

GENRE-STYLE AND SPIRITUAL-ETHICAL METAMORPHOSIS OF FRENCH MUSICAL THEATER OF THE 17TH-20TH CENTURIES

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Abstract: The purpose of the work is to identify the genre-stylistic and spiritual-meaning specifics of the French musical theater of the New Age and its evolutionary paths in the European culture of the 17th-20th centuries. The historical paths of the development of French musical theater of the 17th-20th centuries reveal its genre and stylistic diversity, represented by the typologies of "lyrical tragedy", "salvation opera", "Empire opera", "grand" French opera, lyric opera and numerous varieties of samples of experimental musical theater and synthetic genres formations of the 20th century. The timbre-intonational and dramaturgical palette of the mentioned genres is organically inscribed in the stylistic priorities of French culture and music of the New Age - Baroque, Classicism, Empire, Romanticism, Biedermeier, etc. At the same time, the mentioned typologies of the French musical theater combine a number of common features, among which we single out the essential role of its cult-mysterious primary basis, the corresponding types of imagery and their leading features, oriented to the cultivation of Christian virtues, the idea of spiritual transformation, the harmonious union of the earthly and sacred worlds. The appeal to educational and didactic, as well as spiritual and ethical factors in French opera (even at the level of biblical thinking of own history) conditions its appeal to large-scale bright spectacular performances with a large number of mass and ballet scenes, the genesis of which went back to the spiritual traditions of the culture of French absolutism in its historical development. The specified genre metamorphoses of modern French opera at the level of "genre memory" focused the attention of the listener-spectator first of all on the original manner of conveying the poetic Word, its spiritual and ethical meaning, which went back to the "mysterious mode" of the French musical theater, on a clear fixation of dance-plastic movement-gesture, which collectively retained its significance at all stages of its historical existence.

Keywords: opera; French opera; "lyrical tragedy"; "great French opera"; French lyric opera; opera and mystery; genre; national style.

1 Introduction

"Never miss an opportunity to listen to a good opera" [18], Robert Schumann urged in his time, addressing his words not only to young novice musicians, but also to experienced artists. An outstanding romantic composer, known as the author of numerous piano, chamber, and vocal compositions and the only opera "Genoveva" in his legacy, he was nevertheless clearly aware of the enormous influence of musical theater and its expressive possibilities on the spiritual world and consciousness of the human community and creative personality rooted in its synthetic nature. The latter involves the unification of music in all its manifestations, drama, stage action, words, acting skills, scenery, costumes, ballet, etc. At the same time, the most important components in this synthesis are music and drama.

The uniqueness of opera's poetics is manifested, on the one hand, in its ability to realistically reproduce a wide range of cultural and historical phenomena of human existence in the past and present. On the other hand, the genesis of this genre goes back to mysterious and mythological-religious practices, which reveal its cultic basis, the essence of which has kept its relevance in different eras up to the present day. According to Les Kurbas, "Art, especially theater, must return to its original form - the form of a religious act. It <...> is essentially a religious act. It is a powerful means of transforming the gross into the subtle, of rising to higher spheres, of transforming matter. Then the theater really is a temple, and it must be clean and quiet, even though there will be all sorts of prayers in it" - Les Kurbas claims [22].

The centuries-old history of the development of musical theater in different regions of Europe also stimulated the formation of the phenomenon of national musical style, since "the national specification of the opera form begins with the separation of the singing manner as determined by the national character - emotional and psychological guidelines typical for this national culture, including the relationship to the personality of the artist-musician" [27, p. 8]. The study of the historical paths of the development of the national opera and its genre-intonation specificity is currently one of the leading directions of modern

opera studies. What has been said is also related to the genre and style metamorphoses of the French musical theater, the history of which dates back more than four centuries.

