

## The directorial conception on operetta *Silvia* by Emmerich Kálmán

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**Abstract:** *With a well-developed dramaturgy, "Silvia" surprises by the way in which the meticulous musical characterizations of the characters were made, offering the protagonists distinct personalities. The most popular moments that place the opera in the first line of success of Emmerich Kálmán's works, reflect very engaging rhythms. The directorial conception pleads precisely for this "essence" of operetta, of the genre show, alert, frothy, built of overturns, glasses of champagne and fine humor. The director's conception must include the appreciation of style and the visual side. The directorial conception and the artistic manifestation must achieve an aesthetic fulfilment and be legitimized in the staging of the show by the rightness of the concrete quality of the actors / images relationship.*

Key-words: *history of operetta, musical language of operetta, Hungarian National School, vintage perfume, directorial conception.*

### 1. Introduction. General considerations about the history of operetta.

#### 1.1. The appearance of the operetta

This genus was born in France and Austria (Moiescu, Păun, 1969, 10) in the middle of the 19th century. The subjects were to the French and Austrian bourgeoisie taste at the end of the century, which had a predilection for sentimental stories, although often the ruling classes were ridiculed with finesse and humor.

The operetta is musically accessible. As a rule, operetta performers must be singers, good actors with a sense of humor, dancers, and pantomimes. The ending is always optimistic. Unlike opera, operetta contains text (prose) and dance, expressed through several arts. It is a genre derived from opera. It has a cheerful subject and more accessible music. Unlike opera, the operetta also contains spoken passages. It is spread rapidly due to its great accessibility and optimistic character.

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It's similar to comedy in literature. It generally includes the same elements as the opera (syncretism):

- literary (libretto)
- dramatic (stage movement, performers, singers-actors)
- choreographic (ballet moments performed by dancers)
- plastics (sets, costumes, makeup)
- musical numbers: arias, ariettes, cavatine, recitatives (combined with spoken passages), duets, thirds, quartets, choirs, interludes, overture.

Before the operetta gate opened in front of Jacques Offenbach (1819–1880) in Paris and Johann Strauss-son (1825–1899) in Vienna, there were pictures, pranks, fairy tales and vaudeville with masks and musicians, actors and singers that have existed since ancient times.

The operetta refuses to disappear from the musical theatre. With its emergence, more than a century ago — the public received a new artistic concern. It was devoid of charm or social purpose. It promotes optimism, self-confidence, delicate, chivalrous feelings, encouraging critical thinking through laughter. In our lands, the beginning of operetta was the appearance of vaudeville. The preceding forms differ from the genre itself.

## 1.2. Vintage perfume

Amongst all the artistic currents, romanticism has proved perhaps the greatest historical vitality. It was also natural: the aesthetics of romanticism, based on the generous outpouring of feeling, attracted them as a magnet at all times on composers because it allowed the most intense highlighting of the emotional essence of music.

Romanticism manifested itself in different forms in various arts and marked especially literature and music (although romanticism manifested itself in these arts later than in others). When the current arrived in schools, there were criticisms against his idealization of reality. Thanks to these critics of the movement, the realism has appeared.

Even if the first Romanian operetta, in the consecrated sense, is “Crai Nou” by Ciprian Porumbescu (1853–1883), which appeared in the nineties of the last century — the creation that indisputably foreshadowed the elements of the genre was “Baba Hârca” by Alexandru Flechtenmacher (1823–1898), represented in the fifth decade. The premiere took place in 1848, in Iași, in the titular role being Matei Millo, (Moisescu, Păun, 1969, 114) who also signed the libretto. So, the first Romanian operetta (in indefinite form), appeared in Iași, in 1848, the birth year of the genre,

worldwide being signed ten years later, by Jacques Offenbach (1819–1880), at Paris, when "Orpheus in Hell" appeared on the stage.

Newer vaudeville, comic opera, and so-called "bouffes parisiens" were also cheerful, upbeat, satirical performances. As a reaction against the gravity and lack of timeliness of the opera, the so-called "parodies du nouveau theatre italien" appeared in 1701, in which we first find the expression "opera comique". (Moisescu, Păun 1969, 7)

The operetta took something from all the genres we referred to above. The comic opera, the buffa opera, the beggar's opera are the ancestors of operetta. The operetta does not descend from the opera, but, because of the fact that its melody was treated in the cult manner, which was exhibited by a larger orchestra; it needed an audience with some musical training. This preparation had been made by opera performances.

