



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

UOA D33

MUSIC, DRAMA, DANCE, PERFORMING ARTS,
FILM AND SCREEN STUDIES



RESEARCHER

Gareth Williams

OUTPUT TITLE

Navigate the Blood

OUTPUT TYPE

Composition

DATE OF PERFORMANCE

2 November 2018

FIG. 1
Navigate the Blood Premiere.
 Photo courtesy of Kris Kesiak.



Score available at:

<https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/navigate-the-blood>

01 / STATEMENT

Navigate The Blood is an 80-minute opera conceived by Gareth Williams, co-composed by Williams and Admiral Fallow, with a libretto by Sian Evans.

The work aims to find new partners, participants, collaborators and audiences for contemporary opera in Scotland, by developing a new methodology for creating work in this genre.

The work was developed at NOISE Opera between 2015 and 2018, and produced in partnership with Glasgow Distillery, where the premiere took place on 2 November 2018. The work toured throughout November 2018 and 40% of the audience who attended performances were new to opera.

Williams, opera composer and musical director of NOISE Opera, invited the indie folk band Admiral Fallow to collaborate on a concept opera that explored the industry and community of distilling in Scotland. After a series of research trips, interviews with distillers across Scotland, musical workshops, and readings of the libretto, a process was devised to mentor the new opera-makers (Admiral Fallow) through the process of co-creating opera, creating a common language across the genres of indie folk/pop and opera, during the writing of this music theatre work.

Through a new partnership with Glasgow Distilleries, seven distilleries across Scotland were secured as performance venues, and the whisky/gin making communities of Scotland were consulted and involved in the process of creating the libretto for the work. The work was performed in distilleries across Scotland: Glasgow Distillery, Oban Distillery, Glen Scotia Distillery, Campeltown, Ardnahoe Distillery, Islay, Blair Atholl Distillery, Pitlochry, Lost Loch Distillery, Aboyne, Summerhall Edinburgh and La Taverna Aviemore.

The completed score is a collaborative document, where Williams placed the work of Admiral Fallow songwriters, Louis Abbot and Sarah Hayes, into the framework of the opera, alongside his own music, blending the different voices, gestures, genres and timbres into a cohesive, singular, dramatic piece.

02 / RESEARCH DIMENSIONS



FIG. 2
Still from opening night
performance at Glasgow Distillery.
Photo courtesy of Kris Kesiak.

Navigate the Blood is a collaborative, large-scale, multi-genre chamber opera, conceived by Gareth Williams, commissioned and produced by NOISE Opera with funding from Creative Scotland (see Appendix 5, page 15), and in partnership with 7 Scottish distilleries.

The libretto is by Sian Evans, and the score was composed by Gareth Williams and the indie band Admiral Fallow.

The score for *Navigate the Blood* was created in partnership between Williams and the two main songwriters of the band, Louis Abbot and Sarah Hayes. As musical director, Williams was able to offer continual mentorship in dramatic vocal writing during the process, and to incorporate specific songs and moments written by the songwriters into the structure and language of the overall work. This methodology was developed at NOISE in the 2015 opera, *Hirida*, where Williams co-composed with Shetland fiddler, Chris Stout, and this process makes these two operas unique and distinctive. The musical world and language of *Navigate the Blood* combines tropes from both opera and indie folk genres and for this reason, was enthusiastically received by the band's followers as well as opera aficionados. See Appendix 4, page 14.

The project was made possible by the partnership and support of Glasgow Distillery, who helped contact distilleries across Scotland to tour, and who provided their own distillery as a venue for the premiere. They also helped with research into the process of distilling which greatly informed the libretto.

03 / ORIGINALITY



FIG. 3
Still from rehearsal. Photo courtesy
of Kris Kesiak.

In contrast to the usual composition process, the score for *Navigate the Blood* resulted from a completely collaborative process at every stage.

A preliminary workshop, funded by Creative Scotland, held in December 2016 in Glasgow, provided proof of concept – that a common musical language could be discovered that allowed opera singers to co-exist with indie voices in a dramatic/musical framework, and that Williams could devise a way to lead and mentor new opera-makers through a process of co-creating opera. A filming of the process and sharing of material attracted commissioning and production costs from Creative Scotland. See Appendix 5, page 15.