In modern Ukrainian musicological thought, the history of French opera in all its variety of genre manifestations has become a subject of active research interest only in recent decades. This is evidenced by the numerous works of M. Cherkashina-Gubarenko [2-4], in which outstanding examples of French musical theater appear as part of the multifaceted history of this genre in European music of the New Age. A generalization of its poetics can be found in the collective work of I. Ivanova, G. Kukol, and M. Cherkashina [9], which covers the main stages of the development of European opera of the 17th-19th centuries. Various aspects of the typology of French opera of different eras are highlighted in dissertations and related publications by Ukrainian scientists V. Danshina [6], V. Zharkova [28; 29], V. Movchan [13; 14], O. Enska [7], O. Sakalo [23; 24], L. Mudretska [15], N. Klimova [10], and others, as well as in the fundamental research of non-Ukrainian authors [1; 8; 20]. Their materials significantly complement the scientific investigations of I. Krasylina [11; 12], V. Osipova [19], O. Muravska [16], Shan Yun [25], V. Chernenko [5], K. Nemchenko [17], and others, which reveal a significant role of the mystery-liturgical factor in the poetics of the opera genre (including in its French "hypostasis"), that determines its spiritual and semantic subtext. However, the centuries-old history of French opera, represented by many names and in demand in modern performing and research practice, still needs generalizations of a musicological and cultural order, which determines the relevance of the topic of the presented article.

2 Materials and Methods

The purpose of the work is to identify the genre-stylistic and spiritual-semantic specificity of the French musical theater of the New Age and its evolutionary paths in the European culture of the 17th-20th centuries. The methodology of the work is complex in nature and is based on a combination of cultural, historical-typological, hermeneutic, etymological, intonation, and genre-stylistic approaches. The scientific novelty of the work is determined by its analytical perspective, which takes into account not only the intonation-dramatic and national features of French opera of the specified period, but also its spiritual-mythological (mysterical) factors.

3 Results and Discussion

Nino Pirotta, analyzing the genre and stylistic turns of European culture during the Baroque period, that is, the era of the birth of the opera genre, noted: "Like Columbus, who was looking for a way to India, the Florentine aesthetes went in search of the famous ancient land, but instead landed on the unknown continent of opera, whose immeasurable riches will be discovered by others..." [cit. for: 29, p. 51]. Among the "others", there were not only outstanding Italian composers of the 17th and 18th centuries, but also artists of France - a country that not only showed a deep interest in musical theater and its spiritual and ethical instructions, imprinted in the aesthetics of classicism, but also managed to create its own national "model" of the opera genre, the traditions of which remain relevant to the present day.

It should be noted that the confrontation between rational and irrational principles of thinking in the "fundamentally theological" worldview (according to P. Shawny) of the 17th century was reflected in the stylistic distinctiveness of French culture as a whole, embodied in the typology of both the aforementioned classicism and baroque. Their original synthesis demonstrates the musical and artistic life of France during this period, which bears the imprint of the historically unique "French way" and the "old order" in the social realities of Western Europe in modern times. "French court culture embodied the thesis-imperative about the sacred role of the king

and his entourage in the life of the state, as well as the "maintenance of the Cosmos against the background of history" (M. Bunakova), which in many respects determined the spiritual-ethical and mysterious undertones of both classicist tragedies and religious dramas of P. Corneille and J. Racine, as well as the poetics of lyrical tragedies of J. B. Lully" [25, p. 5].

The historically imprinted contact between the French and Italian musical and theatrical traditions did not become an obstacle in the formation of the actual French opera and its national qualities. "Cardinal Mazarini's desire to create the same wave of admiration for Italian opera in Paris ran into the wall of the French's rejection of Italian opera singing due to its excessive expression <...> Italian singing was considered vulgar to the French, who were brought up on other traditions. In addition, the fascination inherent in Italians with the "unnatural" voices of castrato singers, the love of long-breathed melodies that violate the rhythm of the poem and the meaning of the words, contradicted the ancient guidelines of French culture, according to which the main characteristics of the French vocal line determined a close connection between words and music" [29, p. 128].

