



The
SERIF
of NOTTINGTON

The evolution of a font

Charles & Morris MACPRO

THREADBONE PRESS TYPEFACES OF NOTE SERIES





Thrumpiece is GO!: Intermediate Concept Design May 2017 by Charles MacPro.

Though still known at this point as *Project 468 “Nottingham”*, this early design sketch clearly shows that the twin concepts of “sweep” [above] and “pierce”[below] were central to the font’s design from the very outset.

‘To us, “sweep” represented the range of the Professor’s work whilst “pierce” recognised his ability to cut incisively to the heart of any problem. We felt instinctively that these essentially Thrumpiecian characteristics were fundamental to any design that was to carry his name.’

The letters ‘G’ and ‘O’ were chosen because they were respectively the most difficult and most easy to render, though GO! “*came to symbolise the certainty we all felt that we were creating something which would move forward and last*”.

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ORIGINS & COMMISSION

“It was a huge honour ... but we had to ask: were we up to it?”

Maurice PacPro April 2017

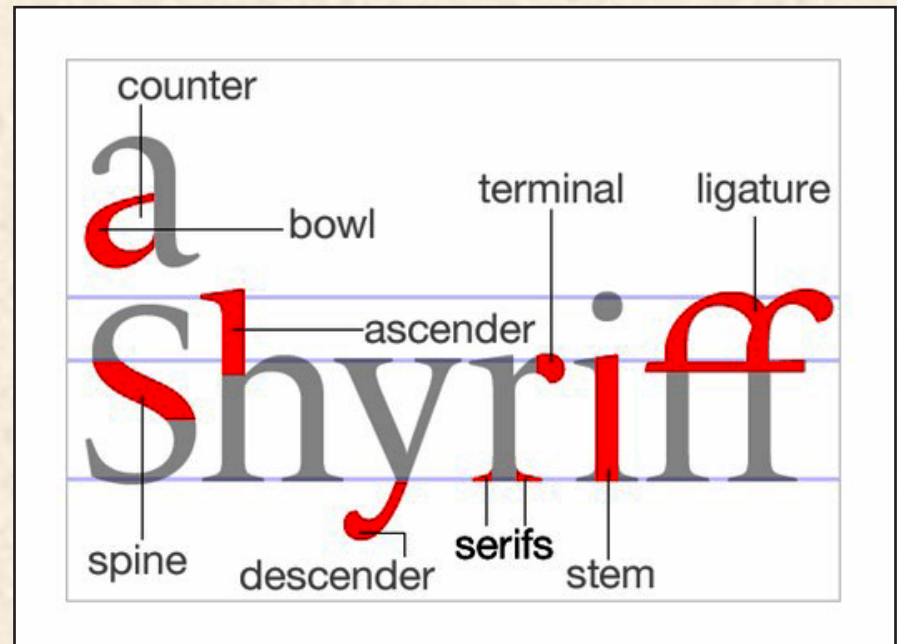
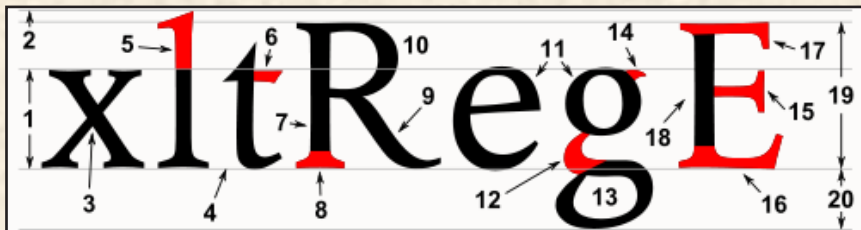
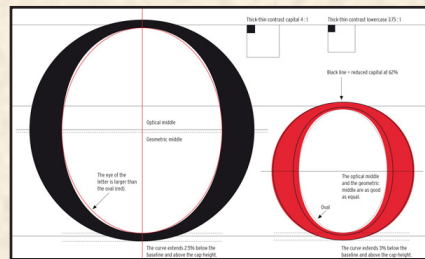
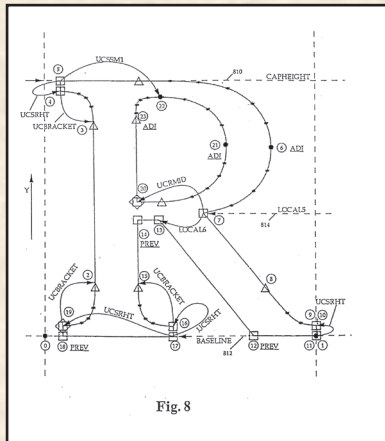
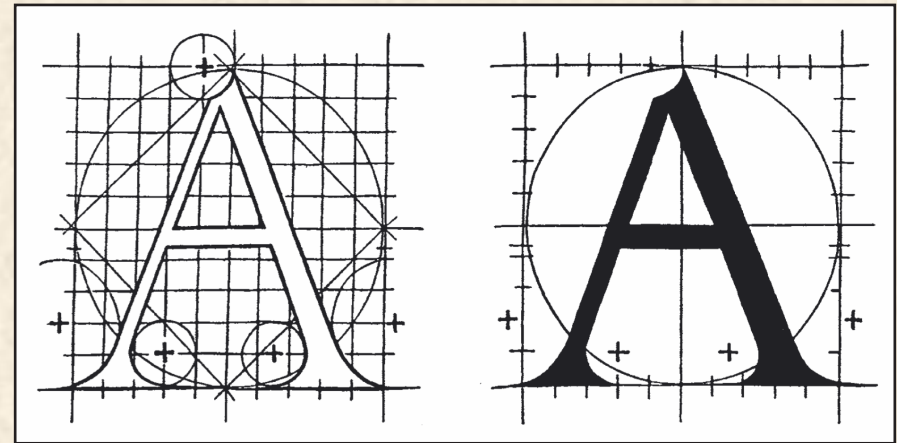
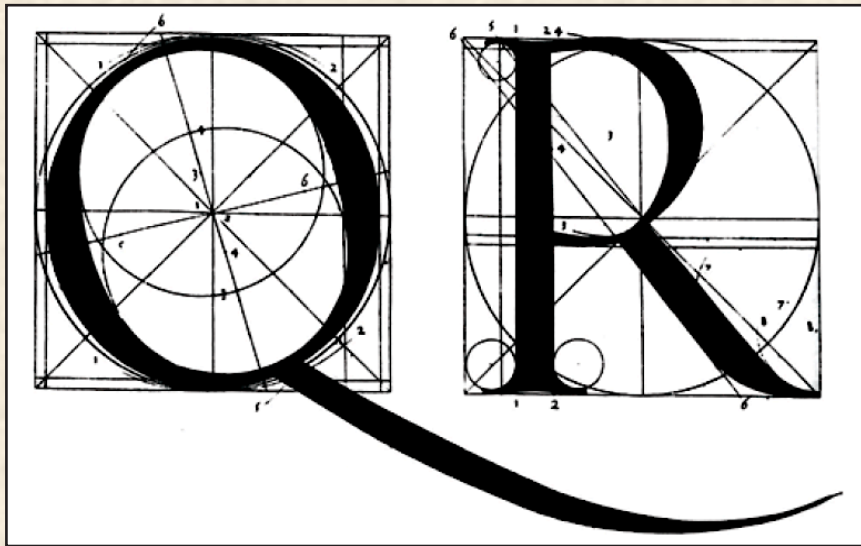
In the fast-moving world of typography and graphic design there will be few who have not encountered, studied - and perhaps secretly envied the Threadbone Corporation their exclusive use of - the Project 468 “Nottingham” typeface better known to non font experts under its later