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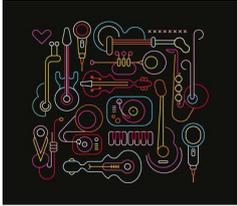
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HERE LIES LOVE AND THE POLITICS OF DISCO-OPERA

Aine Mangaoang

“We had a lot of money, you better believe it,” says *Saturday Night Live* actor Nora Dunn, dressed in a royal blue, satin *terno* (dress) with over-sized butterfly sleeves¹ and perfectly coiffed, black bouffant hairstyle in an immediate send up of the former first lady of the Philippines, Imelda Marcos.

“And let me tell you something, I knew how to party. I *was* the party! I was hot!”

The studio audience erupts in laughter and applause.

“I could disco all night long and look a million bucks the next day!”

Hands trembling, faux Imelda continues, “I’m a broken woman, I’m telling you. But I’m coming back,” she cries, wagging her index finger directly at the camera.

“Don’t worry, I’m coming back! I’m coming back.”

And with that she breaks into a high-pitched warble singing, “Fame! I’m gonna live forever! Light up the sky like a flame. Fame! I’m gonna live forever...”²

Here Lies Love is an album, and later stage-show, based on the real-life story of Imelda Romuáldez Marcos, wife of the former Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos.³ Based on biographical research on the former first lady of the Philippines (1965–86) and governor of Metro Manila (1975–86), *Here Lies Love* traces a novel interpretation of Imelda’s life story, from her youth in rural Philippines through to the Marcos-imposed martial law and their 20-year conjugal dictatorship. It emerged in 2006 as the brainchild of David Byrne, the successful solo artist, international theatre and film collaborator, and former frontman of new wave band Talking Heads. Byrne invited British DJ Norman Cook (Fatboy Slim) to collaborate and add the desired beats and discothèque affect.⁴ Planning to go above and beyond Imelda’s notoriously excessive shoe collection,⁵ Byrne elaborates on his original impetus for the work:

The story I was interested in was that of Imelda’s rise alongside the tragic parallel story of Estrella, the woman who raised her as a child. I felt that this story was more

universal, revealing and profound than that of the shoes—which anyway weren't discovered until the mobs descended upon the Manila palace after the Marcoses fled. For me the Marcoses' departure from the palace was the end of the story.⁶

In such interviews, as well as in his own extensive writings, Byrne goes to great lengths to describe his position as primary author / auteur of Imelda's life story, as that of a neutral or politically ambivalent observer, despite the fact that at the time of writing *Here Lies Love*, Imelda was – and is still – very much alive and practicing politics in the Philippines. As Byrne indicates in the above quotation, his interest in Imelda ends after she and her husband Ferdinand were forcibly banished from Malacañang Palace. As such, *Here Lies Love* also ends at this victorious moment for the thousands of People Power Revolution protesters.

The largely upbeat collection of pop songs, then, would seem to conflict with the historical reality of the Marcos regime. While Imelda herself administered some remarkable achievements during her reign as first lady and Governor of Manila, including significant patronage for Philippine arts and culture, the construction of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines and initiating a variety of state sanctioned arts programmes – all of which are directly referenced or gestured towards in *Here Lies Love's* various songs – it is crucial to add criminal activity and human rights abuses to the Marcos's overall tally. In the years following their reign, multiple reports and (international) court rulings have found Ferdinand Marcos liable for multiple human rights violations during his presidency. While statistics on the extent of human rights violations during martial law vary, Amnesty International report that 3,240 people were assassinated (most without trial), up to 34,000 were tortured, 70,000 imprisoned, and countless more who audibly disagreed with the Marcos family simply “disappeared.”⁷ Undeterred by such harrowing statistics, Byrne believed in his ability to create a work that centred on reportage rather than artistic license.⁸ In essence, Byrne believed that his art could, and would, transcend living Filipino politics.

My approach in this essay suggests a range of perspectives and discourses for understanding the title track “Here Lies Love” drawing from two differing recorded iterations of it as it appears. First is the original album recording of the song featuring the vocals of Florence Welch (2010), and second is the track as performed on the *Here Lies Love: Original Cast Recording* (2014), both released by Todomundo / Nonesuch Records. Despite Byrne's claims of separating art from politics in *Here Lies Love*, my analysis of the song demonstrates how the music is, through its various multimodal forms, fraught with overt socio-cultural and political significance. Following the lead of several music scholars who emphasise popular song as process rather than object, and stress that any analysis of music only becomes meaningful when positioned in relation to the context in which it is received,⁹ my argument proposes that the structures within these versions of “Here Lies Love” reveal a compositional process that can be read as an escalating revisionist, apologist text that operates in defence of Imelda. Drawing from close readings and observations from the stage production, my essay offers an approach that uses analytical tools more usually applied to uncover connections and underlying concepts in classical song cycles and opera to expand our analysis, and ultimately our understanding, of the politics of pop music.

Here Lies Love: the concept album

How do they justify—how does anyone justify—what might *seem* to be atrocious behaviour? Dance music could be some sort of link: the way people sort of lose

themselves at a rave or a club—maybe there’s something about it that connects to the feeling of somebody in power. Kind of a heady feeling, like you’re up in the clouds.¹⁰

In every sense, *Here Lies Love* represents a Western elucidation of Filipino living history. Byrne explains that his fascination with the Imelda narrative began after hearing of her love of disco. On diplomatic visits to the United States in the late 1970s, Imelda’s visits to exclusive, glitzy venues like Studio 54 and Regine’s are widely reported. Imelda found such affinity with disco culture that she converted one floor of the couple’s New York townhouse into a discothèque complete with mirror ball. Imelda’s name became synonymous with a passion for lavish partying, as well as her habit of spontaneously bursting into song,¹¹ with this reputation spreading to audiences around the world as the opening 1988 *Saturday Night Live* sketch synopsis depicts. Byrne envisioned a pop song cycle told from Imelda’s perspective, reflecting on events in her life, from her childhood in rural Philippines, her vital role in the Marcos campaigns for presidency (aided in no small part by Imelda’s real-life affective use of song at political rallies),¹² her well-known use of “handbag diplomacy” during the Marcos’ conjugal dictatorship, to their dishonourable expulsion from Manila. Byrne crafted the lyrics of *Here Lies Love* using found-text from interviews with Imelda, together with media reports and published accounts. The album’s title track “Here Lies Love” signifies just one of Imelda’s memorable quotes. Standing next to the embalmed corpse of her late husband, located (until very recently)¹³ in the Ferdinand E. Marcos Presidential Center – a museum in Ilocos Norte, a northern Philippine province – Imelda gazes at the glass case and declares “In my tombstone I would like to have inscribed ‘Here Lies Love.’”¹⁴