The combination of opera and indie singing styles within one work meant the work had to be amplified and balanced differently from traditional operas, and the instrumentation, which included bass synth, electric guitar, full drumkit, and the convention of ‘backing vocals’, meant that timbrally and gesturally, the piece has a novel sound within the genre of opera. The operatic voices, piano, percussion, and strings, added to the Admiral Fallow line-up, place *Navigate the Blood* as a unique contribution to indie music.

The indie music-making and opera rehearsal processes are very different. Indie music rehearsals have an atmosphere of experimentation and exploration in the moment, and are more democratic in approach, whilst opera has more of a rigid attachment to the score, and an emphasis on decision-making by the director and the conductor. During the creative process, writing, workshopping and rehearsing ideas were explored that led to a great deal of exchange of ideas and discovery of common ground.

‘It was a collaboration waiting to happen - between that notoriously conservative, highbrow, expensive art form called opera, and the popular, mobile, but equally tradition-rooted world of indie-folk.’

Andrew Clark, *Opera Magazine*,
January 2019

04 / RIGOUR



FIG. 4
Still from rehearsal. Photo credit
Photo courtesy of Kris Kesiak.

Williams approached Glasgow Distillery in 2015 with the idea of creating an opera at their site, and decided to invite Admiral Fallow to collaborate with NOISE Opera, after arranging two of their songs for the band plus chamber orchestra at Celtic Connections Festival in 2016.

Over 2017 and 2018, the opera was created through discussions between Williams and the songwriters of Admiral Fallow, Louis Abbot and Sarah Hayes. This was facilitated by continuous online sharing and regular meetings. A shared online folder was created where the band and composers would add scores, demos, charts, song ideas and melodies, and the work grew organically from here.

As each new scene emerged, the creative team were able to understand each others' practice better and develop into fully fledged opera writers. The work was completed in August 2018. This is a relatively short time to create a full-length opera, but the presence of a collective composition team meant much more could be achieved than in the traditional instance of a composer working alone.

Each section of the piece was led by one member of the musical creative team – Gareth Williams, Louis Abbot, Sarah Hayes – and several sections were arranged and orchestrated by Phil Hague. For example the opening scenes, bars 1–219 are written by Williams and naturally lead into a song by Hayes from bar 220 to bar 306.

In Act 1, where the creative team were establishing an effective methodology, scenes that contained dialogue, exposition or conflict were created by Williams, whilst the stand-alone arias and set pieces were written by Abbot or Hayes. See Appendix 1, page 14 for an example of the demo songs Abbot would create, that Williams could notate, arrange, and then insert into the framework of the opera.

In Act 2, the methodology was able to evolve through practice, and each member of the team was able to develop new skills and awareness, with both songwriters beginning to feel comfortable writing in the genre that was new to them. Act 2 is a demonstration of the ground gained. Hayes and Abbot created Part 3 together, whilst Williams created Part 4, leaving space for a collaborative collective song in the closing moments of the opera.

During rehearsal, the band was able to bring a fresh and unique approach to opera creation that offered genuine opportunity for knowledge exchange – changing the way NOISE Opera will make future work. Admiral Fallow's ability to change and re-build things together as a band gave opportunities to discover new approaches and solutions to dramatic challenges in almost every scene.

05 / SIGNIFICANCE



FIG. 5
The audience waiting at the premiere in Glasgow Distillery.
Photo courtesy of Kris Kesiak.

The work toured nine venues across Scotland from 2–24 November 2019, with every performance sold out, and was featured and reviewed in national newspapers, radio and television programmes, blogs, and in the international *Opera* magazine.

An extract of *Navigate the Blood* was performed live at BBC Radio Scotland on *Classics Unwrapped* 28 October 2018, and has remained on BBC iPlayer as a programme highlight. See Appendix 1, page 14.

NOISE Opera was shortlisted for a Sunday Herald Culture Award in 2019, in the category of 'Outstanding Musical Performance' for *Navigate the Blood*.

Creative Scotland were the main funder of the opera.