name *Professor Thrupiece*. Perhaps the single most distinctive font of the 21st century - “an Arnold Boecklin for our generation” - it is widely regarded as a masterpiece of design and remains the only font to have been nominated for a Turner Prize. Its creators Charles and Maurice MacPro - Creative Co-Heads of the Threadbone Design Studios - designed the font in 2017 as a commission from Mrs Amanda J Threadbone whose stated aim was “to bring into this world a distinctive and visually-arresting typeface which will be worthy of the name Professor Brian Thrupiece and at the same time and through skillful deployment, be capable of disguising the paucity of musical interest in Maestra Irina Legova’s second season as Music Director of the Threadbone Philharmonic Orchestra”.

To this end Mrs Threadbone had established within the umbrella of the Threadbone Corporation a dedicated Design Studio capable of bringing style, panache and “a certain *joi de vivre*” to several critical aspects of the Corporation’s sometimes troubled corporate image. Having parted company with Frome St Quentin-based *Designs R’Us* (Nigel Courtauld-Institute and Richard Loewe-Tekk) the previous year, bringing this important aspect of the Corporation’s marketing arm “in-house” made sense, though the appointment of the MacPro brothers was to say the least controversial. The brothers had only recently endured the ignominy of the *Lewis Hamilton Sans Serif* fiasco and were regarded by many in the industry as “yesterday’s men” and “a spent force” (See Max Entropy, “Yesterday’s Men: Are the MacPro Brothers a Spent Force?” Threadbone Press 2017).

