised with Tusk Music in Johannesburg to print a commemorative edition of the song for the occasion of Nelson Mandela’s presidential inauguration, with simple phonetics and tonic solfa, as well as a history of the music – to educate the South African public about their new national anthem. CNA, the leading newsagent in South Africa, placed a large order for the Inauguration Day edition, which was sold throughout the country (The Argus 1994a). Shaper concluded his history of *Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrica* by saying that it was a sad indictment of South Africa’s past

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1 Although all reference sources list Sontonga’s birth date as ‘unknown’ it can be deduced from the fact that his age of death is recorded as 32 years on the Death Register of the Braamfontein Cemetery of April, 1905. His death notice in the local African newspaper, however, cited his age as 33 (Imvo Zabantsundu 1905).
that so little was known about Sontonga’s life. ‘The date and place of his birth remain unknown. It is a mystery where or when or how he died or even where he is buried. At that place we owe him a mark of national respect’ (Shaper 1994).

It is remarkable that Shaper was able to help solve this mystery. By 1994 it had been established that Sontonga might have been buried in the Braamfontein cemetery, but attempts to locate the grave were unsuccessful as sources recording the year of his death gave it as ranging from 1897 to 1904.²

It was only when Shaper prompted the officials to look at the burial records of 1905, and for an entry under ‘Enoch’ instead of ‘Sontonga’, that the grave was located, and it was established that Sontonga had died on 18 April 1905³ (The Star 1996). This entry was confirmed as indeed being Enoch Sontonga when Genevieve Walker of the National of Monuments Council realised that there might have been a report of Sontonga’s death in the local black newspapers. Searching through the archives, she found the following obituary:

In Johannesburg on 18 April, 1905, Enoch M. Sontonga died. He was not ill. He usually had abdominal problems. He just indicated that he was dying, and on a certain Sunday he called his wife and asked to take a photo of her. She did not agree because she was also suffering from toothache on that day. This young man was the choirmaster in Rev. J. Mzimba’s church in Johannesburg location. He was a photographer and also a lay preacher. He leaves a wife and one child. He was born in Uitenhage, and was 33 years old. (Imvo Zabantsundu 1905)

The records at the Braamfontein Cemetery showed that Sontonga was buried in grave number 4885 in the ‘Christian native’ section (The Argus 1994b).

Enoch Sontonga was a prolific composer. He collected the songs that he wrote for his pupils into an exercise book and hoped to get them published. This book was constantly borrowed by friends and colleagues, even after his death. Unfortunately, it has subsequently been lost.

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² The information differs from source to source: *Who’s Who in African Literature* (Jahn, Schild & Almut 1972: 367) gives the date as 1904. This information is also found in the supplement to *The Bantu Composers of Southern Africa*, (Huskiesson 1983: 49) and *The African Who’s Who* (Skota 1965: 78). An earlier date of 1897 is recorded in *Makers of Modern Africa* (Uwechue 1996: 650). The *South African Music Encyclopedia* (Malan 1986: vol. 4, 245) devotes a mere ten lines to Sontonga, and omits any reference to his birth or death dates. It is an indication of the extent of this misinformation that, even in later publications such as *A Concise Dictionary of South African Biography* (Joyce 1999: 249), the date of Sontonga’s death has not been corrected: Sontonga’s birth date is said to be ‘unknown’ and his death is recorded as ‘c. 1902’.

³ Sontonga had been buried on 19 April 1905, under the name ‘Enoch Kaffir’.
It is sad that the only composition of Sontonga’s that we are left with is the beautiful *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrica* (Shaper 1996).

To honour Sontonga’s memory, the South African government decided to declare the grave a national monument (The Argus 1996b). On Heritage Day, 24 September, 1996, at a ceremony – attended, among others, by the then President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, Bishop Desmond Tutu and the Premier of Gauteng, Tokyo Sexwale – a memorial to Enoch Sontonga was unveiled at Braamfontein Cemetery. Shaper was an active participant in this occasion, not only writing the story of Sontonga’s life – delivered as a performance piece by Dr John Kani – but also being asked to contribute to President Mandela’s memorable speech:

But what a hymn it is...this simple appeal to the human heart. It is not a clarion call to arms. It is not an incitement to man the barricades or a scream for revenge. It is not an appeal to summon up the blood and to unleash the dogs of war. It is not one of the tunes of glory that have been the background music of countless deaths in foreign fields. It was always a quiet thing.

Of all the national anthems, *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrica* is unique in its humility. It is a simple heartfelt prayer that reads and sings...‘God bless Africa’.

It speaks quietly, only of thanks and blessings for its people, its teachers and the land we live in. It is a prayer for crops and rain...for harvest and health...and peace for all, within the realm of God’s good grace.

This peaceful message is the torch that has lit our way. This is the torch that even as we fall, we hand on, one to the other, to the end of time... God Bless Africa, God bless our land...God bless our people...God give us the peace to enjoy the abundance of this most beautiful and bounteous of lands.

This is Enoch Sontonga’s gift to us...a heroic message of calm, written in the eye of a storm...and it is in remembrance of this legacy of love and joy that we are gathered here today. You remind us with every breath that we take that we have the nation you prayed for...a nation that we hope to make better...a nation growing in peace and with God’s blessing. (Shaper & Walker 1996)
When Shaper was introduced to Mandela, the President graciously smiled and said, ‘Mr. Shaper, welcome home.’ Shaper recalled that it was a wonderful moment (Shaper 2002b).

Shaper also wrote these beautiful words, engraved as part of Sontonga’s epitaph:

A spark of God’s own light, he died too young
Wept for then, honoured now
And forever in the voices of this nation, sung.4

This event meant a great deal to Shaper, as he described in his diary:

Finally, the cherry on the cake for me was to hear President Mandela deliver the words I wrote. He read with enormous sincerity and power... How many lyricists can say they wrote for Nelson Mandela! I doubt if one ever did – Sinatra, Crosby, Streisand and even Presley are one thing – but to hear my words coming through Nelson Mandela was quite something else... My little poetic epitaph will be there as long as time and the politics of the future, allow – and the President standing in front of it, was a great moment... Nothing I’ve done before in theatre or music compared to the ‘high’ of this day. (Diary, 24 September 1996)

The headline quote for the Cape Argus report on Heritage Day used the words that Shaper had written: Mandela praises ‘torch that lit our way’ (Cape Argus 1996). The truth of this statement is realised only when one reads reports such as the following from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

A former security policeman told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission yesterday how he and others shocked two activists to death, while a third, awaiting his own death, sang Nkosi Sikele i’Africa. (Cape Times 1996)

Shaper’s contribution to the Enoch Sontonga story has not been forgotten; in the keynote address delivered on 18 April 2005 by the Minister of Arts and Culture, Dr Pallo Jordan, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Sontonga’s death, it was mentioned that it was Shaper’s prompting of the officials that had resulted in the location of Sontonga’s burial records (Dept of Arts and Culture website).

4 It is shocking to note that this plaque, unveiled by President Mandela, was stolen in February 1998 (The Star 1998). I presume that it must have been replaced, but have had no reply from the Enoch Sontonga Foundation, despite several attempts to contact them.
In a subsequent radio interview, Shaper said that it was the intensive research into the life of Sontonga that opened up his understanding of an unknown or neglected intellectual African past. He said that it was the dawning of this insight that made possible his creation of La Bohème: Noir, as that forgotten past gave him ‘a history, an attitude, a language and an appreciation of the whole unwritten century, which culminated in the June 16th uprising in 1976 which freed our country and its people’ (Thomas 2000).