Here Lies Love debuted at the Adelaide Festival of Arts in March 2006, originally performed as a live work-in-progress show. With three singers (including Byrne) and four musicians, this preliminary presentation of the song cycle received encouraging reviews. Performances in Carnegie Hall followed in 2007, and in April 2010 *Here Lies Love* – a 22-track song cycle, or concept album – was released by Byrne and Fatboy Slim. It features an impressive cast of 20 guest female vocalists, rotating the character of Imelda from a variety of first person perspectives as well as the secondary characters of her childhood friend and family maid Estrella Cumpas and her husband Ferdinand (performed by Steve Earle). The album’s 22 tracks vary from disco-heavy tracks, Byrne-esque indie pop songs to lamenting ballads, with “Here Lies Love” falling somewhere between both categories. As the title track and leading song, “Here Lies Love” sets the tone for the 21 tracks that follow. Manipulating heady disco motifs of four-on-the-floor, sweeping orchestral choruses, and rising melodies in tandem with Fatboy Slim’s consistent techno pulse, this album, and more specifically, the title track tries to connect the euphoria felt on the crowded dancefloor – the racing beats, the rising temperature, the serotonin speeding through the brain and the body – with the ecstasy felt by a person newly empowered.

To address the song in question adequately as it is experienced, one must mention the distinctive, deluxe packaging for *Here Lies Love* April 2010 physical release. The ruby, cloth-bound book features the album title and artists’ names in embossed gold lettering beneath a colour portrait of Imelda. Photographed in a soft pink *terno* with embroidered flowers adorning the butterfly sleeves, Imelda stares directly at the viewer with a Mona Lisa-like smile, shielding herself from the sun, clutching a white parasol. Directly below the portrait, also engraved in gold text reads “A song cycle about Imelda Marcos & Estrella Cumpas” (Figure 24.1). This significance of this presentation is threefold: First, this red cloth,

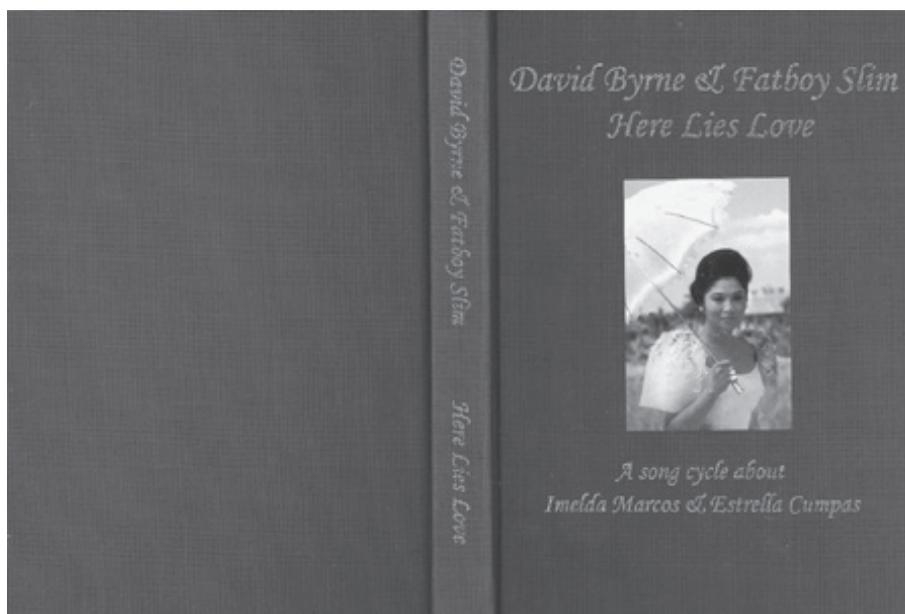


Figure 24.1 Cover for the album/book, *Here Lies Love*, 2010 (deluxe edition) © Todomundo / Nonesuch Records. Photo by author.

gilt-embossed 115-page book with double CDs and DVD concealed inside, bears a notable resemblance to the famous “red book” from the well-known television documentary series *This Is Your Life*, that publicly celebrates the lives and achievements of various individuals – laymen and celebrities alike.¹⁵ Before hearing the album, the packaging is such that it steers the listener towards hearing the work as an ode to Imelda, a biographical celebration or tribute album. Second, although Estrella’s name features after Imelda’s on the cover, it is clear from her lack of featured portrait on the cover, or any image of her in the image-rich book inside, that in this particular retelling of history, Cumpas will be instrumental only in fortifying the work’s lead protagonist.¹⁶ Third, the insistence on including “song cycle” in the title and emblazoned on the cover, positions – indeed elevates – the album alongside the canon of Western art music, conjuring up explicit associations with nineteenth-century Austro-German Lieder collections. This reference thus partly dictates, however indirectly, my approach to the album, as I fuse techniques for understanding aspects of classical repertoire in a genre where the term “concept album” predominates.

Sound(track)ing Imelda: The Mechanics of a Disco-Pop Song

The album’s first track, “Here Lies Love,” features a conventional pop/disco set-up of lead vocalist, guitar, keyboards, and synthesized bass. In addition, Byrne uses an 11-piece ensemble of strings, horns (trumpet, French horn and trombone), and woodwind (clarinet, flute and oboe), creating the quintessential lush, disco background sound. Indeed, the very title blends in easily alongside a litany of classic 1970s heavily orchestrated disco tracks that profess love in their title and refrain, such as “Love Train” by the O’Jays (1972), “I Love to Love” by Tina Charles (1976), Chic’s “I Want Your Love,” Donna Summer’s “I Feel Love” and the Emotions’ “Best of My Love” (1977), among many others. Structurally “Here Lies

Love” is crafted as a pop ballad, akin to disco ballads such as ABBA’s “The Winner Takes It All,” Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive” or the Bee Gees’ “How Deep is Your Love.” It follows a familiar disco-pop song form (Table 24.1), albeit markedly extended at 178 bars/5’52” compared with shorter traditional pop songs.

