NOTES FROM THE PODIUM

Scott Wilson on Adamo's *Little Women*

Interview on 25th August 2022

Published on 5th October 2022

Well, congratulations on such a successful run of the UK premiere at Opera Holland Park!

Thanks! It was intense, but so good.

You were the Associate Conductor and Chorus Master.

Well, that was the title. They're called the chorus in the score, but it's just four voices – but it's true that I prepared them. A very mini chorus!

Were they on stage? I know that Mark Adamo has expressed different preferences in the past – first that he preferred them to be offstage, but has had them onstage in productions that he's since directed.

Mark originally devised them to be offstage but he has given his full blessing for them to be on stage. They were on stage in this production, and their role was also reframed. In some productions, perhaps they could be seen as younger versions of the four sisters, but in our production they were dressed as historical figures that had some kind of connection to the spirit of each of the four sisters. Joan of Arc was the model for 'shadow Beth', Frida Kahlo for 'shadow Jo', and a glamorous movie star was Amy's shadow. Meg's was the modern working mum – she was sat on a part of the stage that had a washing machine. She was eating cereal, at times drinking from the bowl, and later she

was cleaning up the kids' toys. The four 'shadow sisters' were the only people that didn't leave the stage, though of course Beth's shadow left when she died.

In my associate role I was leading the staging rehearsals and responsible for some of the performances. Perhaps what audience members don't appreciate is how much you *don't* watch the opera – I was just really studying the staging all the time, even when Sian Edwards was conducting. But the beauty of sharing a production with someone is when you're feeling like you're on top of the show you can, perhaps, allow yourself to watch a performance. There were so many things I'd never seen, it's such a different experience. When you conduct a piece you have to know where the characters are that you must have contact with and be completely aware of their movement and singing. Anything that is superfluous to the music can be lost to the conductor because it's not useful information for the practical act of getting the show on the road.

Honestly, this is a shame. The research carried out amongst the cast and company is huge. In an ideal world, I would like to have been privy to all the conversations between the director and different cast members, and amongst the cast members themselves etc. – with opera we all only have a limited knowledge of all the many, many decisions that are constantly made throughout the rehearsal process. When I watched the show, there were so many small pieces of choreography, and even some wonderful little jokes, that were happening on different parts of the stage to where the music was taking place. In reality, the music team places a huge amount of concentration on the things that are musically or dramatically essential. What a privilege that I got to watch the show!

I've also seen conductors not noticing what's happening around them in recordings and rehearsals.

Even in a rehearsal, it's of absolutely no consequence who has come into the room. I think the level of concentration does surprise people. Even the orchestra who are looking out into the auditorium aren't likely to pay a great deal of attention, if any, to someone that's walked into the room – music is fully immersive. And in opera there is just so much going on beyond the aural – our concentration tends only to consume itself with what is necessary, there's little space left for anything else.

The size of the orchestra in the *Little Women* score is small, and I know this was also the case in your performances: winds 1, 1, 1, 1, and 1 horn, 2 percussion, harp, piano and strings 4, 3, 3, 2, 2. Is it ever doubled up?

No. It was written as a chamber opera and there would certainly never be a time where the wind, percussion, harp or keyboard would be doubled. The strings could conceivably be expanded but not a huge amount, just to retain balance. At Opera Holland Park the pit isn't covered. That was very interesting, as we had to really mark down the dynamics. When the pit is covered, it dampens the sound to a degree and allows the singers to sing over the orchestra. But at Holland Park they're singing slightly over and through the orchestra sound, so it can be precarious dynamically.

There are two main things at play for the conductor: 1) the decisions you've made prior to performance and 2) the psychology of everyone involved doing multiple performances. The first part is, for example, making changes to the dynamics in the parts so that it balances better. That's a very straightforward thing to do. But the conductor must also commit to physically showing those dynamics, it's not likely the orchestra will truly play a dynamic if the conductor isn't fully invested in achieving a *pianissimo* as opposed to merely a *piano*. The gestures must mimic the dynamic level that you insist upon.