3 La Bohème: Noir

The first time Shaper mentioned the idea of a ‘black South African’ version of the Puccini opera La Bohème was a diary entry of 2 October 1995:

I at last have a clear vision for a new Bohème – La Bohème Noir (the black Bohème) – Soweto instead of Paris, an entire black company and lyrics that reflect the times and regime – and the desperate poverty. It sits well with me and now I can proceed to study. Do it HERE. The opening – a squat in Jo’burg. Act II – a shebeen and rescored with the underlying township feel. (Diary, 2 October 1995)

The stimulus for this idea occurred when Shaper saw Willem Vogel’s SABC TV Debut programme which had featured Sibongile Mngoma singing an aria from La Bohème. As it was the hundredth anniversary of the first performance the following year, the realisation that there were black singers capable of performing the lead roles suggested to Shaper that a South African adaptation would be a very relevant artistic statement in the new political climate:

There is a whole new history to be written about our black and coloured artists, poets, songwriters, authors, newspapermen and intellectuals, whose long existence is scarcely suspected by most of our ‘new’ South Africans. These are the people who inhabit my Bohème – articulate, sharp, deep and human – and suppressed and oppressed for far longer than just the apartheid years. (Parker 1997: ii–vii)

This was to be the start of a long and emotionally draining project for Shaper. Even in the early stages of working on it he described himself as ‘on the mountain one day – a few good lines and by inches – we shall see what we shall see’ (Diary, 5 October 1995). He realised that he was going to need a lot of political help with the project, especially as, having decided to set the opera in Soweto in 1976, he hoped to include Bishop Tutu as the then Dean of
Johannesburg in Act II (Diary, 14 November 1995). The opera would open in an attic in Johannesburg on the evening of Republic Day, 31 May, 1976, two weeks before the students uprising on 16 June and the brutal repression that followed. Rudolph(o) and Marcel(lo) are in an attic as the Group Areas Act made it illegal for black people to live in ‘white areas’ (Shaper 1997a: 3). The gaiety of café life of Paris is mirrored in the social life of the shebeens in Soweto, where people would drink, sing and try to forget about the difficulties of their daily lives (Shaper 1997b).

The lyrics, although in English, were to depict the authentic language and issues of the day. This was to require much research, and input from the cast, many of whom had personal links with that era (Parker 1997: vi). It is noteworthy that Shaper, after watching the first rehearsal, conceded that the opera should have been sung in Xhosa (Diary, 26 August, 1996). In a later newspaper article, Fiona Chisholm encapsulated the essence of Shaper’s Act I vision, saying that he had reset Bohème from the Revolution against Napoleon in 1838 to the start of the revolution in South Africa, beginning on Republic Day in 1976. The four ‘Bohemians’ are now a painter, poet, scholar and musician living an uncertain life in Soweto. Mimi, the heroine, is a seamstress suffering from TB. The original love story between Mimi and Rudolph(o) is maintained (Cape Times 1996a). In his diary Shaper described writing the arias:

A good start – I laboured overnight on the slopes of the famous aria ‘your tiny hand’ etc. and today have made that pitch after several uncomfortable hours – now hopefully an easier climb – except it is never easy... I am at a cross-road of challenge... three famous arias back to back – an opportunity to write something wonderful. (Diary, 15 November 1995)

By the 23rd of November Shaper had completed the first draft of Act I. He had written to Angelo Gobbato⁵, Peter Cazalet⁶ and Janice Honeyman⁷, relating his idea, but had had no response to his letters and was beginning to wonder if the endeavour was worthwhile. Nevertheless, he persisted with the effort, working slowly through Act II which he resignedly

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⁵ Opera Director of the Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB).
⁶ Head of Design at CAPAB.
⁷ Janice Honeyman is a very influential South African theatre director who has also successfully produced opera, for example, The Turk in Italy, for CAPAB, in 1992.
resolved to complete and then shelve, as he seemed to be unable to get any support for *La Bohème: Noir*.

The reactions of two people, Michael Williams, then an Opera Director at CAPAB, who hailed Shaper’s manuscript as wonderful and promised to direct the piece⁸, and Bishop Tutu, who warmly consented to being portrayed in the opera ‘as long as I don’t do any singing’ re-ignited Shaper’s belief in his vision (Diary, 21 December 1995). In his original director’s notes, Williams described how, when Shaper approached him with his idea, he was struck by the good sense of the project and the connections that Shaper had made between Bohemian Paris and the revolutionary Johannesburg of the ’seventies. Williams also felt that the idea would provide perfect material for the singers who had emerged from the CAPAB Choral Training Programme⁹, stretching them vocally and adding a new dimension to their interpretation of opera (Williams 1996).

One of the first logistical problems that Shaper had to work on was that of climate. *La Bohème* opens on a freezing Christmas Eve and the libretto makes frequent references to the bitter cold, but Christmas in South Africa is mid-summer. Shaper solved this problem by setting the opening scene on the eve of 31 May Republic Day¹⁰ holiday, and progressing to the aftermath of 16 June 1976, the day of the Soweto schoolchildren’s uprising which took place during a particularly severe winter¹¹. Michael Williams later described this as a clean idea that worked very well, the lynchpin concept around which Shaper was able to transpose the whole opera to the freezing Transvaal Highveld (Williams interview, 2007).

It was as a result of Michael Williams’s enthusiastic lobbying that Gobbato assented to meet with Shaper to discuss the possibility of a production, and agreed to support it if the money was raised, which Shaper considered a ‘considerable step forward’ (Diary, 23 January 1996).

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⁸ Michael Williams was very involved in writing and staging African operas for the local community, such as *The Milkbird*, *The Seven-headed Snake*, *Child of the Moon* and *The Orphans of Qumbu*, so this project would have inspired him (Beukes 1997).

⁹ A programme, started in 1994, to provide training for singers from the (‘black’) townships.

¹⁰ On 31 May 1961, South Africa became a Republic under Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd. This day had since then been celebrated as a public holiday.

¹¹ In a footnote in the opera score Shaper quotes a line from a poem by Mbulelo V. Mzamane, *The Children of Soweto*, which reads ‘The winter chill cut mercilessly through the skin’ (Shaper 1997a).
On 13 February 1996 Shaper completed his first draft. The emotional roller-coaster ride that La Bohème: Noir was to become for Shaper, and the conflict that developed between him and Gobbato, started right at the beginning of the project. Gobbato was unhappy with the following newspaper report:

Cape Town composer and librettist Hal Shaper has written a new opera based on La Bohème, called La Bohème: Noir. Set in Johannesburg and Soweto during the stormy days of the children's uprising in 1976, La Bohème: Noir has aroused huge international interest... The director of the stage production, Michael Williams, is working with Angelo Gobbato of Capab on casting and funding for the work and says he is confident that the 'Black Bohème' will develop into an opera of vital importance to the whole South African community. (The Argus 1996a)

The Argus article also featured a photograph of Shaper together with Bishop Tutu explaining how he would be portrayed in Act II. Gobbato's reaction puzzled Shaper as it seemed to him that this was a sure indication of Gobbato's real dislike of the project (Diary, 29 February 1996). Yet, on 15 March Alistair Cockburn told Shaper that Gobbato was very keen to do La Bohème: Noir, and then informed Shaper of performance dates in September and further performances in Kimberley, East London and Grahamstown (Diary, 15 March 1996).

Shaper called this vacillation 'the La Bohème: Noir will it? won't it? mating dance' (Diary, 18 March 1996). Aviva Pelham, the well-known South African soprano who had performed Musetta several times, told Shaper that she loved La Bohème: Noir and that what he was doing might well be a masterpiece (Diary, 26 March 1996). It was these small moments of encouragement that spurred Shaper on to fulfil his vision. Even when he recorded that Gobbato seemed, for the first time, enthusiastic about the piece, and said that they had the cast, the theatre, the dates, the tour and that all that was still needed was the CAPAB Board's approval, George Loopuyt\(^\text{12}\) failed to turn up for the meeting and nothing could be finalised (Diary, 28 March 1996).

On 2 May Shaper was informed that the Board had approved the funding, but Ean Smit\(^\text{13}\) felt that it would not be possible to prepare the singers in time for a production that year. Gobbato

\(^{12}\) General Director of CAPAB.