The first track features guest vocalist Florence Welch, “embodying”¹⁷ the character of Imelda Marcos. Frontwoman for the British indie pop band Florence and the Machine, which by 2010 had reached international recognition, Welch was among the most well-known guest vocalists on the double album. Renowned for her bohemian, ethereal vocals, Welch is also significant as a female pop-star whose middle-class status became newsworthy during her up-and-coming years in 2008–9. Many media reports focused on Welch’s non-working class background, as Barbara Bradby notes, the implication being that the search for an alternative narrative of suffering became manifested in Welch’s articulations of her inner demons.¹⁸ Critics of Welch’s rising status such as Alex Niven lament the “championing” of Welch’s “Bloomsbury-meets-Björk aesthetic” as indicative of how the liberal middle-classes have “abandoned counterculture and true radicalism for an unfortunate lingering obsession with escapist lifestyle fantasy.”¹⁹ Bradby’s analysis of Welch’s reception further reveals how

Table 24.1 “Here Lies Love” Song Structure (2010)

<i>Track time</i>	<i>Section</i>	<i>Bar Count</i>
0’01”	Instrumental Introduction	8 bars
0’16”	Drum and Bass Introduction	4 bars
0’23”	Verse 1 (A)	8 bars
0’39”	Verse 1 (B)	8 bars
0’53”	Verse 2 (A)	8 bars
1’10”	Verse 2 (B)	8 bars
1’25”	Bridge	10 bars
1’44”	Pre-Chorus	8 bars
2’00”	Chorus	8 bars
2’15”	Chorus	8 bars
2’30”	Verse 3 (A)	8 bars
2’46”	Verse 3 (B)	8 bars
3’02”	Bridge	10 bars
3’21”	Pre-Chorus	8 bars
3’36”	Chorus	8 bars
3’50”	Chorus	8 bars
4’06”	Instrumental Interlude	12 bars
4’30”	Pre-Chorus	8 bars
4’45”	Chorus	8 bars
5’00”	Chorus	8 bars
5’16”	Instrumental ‘Outro’	14 bars
5’43”	Percussive/Sparkplug fadeout...	/
5’52”	End	Total: 178 bars

such class critiques of Welch are extended to her fans, for whom Florence has become “a godsend for the theatrically ‘troubled’ middle-class girls the world over.”²⁰ The infused class politics and cultural mediation of Welch become compelling in light of Byrne’s choice of Welch to portray Imelda in “Here Lies Love,” the album’s title track and signature song that speaks of Imelda’s deprived youth and her dreams of social mobility. With her commanding, brassy, fantastical voice, the character of Imelda voiced by – and specifically through – Welch sounds both delightfully congruent *and* oddly dissonant. In choosing Welch, Byrne has found a voice that captures much of the complex essence of Imelda as an utterly uncanny being. Welch is especially recognisable as an expressive and emotive vocalist with the ability to sustain notes for long periods of time without wavering in pitch or tone.²¹ Her vocal line in “Here Lies Love” is complimented by a clarinet countermelody, and reinforced by a flute motif in the octave above. The layered, soaring vocal melody is doubled by brass and woodwind as well as Welch’s multi-tracked backing vocals harmonising the melody in thirds, floating above the electric guitar, synthesized keyboards, throbbing bass and looped samples. Byrne’s use of Imelda’s first person lyrical account – gleaned from interviews and diary passages written by Marcos and poetically interwoven with Byrne’s own prose – adds an air of legitimacy to the album’s overall narrative.²²

Lyrically, the first verse paints the scene of Imelda’s modest origins in the rural Philippine town, detailing her love of music and public performance as stemming from childhood: “When I was a young girl in Leyte...” (0’23”–0’53”). The melodic contours of the opening verse of “Here Lies Love” harken back to the well-known octave leap in “(Somewhere) Over the Rainbow.” The upwards octave leap between the first two words “When I ...”, followed by the minor second fall to the seventh (with the lyric “was”) further melodically mirrors “Over the Rainbow,” which, following its octave jump also glides to the seventh (see Figures 24.2 and 24.3). Both songs feast on the tension of the dramatic ascending octave leap, as they fall to the seventh, hover around, and return to the seventh a second time.

By replicating such a well-known musical motif as the opening three pitches of the “Over the Rainbow” chorus to begin “Here Lies Love,” Byrne instantly – albeit possibly unconsciously – positions his characterisation of Imelda Marcos alongside Judy Garland’s wide-eyed Dorothy Gale in *The Wizard of Oz* (dir. Fleming, 1939). Much like Welch’s performance of “Here Lies Love,” Garland’s “Over the Rainbow” eloquently narrates an emotive tale of childhood dreams, insecurity, and a seemingly endless search for happiness. The influence of “Over the Rainbow” over popular culture has endured in the 80-years since its release. Its legacy may be measured, in part at least, by the continuation of the “Over the Rainbow” musical trope: the female protagonist on screen or stage singing a reflective, and



Figure 24.2 Author transcription of the opening verse 1 of “Here Lies Love”



Figure 24.3 Author transcription of the opening chorus of “Over the Rainbow”

reflexive ballad that allows the character to “think out loud,” and in the process of doing so, delivers insight and compassion. The musical motifs that connect “Over the Rainbow” to “Here Lies Love” can be seen as part of a larger trope, read alongside an array of musical standards from “Don’t Cry for Me Argentina” from *Evita* (1976) and “I Dreamed a Dream” from *Les Misérables* (1980), to “Part of Your World” from *The Little Mermaid* (1989), “Let it Go” from *Frozen* (2013), and a host of other Disney power ballads. Such a sympathetic framing of Imelda through this deeply rooted musical association of empathy is antithetical to maintaining a critical distance and political neutrality.