With the psychological aspect it is doubly challenging – it's one thing to rehearse, but psychologically it takes a lot of fortitude for an orchestra to *continue* to play those changes in dynamics that are physically more demanding in each and every performance. Extremes require a greater level of mental and physical application by the orchestral players. By the time you're in any performance after no. 3 one must doubly commit to those dynamics, and the responsibility is quite rightly sitting on the conductor's shoulders. The conductor must reinvigorate the orchestra to continue to do what we've agreed upon, and that's difficult – it's just easier to play a little louder and slightly coast along, even for the very best intentioned musicians. Sian and I were very conscious of being technically very prepared for this detailed score.

That's very interesting. I've seen that the pit and stage are also very wide. Are there other factors unique to OHP that affect your work?

Well, what I just said applies to any multiple-performance theatrical production, but at Holland Park there are additional (and I would say

wonderful) challenges. It's open air, so there is a little bit of competitive noise from outside the theatre (but not too much). The open pit is, at times, literally centimetres from where the singers are standing. The stage is very wide and the usable space is not deep. Also, the stage surrounds the pit and then comes down in front of it, which is highly unusual. The new stage design at Holland Park has the potential for cast members to come out behind the conductor and immediately in front of the audience – it can be incredibly dramatic and intense.

The moment we heard that this was to be the stage design, we were terrified! But what was fascinating was actually how well the heightened drama of the singers coming to the front of the stage actually worked in this opera. Jo is a very acted part – and we had this most incredible singer *and* actor, Charlotte Badham, playing Jo. She would come down the front of the stage, two or three metres from the front row of the audience, singing all out but also acting with a level of expressivity that is not common in opera. She was very funny, dramatic, and also intensely moving at a couple of points. So, in the end, we (the conductors) realised that the little bit of control that we might have lost was outweighed by the dramatic impact of the singers occasionally singing from behind us. Though this unusual stage design was wonderful, it was certainly challenging too. Conductors are not used to working with singers who are behind us!

I've seen dance conductors, conducting on stage, look behind them for the dancers' jumps and lifts. Did you have to look behind you much or change how you were physically functioning in the space?

Well, we had to look a lot less than I expected. Once we realised we could truly hear them, we relied on our ears. In addition, I was very conscious of my physical presence when they were singing behind me. I was conscious of making them aware that my ears were with them. I don't know how big of a physical change this was, but I could sense that I was really gravitating my ears and arms towards them to show that I was right there with them, supporting them, all the time. I was probably ever so slightly turning in their direction.

All that being said, there are times where we can really benefit from watching a singer. I particularly watch the subtleties in their throat and their breath, and I remember moments when I turned slightly more than halfway. In *Little*

Women there is a moment where there are a series of quiet chords – a little triangle note with celeste – that are placed amongst some semi-recitative words (Act II Scene 5 p.535-7 bar 192-205). In those moments, just watching where that sound was about to be produced by the singer was really helpful. I remember clearly watching her throat – she was behind me but very close. Turning to watch her vocal apparatus work was the clearest way to understand how she was about to sing the music.

Mark Adamo himself praised the Opera Holland Park production in a video on their YouTube channel.[1] **He said he was incredibly impressed by how intelligible the singing was: 'such music being made of the actual vowels and consonants of the line itself is unprecedented in my experience of piece'. High praise indeed!**

Wow, that's really nice. We all worked really hard. We had a great cast, but we pushed hard all the time. We had five weeks production rehearsal, but we were dealt huge blows by Covid – we didn't have everyone in the room together until week four! Sian was off for more than a week and most of the cast seemed to go off at one point or another; but no matter the situation, we continued to make endless requests of the singers. As is always necessary, we constantly strove towards an ideal that is ultimately never achievable. And of course, it's an opera in English being performed to an English speaking audience – we were always conscious of this.