\(^{13}\) Head coach of Cape Town Opera.
then decided to postpone the opera, but guaranteed that the production would be mounted (Diary, 2 May 1996). This decision came as a relief to Shaper as he realised that the libretto had many shortcomings. He was so dissatisfied with his work that he decided to rewrite the entire piece:

My draft text is full of amateur errors and quite alarmingly off the notes. It is immensely more detailed than I ever imagined and I’m unhappy with much of it. In English it is clumsy and there are very real (and many) bumps in the flow. English is not the language of Italian Opera which flows like velvet, it is crude and ill-equipped to handle liquid sounds. I don’t think I have ever had doubts as grave as these – the work requires a precision and a skill that may well be beyond me. In truth, only my ignorance of operatic demands made me think that I had the patience and gifts to do this kind of surgical work. I have moments of utter despair, and tonight, many, many doubts and concerns. I think I have publicly shot myself in the foot – it’s all simply too hard – my script is riddled with idiocies and errors of scansion. Plainly no-one who understands the opera actually read it against the score. If they had, they would rightly throw it out and send me packing. I must go back to patient, steady climbing…relax and concentrate. (Diary, 9 May 1996)

What Shaper perceived as opposition to his project merely spurred his determination to succeed. R200 000 was needed to ensure that the production could be staged. This seemed to be virtually impossible, as it was feared that all artistic companies would be disbanded in the new South African political climate. Then Brian Williams, provincial director of the Department of Labour in the Western Cape, persuaded Labour Minister Tito Mboweni and his director general Sipho Pityana to release the necessary funding. This was completely unexpected as it was the first time that a government department not directly involved in arts and culture had recognised artists as workers needing formal employment (Mail & Guardian 1997; Cape Times 1997a). The project was further boosted when Michael Williams, who had been appointed head of Commercial Arts Development at CAPAB, informed Shaper that they were going to perform Act I during an open day at the small 600-seater theatre as part of the ‘demystification of the arts’ (Diary, 19 July 1996). This would be a ‘test run’ and would include a full orchestra with George Michie conducting and Williams as director (Cape Times 1996a). Shaper was thrilled at this opportunity. Williams suggested that some of the character’s names be changed, which Shaper agreed to (Diary, 29 July 1996).
On 26 August, after witnessing the first rehearsal with Michael Williams, Shaper wrote enthusiastically that all his doubts had disappeared and that he was sure that the piece would work, and he was grateful and delighted to have succeeded in getting the work performed (Diary, 26 August 1996).

These first performances resulted in more positive press coverage in the Cape Times, which quoted Shaper as saying ‘I've had calls, letters and faxes. It’s clear we must push on and do a full-scale version of it. The company has risen brilliantly to the material. None of them have ever done a major scale opera before and they have been unbelievable’ (Cape Times 1996a).

One of these letters came from a Cdr. Michael J. Oldham:

'I would like to comment on the above work, as a Director of Music with considerable experience in most types of classical and light music. Being originally from England I was exposed to the best of the world’s music and musicians as a music student, qualifying at London University. I have performed as an orchestral player under many international conductors and have myself conducted extensively, including representing South Africa at the International Vienna Music Festival. I have studied the La Bohème: Noir... my professional opinion is that this is both a unique and an outstanding work. The adaptation is of the highest quality and is extremely relevant to South Africa. To have used such a beautiful masterpiece of the classical repertoire, which has nevertheless been inaccessible to many South Africans, and to have given it such clarity and power in the local context is a rare achievement. The performers respond magnificently and illustrate that there is not a struggle between euro-centric and the African traditions in art. There is simply an evolving and emerging, among honest artists, of new inspiration and upliftment which is of great benefit to performers and listeners. The world needs this, and our country needs this, urgently... Sufficient financial backing to ensure a top quality production of La Bohème: Noir will, I am convinced, result in the creating of something that has never been experienced in South Africa, namely a musical 'happening' that will appeal to the vast majority because of its relevance and freshness.' (Oldham to Shaper, 1996)

Another letter came from Sheldon Harnick, the lyricist of Fiddler on the Roof, who described an early draft as ‘lucid, intelligent, singable,actable, marvellously witty and above all, natural. No ‘oparese’ just...flowing and glorious’ (Parker 1997 vi).
In her annual charity event, ‘Night of 100 Stars’, Adele Searle\textsuperscript{14} included extracts from \textit{La Bohème: Noir}, which resulted in John Kani and Janet Suzman expressing an interest in staging the opera for the opening of the New Market Theatre (Diary 17 November 1996). This unfortunately did not materialise due to the unsuitability of that theatre for an orchestra, and the singers being already contracted for the dates needed. An interest was expressed to resuscitate the South African musical \textit{King Kong} instead, with Shaper’s collaboration (Diary, 30 November 1996), but nothing came of this.

Shaper headed his diary for 1997 as ‘the Year of the Noir’ and wrote that it was a wonder that anything was ever achieved, as the struggle was not just with the work but with the hundred ‘ifs’ and ‘whos’ that surrounded every project – ‘politics and interests, bureaucrats and bumbling, producers and their assorted liars and thieves’ (Diary, 12 March 1997). According to Shaper, Brian Williams was being subjected to threats and political pressure because of his backing for the project, and at times it seemed as if the promised funding was not going to materialise – much to Shaper’s frustration and despair (Diary, 14 March 1997). The date of the planned opening night performance was 17 December, with five performances scheduled, and the possibility of another two. Jill Richie, CAPAB’s Fund Development Director, then arranged for the opening night to be in aid of the Arts and Culture Trust, the head of which was President Nelson Mandela. Shaper was thrilled, as at last the opera would be assured of professional attention at the highest South African level. He wrote that ‘the weight of years of struggling dropped away… what a break’ (Diary, 14 May 1997).

By 19 August Shaper reported that the rehearsal score had been finalised and that Sibongile Ngomo was going to sing Mimi. Plans were suggested to take the production to the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg, and Michael Williams had expressed his satisfaction with the set and costume designs by Michael Mitchell (Diary, 19 August 1997). The conductor, Willie Walters, suggested some changes to the libretto, and after initially reacting angrily to this, Shaper found them helpful and intelligent (Diary 14 November 1997). The rehearsals were not problem-free, and at one point Michael Williams commented that they had ‘a tenor who can’t and a soprano who won’t’ (SABC 1999). After seeing a rehearsal, Shaper concluded that ‘the set wobbles and so do my spirits, the credit in the foyer is flatteringly huge, but there is no doubt who will be blamed for this fiasco unless the sheer power of the music saves us’

\textsuperscript{14} An influential Cape Town socialite and anti-drug activist.
(Diary 2 December 1997). Yet the very next day he wrote that he had changed his mind after hearing everyone in Act III, and that all might be very well on the night (Diary 3 December 1997).

La Bohème: Noir attracted considerable local and international press interest, even featuring on the cover of the November/December edition of the influential British-published magazine Opera Now. The accompanying article by Cape Town journalist Heather Parker was detailed in explaining how Shaper came to write the adaptation and the relevance of this production in the new South Africa:

As a medium, opera is under threat in many places in the world. In South Africa the financial difficulties are exacerbated by ideological issues: the apartheid regime’s subsidy of opera, along with ballet and symphony orchestras, has tainted them as far as the current government is concerned. They are widely seen as representative of the values of the past regime... To overcome widespread public and official antipathy, opera had to break down the preconceptions built up during the apartheid era and give the country’s citizens a new perception of opera as accessible and relevant. La Bohème: Noir which, like Porgy and Bess, has an all-black cast built into the structure, sets out to do just that. (Parker 1997: ii–vii)

The extent to which Shaper and Williams succeeded in creating this new perception of opera, and their detailed portrayal of the realities of life in apartheid South Africa is poignantly described by Fiona Chisholm:

Certainly after watching a rehearsal on Tuesday of the final moments of Act IV, I can predict there will not be a dry eye when Mimi dies. Not on a bed, as is traditional, but on a simple mattress on the floor of a Soweto brick-and-corrugated-iron structure, where Mimi’s frail frame is covered with one of those familiar blue and white blankets that are beloved by women for carrying their babies on their backs. Frankly it is goose-pimply stuff. Michael Mitchell’s set of Soweto on the eve of the 1976 riots has an operatic scale about it, yet it is full of the familiar detail of the furniture and domestic equipment that can be found in a humble black home. The large tin bath, the upturned beer crate used as a table, the
armchair with unravelling upholstery; and even a brazier, a proper one that works and is used instead of the stove around which the four Bohemian students, in conventional productions, huddle for warmth in their chilly attic in Paris on Christmas Eve... Another surprise is that the famous Café Momus has been discarded in favour of a shebeen called the Café Mama, and when Musetta makes her flamboyant entrance it is on the arm of a big black Sugar Daddy who is a liquor merchant. (Cape Times 1997b)

In an interview with Die Burger, Michael Williams explained that, although most of the singers in La Bohème: Noir lived in squatter camps, and opera as such would not improve their quality of life, it did enrich their outlook on life. The singers were proud that they had sung in one of the world's most difficult operas, and their enhanced self image could change their lives (Die Burger 1997a\textsuperscript{15}).

