

The concept of style in the scenic interpretation of a musical score

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Abstract: *In the aesthetics of opera theater at the beginning of the 21st century, the concept of "style" is applicable only to a musical score. The impact of auditory and visual perception in an opera show contradicts the canons of classical opera, which are always focused on the synthesis of the arts that formed this phenomenon. The article is devoted to the urgent problem of the reform of the work, based on the ideals of contemporary drama. The mechanisms and ways of using the experience of a certain type of theater at the beginning of this century are considered by the author in a general historical and cultural context. The article reviews the innovative trends in the art of the opera singer. The purpose of the research is to present a singer-actor who is part of the operatic text. Using the experience of theater and music sciences, the author identifies the patterns of interaction between theatrical and musical series in the art of a singer. The author concludes that it is important to create scientific methods to research the above issues.*

Key-words: *musical score, opera, performance score, style, theater.*

1. Introduction

The evolutionary processes of classical art, caused not by the fact of a true development, but defined as a result of the existence of the canon that gave birth to it, in the cultural context of our time, require a constant clarification in terminology. For the aesthetics of an opera show, which has changed beyond recognition in the last twenty to thirty years, new definitions are needed today. The author of the article aims to introduce the term visual opera in the daily life of theatrical studies. This paper serves as a brief substantiation of the opportunity of its application.

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For musicology, the phenomenon of opera belongs to the genre of musical art, and for teatrology, opera is nothing but one of the facets of the theatrical genre. The subject of the study of musicology is the musical score itself, while a teatrologist examines the literary text of the play. Musicology determines precisely and unmistakably the particularities of style in the genre of opera, and the interpretation of the concept of "style" in relation to the stage score of an opera performance is practically absent in theater studies. There is an explanation for this.

2. The science of musical theater

In the modern field of „theater science“, the show is an independent work, the musical score is just a way to create the original part. A theorist or theater critic is primarily concerned with the director's concept, in which the treatment of a classical subject should be relevant, correlated with contemporary theatrical aesthetics. And in modern theater, where the visual prevails over the auditory image of the show, the action, the “sound” palette and “what happens” on the stage do not form a unit of the show's score. The musical images in such a production are not a guide to action, but only a motivation to create a series of independent images (states).

Each era develops a certain amount of symbolic intonations (sound complexes) in both the art of opera and symphonic music. This is how extremely strong associations are formed that are not inferior to verbal semantics (Abdokov 2009, 207). This phenomenon has been studied in detail by the science of musicology, for example, in music of the Baroque era. If the literary text mentions the ascent of a mountain, then the melodic movement should be ascending, and if the story is about a fall - it will descend into the grave register. Today's listener cannot decipher the „images of movement“ in Bach's music. Their meaning seems to have disappeared. Also, the ancient oriental ornaments are perceived by us today as an independent game of lines, without having a certain semantic meaning. But studies show that ornaments had a form of hieroglyphic writing and can be read as a verbal writing (Stakhorsky 1973, 123-124).

Obviously, in the perception of modern listeners, this harmonious structure has long lost its canonical, „mathematical“ accuracy. Subsequent epochs lose the completeness of the perception of the semantic system of the past, and the canonically treated text today seems an arbitrary ornament, devoid of the structural laws that gave birth to it.

Another example of the inseparable connection between visual and auditory in the past model of musical theater, we find in the comic opera of the late seventeenth century, presented at fairs in France, where there was a „dictionary of

intonations” - twenty types of short songs meant to express certain feelings - joy, fear or ridicule. This musical material was accompanied by certain gestures, a clear and generally accepted way of plastic designation of stage feelings and movements.

This semantic structure is different for each era. Even J. F. Rameau, a follower of his great predecessor J. B. Lully, suggested that Descartes' teaching on affection should be combined with the aesthetics of opera. Rameau understood by affection a definite expression of the leading musical image of an appropriate intonation complex, which allows the performer and listener to determine the type and character of musical discourse. According to the doctrine of affections, the musical movement is an inner reflection of the “moods” as well as of the variability of the outer world (Melik-Pashayeva 1973, 21).

This definition, which appeared in the era of musical baroque, accurately captures the basic law of musical theater: music unites the musician-actor with the audience. If for the latter this is a way of contemplating feelings, feeling emotion and passion, then for a performer, who presents his character in public, music determines the nature of his stage existence.

Nature has arranged so that when we communicate verbally with someone, we first see with the inner eye what is being discussed, only then do we talk about what is seen. And if we listen to someone, then we first hear what they are telling us, then we try to visualize what we hear. To listen in our language means to see what he is talking about, and to speak means to draw visual images (Stanislavsky 1946, 114).

There were periods in the history of opera when the external appearance of the artist did not play a decisive role in his career as a successful singer. The most eloquent example was the age of the castrates. The audience tolerated the overweight aspect of these performers, the inconsistency between the sex and the character they embody, all for the sake of perfect singing, virtuosity, ambition and the technique of extraordinary vocal breathing.