Whether the Threadbone Design Studio needed the MacPro brothers or the MacPro brothers the Threadbone Design Studio is now impossible to disinter, but whatever the case, the conjunction was a happy one. Mrs Threadbone had issued a challenge. The question was: could the fledgling operation rise to it?



RESPECTING TRADITION: Charles and Maurice MacPro declare themselves “*saturated*” in the traditions of typography and deeply respectful of the foundations laid by those who went before them. Hot metal type remains their “*guiding spirit*” as do the well-established “*Dos and Don’ts*” of classical typographic design. “*We embrace the dos and ignore the don’ts*” Maurice once said. It shows. [Opposite] The metrics of font engineering “*a complex mix of art, science and intuition*”.



DIVISIONS OF LABOUR

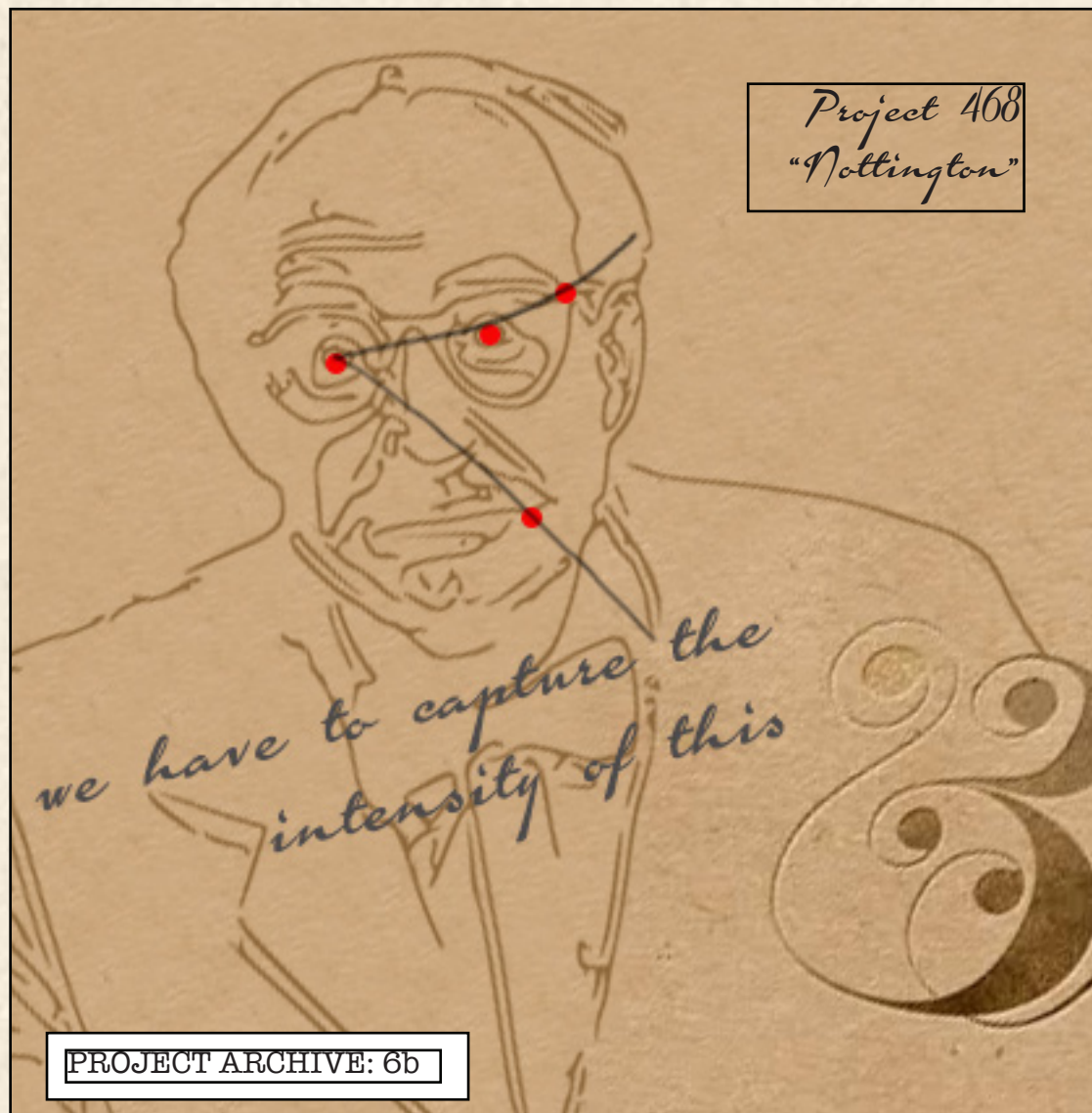
“Should I sweep and you pierce ...?”