This Cape Times article also detailed the overseas interest being shown in the production from the Canberra Festival and the Budapest Opera House (Cape Times 1997b).

La Bohème: Noir opened on the 17 December 1997 with a letter of good wishes from President Mandela in the programme and many influential South Africans, including Bishop Desmond Tutu, in the audience. The performance did not disappoint the critics, and it was hailed as 'Magnificent Bohème Noir' by Carl Fourie, in the Cape Argus:

Puccini's opera ideal was to represent everyday people in everyday situations, but with unexpected circumstances thrown upon them. Hal Shaper's adaptation of the original libretto to Puccini's music is in line with this perception, and it works admirably... I approached Michael William's production with scepticism but left uplifted and delighted. This adaptation breathed new life into this warhorse of an opera for me. It made it relevant. The hallmark was one of poignant reality. (Cape Argus 1997)

Deon Irish credited the opera with making the Bohemians more familiar as citizens of our own experience, but did not think that a reworking of the libretto and setting warranted being

\textsuperscript{15} Translation: D Mertens.
labelled a world première (Cape Times 1997c). The Afrikaans newspaper Die Burger also published a mostly very positive review, saying that Hal Shaper’s transferring of the action to Soweto stripped the original story of all sentimentality and highlighted a piece of township life that too many people in South Africa had ignored as it made them uncomfortable. Johan Stemmet concluded by stating that La Bohème: Noir was an interesting experiment that showed a direction that could be followed: opera became real and was not simply a museum piece (Die Burger 1997b).

Bishop Tutu sent an enthusiastic letter of congratulations to Shaper: ‘My warmest congratulations on the realisation of a dream. It was many moons ago, at Christmas, that you called upon me at Bishops court and spoke of La Bohème: Noir. Since then there must have been innumerable stumbling blocks set in the path of seeing this marvellous South African setting reach performance. Thank you for your perseverance and commitment to make it happen’ (Tutu to Shaper, 1997).

In another letter, thanking Jill Richie for the tickets, Bishop Tutu wrote: ‘I am proud of what South Africans can do... Last night was a celebration of many talents that are being enthusiastically brought together and developed to enrich us all. Please convey my good wishes to the cast and everyone involved with this production. These are the things we have been hoping for and it is exciting and invigorating to see them happening’ (Tutu to Richie, 1997).

In an interview with the author, Michael Williams remarked that the most positive aspect of the concept was an affirmation of the black cultural life in South Africa – the story of the struggle of the 1960s had found a new medium, which was opera. It brought about a greater relevance for the art form that enabled people to look at Bohème from a South African point of view. The artists, trying to eke out a living for themselves during the apartheid era, had suddenly found a new voice, a new meaning, and expressed themselves in this opera. Williams pointed out that Shaper had only hinted at Mimi’s dying of TB, with the implication that she was dying of AIDS as well, but his emphasis was on her being a struggle victim, thus making a strong political point. Williams said that he himself had tried to move away from strong political sloganeering and messaging in the piece, but a political statement was also made in Act III: in the original, the people come into the city with produce from the country, but in this production they come into the city with their passes, to allow them to work in the area. Thus the policemen were white who inspected these ‘dompasses’. Another political
message was conveyed by the use of a huge beer advert in the background that suggested the rise of commercialism and capitalism (Williams interview, 2007).

Williams felt that it was most important that the love story was retained as the main focus of the piece. Shaper had wanted to introduce Casspurs and dogs, but Williams said that he had insisted that it was not a political story, but a tale of love and friendship with a tragic ending. He believed that the work could only take a certain amount of politicising before it was hijacked and its essence lost (Williams interview, 2007). The same opinion was expressed by Julius Eichbaum, writing in *Scenaria* (Eichbaum 1998).

*La Bohème: Noir* opened at the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg on the 12 March 1998, and once again the critics were enthusiastic in their response, with *The Star* headline reading ‘Doing Puccini Proud’ and stating that it was an exciting and original production, and that despite the ‘shrill fashionable publicity it is in fact art, made accessible’ (Star 1998). Jill de Villiers of *The Citizen* wrote:

> Even the great traditionalists will respond positively to this gorgeous *Bohème*... through this new adaptation in English, suddenly every word becomes understandable and the arias once sat through in the past with only a vague conception of what was really transpiring, get a new clarity... This production is proof that the so-called Eurocentric arts are not an anathema to our African souls and artistic impulses. I have seen many *Bohèmes* over the years... but never one so timeless and universal... all so reflective of human existence... transcending time, place, race... and containing the power and essence of love, poverty, friendship, jealousy and political unrest... despite having experienced the final act so often, it brought tears to my eyes... it is soaring and stunning. (*The Citizen* 1998)

The *Business Day* review also demonstrated just how successful Shaper had been in making this opera innovative and relevant in the new South African political climate and stated:

> Anyone apprehensive about this relocation from Paris 1851 to Soweto 1976 had their fears allayed within minutes of the curtain rising... its details of time and place are transformed easily to highlight inherent sub-texts and new historical and political situations as have been demonstrated by such avant-garde exercises in

16 Armoured police vehicles, strongly connected with the repression of protest during the apartheid era.
contextualism as the Kupfer Ring.\textsuperscript{17} A \textit{Bohème} set in apartheid South Africa should be judged no differently...and this one makes accessible a sophisticated western genre to a multiracial audience which in the past has not been exposed to it. The social and political arena cocooning \textit{La Bohème: Noir} is explored vigorously and meaningfully... it has a freshness and immediacy obvious not only to the non-operatic public but those connoisseurs whose jaded palates have long since lost their taste for the standard fare dished up as usual. It is a visionary conception... nothing can take away from this production's joie de vivre... and it has as much crossover potentiality as any musical genre in today's global multicultural mix. (Business Day 1998)

There was considerable interest expressed in presenting the production internationally: 'The opera...is being widely hailed as a flagship South African cultural work in Europe and the US, and has received 'enthusiastic invitations' to perform in London, Australia, various European\textsuperscript{18} venues, the US and Tokyo' (Cape Argus 1998). Plans were made to perform the opera at the Open Air Theatre at St Margaret's Island, Budapest in July 1998. This had to be abandoned as the R500 000 needed to ensure the venture could not be raised in time (Cape Argus 1998). Gobbato confirmed that there was world-wide interest in this \textit{Bohème} and that it was possible that the company would perform in Australia either the same or following year (Rapport 1998). Once again, however, funding proved difficult to find and the production failed to travel beyond South African borders. Shaper remarked that unless the momentum of interest was sustained, the opera company would no longer exist after its run in Johannesburg and the opportunities for growth, travel experience and job opportunities would end. In an interview with the Cape Argus he said:

> The creative work has been done. Now it comes down to simple funding. With it we fly the flag - without it we put it away and the opportunity can never come again. A company can't be re-assembled in five minutes. (Cape Argus 1998)

Another ambitious project Shaper conceived was to strengthen Cuban-South African relations through the field of Arts and Culture, and to present \textit{La Bohème: Noir} in Havana. It was hoped that this would be funded by both governments, and that the result would 'focus

\textsuperscript{17} Harry Kupfer was an East German opera director who staged Wagner's Ring in a futuristic post-nuclear-war setting. The Bayreuth audience booted it, but \textit{Time Magazine} reviewer Michael Walsh stated that in a couple of years they would be cheering (Walsh 1988).

\textsuperscript{18} A small article about the production appeared in \textit{Das Opernglas}, a German opera publication (Das Opernglas 1998, 39).
enormous international interest in Cuba on a non-political, and highly cultural basis, transcending all political boundaries’ (Shaper n.d.(d)). This funding, too, failed to materialise.