In the theater of the eighteenth century there was „a whole series of conventional gestures, which convey various states of human passions. In the canonized gesture an immediate impulse was recorded, which received an invariable classical form: surprise - arms bent at the elbows, raised at the shoulders, palms facing the audience; disgust - the head is turned to the right, the hands are raised to the left and the palms seem to reject the object of contempt; prayer - the hands are joined and directed towards the partner” (<https://thehistoryofeuropentheatre.com>). The singer on stage mimicked the allegory of feelings, symbolizing the images of the characters, but he himself personified this hero only in the auditory, musical space.

But already in the aesthetics of the romantic work, the appearance of the singer had a greater importance. But when the creator of the musical drama R. Wagner was looking for an ideal performer for the role of Siegfried, his choice was Ludwig Schnorr, a singer with remarkable vocal and interpretive skills, but with an extremely unsuccessful stage appearance, who was obese. According to the composer-reformer, the creator of the theory of concordance between music and acting, Ludwig Schnorr “penetrated the ideal essence of my drama and deeply merged with it. No thread of the psychological fabric went unnoticed, the most hidden nuances, the most tender features of emotional experiences found expression in his creation” (Gray 1983, 484). Obviously, it is not so much about the stage play as such of the singer, but about the creation of the ideal image of Tristan through the vocal means.

The first performer of Othello's role was F. Tamagno, a remarkable voice, however, without special qualities in the art of acting. However, “his teachers knew how to reveal to him the essence of the talent of his spirituality. It's just that he didn't know how to do anything alone. He was taught to play a role, but he was not taught to understand and master the art of an actor” (Stakhorsky 1973, 25). According to K. Stanislavsky, classes with Salvini, the famous Othello of dramatic theater, only partially filled this gap. But G. Verdi, personally listening to dozens of singers, looking for an Othello for the premiere, preferred a good voice, to the detriment of the physical appearance or dramatic talent of the performer.

In the second half of the last century, the opera house still felt the influence of the three and a half centuries of its own history, when the aesthetics of the opera was formed, first of all, by the desire for a perfect reproduction of the musical score. In her recent interviews, Joan Sutherland remarked that, with a figure as large as her own and not with the most scenic appearance, she would hardly have managed to become a star today. Not even Montserrat Caballe or Mereline Horn had a very successful stage appearance, but the audio recordings of these singers will forever remain in the history of opera as a hard-to-match landmark of vocal skill and style in the works of G. Rossini, V. Bellini, G. Donizetti. It cannot be said that the opera has never tried to match the stage image of the singer with the musical image of the show. Such cumulation is always desirable, except that in the past this criterion was not defining.

3. The conception of style in the interpretive art

But music explores a person's inner, emotional world and lives „invisibly”. If we were to place the concept of „style of performance” in the field of art criticism analysis (not just musical), it will become obvious that the style in the opera will

have to have both auditory and visual expression. Because, through the structure of the vocal line of the role, it influences the singing technique, ie both the stage state of the singer and his psychotechnics. A professional singer, when faced with a vocal score from an opera such as Rossini's, will sing the songs and cadences differently from the cadences in Verdi's early works. If he is offered to sing in an opera by Puccini or Shostakovich, he will either adapt his voice to the requirements of twentieth-century music or refuse the project.

In the process of working on the role, until the last decade of the last century, in creating the stage image, the director took into account the vocal individuality of the singer-actor. It would be naive to assume that, in the directorial and aesthetic conception of the former narrative theater, there were only acting clichés and the principle of primitive illustrativity of music, through stage action. There, rules and norms developed for the true unity of vocal and acting skills were developed.

The differences between virtuoso singing, for example from the 18th and 19th centuries, and the melodic constructions of the classics of the last century, are enormous. The influence of the psychophysical qualities of the singer on his stage comfort, but also on his predisposition to one repertoire or another are obvious. But contemporary theater theory does not strive to imprint a visual understanding of the style of musical performance. At the same time, the musical interpretation of the score by the conductor or quartet, outside the requirements of the composer's style - Mozart, Verdi or Wagner - will be harshly criticized, and the refusal to respect the tradition (or the text itself) in the stage reading of the score at the beginning of the 21st century, it is perceived not only as something hypothetically possible, but as a necessary condition for the success of the show.

At the same time, the director's task is not to confront the music but to reveal the significance of this combination, of the relationship through the interconnection of the scenic situation with that of the music (Pokrovsky 1973, 61). In opera, the dramatic line and the musical score may represent different arts, but they are designed to serve a common task, in uniting all the scenic means available to this type of theater. The singer-actor and the listener-spectator must be able to combine undividedly what happens on stage with the sound support of the action, even in the case of the most radical directorial decisions. Here, too, the issue of musical style, the degree to which the director's conception of the show corresponds to the musical part is the most accurate criterion for assessing the artistic result.