Maurice MacPro May 2017

On a crisp bright day in early April, Charles MacPro sat at his desk facing a blank sheet of paper. He, with as much help from his brother and other members of the design team as he could muster, had just a few short months to design a completely new kind of type face capable of meeting an as yet uncertain but unquestionably complex brief. They needed [a] to produce a design of immediately striking beauty [b] to incorporate within it the essential character of a man neither had never met but whose presence impregnated every brick and stone of the Great Heaving Biomedical Campus, Science and Business Park and [c] to incorporate within their design a flexible practicality which would allow for its use in a variety of as yet unknown contexts.

With only a fading photograph of the Professor to guide him (this was the famous “*Thrupiece with Rictus Grin*” - the only surviving self-portrait from c1993), Charles was at a creative impasse. [Maurice was at a cheese and wine reception in Lyme Regis.] Whether by good fortune or studious disinterest, it was a half-hearted attempt to enlarge the picture on a faulty photocopier, which provided the breakthrough. Failing to produce the photograph with proper fidelity and instead registering only the darker outlines of the Professor’s face, the copier presented an image of Professor Thrupiece dominated by four cardinal points of outstanding topographic (and potentially typographic) interest. Joining these together (rather as a bored child might join the dots of a puzzle to reveal the outline of - say - a young Silvia Sims), Charles was able to map two probable linear pathways (curves) - later denoted as the “*pierce*” and the “*sweep*” - which were to prove the creative enema the the “blocked” team so badly needed. He immediately sought to inform Maurice of his breakthrough. His brother’s mobile was eventually answered by the slurred voice of an unknown female: Maurice was otherwise engaged.

Even so, the pathway was now clear and though a significant incident (see “*A Bit of a Blip*”) and many difficult questions still needed to be resolved - *How might the tasks be divided? Should I sweep and you pierce? Should I do the letters and you do the words? Should I make the tea and you do the work? Are you ever coming to work?* - there was no doubt but that they had “*re-found their mojo*”. *Project 486 Nottingham* - named for the village in which Professor Thrupiece had taken his now inspirational self portrait - was properly under way.



THE BREAKTHROUGH: Charles's sketch of Professor Thrupiece in which he first recognised the four points of intensity in his facial features. It provided the key the designer had been searching for for over a week. The sweep of the face together with the piercing stare set him on the path to the "mutilation" of the traditional font type we now recognise as the defining essence of *Project 468*. "It was as though the sun suddenly shone", Maurice recorded. "We knew exactly what we wanted but could we deliver? Big decisions lay ahead though thank the Lord we had no idea just how big"



SIGNIFICANT STEPS: The adoption of CAD techniques - pioneered by the Threadbone Design Studio engineers - enabled Maurice MacPro to model the exact contours of Professor Thrupiece's face (as suggested by Charles's early sketch) in less than two months and to abstract five cardinal points as a metric for later application. The exact fit with an experimental letter "A" [Pierce variant] was encouraging and led to further stretching of both the concept and the typography as well as the budget.



MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: The full Thrupiece Font Suite in both “Pierce” [ABOVE] and “Sweep” [BELOW] forms. Capable of infinite variation depending upon context, the font is the “*most costly, least stable, most complex and - according to some - least aesthetically consistent font in the history of typography*”. Given its “*many flaws, patent dysfunctionality and limited deployability*” it is no surprise that it was the first font to be shortlisted for The Turner Prize.

[The quotations are taken from the Turner citation.]



ALWAYS MOVING: The phrase was an “*in house*” test for the font’s ability to “*accelerate through its deployment*” and proved the concept beyond doubt. It also became something of a catch phrase for the team as few members stayed very long. It was also an in-joke. Charles loved the fact that the ‘*dynamic movement was contained in the word “always” and not in the word ‘moving’ which stayed entirely and conventionally still.*’ It was an irony lost on almost everyone.