Therefore, from the moment of its formation and in accordance with its terminological definition ("lyrical tragedy"), French opera was nourished by the creative and performing traditions of the classical dramatic theater, including tragedy, as well as its mysterious component, the genesis of which went back to the spiritual theater of the Middle Ages and its religious instructions. It should be noted that this type of typology will also be indicative for the French musical theater of the following eras, including in the 20th century, as evidenced by the late operatic heritage of J. Massenet (including the miracle opera "The Juggler of Our Lady", "Herodiade", "Thais"), and the mysterious stage compositions of D. Milhaud, the concept of the stage and choral opuses of A. Honegger, and, finally, "The Legend of St. Francis of Assisi" by O. Messiaen.

Returning to the original sources of the French musical theater, we note that the "lyrical tragedy" created by J. B. Lully, unlike the opuses of the "Florentine Camerata", was represented in the form of a large-scale five-act composition with an allegorical Prologue and Apotheosis, which were complemented by bright choral and ballet scenes, recitatives, which genetically resembled the traditions of "the affected declamation of the French acting school, derived from the ritual-majestic pathos of cult practice. French opera ariosity, formed under the influence of the "court" aria, and extended ballet diversions reached the sacred instructions of the court culture of French absolutism and Christian ritual practice, revealing not only the specificity of the French musical theater, but also its mysterious foundations" [25, p. 5]. "Story, dance, decor, machines - Lully's opera appears as a "whole performance", which, according to Bruyer, satisfied "the mind, eyes and ears of the audience" [1, p. 406].

The specified typological features of the genre and its priorities, which focused the attention of the listener-spectator on the original manner of delivering the poetic word, its spiritual and ethical meaning, that went back to the "mysterious mode" of the French musical theater, on the clear fixation of the dance-plastic movement-gesture, kept their significance in subsequent eras as well. This is evident both in the poetics of the "salvation opera" and in the musical and stage works of the era of the Napoleonic Empire. In the latter case, the creative experience of G. Spontini, the author of the opera "The Vestal", popular at the beginning of the 19th century, is indicative. Summarizing its poetics, we note that the vertical "Empire - hero - New (imperial) Order" built in this work openly appeals to the pagan standards of Rome, while at the same time introducing artistically tested analogies to the Christian mysteriousness of martyrdom, beautifully removed from Above. At the same time, the genre declaration of "lyrical tragedy" (the author's definition of "The Vestal") indicates the total musicality of the stage action, which thereby raises the concept of the revolutionary "salvation opera" to the level of a high genre, the three-act structure of which is in solidarity with the "pro-passion" reformed operas of K. V. Glyuk and denotes

the compositional whole of the works of G. Spontini [see more details about this: 16, p. 285-297].

At the same time, the selected dramaturgical features of G. Spontini's opera are marked by the author's reliance on the stylistics of popular genres in France - the march, the anthem. A characteristic attribute of Empire opera can also be considered the attraction it inherited from previous eras to grandiose mass spectacle-ritual scenes, manifestations imbued with militant-heroic rhythm-intonations. "The Vestal", as well as other works of G. Spontini, also demonstrates a certain type of drama, in which the author organically combines the traditions of the French musical theater of previous eras and their innovative interpretation, thereby directly anticipating the spiritual-semantic and intonation-dramaturgical instructions of the "great" French opera in the work of its classics - G. Meyerbeer and J.F. Halevi.

Summarizing its most essential typological features, which genetically go back to the mysterious original sources rooted in French culture for many centuries, and to the poetics of "lyrical tragedy" of the time of J. B. Lully, Shang Yun notes that the meaning of most examples of this genre "comes down to a single plot, according to which the hero, who is in harmony with his environment, at a certain time commits a misdemeanor, thereby bringing himself and the surrounding world into chaos. The search for ways to overcome it becomes for him a source of spiritual Transfiguration, which ultimately marks the discovery of Eternity ("vision-enlightenment" in the finales of operas)" [25, p. 14].