"Where there is no style, there is no art", exclaims Coquelin, and clarifies: "Here we should note the following: the direct duty of the actor is to respect the text. Regardless of the interpretation, it must say exactly what the author wrote, no

less, no more" (Coquelin 1968, 35). The quote is deliberately taken from the non-directorial era (acting theater), because the opera text, losing the multidimensionality given by the music, loses its dramatic coherence (the stage action conflicts with the musical drama).

Contemporary opera continues to address most of the classical repertoire, but the problem of modernizing the classical is not just one of lyrical theater.

For an opera singer, the problem of not respecting style is different. The text of his role is meticulously described in the musical score. This is one of the elements of the general score that cannot be changed. Its form is archaic and does not support transformations. Failure to respect the style in the opera, from the point of view of the actor's stage art, faces an inherent problem of this type of theater. The stage action, which develops a new content, also involves the emergence of new feelings, placed in a previous form. Given that the reaction between the composer's intention (tone, rhythm, role dynamics) and the ability to perform it is minimal, the emergence of new meanings for the singer-actor is difficult a priori. A paradox is born: the aesthetics of contemporary work strives for the unity of music and drama. But, violating the stylistic norms of the musical genre of the opera, namely in such a show the singer is deprived of the possibility of synthesis in his creation.

The score of the work establishes and fixes a continuous line of experience. "The tempo and rhythm of the action should be in line with the music. The movement must follow an endless line, stretching like a long note on a stringed instrument, interrupting only when needed, like a staccato of a coloratura singer" (Stakhorsky 1973, 387). This quote contains the alpha and omega of the stylistic unity of the auditory and musical series.

"The real challenge is to determine the nature of the composer's timbre-acoustic and orchestral thinking, at the same time to find a plastic image corresponding to this process. Thus, we put a sign of equality between the spatial-volumetric content of the orchestral sonority and its spatial-choreographic resolution" (Abdokov 2009, 14). Solving the role by the singer-actor requires a no less precise correlation between sound and visual in the opera performance, than the search for the correspondence between music and movement by choreographers throughout the history of ballet art.

Indeed, the actors sometimes like to make a "wide and beautiful" hand gesture. An instinctive feeling of space lives in them at this moment" (Chekhov 2003, 40). To this we can add that the actors in the opera „interpret not only every image, but also every movement" (Nemirovich-Danchenko 1989, 442). Probably the reason for this is not so much the inability of the opera singer to play, as the fact that, given that the text is pronounced by the performer less often than in real

life, the distance between the stage and the spectator is increased by the orchestra pit, and the space in around the actor-singer is filled with sounds of epic power, he voluntarily or involuntarily submits to music - its rhythm, intensity, dynamics. All these are equally characteristic of the musical drama and the musical style of the score.

3.1. Aesthetics of types of art

It is certain that there are two types of art. One type that is focused on the canonical system "ritualized art", "the art of identity aesthetics", and the other, which focuses on the violation of canons, on avoiding all previously prescribed rules. In the second case, the aesthetic values appear not as a result of the action of the norm, but as a result of its violation" (Lotman 1973, 16). That is, the work is born of the canon and is subject to the canon; it is "the art of identity aesthetics". The aesthetics of modern theater do not seem to set the task of destroying such a canon. But the contradiction of the musical and scenic style in the realities of the opera is exacerbated to the limit. "All this is for the visual, while the work is meant to delight the ear" (Bernie 1967, 30).

This formula, which dates back to the era of the confrontation between the French and Italian opera models, is still relevant today for assessing the possibilities of interaction between music and theater in a new directorial stage in the evolution of opera. K. Goldoni's definition, in which he argues that "this is heaven for the eyes and hell for hearing" (Goldoni 1877, 448), referring to the same period in the history of the work, very faithfully reflects the state of the modern listener, who came to the opera at the beginning of the 21st century to listen and discover new perspectives that would provoke thought. The singer-actor is placed in a similarly ambiguous position to the new aesthetic of the genre.

4. Conclusions

The problem with the aesthetics of today's opera performance does not lie in the fact that it is outside the context of contemporary theater. The performances of the last years on the best stages of the world are not inferior to the dramatic performances in the audacity of the scenographic decisions, in the novelty of the directorial conceptions. Today, when the opera has abandoned, without regrets, the principles of previous aesthetics, the question is different, to what extent these innovations correspond to the content, form and language of this type of theater. Moreover, the way in which these innovations relate to the abilities of the performer, relying on music in the stage transposition of his role.

The evolution of the aesthetics of the work, which we observe today, is not a fact of its progressive development. The very division of theater into types has always taken place at a time when one of the performing arts, included in the ever-changing phenomenon of synthetic theater, has reached a high degree of development. For opera, it is the voice-instrument and the art of singing; the musical element that is born in the sound of the orchestra and the musical drama expressed by it. The artistic dominance of operatic art is entirely in the auditory space. The plasticity of the actor, the stage action here only personifies, connects, explains and completes the world of sounds. Rejecting the inviolability of the opera canon, or, more precisely, denying the relevance of its existence in the aesthetics of the theater of our time, the visual work does not undergo reforms, but upsets the balance of the parts that form the phenomenon of the whole.

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