Some critics felt that in trying to prove the relevance of opera in the new South Africa, political correctness was being used on already-great works of art, which had achieved worldwide recognition. Eichbaum, for example, did not feel that Shaper’s adaptation was any improvement over the original opera, and wrote that a political agenda was being imposed over a story of love and friendship (Eichbaum 1998). Yet the review by Lolke van de Heide needs to be read to balance this opinion:

This is an opera with an all black cast, it is the first opera written and conceived in and about South Africa. It is being acclaimed as the true successor to America’s Porgy and Bess and rightly so. For those who remarked on its undoubted political correctness, let me quote the SA music critic who wrote: ‘bury all the comments about hype and the fact that there was government help via Minister Tito Mboweni in ensuring this opera was staged. This opera reflects a terrible social realism, and the commonality of the loss of human rights and the underlying struggle against a great and pervading evil’... An opera does not need to be socially relevant but it must have quality and La Bohème: Noir has it without doubt... it has already become the yardstick against which all emergent art in music in South Africa will be measured. There is interest in this production internationally, and the surety of it opening up a whole new world to its talented players. One can envisage that even the hallowed halls of Italy must open their arms to this opera nero. A black opera at La Scala? One can only hope so. (Van de Heide 1998)

Michael Williams felt that Shaper should have been bolder in making his artistic statement. He should have used the South African adaptation of the La Bohème story, but employed a composer to rewrite the Puccini score so that the original music became just a ‘shimmering, ghost-like presence’ and the work then had a new South African flavour.\(^\text{19}\) Williams said that if someone had rearranged the score in a dynamic and interesting South African way a real

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\(^{19}\) This formula has been used very successfully in the 1996 Broadway rock musical Rent in which the plot is based on Puccini’s Bohème but modern issues such as Aids, homosexuality and drug addiction are examined. The music, by Jonathan Larson, is rock, occasionally incorporating a musical theme from the opera (Holyoke website). Shaper saw Rent in New York: ‘...and so to Rent which I would have left at interval... it is a modern lesson in what will fill a theatre despite having little melody, unbearable lyrics and the usual rock-in-your-face confrontational style. It is not my world...but a hit and a very palpable hit that left me entirely cold’ (Diary 26 June 1996).
excitement could have been generated and a new South African musical would have been created (Williams interview). He thought that Shaper had not been radical enough in that the score of *La Bohème: Noir* remained nineteenth-century Italian Romantic music. However, in his very first diary entry describing his vision for a South African *Bohème*, Shaper did say that he would like to re-score the music to give it an underlying township feel (Diary, 2 October, 1995).

It is possible that Shaper paved the way for another very successful South African version of the romantic opera *Carmen*. *U-Carmen eKhayalitsha* went further than Shaper’s in that it was sung and spoken entirely in Xhosa, with English subtitles. Pauline Malefane, the singer who portrayed *Carmen*, had been a member of the *La Bohème: Noir* chorus²⁰. In winning the Golden Bear at the 2005 Berlin Film Festival, the director, Mark Dornford-May, succeeded in getting the international exposure and recognition that Shaper had tried so hard to obtain (Cape Argus 2005). A double CD original cast recording was however made of *La Bohème: Noir* (Puccini 1997) with the financial support of the Oude Meester Foundation for the Performing Arts (Shaper to Heyneman 1997).

Williams did feel that it was a wonderful testimony to Shaper’s life that he spanned so many art forms, and that towards the end of it he conceived and created a South African *La Bohème* (Williams interview).

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²⁰ Cast list (Programme Notes 1997).
Chapter 6

Sparta Florida Music

On the 25 February, 1964, Shaper, who was at that time living in London and working at Robbins Music, sent a letter to his sister announcing that he had just handed in his notice and intended to set up his own publishing company (Shaper to Joan 1964). It was the success of ‘Softly as I Leave You’ that allowed him the financial security to make this brave decision. The 32-year-old Shaper described this career move as the first really independent thing that he had ever done, adding that his confidence was developing and that he was getting tougher. ‘This game can really stiffen up one’s sinews, and soon I will know if I have the guts to match the ability and the staying power!’ (Shaper to Joan 1964).

Shaper decided to name his new company Sparta Music as a result of a bronze statue of a Spartan warrior that he had photographed on a holiday in Corfu in 1962. This became the logo of the company ‘as I had in mind the Pass of Thermopylae, where 300 Spartans held off 30 000 Greeks – or was it the other way round? I thought the name constantly would remind me that it wasn’t going to be easy’ (Hunter 1989: 2). Shaper said that in starting his own publishing company it was not his intention to just publish his own work. Working in the industry one kept discovering marvellous talents, and he made a conscious decision to find talent himself, and create a publishing company that a songwriter would like to work with (Mahlowe 1985: 12).

The early 1960s was a time of great change in the world of popular music with the arrival of the Beatles. Shaper called it ‘an electric atmosphere’, when Britain was a real force in the international music industry (Hunter 1989: 3). His first major signing was the Birmingham band, the Moody Blues, whose second recording, ‘Go Now’, went to Number One on the worldwide hit parade. At the time Sparta had only been in business for seven months. Following the release of the album This is the Moody Blues and their tour with the Beatles, the song ‘Nights in White Satin’ became a worldwide sensation. The Beatles/Moody Blues tour had other beneficial consequences, as Shaper was asked to put a proposition for a concert in America to the Beatles manager, Brian Epstein. This resulted in their celebrated concert at New York’s Shea Stadium in August 1965 (Hunter 1989: 3; www.rarebeatles.com).
In 1965, another important early signing was David Bowie who had been brought to meet Shaper by his manager, Ralph Horton. Shaper recalled that the first time he saw Bowie he was wearing a soldier's uniform 'which doesn't sound like anything now, but then it was spectacular. It was like having a peacock in the office... I never thought David could sing, anymore than he thought he could, but I had enormous affection for him as a songwriter. His ideas were not only bright and really off centre, but he had visions which really did come from within. Over and above merely producing songs which were commercially popular, David was one of those people who really wrote what he was thinking about.' Bowie left Sparta Music after two years, but then at the height of his fame requested that Shaper's company look after his publishing again, which Sparta did for another three years (Mahlowe 1985: 13).

When Shaper first heard reggae music in 1966, he said he felt sure that it would only be a matter of time before these West-Indian rhythms fused with British popular music to create a new sound. Realising the potential, Shaper signed every reggae act, label and publishing company possible and waited for someone to emerge. This happened early in 1969 with the worldwide Desmond Dekker hit 'The Israelites'. This opened the floodgates for Sparta to publish its huge catalogue of reggae which produced such hits as 'The Tide is High', 'O.K. Fred', 'Rudy a Message for you' and 'Train to Skaville' (Hunter 1989: 3.).

In 1969, Shaper expanded his company internationally when he formed a partnership with American Jeffrey Kruger who owned a company called Florida Music, and Philip Solomon who owned Major Minor records. The various acquisitions and publishing interests of the partners were merged into one new entity called The Sparta Florida Music Group. The aim was to have a broader base than simply a reliance on songs, with Kruger and Solomon concentrating on the record business and Shaper on the publishing (Shaper to Joan 1969b). Eventually, in 1987, this developed into their own recording label, Prestige Records Ltd. Shaper saw its aim as to 'find and develop new recording talent, specialising in acts with depth, musical integrity and excitement' (Cape Jewish Chronicle 1999). In addition to purchasing recording and music catalogues, the company produced new recordings by both

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1 *The Oxford Companion to Popular Music* says: 'Reggae emerged as a fully-fledged music around 1969. With the establishment of so many West Indian communities in British cities, the UK soon became its second home with its own record companies and clubs vigorously operating and the music having its effect on the rock scene in general' (Gammond 1991: 485).
established and new artists. Their extensive repertoire covered a wide range of music: classical, blues, jazz, country, stage and screen, soul, reggae, pop, rock, instrumental, dance, easy listening, new age, techno and children’s melodies (Prestige Records. n.d.).

Shaper did not limit his musical interest to his genre of expertise; during the punk era, Sparta Florida discovered the UK Subs (United Kingdom Subversives) in 1976, who subsequently had hits with every single and album that they recorded (Mahlowe 1985: 13).