In addition, Sian and I were very aware that creating a positive atmosphere, where everyone felt like they were a part of a huge family, was so important. That also extends back to the Opera Holland Park production team, and the whole administration. That's the ethos of this Company, and we all realise that setting that positive tone means we can push harder, all the time. I should also mention that our repetiteur, Mairi Grewar, was astonishingly excellent. The three of us Music Staff worked really hard in getting the singers to express through the vowels and to enunciate the consonants. It's very easy to stop pushing on those things, but you absolutely must because there's no point us all being there unless we make it as good as it can possibly be.

I thought that it was something that I hadn't heard composers or conductors really single out before. The fact that he said you had done that to an unprecedented degree intrigued me…

Our commitment perhaps *was* unprecedented. We found a thousand vocal score corrections, and a few hundred in the full score. This is an opera that has been done many times over a relatively long period of twenty-five years. We found errors that Mark has never known anyone to find. This nothing more than a gentle criticism of the publisher – it's very, very hard for them to get everything right for the first edition of the score. Even a few thousand errors would only equate to a couple of very small errors per page of music. Furthermore, I don't mean to state that our error finding was a uniquely grand achievement, but it does appear that Mark found the level that we were prepared to study the score to be unprecedented. We just wanted it to be as good as it could possibly be.

Very impressive. So, how did you prepare this score? I remember you telling me that you when you start learning a big piece you usually use your intuition to find an access point. Did you do something similar with *Little Women*?

Well, opera is fascinating because so much practicality gets in the way all the way along. Whether it's during the performances and the door doesn't open, or during the rehearsal process and a singer gets tired and needs to be replaced by a deputy. Practical issues in opera are off the scale compared to the rest of what conductors do. It's the same in the preparation. I got sent the vocal score pretty quickly after I got booked to do it, and I started work instantly – it's all about starting as soon as possible. I tried to start squeezing in daily time on the score from the moment I received it. If I could find half an hour, I treated it as gold dust. It's always unlikely you'll get a score and suddenly have three weeks of eight hours a day available. But, if I can find half an hour from day one that really counts.

As it turned out, I didn't get the full score for ages, and from the beginning I didn't know when I'd get it. They kept being vague about when it would arrive, so that was not ideal. But I had to ignore that and get to work. I immediately looked to see if I could purchase the libretto, but I couldn't find one. I don't think it exists. So I just got to work with the vocal score. If I had half an hour, I would spend fifteen minutes just working the text, and then fifteen minutes diving into the music (approximately 50-50). I really work the text because I want to understand the drama. I don't know about other conductors, but I find opera librettos really difficult to truly understand, and have to put a lot of study in. I started with the text on page 1 of the vocal score. Even though I

wanted the full score for reference, working from the vocal score is my preference.

So, I started to make quite long-winded notes in my score in tiny little pencil handwriting. I've done this all over the score at the top and the bottom of the pages. Sometimes I'm marking the dictionary definition of a word that I either don't know, or that I've heard but don't know the heritage of that word. Mark Adamo is a wordsmith and librettist of brilliance. He uses words in a very considered way, so I wanted to understand the true meaning, and full resonance, of his libretto. I go through the text, and as I go I create a little document on my computer that gives dot-point information, for example, about what happens in each scene. Then every time I come back and work on the next few pages of text I can remind myself where we are in the opera in terms of the dramatic narrative. Over time, I start to memorise the story – but honestly, I find that process very challenging. I have to work very hard at the text to properly understand it.

Then there's the historical context, in this opera there are many references to other pieces of art or operas etc. This opera quite often references *The Pilgrims Progress* so I made notes on that. There's an aria in German that I needed to get to grips with. In terms of the music, I begin by working with the vocal score. For this production I began with the only part of the opera I already knew, which was Jo's aria 'Perfect as we are'. Given that the whole score was otherwise entirely new to me, I wanted to give myself a helpful starting point that I could get to grips with quickly. I don't really condone that approach in general, I think we should dive in at the most difficult bit and work from there. When time inevitably dries up, at least you know the toughest bits well! But, on this occasion, as I had so much demanding work to do on the text and story, I sought a gentler window into the music.