POINT PROVEN: Three further examples from the Studio trials of the new font. Keen to test their work in what they assumed would be its common use, the Threadbone Design team decided to model several famous composer's names and works in the quickly developing typeface - Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Debussy etc - little realising that these would be precisely the composers and works which would never see the light of day in an Irina Legova concert.



A BIT OF A BLIP: Described at the time as “*a bit of a blip*” the infamous “*Sod off Char[les]*” artwork caused consternation within the Threadbone Design Studios team. No-one claimed responsibility though many believed Maurice was the author of the work which rapidly disappeared from view along with the junior member of staff on whom responsibility was pinned. Thought to have been destroyed on the orders of an incensed Ms Badminton-Court, the controversial design is reproduced here for the first time. Above is an artist’s impression of a typical Thrupiece Design Studios workstation of the day where state of the art technology and sound ergonomics were “*simply taken for granted*”.

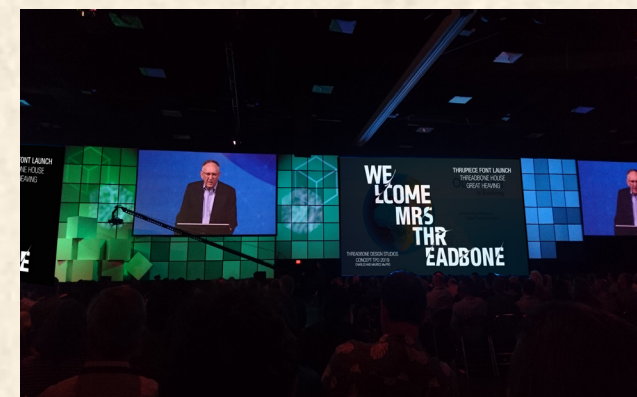
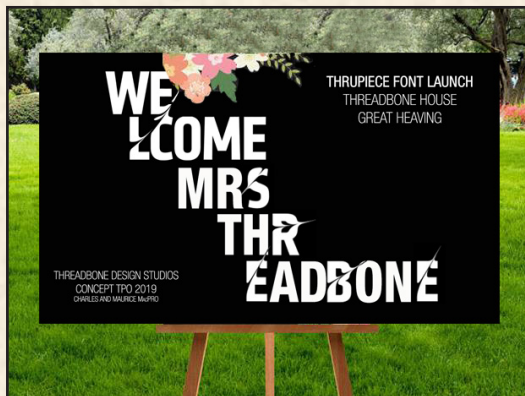
UNVEILING & RECEPTION

“We were confident we had done our best work but one can never be entirely sure that others will agree...”

Charles MacPro December 2017

The official unveiling of the new font was scheduled for mid December 2017 only a few short weeks before the launch of the TPO's 2018/19 *Season Brochure* in which the font and its associated graphics would take centre stage and thus be hideously exposed. Nerves were frayed: so much was at stake and the font was - as one insider put it - “so out there you needed a moon probe to see it”. In an attempt to minimize risk and “make sure the Great Heaving hierarchy were on side”, it was decided to hold a series of private viewings in the Edna Whisky McNightly Suite of the Threadbone Corporation's Great Heaving headquarters. First to see the finished results was Mrs Amanda J Threadbone herself. Without her support, the font was “dead in the water and so were we” (Maurice MacPro, *Dorset Graphic Design Monthly*, January 29018); so it was with very considerable trepidation that the two brothers made their presentations. “The room was eerily quiet”, recalls distinguished author Shelley-Lulette Sizemore who accompanied Mrs Threadbone to the viewing, “she looked, she stood back, she looked again; she traced the outline of some of the characters with her finger as though trying to understand their sweep and inclination. At last she stood back and a half smile formed on her lips: ‘I am moderately satisfied’ she said, which was high praise from her. Maurice, who was literally “shxxxxxg himself”, made a bolt for the door, whilst Charles let out a stifled yelp from behind a large sofa. After that nobody much cared and we went for lunch”.