Because of Shaper’s involvement in the film industry, it was inevitable that the company would become involved in publishing the musical scores of motion pictures and television series, and among those they put out were Moonstruck, First Blood, Rambo, The Avengers, The Sweeney, Dr. Who and the score of the Academy Award-winning film Mephisto (Hunter 1989: 6). A newspaper cutting Shaper enclosed in a letter to his family in February 1970, describes how ‘Hal Shaper’s Sparta music group is setting up a major share of Continental film scores’ and adds that Shaper intends Sparta to be the biggest publisher of Continental film scores. The article continues by saying that the company would also be active in the pop music field throughout the Continent, through its connection with the company Ember Records. Vic Damone, Glen Campbell, Julie Rogers, Kenny Lynch, the Back Street Band and Blonde on Blonde are named as being included (Unnamed newspaper 1970). Another lucrative area of involvement was television advertising: running one successful advertisement was described by Sparta Florida’s international director, Stella Groves, as being ‘like selling a million singles overnight and getting paid the same day’ (Hunter 1989: 5).

Shaper’s admiration for Sinatra made him determined to secure the rights to the valuable Barton catalogue which included standard songs recorded by Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. Shaper said that every major publisher wanted them, and that he was one of the younger publishers who went to California to see if he could secure them. One of the founders of the company that owned the Barton catalogue was Hank Sanicola, Sinatra’s manager of twenty-five years. Shaper’s rivals for the Barton rights would take Sanicola out for breakfast, lunch and dinner, but Shaper realised that Sanicola was used to night club hours, so he entertained him until two or three in the morning when they would end up in a club, playing songs. When Sanicola realised how well Shaper knew and loved the songs, he sold him the catalogue and it became one of Sparta Florida’s most important assets (Mahlowe 1985: 13).
Shaper's achievements were later undermined by what he saw as the de-personalisation of the industry. The smaller publishing houses and record producers were bought out by major corporations such as EMI and Chappell. Sparta was one of the few companies to retain its independence in the face of change (Mahlowe 1985: 14).

Undoubtedly, Shaper's legal training would have been invaluable in managing and maintaining all his business interests. At the end of the Gerald Mahlowe interview, Shaper lamented the fact that lawyers were taking over the personal relationships in the music business (Mahlowe 1985). This resentment could have been as a result of the acrimonious break up of the business relationship between Kruger and Shaper in the early 1980s, when a dispute developed over the ownership of copyrights. When Shaper returned to South Africa in 1992, he sold his publishing interests (Independent 2004).

Although Shaper started as a music publisher, his business evolved so that he became a licensor, deal maker, production supervisor, negotiator, banker and general music consultant. Shaper also served on the committee of BASCA (the British Academy of Composers and Songwriters) for two years, helping to clarify the rights of lyricists of foreign words. He was also concerned at what he saw as an attack on copyright controls, with copyrights moving into the hands of record companies and the broadcasting media, 'which are more concerned with corporate profit than with the writer's rights or a publisher's control' (Hunter 1989: 4).

Through his company and his passionate involvement in the interests and creativity of the song-writing and music industry, Hal Shaper made a significant contribution to many artists and impacted on numerous careers.
CONCLUSION

Shaper’s passion for his song-writing profession endured until the very end of his life. On 7 January 2004, the day before his death, bedridden and in pain, he finished writing a humorous song, ‘The Ten Tap Dancing Rabbis from Minsk’, for the fourth annual Cape Town Yiddish Song Festival.

Shaper never completed his autobiography, although he made numerous notes and drafted two chapters. He published a book of his own poetry, A Prince of Liars, in 1993 (Shaper 1992). In his last years he devoted himself to completing an Internet book on his memorabilia collection of the great songs and songwriters of the twentieth century (Shaper website). This site is unfortunately no longer available in its entirety.

Shaper produced hit songs for other people in an age that was dominated by rock and roll and super-groups such as The Beatles who performed mainly their own work. The huge success of ‘Softly, as I leave you’ enabled Shaper to be financially secure enough to start his own publishing company, just as the American songwriters Richard Rodgers and Frank Loesser had done (The Guardian 2004).

The success of Shaper’s company was due – at least in part – to his willingness to promote music which he would never have written himself – as is evidenced in his large reggae catalogue. He published songs such as Desmond Dekker’s ‘The Israelites’ and the Paragons’ ‘The Tide is High’, which became a hit for Blondie in 1980 and for Atomic Kitten in 2003. While running his own publishing and recording business, Shaper also encouraged and helped other songwriters and performers. He worked with many legends in the entertainment industry – Barbra Streisand, David Bowie, Dusty Springfield, Elton John and the rock group, Blur, and wrote for artists as diverse and unique as Julie Andrews, for whom he wrote the words of ‘When You Were a Tadpole’ to be sung with Kermit the Frog on the Muppet Show, and his close friend Rolf Harris, with whom he wrote ‘Christmas in the Sun’ while they were on holiday together in South Africa (Holloway 2001). One of the last recordings that was made by

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1 Score completed in collaboration with Fay Singer and Matthew Reid, in January 2004. Shaper’s lyrics, notes and instructions for staging were given to Philip Todres, founder of the Yiddish Song Festival. Lyrics in Appendix.

2 Together with Oscar Hammerstein.
Bing Crosby, just before he died in 1977, was Shaper and Ornadel’s ‘At My Time of Life’\textsuperscript{3} from *Great Expectations* (The Guardian 2004). Shaper also wrote the lyrics for the scores of over seventy feature films, working with some of the world’s foremost composers, including Jerry Goldsmith, Francis Lai and Michel Legrand.

On his return to South Africa, Shaper embraced the new political dispensation, and made a valuable contribution to the history and cultural life of the country.

The epitaph on the monument beside the grave of Enoch Sontonga, and Shaper’s own vision in creating *La Bohème: Noir* have left a valuable legacy, generated by his enduring love for his country.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{shaper_bing_crosby.jpg}
\caption{Shaper with Bing Crosby}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{shaper_awards.jpg}
\caption{Shaper with his Ivor Novello awards}
\end{figure}

Shaper was honoured for his musical achievements by many and varied sources, with acknowledgements including five Ivor Novello Awards. In 2000 he was elected to the British Songwriters Hall of Fame, joining such legends as George Gershwin and Irving Berlin (Mail & Guardian 2004; Cape Argus 2000). In May 2002 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Music degree by the Five Towns College in New York (Stanley Cohen to Shaper, 2001). Shaper bought into the English aristocracy when he became 39th Lord of the Manor of Stoke Bruerne\textsuperscript{4} (Sunday Times 2004). He was also granted the Freedom of the City of London in 1989.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Lyric in Appendix.
\item A Northamptonshire village of approximately 200 inhabitants, about 75 kilometres from London.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Shaper, a handsome and charismatic man, did not marry his first wife, Susan, until April 1972, when he was nearly forty. Their daughter, Hollie, was born on Christmas Eve, 1975, the night that Great Expectations opened (Cape Times 1975). This marriage ended in divorce in 1989 (Guardian 2004). Shaper met his second wife, Pippa, when she was stage manager for his disastrous production of Jingle Jangle – which he thereafter dubbed his ‘most successful production ever’ (Shaper 2000) – and they married in 1990. Four children were born to them, Jack, Pia, Lucy and Harry. Tragically, Lucy died very suddenly of an undiagnosed virus in 1999 at the age of four.

Pippa described Hal as ‘a man of wit and wisdom who lived life to the full’ (Cape Argus 2004). In a diary entry made at the end of 1996, Shaper humbly assessed his life achievements:

In the final analysis I plainly have a talent but it is not the ‘remarkable’ talent of a Tim Rice, Andrew Lloyd Webber or Don Black. Their achievements are gargantuan – but I have made a substantial living from my gifts and many friendships. I have much to be grateful for (Diary, 1996 end-of-year summary).

If one considers the level of international success that Shaper achieved, competing against the very highest standards, he must surely rate as one of South Africa’s finest, and possibly most underrated, artists.
Appendix

Part 1: Song Lyrics

**Tall Dark Stranger**

A tall dark stranger rode into town  
A weary stranger whose head hung down  
As tall as timber with eyes of fire  
A man in danger, a gun for hire.  
Mine was a young heart that saw him there  
A man who needed someone to care  
And in that moment he caught my eye  
He smiled to see me, then passed me by.