Immediately after that I turned to the very end of the opera and started working backwards through the music (I was working forwards in the text and backwards in the music). Again, this was a purposeful strategy, because near the end of this opera is very similar to near the beginning. The Prologue that the audience hears/sees first is actually how the story would have ended. But, what the audience witnesses is our story going back in time. In Act One it's now three years ago. From there, we observe the three years in vignette-like scenes. As we watch the opera through, we watch the transformation in the main character Jo, and when we get to the end it has changed – it doesn't exactly replicate the Prologue. So, when I learned the

score, working from the ending helped me to understand the beginning and end at once. Of course, working from the end is often helpful, because, as we work backwards, we always know the direction of the drama in front of us.

As I began to uncover the opera, my usual pattern of work took over. I emphasised working on the more atonal parts. The tonal parts are somewhat sight sing-able, so it would have been lazy for me to prepare those first. I have to get into the music that I will aurally struggle with as early as possible.

So, in brief: I learned the text so I could understand the drama, and it's direction. I worked with an easy access-point into the music so I could understand part of the language as soon as possible. I then found an ideal access point – the ending, which is the beginning – that would give me a great musical overview of the piece as quickly as possible. Then I worked backwards, strongly emphasising learning the challenging bits as early as possible.

And, you know, I'm glad I decided to work with what I had immediately. I didn't receive the full score until two weeks before the music rehearsals!

(Laughs) Getting the full score two weeks before, I can't believe that!

Well, bear in mind we don't hear the orchestra until still five or six weeks later because we're working off the vocal score. So, not ideal, but it was OK.

Some people prefer to prepare with the full score, but there are often instructions in the vocal score that don't carry over into the full score. So I like to fully prepare from the vocal score – and that's why I found those one thousand mistakes! Then I like to move to the full score and prepare that as thoroughly as possible whilst already having all the pitches in my head – now I'm just learning the orchestration. Once you've got both scores, it's a very back and forth process – the orchestration affects the vocal score because it affects the way that the repetiteur will play certain sounds. It also affects the pacing of the music because a thicker texture in an orchestra might need to be slightly slower than what a piano can play.

Following the score, it's easy to see there are plenty of difficult transitions.

Yes.

Are there any other tricky aspects that are challenging for you as the conductor?

Yes. In virtually all of the standard repertoire pieces that you might have to perform, you wouldn't normally have more than two or three moments per piece that are truly dangerous. For example, for a standard overture, concerto, symphony concert I don't really feel any urgent need to look through the scores before the performance. It is different with this opera – the score is often awkward, so both Sian and I were going through the entire score during the afternoon before our performances. Every single bar. And, even more importantly, I made a list of the things to look at twice before a performance. I've got here seventeen moments written down that are so awkward for me, the orchestra or the singers, and things that I have to double check before every performance. Frankly, it's too many – it is a problem with this score that too many moments are unnecessarily awkward and can fall apart. I guess you could say that we found the technical responsibility for the conductor to be very high for this piece. But of course, the conductor *should* be fully technically prepared, it's just that it is helpful for everyone involved if the number of awkward moments is relatively few.

You were right to ask about this. This piece *is* awkward, but the striving for excellence from the composer is there in every moment – so, I have nothing but respect for Mark Adamo. Beyond that, I like him so much personally. I think this opera is a major achievement and a fantastic piece of theatre, but it's also OK to say that this was his first opera and an early work of his. Even he has said that he wants to make revisions and changes to the orchestration. It's natural that, with time, he's become an even finer composer and would now write music with even more skill. Perhaps one or two of those awkward moments might disappear too!