Frequent changes of measures, highly varied rhythm and sharp rhythmic contrasts give a greater vitality of the sound fabric. The melody is diversified with symmetrical lines, coming from the popular song or dance, but also with free performances such as the recitative or arioso of the opera.

Numerous chromatisms and modulations, as well as non-singable melodic formulas of instrumental nature, greatly enrich the musical expression, along with the frequent modal fabrics discovered in folklore, in the old or exotic song.

In the conception of Emmerich Kálmán (1882–1953), Silvia was outlined as a popular singer. That is why her entire score was built on popular intonations, which, at the time of the operetta's creation, represented a great novelty in the musical structure of the genre.

All this made the work a huge success, being at the forefront of the entire creation of the composer. Initially titled "Queen of the Csardas", due to the force with which the character Silvia was made, especially from a musical point of view, the work borrowed the name of the protagonist. The most important musical moments of Silvia's operetta are: Silvia's entrance area, the verse "Happy Girls..." the dramatic endings of acts I and II, the ensemble scenes and the dances, in which the viennese waltz is indispensable.

## **2. Objectives. Emmerich Kálmán in the history of operetta**

### **2.1. Emmerich Kálmán's place in the Hungarian National School**

One of the brilliant representatives of operetta in the early twentieth century, which brought a new breath to the music genre, is Emmerich Kálmán, known to the Viennese public especially through his operetta Silvia (1915). There is a poetic force

in Emmerich Kálmán, manifested by the fulfilment of *Silvia*, the happiest moment of his rich creation. In none of operettas he wrote after 1915 did he reach the same sincerity, even though he never lost the thread of happy leadership song. In 1924, at the Theater an der Wien, the celebrated tenor Hubert Marischka won his first major success. He had allied himself with an excellent buff actor, Max Hansen, and a comic book classic, Hans Moser. On top of that was a primadonna, Betty Fischer, who, as a vocal organ and with her acting skills, did not lag behind her famous predecessors.

The Hungarian school will know a strong affirmation, still dominated by the spirit of a postromanticism, but with the acquisition of a strongly chromated language and the liberation from the tyranny of the classical symmetries. The main representatives of the Hungarian National School are Jenő Hubay (1858–1937), famous violinist and composer with esteemed success, Ernő Dohnányi (1877–1960) pianist, conductor and composer (symphonies, concerts, rhapsodies, chamber music), who claims to be the successor of Franz Liszt (1811–1886), Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) and Béla Bartók (1881–1945), who make a synthesis between the authentic peasant folklore with the new formulations of the European musical language, especially those brought in circulation by impressionism and expressionism.

The composer Emmerich Kálmán was born in Hungary, at Siófok on the shores of Lake Balaton, on October 24, 1882. He studied piano, later enrolling at the Budapest Academy, becoming a student of Hans von Koessler (1853–1926), a renowned organist, composer and professor of composition at the Academy of Music in the Hungarian capital. Here, Emmerich Kálmán was a colleague of Bela Bartók (1881–1945) and Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967), with whom he has fond memories of his student life. Emmerich Kálmán composes piano sonatas, symphonic poems, orchestral pieces. The Hungarian school will know a strong affirmation, still dominated by the spirit of a postromanticism, but with the acquisition of a strongly chromated language and the liberation from the tyranny of the classical symmetries. Emmerich Kálmán will revive the European musical language, appealing to the inexhaustible source of folklore. The variety and originality of the expression formulas, their fresh and naive breath, gave sincerity to his music, with unique sonic expressions.

## **2.2. Development of the musical language of operetta**

Today, operetta is a place of invitation and artistic effervescence. With remarkable suppleness it manages to stay in tune with our time and faithful to tradition. The most pertinent proof of this amazing fact is her young audience. Today, as more

than a hundred years ago, the public applauds us; they give the wings of artistic flight.

As Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1938) stated in his book "My Life in Art", operetta and vaudeville are a good school for actors: our old predecessors, not in vain, began their careers playing in such shows with the help of which they learned the art of theater and the technique of acting.

Just as we talk about female prototypes in Giacomo Puccini's (1858–1924) creation, we encounter the same thing in the work creation of the operetta composer Emmerich Kálmán. He places the woman in the foreground in most of his works, highlighting through his compositional mastery his extraordinary ability to capture and outline musically complex characters, strong characters, temperamental, in opposite camps, whose deeds and actions trigger passions, jealousy, love, with exceptional qualities that arouse the admiration of the opera spectator.

The composer distinctly outlines a prominent female character as opposed to other operetta composers. This is one of the reasons why I chose to study and present in this paper, all the knowledge related to this composer and his works of reference. The music of Emmerich Kálmán's operetta is one of a huge vibration, with more tragic accents than lyrical, in a hectic unfolding, leading to an overwhelming positive drama.

Emmerich Kálmán has a great contribution to the development of the musical language of operetta (folk music, csardas with all its types: palotás — type of elegant csardas, palace; halgató — listening; ropogós — military character, elegant; friska — met more in the Hungarian Rhapsodies of Franz Liszt). The capitalization of the Hungarian musical folklore does it, however, remaining in the tonal sphere, trying the modal inflections in the elaboration of the language of the characters of its operettas.

Emmerich Kálmán's music is melodic, pleasant, cheerful, elegant, and full of fine humor, the melody being its main quality, to which a remarkable sense of contrasts is added, an original orchestration, a good technical mastery of the means of expression and an excellent introspection. In the Hungarian folk song, which was felt especially in his first operettas, he achieved the greatest successes.

Emmerich Kálmán used timbre colours in his musical discourse, bringing Hungarian folklore closer but remaining in tonal writing. He was inspired by Hungarian folk music using a lot of csardas as well as the songs themselves. The staging of this operetta must be reminiscent of the Transylvanian atmosphere scent. Generally, Emmerich Kálmán's music is melodic, pleasant, cheerful, elegant, full of fine humor, with contrast, original orchestration, good technical mastery of the means of expression, and especially an excellent introspection into Hungarian

folk song. This was felt even in his first operettas, thus achieving the greatest successes.

The score of the operetta *Silvia* by Emmerich Kálmán was built on popular intonations, which represented a great novelty in the aesthetic program of the genre, hence the great success of this operetta. In other words, in the montage, the atmosphere, the customs, the costumes, the language, everything must be reminiscent of those times atmosphere.

### **3. Research methods. Operetta Silvia**

#### **3.1. Directing the work**

The operetta *Die Csardasfürstin* (Queen of the Csardas) premiered on November 17, 1915, at the "Johann Strauss Theater" in Vienna, with a libretto written by Leo Stein (1872–1947) and Béla Jenbach (1871–1943), later adapted by István Békeffy and Dezső Keller. (Moisescu, Păun 1969, 152)

In the stage version, this score (also entitled "Long live love" or "Queen of Csardas") must be dynamic, frothy, but keeping the romance of couples in love and the humor of stage puzzles. Love stories woven between cabaret and high society characters, intrigue and upheavals need talent and naturalness to be credible. That's what everyone expects, first and foremost, from performers. The director builds human relationships based on feelings, sometimes it emphasises intrigue or ends with scenic means that provoke laughter or nostalgia, nevertheless the characters must be natural, to be able to take us into a fictional world of princesses, generals, counts and countesses, singers and cabaret dancers.

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The show grows in tension from one act to another. From inside a supposed cabaret in Budapest, with a fairly simple setting, with "cheerful girls" in cabaret-specific costumes, where everyone participates in *Silvia's* farewell party, until the end of the operetta when the action takes place in the setting of Act I, involving the entire cabaret. The scenic ambiance is airy, acquires depth and light, the costumes have style and elegance.

The location of the characters is done in accordance with the setting; they are placed in the forefront during most of the show (especially the main characters). The realization of artistic emotion gradually develops from reading at

the table to rehearsal. The realization of the director's way of working, aims to create the state through psychological tension, a state that must be imprinted on the singers.