Subsequent viewings also garnered generally positive reactions and confidence was high prior to the great reveal in late December. Before a huge audience with press gathered from all over the county and beyond, the team presented *Professor Thrupiece* in all its glory. The font had now been placed in its intended context: married to the work of photographer Lens Eastman-Kodakowski, whose abstract studies provide the colourful background counterpoint to the font's striking gestures. The whole could now properly be described as “a fully integrated graphic design concept” (or *house style*) and as such it made its full public debut in the foyer of the **barbican** Bradpole. Here reaction was overwhelmingly positive: “the best thing here”, “better than the concerts” and “such a waste on this pile of shite” being amongst the most succinct and frequently



CHARM OFFENSIVE: The public launch of the font [Right] was an important event, though perhaps not so important as the private reveal to Mrs Threadbone on whose say-so the project would succeed or fail. The MacPro brothers and their staff pulled out all the stops to ensure a positive reception including a Threadbone font “A” (for Amanda of course) fashioned into a floral tribute. Mrs Threadbone half-joked that she would have preferred her full name.

"This was music making of a kind I have never heard before
... and it sounded as though the orchestra hadn't either"

Meynia Bumme-Note

"Unfathomable"

C Sharpe-Minor

IRINA LEGOVA



THRUIECE
PHILHARMONIC
ORCHESTRA

www.tpo.co.uk



HARMONICS FOR THE PHILHARMONIC: This poster dominated the launch of the Thrupiece Philharmonic Orchestra's Season and is perhaps the finest example of the marriage of art and design. Here the *Thrupiece* font wonderfully captures the exotic and unpredictable allure of the Philharmonic's Chief Conductor whilst Lens Eastman-Kodakowski's abstract imagery hints at the subterranean unfathomability of the music the orchestra will present. It was voted *Best Irina Legova Poster 2018* by a poll of audience members at the Addinsell Threadbone "comeback concert" at which the ageing former Chief Conductor once again took to the podium to present a selection of his lighter classics.

APPENDIX

“Only when we witness the font in action - in its intended environment as it were - will we be able to judge just how reckless we have been ...”

Maurice MacPro December 2017

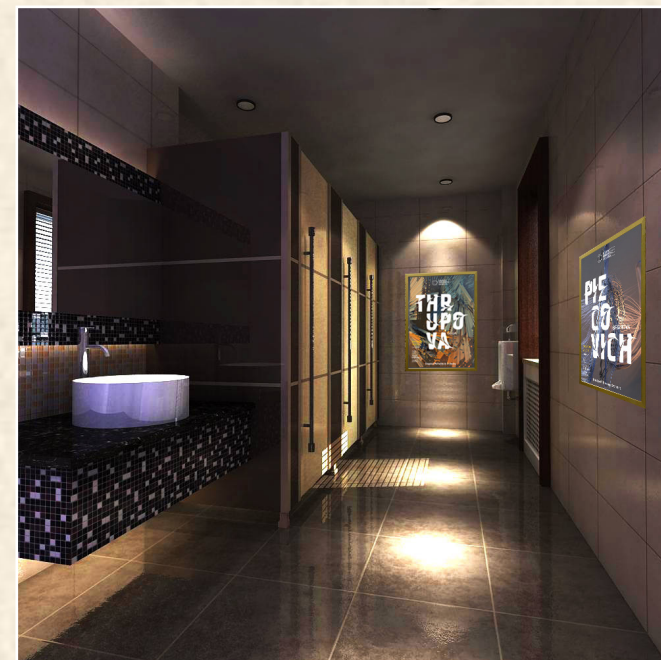
After the successful public unveiling in Great Heaving - Mrs Threadbone again declared herself “*moderately pleased*”, which is all that really mattered - the Threadbone Design Studios team turned their attention to matters of deployment and in particular to designs for the Thrupiece Philharmonic Orchestra’s *2018-19 Season Brochure*. This, after all, had been the object of the exercise. Intended at initiation as a font which could reflect, celebrate and display the attributes of the man in whose name it had been commissioned, the Thrupiece font was, nonetheless a “*working object*” and one which had quickly become associated with the launch (and cosmetic invigoration) of the TPO’s otherwise wholly lacklustre 2018/19 season. Lifting the dismal TPO management team’s mood was no mean task and one of a magnitude no font had ever before been asked to address. Would *Project 468 “Nottingham”* be up to it?