'NOISE is one of the boldest contemporary music companies in Scotland, and *Navigate the Blood* is a great example of how they break down barriers when it comes to opera. Not only does this production get out of the concert halls and into the communities, making Scotland's distilleries the subject and the setting of each performance, it bends the rules of composition, with top-class classical talent collaborating with one of the country's most musically ambitious bands. This is an inventive, exciting way to bring opera to new audiences, and Creative Scotland is proud to raise a glass to that.'

Alan Morrison,
Head of Music, Creative Scotland.

FIG. 6
Still from rehearsal. Photo courtesy
of Kris Kesiak.



06 / APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Audio and video clips

Watch the full live performance at Summerhall, Edinburgh, November 2018:

https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/NTB++Live+in+Summerhall+Full+Cut/1_3hrwavgd6

Watch the 23 minute film of rehearsals and performances:

https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/Navigate+the+Blood/1_ruaz6pwq

Watch the 4 minute trailer of the Opera:

https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/Navigate+the+Blood/1_tc12fmp8

Watch the BBC performance here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06pym6z>

Watch the original workshop development video here:

https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/Navigate+the+Blood/1_pzomfszl

Appendix 2: List of performances/broadcasts

2-3 November 2018	The Glasgow Distillery.
8 November 2018	Oban Distillery.
11 November 2018	Ardnahoe Distillery, Islay.
16 November 2018	Blair Athol Distillery, Pitlochry.
17-18 November 2018	Lost Loch Distillery, Aboyne.
21 November 2018	Summerhall, Edinburgh.
24-25 November 2018	Speyside Gins at La Tarverna, Aviemore.

Programme

<https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/navigate-the-blood-programme>

Appendix 3: Website

<https://www.noiseopera.com/navigate-the-blood>

Appendix 4: Selected press extracts

‘As an immersive experience it’s hard to beat, as we smelt the vapours of the spirit in the air around us... part of me wished that the experience of opera was like this more often.’

Simon Thompson,
The Times Film News, ☆☆☆☆ 7 November 2018.

‘The creative mainspring was Gareth Williams, former composer in residence at Scottish Opera and now NOISE’s musical director, whose willingness to tailor his own uncluttered musical language to Admiral Fallow’s ideas was the single most impressive element of *Navigate the Blood*. Although there were identifiable passages of transition, you couldn’t tell where ‘classical’ ended and indie-folk started, or vice versa. The two fed off each other in the most productive way, the un-improvised sophistication of one blending with foot-tapping simplicity of the other, giving the whole a mesmerizing consistency and compactness.’

Andrew Clark,
Opera Magazine, January 2019.

‘It points the way to a cheaper, more inclusive, more self-sustaining creative future for our beloved art form.’

Andrew Clark,
Opera Magazine, January 2019.

‘Judging by the cheers, whistles and prolonged applause from the packed out opening night, *Navigate the Blood* went down a storm in Glasgow, and we’re not talking about the city’s cultural heartland of the West End, but a business park in Hillingdon. This bodes well for the opera as it heads deeper into Scotland on its three-week distillery tour.’

Tom Bruce-Gardyne,
www.ScotchWhisky.com, 6 November 2018.

Appendix 5: Funding

All three phases of this process were funded by the Creative Scotland Open Fund, with in-kind support from Glasgow Distilleries and Scottish Opera, with additional fundraising at NOISE Opera.

16 November 2016
Development / Workshop Costs – Open Fund
£6,508.00
(CS-1609-21573)

5 July 2017
Commissioning Costs – Open Fund
£17,000.00
(CS-1705-23475)

30 May 2018
Production Costs – Large Scale Open Fund
£90,000.00
(CS-1804-25577)

**Creative Scotland funding total:
£113,008.00**

FIG. 7
Full cast, ensemble and crew at the final performance. Photo courtesy of Kris Kesiak.





THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

ISBN: 901-1-83645-060-3
DOI: 10.2218/ED.9781836450603

All text in this portfolio is under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) licence. This means you are free to share and adapt this content provided you give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

All images in this portfolio are All Rights Reserved. This means the authors retain copyright over original work and it is not permitted to copy or redistribute these images.

May 2020

The University of Edinburgh
is a charitable body, registered
in Scotland, with registration
number SC005336.

www.eca.ed.ac.uk