From my point of view, the staging of this show consists in the simplicity of decoration (all white), light affecting suggested partitions (curtains on the back), furniture elements (chandelier, coffee table, and staircase), and the decor being in accordance with the location of the characters and conducting the action.

I consider that the realization of a show must be based on the intentions of the composer, regardless of the more modern methods used in terms of directing; those methods must suggest the same thing the composer wanted.

### **3.2. The realization of the character Silvia**

Comparing the staging of opera productions with that of operetta, it is known that directors enjoy more freedom in using the resources of theatrical techniques. Operetta drama abounds in comic and melodramatic elements, superficial conflicts that must end in a happy way. The message of the words is as important as the musical message and so the acting singer must have special skills in music, theater and choreography.

The love between Silvia Verescu, a famous cabaret singer, and Edwin, Prince of Mittenkofer-Löwenstein, is deeply disapproved of by Edwin's family. Especially his mother, Princess Cecilia, is particularly affected by this relationship, considered scandalous, and tries to prevent it by all means. All these plots of Princess Cecilia lead to the separation of the two lovers.

The character Silvia is represented by a popular singer in the vision of Emmerich Kálmán (Moisescu, Păun, 1969, 54), a Romanian from Transylvania (Transylvania — was a territory attached to the Austro-Hungarian Empire). The titular heroine of the operetta embodies Silvia, the queen of the csardas, a popular cabaret singer in Budapest, taken out of the rural environment and raised in the urban space. She has the purity and nobility of a simple woman, from the country. She takes part in the immortal musical moments in the score.

Silvia is a passionate woman, who's turmoil transcends when she has to choose between art, career and the love she has for Edwin. She is willing to give up everything for him, but the obstacles do not take long to appear at every step. Temperament, energy, love for art, inner and outer beauty, purity, simplicity and nobility are all characteristic of Silvia. In her personal vision, Silvia is noticed by the penetrating look and the sparkle of the look, by the convincing attitude but at the same time by the gentleness of the heart that is transmitted even by the voice. Even if it is distinguished by these characteristics, the temperament does not delay

to reveal the jealousy (in the scenes with Edwin and Stazi), or the impulsivity and the pain leading to the melodrama.

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#### **4. Results. The lyrical theater director**

The main attribution of a director is the translation, decoding of the ideological, literary, philosophical meanings as well as the decoding of the composer's musical intentions (unfolding on acts, paintings, scenes, musical moments, starting from the motive cell), by specific means. He must also acquire knowledge about the history of music, the history of the arts, the history of the performing arts (make-up, hairdressing), aesthetics, philosophy, human psychology; to have organizational skills, diplomacy working with artistic groups but also with artistic directors, namely: conductor, choir conductor, master choreographer, architect / scenographer). Last but not least, it must highlight the team he works with, speculating on the means found at his disposal, to bring something new in the entertainment industry, highlighting his own artistic personality.

Coordination from the point of view of sung and spoken vocality and the transition from one to another, body expression, facial expression, timbre colors and the character's entry into the unity of the show, (Bălan 1961, 2) the way of maintaining and claiming artistic discipline and concentration, all these attributions belong to the director, who in turn must induce them to the performer. The maximum quality of a show consists in the way in which the performer's relationship with the director and the other directors ends. All these crown success. From my point of view, culture and taste ennoble the talent, a fact valid for both the director and the performer. Any role on stage is a composition, especially one in which finding yourself as a person, you have to recompose yourself as an actor. The actor is the messenger of ideas and deeds relevant in scenic situations and circumstances meant to outline human profiles, models of representative typologies for a time always in motion, in a certain historical moment. Today, the actor no longer has enough talent and intuition, no matter how great they are, or valued by one director or another, but also a very rich baggage of political, social-historical, philosophical, aesthetic, even economic and technical knowledge.

At the same time, specific to an actor is the art of not repeating himself in roles. The role represents multiple ways of understanding / inspiration and requires meditation on it. The director must induce the performer to "forget himself" (Silvestru 1966, 12) even if he cannot fully transpose himself into the character's being, as Stendhal (1783– 1842) says that "theatrical performance is an imperfect illusion" and Paul Verlaine (1844–1896), who called it "the art of relative convention".