We also had far too little rehearsal – the budget is only so much. We really needed another three-hour orchestra rehearsal and another three-hour stage and orchestra rehearsal, but we just couldn't. It was Sian who was responsible for rehearsing the orchestra and giving the first performance, but it also meant that I was left with having never rehearsed this with the orchestra. It is a professional responsibility to be able to conduct without rehearsal – that is just how it goes in opera. But it was intense! That level of intensity can create magic because everyone is on the edge of their seats (and we got some magic) but if there's any hesitation it can very quickly be a disaster. But fortunately it all went well.

When Beth plays the piano on stage is it always really played down in the pit?

Yes, and that would always be the case. As romantic as it would seem, even for a very good piano-playing singer it's just raising the stakes too high. The singer needs to sing at a 100%, not 99.5 %. But even if they're a genius and can do both the singing and the piano to 100%, it's just not worth the risk.

I can give you a scenario: the singer walks over and their dress gets caught on the way to the piano. Musically, the next bar is coming whether they're ready to sit down and play at the piano or not. The conductor and orchestra can't just stop and wait for them to arrive, as this would cause an obvious mistake. But, if the singer isn't responsible for playing the piano, they can untangle their dress and start singing. Meanwhile, the audience can allow their mind to imagine that she was playing the piano. A small mistake, but something the audience, the singer, and the orchestra can immediately move on from.

An even more extreme version – and these things happen – the singer's dress has ripped, and she's got to the piano on time, but she's now thinking about that ripped dress. That's fine if she's only singing. Or maybe someone's had a stage issue, or perhaps something unexpected has happened in the pit. Essentially, it's fine for us (the singer, the orchestral musicians, or the conductor) to deal with a few extra problems at any one time. But to add in another level of difficulty on top of what is already a challenging job – it's just not worth the risk. I think it was Malcolm Gladwell[2] who wrote about studies to do with plane crashes. They only ever happen after something like seven errors – scientists have worked this out. Though with much lower stakes, it's the same for us. Catastrophic errors aren't likely to happen unless there are multiple things going wrong at once. We have to minimise the chance of getting five or six things wrong simultaneously. In opera, there's constantly one or two little things going wrong – that's fine. We're professionals, we hold tight and get through it! But adding in unnecessary risk is just not worth it.

I watched a very interesting hour-long panel discussion on *Little Women* including John Allison, editor of Opera magazine, Deborah Friedell, contributing editor at the London Review of Books, and OHP Director Ella Marchment. John Allison commented, 'he always strikes me as a *real* opera composer… There are a lot of opera composers who write, if you like, film

score type opera scores that accompany the action, that illustrate the action but they're not the engine that *drives* the action. And in my experience with Mark Adamo's pieces… his music is a kind of dramatic motor'.[3]

I was wondering if that's also how you experienced the work. Does that affect how you conduct it?

Well, by the time I knew the libretto and was getting into the music, it had struck me that this is a composer of the theatre. Mark Adamo understands theatrical experience for the audience, and what that means in terms of the score is *pacing*. The libretto is fantastic, but the pacing is what I got really excited about. So when preparing the score I was trying to serve that. Mark Adamo is someone who really understands how to give an audience a thwack when they need it or a completely devastating climax. He's got it! He's got that rare ability. I loved that about this piece. The libretto and the pacing of the drama was what developed my biggest respect for Mark as a composer of opera.

I found him a great dramatist – in particular, for me, the point where Beth is trying to calm down Jo down on her deathbed (Act II p.434 bars 48-53). She sings 'Jo, Jo, Jo, Jo, Jo' after her sister's hysterical outburst and the mood of the whole scene changes. I hadn't heard anything like that before.

I really agree with that, that's a very dramatic moment. Such intensity builds up and then Beth, the deeply devout, quiet character has an outburst, but one that is so restrained. It only uses one word, 'Jo, Jo, Jo, Jo, Jo, sssh'.