The B section of the second verse further illustrates the rising melody with accompanying woodwind countermelody and Welch’s controlled, sustained notes as the percussion builds. Marcos’s soaring ambition towards class mobility is revealed to have originated since childhood: “We lived a stone’s throw from the palace...” (0’54”–01’24”). The accompanying four-on-the-floor rhythm at 125 bpm is provided by synthesised beats, in addition to syncopated bass line, with thick octaves textures. The synthesised, syncopation reflects the lyrical content, underlining the fictional Imelda’s ambition to overcome her current impoverished state, while use of the octaves emphasise an underlying power present from the beginning of Imelda’s life. Welch’s mezzo-soprano range is utilised; her elastic chest-voice seamlessly leaps between octaves, with melodic and harmonic lines traversing two octaves (from a^4 to a^5), suggesting Imelda’s ability not only to survive, but thrive, on different strata.

Naïve innocence is feigned in the bridge section, as Byrne crafts an act of denial as his staged Imelda asks: “Is it a sin to love too much?” (01’25”–01’43”). Welch sings the first line with a subtle flatness in tone, augmenting her appeal for absolution. Only at the word “unfair” (01’40”–01’43”) does her tone develop a subtle vibrato. A relatively limited dynamic vocal compass restrains the pre-chorus, matched with a highly controlled vocal delivery, sustaining the pitch with a minimum of vibrato towards the end of the note rather than boiling over with uncontrollable emotion, keeping Welch, and thereby Imelda firmly and clearly in command.

This sense of composure continues as the chorus pushes into a bright and substantial head voice, with only minor vocal inflections that serve to add to the soulful expression: “I know that when my number’s up (...) Just say: Here lies love” (01’44”–02’30”). The level of vocal control here is remarkable. Welch remains steadily paced throughout the duration of “Here Lies Love,” almost to the point of restraint, embodying a sense of authority as a singer, and as one personifying the character of Imelda.

Like many pop and disco tracks, repetition is prominent. The song title pervades the chorus, repeated six times. The words “here lies love” are heard 18 times in total, compulsively reinstating Imelda’s high hopes and romantic fantasies, propelling them forward. In addition to the repeated lyrics of the chorus, the instrumental features are explicitly reiterated. Synthesised bass riffs sound throughout, cushioning the melodic “Here Lies Love” motif, echoed by the strings, and repeated 18 times throughout the track. The infectious, looping four-to-the-floor rhythm impels the listener to move, with each percussive repetition breeding the desire for another, engaging with the listener’s entire body. In Susan McClary’s words, “one truly does not want the groove to stop”.²³ The song’s continuous repetitions and the continuous circulation of the phrase “here lies love” function as a form of aural domination, ascribing it with the ability to captivate the listener into singing, and dancing, along.

This repeated chorus, based on Imelda’s fantasised tombstone epitaph, provides at least one extra layer of psychoanalysis worth considering, bridging death, repetition,

and omniscience. Early Sigmund Freud saw compulsive repetition as a ritual enactment of repressed material too unpleasant for us to deal with. Repetition is linked, then, to the Death Drive, Thanatos, which is in ceaseless dialogue with Eros, the Life Drive. The death drive is transversal to identity, and in what Julia Kristeva's terms, its tendency to disperse narcissisms.²⁴ At the same time, narcissism and pleasure are only temporary positions from which the death drive blazes new paths. Narcissism and pleasure are therefore seductions and, in this case, realisations of the death drive. Lyrically, a naïve, nostalgic, and somewhat narcissistic Imelda is depicted as she looks back at her life through rose-tinted glasses. Musically, the looped, disco-tinged accompaniment and euphoric repetition sugar-coats her saccharine prose even further. The song follows a disco-meets-ballad blueprint with its use of A major-key, overtly uplifting, soaring instrumental arrangement placed atop a driving bass and percussion section. The song's ascending melodic, disco-anthem nature and repetition of the upbeat chorus leads ultimately to an overwhelmingly positive sound that coaxes the listener to move to the groove. The (temporary) seduction and pleasure gained from the almost compulsive repetition within "Here Lies Love" is further construed when combined with the utopian, collective ecstasy of disco.

Bringing Shoes to the Stage in *Here Lies Love* (2014)

The 2010 *Here Lies Love* album was followed by *Here Lies Love: Original Cast Recording* (hereafter OCR) released in May 2014. This time the song is the second track on a double CD album that includes an 80-page, full-colour booklet featuring Byrne's writing, and the 2010 recording of "Here Lies Love" was considerably revised to make it more suitable for an off-Broadway audience. According to his own liner-notes, Byrne found several challenges in adapting the song cycle to stage, and to assist this, the creative team sought out every opportunity to tell the story visually as well as musically. Byrne and director Alex Timbers describe how, in the stage version, all the elements, "the music, lyrics, dance, staging, lights, video—collide to create a sense of meaning and emotion,"²⁵ helping accelerate the narrative in a time-efficient manner.²⁶ *Here Lies Love*, the "revolutionary musical experience"²⁷ or disco-opera, premiered at New York's Public Theater in April 2013 and opened in London's National Theatre in 2014.²⁸ Employing a cast of primarily Filipino- and Asian-American actors, the musical is experienced through a continually reconfiguring, flexible set, with up to half of the audience positioned standing in front of the stage as if at a pop/rock gig, or more specifically, on a disco dancefloor.²⁹ Choreography, by Annie-B Parson, includes audience participatory line-dances led by the cast.³⁰ Dance is an "ideological way of listening," in Simon Frith's terms, that "draws our attention to arguments about its own meaning."³¹ To build on Frith's assertion, additional meaning is ascribed to *Here Lies Love* by the ways that audiences respond to it; their physical movements serve to "say something about it."³² Audiences are also transported *inside* the production, willingly or not, by using innovative video techniques. Real-time visual projections of audience members' faces simulcast onto large television screens during scenes of political rallies give the effect of the audience as members of the Filipino public during Marcos's rule. By cheering the characters of Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos along, with images of the audience applause played back on the vast flat-screens around the theatre, the paying audience become complicit in the rise of the regime. Such inventive staging does much to break the fourth wall between audience and actor, patron and player, as well as critically question the complicit role of audiences in times of political turmoil.