In the analysis of the stage play and of the interpretation, aspects related to the capacity were taken into account for the singer-actor to build his character and adapt to the stage play. Thus, it was a pursued intention: to be the equivalent of a thought. Every time the thread of thoughts changes the intention must also change:

Flexibility →	ability to adapt to the situation
Character construction →	the action of each character must be according to its global objective (what the character wants most from life) or scenic (what the character wants during a scene);
Relationship with partners →	building the attitude according to the partner's remarks. Gestures must not anticipate the partners' remarks; they must appear as a reaction to them.

The vocal technique is persued as follows →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a fluent and easy interpretation;</li> <li>• maintaining a constant rhythm;</li> <li>• accuracy;</li> <li>• correct pronunciation and articulation of words</li> </ul>
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Undoubtedly, the success of a show depends on the management of the interpretation, which can be determined by dramaturgy, through opting on one of the several possibilities of scenic transposition or imposed by a new vision that uses dramaturgy only as a pretext show, in fact, pursuing its own fable. Hence the nature of the director's relationship with the play and the author, with the actors and other collaborators on the show, the whole climate of creation of the theater.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the main reasons for which the knowledge of this field represents a good approach in the career of any singer are: the improvement of the actor-singer training and the enrichment of the knowledge. At the same time, directing has elements of pedagogy (transmitting the performer how to play, how to interpret, how to move, creating the right state for the role). This helps in improving the performer.

The scene is the truth that the actors have to believe in (Stanislavski 1956, 35). The opera singer has to do with all the arts that make up the show: that of diction, of music, of stage (creation). Action, word and music must form a unity. The voice, the diction, the gesture, the movements, the lively rhythm, the sincere joy, are all necessary features for this genre, not at all easy. For this reason, my wish is to give a personal imprint to this new work and values. Several stagings were made, but a special importance is the highlighting of humor, of the essential guidelines in working with performers. At the same time, I believe that a simple suggestion can create a much more convincing effect than cumbersome costumes and heavy or expensive decorations, the ideal being the maximum effect with minimum resources.

It is very important to hide the primary thoughts and obtain the maximum effects in the stage space, with the device available to the director and the technical elements (projections, lights) but also through various effects such as trompe l'oeil (deceptive eye effect that refers to depth, height, depth, contouring of the character).

Today, the main person in charge of the theater anywhere in the world is the director. He must have the preconception and the paternity of the whole. The final directorial conception is an organized and directed sum of the interpreters' conceptions, the director being in his turn an interpreter. This is a coordinator of the components of the show. In order for the show to follow a clear, chosen and determined path, all recreational art performers add their artistic grace to the director's recreation and the composer's creation, adding value to the aesthetic project approached, so that the road from artwork, recreation and reception, to be an ideal one (Stanislavski 1958, 38).

The realization of a show is based on the intentions of the composer, regardless of more modern methods used in directing; but those methods must suggest the same thing the composer wanted.

Emmerich Kálmán was one of the most brilliant operetta composers of all time. Thus, the arias bring an occasion of joy for the public that knows Emmerich Kálmán's works. Create a world of movement that supports the characters, the

action, and the relationships between the characters as well the cultural diversity of operetta. The public can recognize elements of folk dance, society dance, and contemporary dance in an inspired stage movement, which will give the show a new and fresh image.

Nowadays, the operetta embodies the artist completely, being a requirement of the 21st century, as it has a multitude of stage qualities, such as: body elasticity, facial expressiveness and vocal technique. All these must represent a unitary whole, on which the artist depends to give the audience a perfect show.

So music is both a feeling and a science. It demands to the one who cultivates it, performer or composer, a natural inspiration and knowledge that is acquired only through long studies and deep meditations. From the combination of science and inspiration arises art. Free of these conditions, the musician will only be an incomplete artist. In fact, in operetta, the art of sounds combines the dance of mimicry, poetry, eloquence and even the collection of all sciences. The works of the operetta return with remarkable vitality, like the migratory birds. This circuit demands the generations who want to see and hear that what has been done before them and especially in their time. Operetta creates this environment, without fading its brightness, but perhaps, on the contrary.

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