It is so powerful, that hit me as soon as I heard it.

And Beth's death is another powerful moment. In the studio rehearsals – with no costumes and limited props, just singing and piano – we had people in tears every single time we did it. I definitely had to try and keep it together a few times. That's what happens in exceptionally good theatre, and this is a result of something more than just the momentary excellence of the composition or the performance. It's the way that the piece is constructed, the way the audience is taken, over time, to that moment of heightened drama. Something similar happens at the end of the opera. The pacing and the artistic beauty of the four sisters coming back together is very moving. Mark

was able to create a sense of 'artistic whole', and there's something about achieving this that affects us as audience members.

Interestingly, Mark's libretto isn't actually the story of *Little Women* as told by Louisa May Alcott – I found that fascinating. It's a real character study, especially of Jo and her sisters, in under two hours of music. You get a very clear sense of who each of the sisters are. Mark borrows a few scenes from the novel and reorders them. He embellishes bits and adds or takes things away, and creates his own piece, but I think it is fundamentally *Little Women* because it's a character study on the sisters, as opposed to a verbatim a to b experience of the novel. I found that to be exceptional – the effort that it must have taken Mark to write something that is so respectful to the original must have been enormous.

At the end of the Houston Production DVD Mark Adamo is shown speaking about his connection to the story of *Little Women*. He said he could relate to Jo's feelings of betrayal when Meg left, as he had had a very close relationship with his sister and felt very abandoned when she got engaged. That scene was his route into the piece.[4]

Yes. What came up time and time again during the rehearsal process is how it's hard not to sympathise in some way with Jo's experience – whether it's losing a friend, to have to share that friend or sibling, or to be in a moment where you really think life's perfect but things soon change. We get told that throughout the opera – 'Things change Jo' is one of the central features of the story. We're seeing Jo and her sisters change throughout the opera. And it's hard not to relate that to our own experience. We've all lost a best friend or a sibling to their spouse, haven't we?

We have. Watching the Houston production, I could hear on p.521-22 (bars 72-88) that the solo cello line had been omitted.

Yes, there's one moment in the score where Jo gives a soliloquy and there's a solo cello line underneath – that cello solo was omitted in our production and also the DVD recording because Mark doesn't really want it there. He said you can put it in if it's needed. It says that it's optional in the vocal score (p.295).

So you did everything that was in the score other than that solo cello because of Mark's preference.

Absolutely, yes.

Sian Edwards briefly spoke about Adamo's sound world in this clip.[5] **'It's very lyrical, informed by American Musical theatre – the sort of complexity, but at the same time flowing ease of Sondheim, but little twinkles of Janáček and so on. So lots of lovely sounds.'**

Did you hear the music in a similar way?

Well, I should first of all say, I really don't know Sondheim that well, although once we'd discussed his music, his influence in Adamo's music became more clear to me. I certainly hadn't thought about Janáček, but Sian is a great Janáček advocate so you see why people's ears go in certain directions. But what sprung out to me was the influence of the nostalgic sound of Barber in the tonal sections. I think that's a very conscious decision on his part because Barber is able to capture that timeless American quality. I thought a lot about *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*. None of this music sounds like that piece, but they both evoke the image of someone sitting out on the veranda of a wooden house in hot weather – that's a classic American spacious sound. But, I was also probably drawn to that piece because there are the less lyrical moments in the *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* too. You can hear the modernism clashing against the nostalgic vision. In *Little Women* I hear that tonal, nostalgic sound, and I hear it juxtaposed against suddenly much more angular writing.