The stage edition of *Here Lies Love* significantly extends the original 2010 album, with seven new songs written specifically for the musical.³³ The disco-opera setting of “Here Lies Love” is marked by some noticeable, structural differences to the album version of the song. As mentioned above, Byrne describes the necessity in re-writing, deleting, and indeed composing some brand-new material for the stage production of *Here Lies Love* as a necessity to move the story forward in the manner of musical theatre song-writing. Moved from being the opening track as it was on the first album, “Here Lies Love” – with Ruthie Ann Miles portraying Imelda – is the second track heard in the live show/on the OCR.³⁴ At 4’06”/128 bars, Miles’ version of “Here Lies Love” is 50 bars shorter than the Welch edition, condensing the original song considerably from its original 5’52”/178 bars while keeping the same upbeat 125 bpm as the previous recording. The revised edition hears the chorus repeated three times compared to the original six repetitions, and brings a greater sense of immediacy to the lyrics by changing the first verse from past tense to present. Minor structural revisions are made by bringing verse three forward to follow verse one. The accompaniment remains similar to that of the first recording with the sweeping string sections, woodwind counter-melodies and rippling synthesisers. In conspicuous contrast to Welch’s indie pop vocals, Ruthie Ann Miles’ crisp delivery emphatically articulates each vowel and syllable in true musical theatre style, hitting each note with perfection that resonates into a rich vibrato. The overall effect of Miles’ clean and clear delivery is one that removes some of the pleading, yearning ambition heard in Welch’s version. And in further contrast to the first recording, the disco-opera edition introduces a second character of Cumpas (sung by Melody Butiu) leading the melody on a line in the second verse.

Byrne stated from the outset that he sought to avoid Imelda’s notorious shoe narrative that has, over the past 30-years, become something of an international joke and tale of ostentatious excess. In staging *Here Lies Love*, Byrne and Timbers detail their complete avoidance of Imelda’s shoes and their desire not to venture into the melodramatic or camp territory. “We don’t even mention the shoes” Byrne declares, while Timbers pronounces “This definitely isn’t *Evita*.”³⁵ However, one of the main, if not the most noticeable changes we hear in the second recording of “Here Lies Love” is structural change, caused by added lyrics. Following the third verse, the song shifts from the previous arrangement (Table 24.1), modulating into a new middle 8 that is repeated into a 16-bar section (see Table 24.2).

This added section serves as a novel way of fusing the title track with an excerpt from another song from the first *Here Lies Love* album that was abandoned in the ensuing disco-opera. Lyrics from the second section of verse two of “Every Drop of Rain,” originally sung by Candi Payne and St.Vincent, are repurposed and rewritten with fragments inserted into the revised version of “Here Lies Love” to effectively portray Imelda’s childhood destitution. As such the new extended middle 8 section becomes Imelda, Estrella and Chorus singing: “At least we have each other / The neighbours passed us food” (8 bars), followed by Imelda with Chorus in backing harmony singing: “No clothes, no bed, no jewellery / Sometimes I had no shoes” (8 bars). This tonal shift is echoed in the music, as it moves from the bright-sounding A-major into A-minor for the duration of this section’s 16-bars. Following the third verse, which featured heavy orchestration, synthesisers and percussion, the new middle section initially drops to an almost acapella female chorus of vocalists in two-part harmony for 8-bars (“At least we have each other / The neighbours passed us food”). Holding the word “food” for four beats, with sparse harmonies, the lyrics and

Table 24.2 “Here Lies Love” song structure (*Original Cast Recording* (2014))

Track time	Section	Bar Count
0'01"	Instrumental Intro	4 bars
0'06"	Verse 1 (A)	8 bars
0'22"	Verse 1 (B)	8 bars
0'37"	Verse 2 (A)	8 bars
0'53"	Verse 2 (B)	8 bars
1'07"	Bridge	10 bars
1'28"	Pre-Chorus	8 bars
1'42"	Chorus	8 bars
1'58"	Verse 3 (A)	8 bars
2'46"	Verse 3 (B)	8 bars
2'28"	New Middle Section	8 bars + 8 bars
2'59"	Bridge	10 bars
3'18"	Pre-Chorus	8 bars
3'33"	Chorus	8 bars
3'49"	Chorus	8 bars
4'06"	End	Total: 128 bars

delivery of the latter lyrics serve to make explicit that young Imelda knew poverty. The second 8-bar section is led by Miles singing the melodic line to the fore and the chorus of female voices singing a harmonic countermelody a third below. This section gradually gets louder, associating the richer, sonic textures with Imelda's real-life growth in wealth and material riches. The accompanying violins return playing the familiar “Here Lies Love” orchestral motif in the upper register, combined with a loud drum fill culminating on the word “shoes,” sung on the tonic – A – sustained for maximum effect across two bars. The sustained A on the lyric “shoes” then oversees the modulation back to A major, acting as the bridge between the minor and major sections, delivering us from Imelda's childhood poverty to the dazzlingly powerful First Lady singing this song in “real time.”

Adding this new “shoe section” to “Here Lies Love” signals – or quite literally punctuates – Byrne's desire to show diplomacy in his version of Imelda's succession to power. The uncovering of Imelda's shoes by anti-Marcos protesters, be they 3,000 or 1,060 pairs,³⁶ has become a metonym for the voracious consumerism and rapacity of the ousted Mrs. Marcos. The shoes publicly heralded the moment that much of the world took notice of Imelda's excessive lifestyle, positioning her as a veritable Marie Antoinette figure of power “behind the throne.”³⁷ Byrne's decision to include Imelda's tale of childhood poverty in the disco-opera's title track is crucial in setting up *his* characterisation of her. But by choosing to reference her historical lack of childhood shoes in the staged version of the song becomes a powerful, and profoundly partisan moment. It reconstructs and reframes the Imelda narrative Byrne elects to tell from the beginning, musically manipulating the audience to invoke pity, empathy, or even understanding towards the Iron Butterfly. In the revised version of the song then, Byrne's dramatic, climatic inclusion of Imelda's shoes – or lack thereof – become the song's new leading metaphor underpinning Imelda's inner psyche.