Further analyzing the spiritual-didactic and ethical component of the poetics of the "grand" opera, the researcher notes that the way to the harmonization of the antinomies of this genre, focused on the grand religious conflicts of the past, "its authors see first of all in love that overcomes all national, religious, and confessional obstacles and becomes, according to the specifics of the romantic spiritual worldview, the source of the discovery of the Truth. Nevertheless, in the historical and dramatic realities of the development of the action of the "great" opera, this path is represented as sacrificial-martyrdom, which reveals a significant role of the main characters of precisely Christian virtues in the images - humility, forgiveness, sacrifice, prayerfulness, steadfastness of faith, etc." [25, p. 14]. It should be noted that all these features distinguished not only the characters of medieval French mysteries, but also the heroes of the French classical theater, thus determining the continuity of the spiritual traditions of the French dramatic and musical theater.

French opera of the second half of the 19th century is represented by a new genre - "lyrical opera", which, on the one hand, can be considered as a kind of antithesis of the "grand" opera of G. Meyerbeer and his contemporaries, that is manifested in its structural and large-scale parameters, in the absence of large mass scenes, in the obvious dominance of lyrical quality and corresponding types of heroes. On the other hand, the named genre reveals many features inherited from the concept of "grand opera", representing them, however, in a somewhat different figurative-semantic and large-scale-structural format [see more about this in the works of V. Movchan: 13; 14].

The figurative-semantic essence of French lyric opera is the original "confrontation of the individual "Self", the personal drama of the main characters, which has an extremely high significance in the conditions of the culture of the 19th century, and the equally significant spiritual-patriarchal tradition or environment in which the main characters live and act. The specificity of the specified conflict between the individual "Self" and the norms of the "patriarchal society" in French lyric opera is also determined by its essential Christian (often mystical) subtext, due to which the works of this genre also acquire a moral and ethical meaning, while spiritual transformation of the main characters become the determining factor of their fate" [16, p. 371]. Thus, the poetics of French lyric opera reveals intersections with the mysterious tradition, which is essential for French theater and culture, and with "religious-philosophical

tragedy”, that became one of the features of the genre priorities of romantic art.

In addition, the above-mentioned opposition “individual – patriarchal” largely determines the stylistic qualities of this genre, which was born at a peculiar intersection of the romantic and Biedermeier traditions, that determined the spiritual and ethical indicators of culture and music of the 19th century. At the same time, the first of them is related to the comprehensive display of the inner world of the main characters, their individual psychological drama, while the second reflects the patriarchal world in which they live. This side of French lyric opera is always demonstrably highlighted through appeals to typical universal means of musical expression – folklore, home music-making traditions, as well as a direct or indirect appeal to the church singing tradition.

Let us note that from the poetics of the “grand” French opera, lyric opera also inherits the dominant role of the theme of hero (in its broadest sense), which overcomes not only state, religious, and confessional boundaries, but also national ones. Against the background of the introduction into the plot and semantic basis of the lyrical opera of oriental themes, quite popular in the French culture of the Romantic era [see: 21] (the opera heritage of J. Bizet, L. Delibes, C. Saint-Saëns, etc.), the processes of searching for unity of not only kindred souls, but also East and West take place, and ultimately earthly and Sacred, which again reminds of the mysterious genesis of French musical theater. A vivid confirmation of the latter is the late period of the work of the classic of lyric opera - J. Massenet, who in 1902 created the miracle opera “The Juggler of Our Lady” based on the novel by A. France.

The allegorical plot basis of this work, according to A. Tatarnikova, determines “the appearance of a new type of hero in the French musical theater of the beginning of the 20th century, whose meaning is determined not by a willful dramatic confrontation with the phenomena of the surrounding world, a struggle for personal happiness or public interests, but by self-deprecation, self-humiliation, awareness of own ‘poverty of spirit’, which is at the same time a stimulus for his spiritual ascent. Its signs are not only transfiguration, but also the dominant role of service-praise” [26, p. 235].