It was interesting to me that Mark was, at times in the opera, so willing to be so explicitly tonal when writing this only twenty-five years ago. But, just moments later in the score he would compose in twelve-tone language. Unlocking the reasons behind why he did this helped drive my study of the score. I remember thinking about the recurring melody in the horn (Prologue, bar 23), which Mark always refers to as the dodecaphonic melody. But, it only has eleven pitches in it! In the weeks we spent together I never thought to ask him about that. But, it remains interesting – in realising that the dodecaphonic melody doesn't even contain all twelve pitches, you learn something about the composer. Mark is someone of great richness and great dramatic and expressive ability, but I don't think he feels compelled to be within a box or stuck to a particular definition of how his music must be composed. Understanding that fluidity was part of his music helped me get more quickly into the score. Some of those juxtapositions are initially rather confronting, especially when you've gone from playing very straightforward

pianistic writing in the vocal score to unplayable chords that I can't read – even slowly – because there's so many pitches! I learned to appreciate that a wide-ranging sound world heightens his storytelling.

I also wonder how much he drew from *The Turn of the Screw* by Britten. That is partly serial – the horn does a twelve-tone theme between scenes, it's a chamber opera and Britten uses both tonality and atonality depending on what's dramatically most effective. They also both use piano, percussion and harp. There are a lot of similarities.

Yeah, it's a very reasonable assumption – but it's not one that occurred to me. What did occur to me was Britten's *Death in Venice*. I remember preparing *Little Women* and thinking of the decorative percussion and dreamy sound painting at the beginning of *Death in Venice*. I thought about the ending too – by memory, in its last few minutes, A major melodies are played over a very quiet, dissonant G# pedal note. It's haunting! Mark Adamo creates tension for the audience in a similar way, creating a feeling of joyous happiness with the major whilst a dissonant bass note underneath tells you that everything is not well. I think Mark is very good at doing that. He's wonderful at conveying the complexity of a character's emotions. And also, the 'shimmering' music of the opening of *Little Women* is a bit like the pulsating notes at the beginning of *Death in Venice* – I remember occasionally thinking about that too.

Well, I hope the OHP production gets put on again and I can get a chance to see it.

It was a really good production. What Opera Holland Park achieved was great. But despite the fact I think we did successful performances, there's a few moments in the score where I now realise we really could have done much better. Only at the point after we'd made critical decisions about tempos and staging etc. – where things couldn't be changed anymore – some pennies dropped for me (and probably for all the Music Staff) regarding how we could bring this music to life even more. Two moments in particular we, in retrospect, made incorrect pacing decisions. And, undoubtedly, there's detail in the score we missed too. That's the reality of doing pieces for the first time. It's inevitable that everyone learns so much through the process, even after the first performance! So we all need to do another production of this in order to make it even better!

Yes, please! Well, I think we've covered everything so thank you – you're always very supportive of this project.

It's always lovely to speak to you Hannah, so thank you for your time too and looking forward to seeing the result...

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdvdDIoy99o

[2] Gladwell, M. *Outliers* (Penguin 2009)

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlvqP8vOOcw 31m40s – 32m05s

[4] When people ask me about this opera, *Little Women*, and how I came to connect with it, I always think of Scene 2, which is the scene in which Jo accuses Meg of abandoning her, in essence, and in which Meg admits it quite bluntly. She says, 'yes, yes. I love you. But I love someone else now, differently and more.' And when I read that scene in the book I realised that I had lived this scene, because there were a couple of years when my sister Deborah and I were growing up in which we were friends in a way that's unusual, I think, for a brother and sister. I mean, most brothers and sisters get along but we really liked each other in a way that is unusual. And when she became engaged to the man with whom she's been very happily married for sixteen years now, I remember feeling extremely betrayed and abandoned. And Jo's response in the book was my response – I wanted to control the way she felt. I thought I was entitled to control the way she felt. And when that failed the temptation was to control myself to an alarming degree, that I would no longer be vulnerable to that sort of betrayal. And as I grew older I realised that this was far from an uncommon thing, that not only did that issue resurface in my own life, but in that of virtually every other adult I knew struggling to love and not to lose.

[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvHb5A8rQjo