Discussion and Conclusion: In Defence of Imelda?

Imelda's return to Manila in 1991 after her husband Ferdinand Marcos died in exile, revealed a nation of Filipinos who continue to love and hate their former First Lady in seemingly equal measures. Imelda Marcos continues to serve the nation, having assumed office as a Member of the Philippine House of Representatives in June 2010, just a few weeks following the release of Byrne's *Here Lies Love* song cycle. Approaching her nineties at the time of writing, Imelda remains among the most influential figures in the Philippines today. Public discourse towards the Marcos family has also continued over the years, sparked in part by her daughter Maria "Imee" Marcos's alleged role in the torture and murder of a Filipino college student in the 1970s, her son Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.'s narrow and highly contentious defeat in the Vice President of the Philippines 2016 election, and current President Rodrigo Duterte's controversial decision to give the late Ferdinand Marcos a state burial with full military honours at *Libingan ng mga Bayani* (Heroes' Cemetery) in November 2016. Despite public outcries from the Philippine academe calling for the Marcos family to be held accountable for their attempts to glorify the harrowing horrors of Martial Law, Imelda and her family continue to the feature in Philippine celebrity columns, are regularly included in popular commentary, and grace the covers of Filipino newspapers and magazines. A recent statement released by the University of the Philippines Diliman warns that:

Great danger now lurks behind a deceptive nostalgia for a past that never really existed—that the Marcos years were a period of peace and prosperity. This is patently Marcos myth and deception.³⁸

While much scholarship on the Marcos' conjugal dictatorship and analyses of the Imelda "myth" exists, *Here Lies Love's* recent arrival to the table means that relatively little has been written about the musical work to date.³⁹ Motivated by a desire to rewrite the history books, Byrne describes his aspiration for *Here Lies Love* as a work of art that focuses on the "incredible, brave, and beautiful" – but largely forgotten – actions taken by the Philippine people during the peaceful People Power Revolution of 1986. For the disco-opera, Byrne goes to great lengths to establish a "festive clubby vibe, introduce the Filipino inundation and fascination with U.S. pop culture, and, by implication, bring up U.S. influence over Philippine politics."⁴⁰ Indeed a small number of the other songs from *Here Lies Love* go the distance to demonstrate the lived reality of violence effected under martial law. The ballad "Order 1081," as one predominantly affecting example, lyrically paints a picture of the everyday struggles faced by millions of Filipinos under Marcos's authoritarian rule – bombs, insurgents, guerrillas, the Pope's visit in 1981, the false sense of security a dictatorship affords.

Claiming neutrality in presenting Imelda in theatrical form is a paradox in itself. As Stuart Hall reminds us:

The past is not waiting for us back there to recoup our identities against. It is always retold, rediscovered, reinvented. It has to be narrativized. We go to our own pasts through history, through memory, through desire, not as literal fact.⁴¹

Byrne's disco-opera spectacle is a musical reinvention of Philippine history, of martial law, and of Imelda Marcos, in order to make her appealing to audiences. Byrne strove to find a balance in "creating a portrait of Marcos that didn't vilify or mock or condone her actions," citing this as one of the disco-opera's greatest compositional challenges. Byrne believes that

in a disco-opera at least, “you can’t sort of hate your main character right from the beginning of the show.”⁴² His desire to marry factual, historical accounts of Imelda with music, and enjoy (artistic and commercial) success creates complexities, and profound limitations, in creative freedom. Even more so, by the time the disco-opera took to stage, Byrne revealed a yearning to engage directly with the protagonist of his disco-opera, Imelda Marcos, as his programme notes pronounce:

Madame Marcos had the flu when I was visiting Manila for research, so no, I didn’t meet her. Does she know about the project? Yes, she does, but she hasn’t seen the earlier production at the Public Theatre in NYC. I think she’d like the music, the festive vibe, and the attention...⁴³

This is followed by a colour photograph of Imelda, white earphones in hand, and an iPod in the shot, with the caption “Imelda listening to the earlier all-star version of *Here Lies Love*” (see Figures 24.4a, b). This fleeting, but nonetheless telling aspect of Imelda’s perspective on



Figure 24.4a Photo by author of *Here Lies Love* programme cover and excerpt of David Byrne’s essay that features “Madame Marcos.” Byrne, D. (2014). *Here Lies Love: The Story*. (Programme notes) National Theatre: London. Photograph in view is © Jes Aznar / New York times / Redux / eyevine



Figure 24.4b Photo by author of *Here Lies Love* programme cover and excerpt of David Byrne's essay that features "Madame Marcos." Byrne, D. (2014). *Here Lies Love: The Story*. (Programme notes) National Theatre: London. Photograph in view is © Jes Aznar / New York times / Redux / eyevine

Here Lies Love speaks volumes about the troubling task it is to retell, reinvent and indeed to rewrite *living* history. Imelda, the protagonist, continues to be deeply involved in Philippine politics, serving as congresswoman for a third, consecutive term. To remove the political from such a pop production is truly impossible, since Imelda *is* politics. As my reading of the title song suggests, by including Imelda's engagement with *Here Lies Love*, combined with Byrne's sympathetic framing of Imelda through the mechanics of popular song (whether consciously or not) is clearly antithetical to maintaining critical distance and political neutrality. While Byrne claimed to seek a form of critical objectivity at the outset of the work's creation, I have shown that contrary to this, the two versions of "Here Lies Love" contain subtle individual features that when considered together trace a different pathway, portraying Imelda as a figure of giddy excess rather than a deceitful criminal. Both versions of "Here Lies Love" work musically, lyrically and visually to place the audience in a position of empathy with Imelda, observing her as the disco-opera's protagonist – a flawed individual but heroine nonetheless.