“The Juggler of Our Lady” by J. Massenet, the opera-mysterical heritage of V. d’Andy, the sacral-stage “action” by C. Debussy “The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian” and other similar works actually open the way to spiritual and ethical searches and creative genre and style discoveries in French opera of the 20th century. At the same time, despite all the innovation of this kind of search, they always maintain a connection with the established spiritual and patriarchal traditions of French culture, a deep interest in the Word and its stage-plastic-intonational “utterance” as an indicative typological feature of the French musical theater of different eras.

The above clearly demonstrates the idea of A. Honegger’s grandiose composition “Joan of Arc at the Hearth”, bordering between the typology of oratorio-mystery and solemn stage action, close to the standards of the musical theater of the last century. The dramaturgy of this opus combines several time layers in an original way: the real one - Jeanne at the stake, then in the burning scene, in numerous declamatory dialogues between Jeanne and Dominique; episodes-memories about specific events, including the coronation in Reims, scenes of Jeanne’s trial, etc. They are complemented by Jeanne’s poetic dreams and her experiences. Of special interest is the timeless philosophical and symbolic layer, which symbolizes the introduction of the spiritual Divine world into the oratory events.

In such a symbiosis, on the one hand, the influence of cinematographic techniques (in which A. Honegger was also involved in the early period of his work) is evident, which was manifested in the “flows” of memories and lyrical reflections of the main character, related to real events, in using montage of frames from different time layers. On the other hand, in this

approach, a significant influence of the typology of oratorio, opera, and, above all, the medieval mystery, which in the first half of the 20th century was experiencing a real renaissance, is most fully represented precisely in French music and drama, involved in the ideas of the “Catholic revival”.

The result of this tradition at the end of the 20th century is the “mysterious fresco” of O. Messiaen “St. Francis of Assisi”, the genre nature of which has absorbed the typological features of the entire spiritual theater of the Middle Ages - moralite, miracle, life-itinerary, as well as fragments of Catholic worship with the corresponding vocal-intonation embodiment. At the same time, the selected genre attributes of Christian culture, which reveal the essence and idea of this work, are supplemented by the inclusion in it of elements of non-European ritual theater - Japanese drama “no” and Balinese religious ideas, thus symbolizing the universal nature of this action, in the story of which the East and West organically unite. The above said also determines the final character of this work in the work and life of the great French composer of the last century, who after his death was included among the saints of the Catholic Church, “thus becoming even closer to his medieval predecessor who preached to the birds” [see more details about this: 16, p. 431-438].

4 Conclusion

Thus, the historical paths of development of the French musical theater of the 17th–20th centuries reveal its genre and stylistic diversity, represented by the typologies of “lyrical tragedy”, “salvation opera”, Empire opera, “grand” French opera, lyric opera and numerous varieties of samples of experimental musical theater and synthetic genre formations of the 20th century. The timbre-intonational and dramaturgical palette of the mentioned genres is organically inscribed in the stylistic priorities of French culture and music of the New Age - Baroque, Classicism, Empire, Romanticism, Biedermeier, etc. At the same time, the mentioned typologies of the French musical theater combine a number of common features, among which we single out the essential role of its cult-mysterious primary basis, the corresponding types of imagery and their leading features, oriented to the cultivation of Christian virtues, the idea of spiritual transformation, the harmonious union of the earthly and sacred worlds. The appeal to educational-didactic and spiritual-ethical factors in French opera (even at the level of biblical thinking of its own history) conditions its appeal to large-scale bright spectacular performances with a large number of mass and ballet scenes, the genesis of which went back to the spiritual traditions of the culture of French absolutism in its historical development. The specified genre metamorphoses of modern French opera at the level of “genre memory” focused the attention of the listener-spectator first of all on the original manner of conveying the poetic Word, its spiritual and ethical meaning, which went back to the “mysterious mode” of the French musical theater, on a clear fixation of dance-plastic movement-gesture, that collectively retained its significance at all stages of its historical existence.

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