But in the night by the light of the open tavern door  
He saw me there and his eyes seemed to draw me  
across the floor.  
The thrill of danger led me astray  
I loved a lifetime in just one day  
But I’ll still love him though years may go  
My tall dark stranger will never know.

**Mysterious People**

Children are people who live in the land  
Made of raindrops and pebbles and puddles and streams  
Solemnly watching a twig as it sails on a clear crystal pool to an island of dreams.

There go a pair who have just built a city of mud  
And it’s real!  
They know the mud doesn’t look very pretty  
But oooh! how it feels.  
This little boy greets the snow with a smile,  
That little girl has discovered an isle made up of pillows,  
One little fellow is friends with the wind in the willows,  
All of them children and all are mysterious people.

Here comes a boy who’s an Indian brave.  
He’s got a map that will lead to a cave  
Filled up with treasure.  
One little girl makes a new funny face  
Laughing with pleasure  
All of them children  
And all are mysterious people.

I can remember when I was a child that my bed was a ship that I  
sailed through the night,  
And I remember the world as a place that was eager and loving and shiny and bright. Where is  
the boy who was friends with a rainbow and once rode upon?  
Where is that shy and mysterious person oh where have I gone?
I remember I once said my prayers,  
Now I stand by while my children say theirs,  
Watching them kneeling,  
And I could cry that one day they'll forget all that they're feeling,  
Isn't it sad that our children should grow into people?

*Paris was made for lovers* *(from the film Time for Loving)*

Paris was made for lovers, Paris was made for lovers  
Why else would Paris even be there?  
The little streets so charming, the mademoiselles disarming  
And that's the reason you'll find me there.  
Paris was made for lovers, it's something one discovers  
You walk along the Seine and hear the song,  
And love is all it's saying and that accordion playing  
Just seems to sweep your heart along.

Paris was made for romance, Paris was made for romance  
Why else would songs be sung about her?  
Don't let the smile deceive you for if your love should leave you  
How lonely it would be without her.  
Paris was made for people, for all the loving people  
For all those maybe dreams that could come true  
Paris was made for lovers, yes, it was made for lovers  
Paris was made for me and you.

*Theme song for the television series The Burning Shore*

I never dreamed this could be  
This paradise on earth  
Of sunlight and mountain  
Of river and rainbow  
Where I'm lost in the wonder of sky and sea...

How beautiful it all seems  
This place beyond my wildest dreams  
I want its dangers and its delights  
To know the valleys  
And climb the heights  
And feel my passion flow –  
Through the endless nights  
Of love...  
Unafraid...  
Where the mem'ries of life are made  
The storms and the calms  
And to fall asleep in your arms  
Forever...and ever...

For love is what I'm here for  
To walk along its burning shore  
To reach into its golden sand  
And hold its diamonds in my hand  
And love you evermore.


**Comes the Night** *(from the film Sebastian)*

Here comes the night to stir like an ember all the lonely hours of regret.
Here comes the night to make me remember all the things I have tried to forget.
How beautiful I felt when you loved me;
How good it was to sleep in the sheltering deep of your arms.
I still think about you as each long night drifts into dawn,
And though you’ve gone, I still want to kiss you,
And it’s sad just how madly I miss you!
And I wonder did you love me?
While I wonder, here comes the night.

**Free As the Wind** *(from the film Papillon)*

Yesterday’s world is a dream,
Like a river that runs through my mind
Made of fields and the white pebbled stream
That I knew as a child.
Butterfly wings in the sun
Taught me all that I needed to see
For they sang to my heart
‘Oh look at me! Look at me,
Free as the wind, free as the wind
That is the way you should be.’

Love was the dream of my life,
And I gave it the best I knew how,
So, it always brings tears to my eyes
When I think of it now.
Gone like the butterfly days,
And the youth that I once used to be;
But my heart still hears a voice telling me,
‘Look! And you’ll see,
Free as the wind, free as the wind,
That is the way you should be.’

**La Vie Parisienne** *(from the film The Legend of Frenchie King)*

I still can hear the songs that Paris sung,
I close my eyes and once again I’m young.
It seems somehow an age ago,
My years of innocence were there,
And why I left I’ll never know,
I still hear Paris everywhere.

Won’t you come along, listen to the song
Echoing across the tables and the years.
Just when it was gone that accordion captured so
The precious memories and the tears
Been away so long, funny how a song seems to be
Not just a melody one hears.
And every now and then I think of it again,
*La Vie Parisienne.*


A little girl with eyes as clear as mountain streams
Who came to Paris still believing in her dreams,
Whose parents said 'goodbye' there.
That little town where I was born, that no one knows
Is still a place one leaves
And no-one ever goes,
Except maybe to die there.

And I believed in everything that I was told.
I still can see the streets of Paris paved with gold,
And men who would adore me.
And all the women standing at the doors of shame.
To me it seemed their lives were just a game
That had no meaning for me.

And I still taste the sound of every Paris tune,
And see the wine that filled the gutters of the moon
And spilled and flowed around me.
I'm still the girl with eyes as clear as mountain streams,
And I left Paris still believing in my dreams,
The dreams that never found me.
But every now and then – I think of it again
La vie Parisienne.

**Martina**

I can see Martina as a child of three
In the sad seclusion of her nursery.
Go outside Martina! Go outside and play
Never speak Martina, put your toys away.
So her days were loveless and her nights the same
When she cried for someone,
No one ever came...
Is it any wonder that her eyes grew cold
That she loves nobody
And her young heart grew old?
All the children crying from the age of three
Grow up to be Martina and me...

**The Years of my Youth**

Somewhere the years of my youth lie inside me
Growing old like mellow wine.
I shed no tears for my youth, none that blind me
They're behind me now
Where those sad times will never find me.

I have the loves of my life to remind me
That the whole wide world was mine.
I feel at peace with all that surrounds me
And the joy of these autumn days still astounds me.
Somehow the years of my youth seemed so endless
Like a thousand dreams come true.
Meadows of summer greens that I ran through
And the girl who gave me her loving arms to turn to.

How little time from our first sweet beginning
To our lonely last goodbye,
But I’ve so many songs left unsung yet, I’m young yet
And my heart is the heart of a young man who doesn’t want to die.

**Momma Married a Preacher Man**

I was raised in the ghetto
In the shadow of God on high
And he stood on the corner in the arctic wind
And he preached of life to come.
Preached of the fire and the life to come
And that Jesus died for men.
And I don’t know exactly how he met my ma
But that’s how it all began.

Momma married a preacher man
Who sang of the power of the sword
And his eyes were as bright as a starry night
And he really loved the Lord.
Momma married a preacher man
Who really loved the Lord.

**At My Time of Life (from Great Expectations)**

Who would have thought what I would find at my time of life.
Quiet days and peace of mind at my time of life.
Puffing my pipe and watching the smoke rings fly.
Doing my best and as for the rest, just letting the world go by.
Calmer somehow than ever before at my time of life.
Loving you now, and fin’ly sure of what I want to be,
Contented, aye that’s the word,
Contented as you see,
And at my time of life, happy to be just me.

**Those were the days in Muizenberg**

Muizenberg was more than just a village
More than just a shtetl by the sea
Mem’ries from the Snakepit to the Empire..
Muizenberg was everything to me...

THOSE WERE THE DAYS MY FRIEND
We thought they’d never end
We’d sing and dance forever and a day
It was another world
The shul was always filled
Those were the days... oh yes those were the days...

Then the busy years went rushing by us...
Birthdays and barmitzvahs came and went
We'd write across the world to one another
Of Muizenberg and just how much it meant...

THOSE WERE THE DAYS MY FRIEND
We thought they'd never end
We'd sing and dance forever and a day
And still the mem'ry glows
Of those Vic Davis shows
Those were the days... oh yes those were the days.

Just tonight I stood before the mirror
Nothing seems the way it used to be
I gazed upon a stranger in that mirror...
And asked...where was the kid that once was me?

THOSE WERE THE DAYS MY FRIEND
We thought they'd never end
We'd sing and dance forever and a day
Where every Dad and Mom
Once walked along the prom
Those were the days... oh yes those were the days.