The nature of musicals and opera is such that much of the storytelling is carried over from the music to the visual. As such, the inventive staging – choreography and lighting included, the real-time and archival film projections, and vivid costumes – helps to tell the story visually, complementing and accelerating the narrative information in the songs by gesturing towards Byrne’s un-scored thoughts on Imelda. The presentation of extra-musical material, then, becomes crucial to the overall experience of the song, and especially in voicing Byrne’s more critical perspective of the Marcos regime. The cost of separating the song from its spectacular audiovisuality – its imaginative, immersive, critically engaged staging – so that it is experienced only through the medium of recorded song means the crucial, critical perspective is rendered unspoken and therefore lost in “audio only” format. As a single, signature song for the album and disco-opera, the song is ascribed with meaning akin to Marcos revisionism. Through this process of looking deeper into “Here Lies Love” and its various iterations, its carefully constructed musical *jouissance* is revealed, affirming it as an audible form of Imelda apologetics.

Notes

- 1 The *terno* is the national dress of the Philippines, popularised internationally by Imelda Marcos.
- 2 Set up as a satellite TV interview sketch, the impersonated Imelda only stops singing when the satellite screen cuts out. Transcript by the author from Nora Dunn’s interview with Dennis Miller. *Saturday Night Live*, Season 14: Episode 5. Aired November 12, 1988.
- 3 Hereafter I refer to Imelda Romuáldez Marcos as Imelda, to differentiate from her husband Ferdinand Marcos. Imelda was and continues to be referred to as the Iron or Steel Butterfly. See Katherine Ellison, *Imelda: Steel Butterfly of the Philippines* (Lincoln, NE: McGraw-Hill, 1976). The moniker derives from both her political approach and her popularisation of *terno*, a long dress with oversized short-sleeves called butterfly sleeves, usually made of pineapple fibre to keep shape.
- 4 Byrne’s decision to invite Cook to collaborate reveals Byrne’s aspiration to work with a dance music expert who had practice in many genres including live band experience. Norman Cook honed his craft as the bassist of the 1980s band The Housemartins, and thus Byrne saw in Cook a DJ with a strong understanding of song structure. To date, Cook appears to have remained silent on the album’s subject matter, with no evidence of Cook’s perspective or commentary on public record.
- 5 After protesters stormed Manila’s Malacañang Palace in 1986, they uncovered up to 3,000 pairs of Imelda’s shoes, which were widely covered in international news reports.
- 6 David Byrne, *Here Lies Love* (Nonesuch Records, 2010).
- 7 Lito Tiongson, *Batas military: A Documentary About Martial Law in the Philippines* (Pasig City: Foundation for World Wide People Power, 1997). As of May 2015, 75,730 persons have filed in the Human Rights Victims Claims Board (HRVCB) in the Philippines as human rights violations victims of martial rule (1972–1986), or as next of kin of victims who have suffered, died, or disappeared during those dark years of the Marcos regime. Moreover, in the 1990s a US jury held the estate of Ferdinand Marcos liable for human rights violations that occurred in the Philippines during martial law. After six years of pre-trials, appeals, and two-week trial, “the estate was found liable to a class of ten thousand Filipinos and twenty-three named plaintiffs for torture, summary execution, disappearance, and prolonged arbitrary detention.” Ralph G. Steinhardt, “Fulfilling the Promise of Filartiga: Litigating Human Rights Claims against the Estate of Ferdinand Marcos,” *Yale Journal of International Law* XX (1995): 65–66.
- 8 As Christine Kearney’s review of Byrne’s Carnegie Hall performance of *Here Lies Love* details: “‘This is not artistic license, this is reportage,’ Byrne told a laughing audience.” See Christine Kearney, “In New York, David Byrne sings of Imelda Marcos,” *Reuters*, via *The Washington Post*, (February 4, 2007).

- 9 See for example: Nicholas Cook, “Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance,” *Music Theory Online* VII, no. 2 (2001); Simon Frith, “Music and Identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996); Lucy Green, *Music on Deaf Ears: Musical Meaning, Ideology and Education* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Stan Hawkins, “Musicological Quagmires in Popular Music: Seeds of Detailed Conflict,” *Popular Musicology Online* I (2001); and Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).
- 10 David Byrne, *Journal Entry* (2006) from www.davidbyrne.com (now unavailable), quoted in “Indie Rock’s Patron Saint Inspires a New Flock.” Will Hermes. *The New York Times* (January 14, 2007).
- 11 Further details on the performative power of Imelda’s singing, see Christina Bacarenza Balance, “Dahil Sa Iyo: The performative power of Imelda’s song,” *Women Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* XX, no. 2 (2010): 119–140.
- 12 Sharon Churcher, “Imelda Marcos’s Nightlife.” *New York Magazine*, (May 10, 1982): 10.
- 13 2016 marks the 30th anniversary of the Philippine People Power Revolution, and a recent decree from the current Filipino Supreme Court, with the support of President Rodrigo Duterte, granted former President Ferdinand Marcos a burial with honours at *Libingan Ng Mga Bayani* (Philippine Heroes Cemetery) in November 2016. The full military burial was carried out with almost no warning to the Philippine public, and met with mass protests from anti-Marcos demonstrators.
- 14 Ramona Diaz (dir.) *Imelda: The Movie* (Makati City: Unitel Pictures, 2003).
- 15 *This Is Your Life* aired as a US radio and TV series on NBC from 1948, and continues to be adapted by various international television broadcasters today.
- 16 For further critique on Cumpas’s marginalised representation on the album, see Katrina Macapagal, “Here Lies Love: Notes on Fetishizing History,” *Review of Women’s Studies* XXI, no. 1 (2013): 38–53.
- 17 The extent to which a singer “embodies” a character in popular song more generally falls outside the remit of this essay; here I refer to character embodiment – considering the voice as a supplier of the body and as a means for “corporeal theatrics” (Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *Inside Out: Lesbian Stories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss, [London: Routledge, 1991], 13–31, 3).
- 18 Barbara Bradby, “Too Posh to Rock? The Exposure of Social Class,” in *Popular Music Matters: Essays in Honour of Simon Frith*, edited by Lee Marshall and David Laing (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 11–30.
- 19 Alex Niven, “Florence and the Machine Feed a Bourgeois Fantasy of ‘Folksiness.’” *The Guardian*, November 5, 2011.
- 20 Adam Smyth quoted in Barbara Bradby, “Too Posh to Rock? The Exposure of Social Class,” in *Popular Music Matters: Essays in Honour of Simon Frith*, edited by Lee Marshall and David Laing, 11–30. (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 20.
- 21 Example of this in Florence and the Machine track “No Light, No Light.”
- 22 Although to be fair, Imelda’s musings are taken somewhat out of context when cut and pasted into Byrne’s ballads.
- 23 Susan McClary, “Same as It Ever Was: Youth Culture and Music,” in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*, edited by Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, 29–40 (London: Routledge, 1994), 38.
- 24 Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 128.
- 25 Quote from director Alex Timbers from Adam Green, “Good Times: David Byrne and Alex Timbers Team Up for *Here Lies Love*,” *Vogue*, March 13, 2013.
- 26 As Timbers and Byrne detail, such novel, multimodal techniques include the introduction of young senator Ferdinand Marcos to the audience via simulated live TV coverage of his senate campaign, projected onto screens around the theatre, instantly conveying Marcos as a charismatic and aggressive up-and-coming politician.