The *TPO Season Brochure* was unveiled in December 2017 and distributed to the public in both printed and digital form. Within two weeks posters were beginning to appear in and around the **barbican** Bradpole (the orchestra’s temporary home pending completion of the Thrupiece Philharmonic Hall in 2025). “*The world of classical music is not renowned either for its sense of adventure or its commitment to modernity let alone post modernity and certainly not post post modernity of the kind embodied in the font’s DNA*”, recalls Classical Music Historian and Typeface Enthusiast Benton Yesteryear; “*so it was a question of light the blue touchpaper and retire*”. In the event reactions were mixed and in that rarefied world of crotchets and quavers, the jury is still out. Happily, however, the font has achieved a life of its own, adopted by various parts of the Thrupiece Organisation, Threadbone Corporation and Hornimint Empires in whose hands exclusive copyright rests until October 2057.

Great Heaving
St Edna of Fettuccini Day 2018



THE CONCEPT IN SITU I: Three examples of Thrupiece [Sweep variant] in deployment. In collaboration with Photographer Lens Eastman-Kodakowski, whose abstract studies provide “a colourful background counterpoint to the font’s striking gestures”, Charles and Maurice MacPro have produced a series of signature images which encapsulate not only the characteristics of the font’s eponymous inspiration but also the dynamic feminism of the Thrupiece Philharmonic’s Chief Conductor and Music Director Ms Irina Legova. “It feels like a synergy forged in adversity; a marriage of inconvenience if you will ...”, typographical historian Caxton Ovid suggests, “... who would have thought that such alien elements brought together in this way could “work” as improbably as this. It’s an Eton Mess of a design - a high class accident that waited more than 20 years to happen”.



THE CONCEPT IN SITU II. Poster for the 2018/19 Legova TPO Season displayed in the foyer and the gentlemen's restrooms of the **barbican** Bradpole. “*Only in its intended milieu does the concept truly come to life*”, Charles MacPro insists. Here - and especially in the restrooms - it “*sings*” just Ms Legova had always hoped “*like a Thrupova melody*”.

TIME LINE

DECEMBER 2016

Threadbone Design Studios established after an inspired idea by Mrs Amanda J Threadbone
Ms Audrey Badminton-Court, Ms Celia Notso-Pointy and Mrs Brenda Oats appointed to Appointments Board

JANUARY 2018

Charles and Maurice MacPro recruited to head the Design Team
Other Design Team members appointed including Ralph Fienne-Trace, Head of CAD

APRIL 2018

Team commissioned to invent new font in memory of “*Our beloved Professor*”
Project 468 “Nottingham” commences in great secrecy
Charles MacPro first hand-traces Professor Thrupiece’s face [See Project Archive 6B]

MAY 2018

CAD Team produce first metrics and elaborated congruence principles
Thrupiece is GO!

JUNE-SEPTEMBER 2018

Diversification, proving, rigidity, temperature and stability tests

OCTOBER 2018

Private focus group consultations

NOVEMBER 2017

Lens Eastman-Kodakowski commissioned to produce “*still*” or better still “*even stiller*” life backgrounds

DECEMBER 2017

Private viewings [Great Heaving]
Public Press Launch [Great Heaving]
TPO Season Brochure Launched to mixed reception

JANUARY 2018

Thrupiece Font nominated for Turner Prize and adopted into FONT HALL OF FAME as “*a distinguished contribution to the art of font mutilation*”.

CREDITS

The authors wishes to acknowledge the help, support and kind assistance of the following:

Mrs Amanda J Threadbone
Mrs Edna Whisky McNightly
Mrs OSX DesktopPro [Thanks mum!]

The Thrupiece Archive, Great Heaving
The Threadbone Corporation Font Collection
The Thrupiece Philharmonic Orchestra [Irina Legova, *Chief Conductor and Music Director*]
The Royal Dorset College of Printed Art and Typographical Design [colloquially “The B and A”] (Lottery Funded)
thrupiecemedia

The **barbican** Bradpole
Graf Helvetica von Neue, typographer extraordinaire
Graf Paper, supplier of stationery to The Threadbone Corporation
The Threadbone Press
Threadbone Computer Diagnostics and CAD Typographical Extensions Ltd, Great Heaving
The Hornimint Company
The Ziggy Osmington Font Collection
Ms Celia Notso-Pointy
Ms Audrey Dadminton-Court
Omar Serif
The Very Reverend Baptismal Font
Diocletian [aka Times Old Roman]

BACK COVER: The celebrated “*Halleluljah*” frame. It was created at the end of the project in “*a mood of triumph, relief and apprehension*” Only three were produced: one for Mrs Threadbone and one each for the Chief Designers themselves.



Charles & Maurice MacPro

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UK £65
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ARTs