Through the door I hear familiar laughter
See your face and hear you call my name...
Oh my friend we are much older but not wiser...
For in our hearts the dream is still the same...

THOSE WERE THE DAYS MY FRIEND
We thought they'd never end
We'd sing and dance forever and a day
The mem'ries never dim
When we were chaverim!
THOSE WERE THE DAYS! OH YES THOSE WERE THE DAYS!

The Ten Tap Dancing Rabbis from Minsk
We all were born in Russia
I'm Mischa, I'm Sasha,
I'm Bendel, I'm Boris,
I'm Mendel & I'm Morris,
I'm Yitzakh, I'm Gabe
And two of us are Abe.

So you can hardly blame us,
If we're proud of being famous
As the ten tap dancing Rabbis, from Minsk!

Hey! Gezatske, Hi! Gezatske,
Ho! Gezatske, Hee!
Hey! Gezatske, Hi! Gezatske,
Ho! Gezatske, Hee!

When they required some choirboys,
To fill in at school,
On the way we learnt to lay
Tifillin in Shul.
We Read the Torah,
Learned the Horah
And we danced it with them
Our piano teacher – Gershwin – said
We all got RHYTHM!

(*GOT RHYTHM*)

And once we got the make-up on,
We all shouted “OY!”
A Kosher Mosher, expialidocious
surge of joy,

We ate our Latkes,
washed our Gatkes,
Once we hit the board-way,
‘Twas goodbye Soviet Unionski
And, Hello BROADWAY!

(*GIVE MY REGARDS TO BROADWAY*)

We all were born in Russia,
He’s Mischa, He’s Sasha,
He’s Bendel, He’s Boris,
‘Im...Oy gevatt and tsores!
He’s Yitzhak, He’s Gabe
And two of us are Abe.

So you can hardly blame us,
If we’re proud of being famous
As the ten tap dancing Rabbis
From Minsk, NICHT PINSK!

Hey Gezatske, Hi Gezatske etc.

Ostrovnia, Cherchovnia,
Petrovnia, Dubrovnia,
Ichikov and Michikov
And Hertzog Goverichikov.
We find we’re at the station
‘cause we gonna take vacation
from the ten tap dancing Rabbis,
The ten tap dancing Rabbis,
The ten tap dancing Rabbis from Minsk!
Part 2: Prose poem

**Muizenberg**

I have become the Old Men who once we saw
Stroll along the Prom, or with their wives go to the Empire Bioscope
On Saturdays...And to the Vic Davis Show on Sunday nights at the old pavilion.

We were the kids
Who sat on those cool green leather stools at the Milk Bar
Along with the homesick soldiers, sailors and airmen bound for the war up North.

The Jukebox was our daily port of call and songs like 'Little white lies'
'Dance Ballerina, Dance' and 'This is a quiet Town' [down in Crossbone Country]
were played until the old shellac wore thin.

Our over eighteens, went to the Lizard Club in the old Talmud Torah Hall while we were gathered
at the Hamburger Hut opposite the Rocky Beach, where the Hamburgers
came fresh and hot and smothered in lettuce and onions and that rich tomato
sauce...and the music was jive and our hair was cut like ducks'...

The Muizenberg Mohicans was our baseball team long before the Putt-Putt course
...and Saturday mornings packed us in to the eight penny seats to watch the serial and
to hope our tickets were the lucky ones that ended in the half-crown prize...before we
spilled out to the Snake Pit where all our worlds began anew, each summers day.
And there in the tumble of bathing boxes and coloured towels the Bok Bok lines of growing boys
first found their confidence and showed-off for the younger girls who had 'come down' for the
Season...

The height of all our growing up was the Blue Moon Hotel at Lakeside where for the
first time we wore a tux and took our ballgowned girls to their first summer dance in
Dad's old car...there was a real band...twenty eight fellows dressed in jackets of creamy white
with bow ties and a bandleader...with every song announced...and every dance ending with
applause.

And the Old Men trailed respectfully to shul
And sat there in the suits and tallises
While their wives looked down in ritual obedience
To an ancient voice.

Old Goldwasser offered us 'teffermints'
To stand up on the bima and sing
But sunshine and the freshness of the air outside
Was always more compelling
We preferred tadpoles and the park and learning how to smoke
And talking of our heroes.
And who we were about to play the following weekend....
At SACS or Bishops or Rondebosch...these were the schools we knew had pride and
A fierce upbringing...and if you scored a try or made a hundred against these boys
...your name was read out at Assembly...and your reputation was in place.
The Old Men drank their scotch on Sundays and after lunch stretched out and slept Upon the lawns...and played chess in the early light in Wherry Road...and poker once a week...while wives dealt hands of rummy and sipped their tea and put their children To bed at half-past six.

And the Old Men talked the language of their concerns...many a Yiddish voice with Memories of Lithuania and Latvia and Estonia and Lodz and Warszova...shook their heads and wondered if they would ever be left in peace...first the Czar then Hitler and now the rising threat of the Afrikaner...somewhere always the new continent of Cossacks, knouting and whipping our people across the face of Europe...next year in Jerusalem was the annual prayer...while we were this year in the surf and running Along the ivory-white sand that stretched as far as the eye could see...a multitude of children in and out of each others houses...and knowing everyone in the street Across from us the Leibs and their Chrissie who made roast potatoes that even now Some sixty years along, we still remember...and Boris Gershuni Rifkin’s mother’s Matzohballs...and the Herbsteins and Schere’s, the Mendelsohns and Katz’s...the Solomons and Sher’s...the Cohens and the Yosh’s...the Briners and the Friedmans and the Blocks ...the Greenbergs and the Kaplans and Kirsch’s...divided only by who lived ‘across the bridge’...our well-to-do...and the poorest of the poor in Palmer Road.

And now some fifty years along
I have become the Old Men who once we saw
Stroll along the prom, transported from another life into the quiet beauty of this seaside town
This miracle of sand and surf a million miles away from Lodz...and Minsk and all
The other towns of terror.

They’re all still there...Laid out in family rows, where every headstone were my parents friends...
The Cohens and the Kaplans
The Shapers and the Shers...
I still see them...everyone...
As shining clear as yesterday
Their voices fill the empty streets
They’re all still there if you know where to look...
I see ‘The Empire’...that centre of a universe now gone
And see another world...
Love theme from the film ‘The Burning Shore’ – second draft

[Handwritten text with music and lyrics, discussing themes of paradise, beauty, and love.]

1. Never dreamed this could be
   This paradise on earth
   Of sunlight and a mountain
   Of river and a rainbow
   Where the eagle soars.

2. Never dreamed this could be
   This paradise on earth
   Of straight and ocean
   Of sunset and moonrise.

Beautiful as it seems,...
This place, beyond my wildest dreams.
I want it's dangers
And it's delights
To know its valleys
And climb its heights
And feel my spirit fly
Through the endless nights
Of love, unafraid...

Where the moments of life are made.
The storms, the memories
And the calmness
Just to know I'm safe
In your arms... forever... and ever...

Love is what I live for
To walk along its burning shore
To rest upon its golden sand
To hold its diamonds in my hand
I love you... evermore.
I never dreamed this could be
this paradise on earth
of sunlight & mountains
of oceans & rainbow
where the sky & sea
where there is beauty & peace
where the love is
where we are a part of
how

I WANT ITS DANGERS
AND ITS DELIGHTS
TO KNOW THE VALLEYS
AND CLIMB THE HEIGHTS
AND FEEL MY SPIRIT FLY MORE
THROUGH THE ENDLESS NIGHTS
OF LOVE... UNAFRAID.
WHERE THE MEMORIES OF LIFE ARE MADE
THE STORMS AND THE CALMS
AND TO FALL ASLEEP
IN YOUR ARMS
FOREVER & EVER.

I love is what I'm here for
To walk along its burning shore
To fly along its golden sand
And hold its diamonds in my hand
A love you... Eternally

I never dreamed this could be
This paradise on earth
of sunlight & mountains
of ocean & rainbow
where the sky & sea
where there is beauty & peace
most
How
looking out on the sky & sea

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\(^1\) Joan Shaper, Hal's sister; later Joan Cohen.

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