- 27 As it is reference on the *Here Lies Love* poster campaign and National Theatre programme cover for *Here Lies Love* (2014).
- 28 My observations of the live *Here Lies Love* performance are based on my attendance at the National Theatre's Dorfman Theatre in December 2014. The stage production won a host of accolades for its music, performance and production, and its New York run was extended four times. A brief glimpse of such awards includes: two Theatre World Awards, an Obie Award for music and lyrics, an Outer Critics Circle Award Drama Desk Awards for Outstanding Music, Lighting Design, and Projection Design among many others.
- 29 The rest of the audience are seated above the action, witnessing the configuring stage and the crowd being maneuvered accordingly from a height. It must be noted that the extended, international runs of *Here Lies Love* are tremendously important in countering the otherwise near-invisibility of Filipinos in international media culture, and in doing so, offers an alternative mediated representation of Filipinos. As the second-largest population of Asian-Americans (about 3.4 million people/1.1% of the US population in 2010), *Here Lies Love* has the not unproblematic role of giving actors of Filipino (and Asian) descent opportunities to be represented in more mainstream and/or popular media. The timing of the *Here Lies Love* 2010 album – which notably featured only one Filipino guest vocalist of a roster of 22 (namely the “Jazzipino” singer Charmaine Clamor) – to the disco-opera in 2013 is both historically and culturally pertinent, particularly following the devastating Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan, where a barrage of images of Filipino faces of tragedy were heavily mediated across international television screens to large-scale billboards.
- 30 Other examples of *Here Lies Love* fan-choreography include Scott Schrank's line dance to “Eleven Days.” See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtwm7PsNW7s.
- 31 Simon Frith, “Music and Identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996): 108–127.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 These include songs to clearly move the narrative forward, with titles like “Child of the Philippines,” “The Fabulous One,” based on Ninoy Aquino's famous speech “A Pantheon for Imelda,” and “God Draws Straight,” based on the book *People Power: The Philippine Revolution of 1986 (An Eyewitness History)*, edited by Monina A. Mercado (Manila: James B. Reuter Foundation, 1986).
- 34 Two versions of the song appear in the live show and OCR album, as it returns (in slightly abridged form) as a reprise during the final curtain call sung by the full cast. With an artful nod to the Filipino love of karaoke, the cast actively incite the audience to sing-along by following the lyrics projected on the large stage screens. There is insufficient space here to discuss this third recorded version which appears as the final song, track 26, on the OCR album, nor the subsequent “Here Lies Love” club remix version released in 2014.
- 35 David Byrne, *Here Lies Love: The Story*. (Programme notes, National Theatre: London, 2014).
- 36 “I did not have 3,000 pairs of shoes, I had 1,060,” says Imelda in the oft-quoted public retort on her vast, but not so vast, shoe collection (Katherine Ellison, *Imelda: Steel Butterfly of the Philippines*, 1988, 7). Today, up to 750 pairs of Imelda's shoes can be seen at the Marikina Shoe Museum in Manila, Philippines.
- 37 For more on Imelda's mythic excess of consumption and her role as a power “behind the throne,” see Anne Norton, *Republic of Signs: Liberal Theory and American Popular Culture*, (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 57–60.
- 38 Statement released by the University of the Philippines Diliman Departamento ng Kasaysayan (History Department) entitled “*Malakas at Maganda* (Strong and Beautiful): Marcos Reign, Myth-Making and Deception in History” (28 March 2016). This followed earlier statements released by Ateneo de Manila University in February 2016, and the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) entitled “CEAP Supports Call Against Marcosian Snares and Imeldific Lies” (March 7, 2016).
- 39 Notable exceptions include essays by Filipina-American Studies scholar Christine Bacareza Balance and Filipina film theorist Katrina Macapagal. Balance's article on the performative power and spectacular politics of Imelda's song includes a brief mention of the then recently

released album. She describes how Byrne has found in Imelda an “ideal muse in the rags-to-riches story of an ambitious and driven former beauty queen, dictator’s wife, and Studio 54 regular,” yet through the album he “maintains an ironic distance from its subject, an amused detachment from the actual events that led to her notoriety” (Balance: 133–134). Meanwhile Macapagal charged Byrne with creating a sympathetic retelling of the Imelda myth, calling it a fantasy-production of Western imaginary that allows for the fetishisation of history.

- 40 David Byrne, *Here Lies Love: The Story*. (Programme notes, National Theatre: London, 2014).
- 41 Stuart Hall, “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, edited by Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 173–187.
- 42 Contrary to what Byrne states, there are many examples of successful musical theatre and opera protagonists that are criticised or loathed from the start, e.g. Mrs Lovett in Stephen Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd*, and Richard Strauss’s *Elektra*, although audiences come to realise she is on the side of good by then end of the opera. David Byrne in Adam Green, “Good Times: David Byrne and Alex Timbers Team Up for *Here Lies Love*.” *Vogue*, March 13, 2013.
- 43 The paragraph ends with Byrne stating: “but other aspects have led Marcos loyalists to angrily walk out of the show.” David Byrne, *Here Lies Love: The Story*. (Programme notes, National Theatre: London, 2014): n.p.

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