

13. EVOLUTIONARY MARKINGS - FROM THE OPERA SERIES TO THE OPERA BUFFA

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Abstract: *For Italian culture, and not only, the 18th century was one of reforms in musical theatre, which were manifested from the very first years, when composers began to abandon complicated plots and the connections between tragic moments and comics, specific to the librettos of the previous century. The simplified stage action thus becomes more believable and as a consequence of the evolution and reform of the opera series, a new type of show is taking shape, based exclusively on comic situations and characters: the opera buffa. So, the 18th century is not only the century of opera series, but also of the affirmation of opera buffa.*

Key words: *opera series, opera buffa, evolution*

„La forza d'espressione si deve sentire da chi compone, non s'impara dalle scuole, non vi sono regole per insegnarla, e tutta consiste nel ritmo. Nel ritmo sta l'espressione musicale, nel ritmo tutta la potenza della musica“.⁵⁶ Gioacchino Rossini

1. Introduction

Concerned about the reform of libretti in favour of historical subjects, the poets Apostol Zeno and especially Pietro Metastasio also pursued the rigorous regulation of the metric. Metastasio achieved a great success in the work of the 18th century, among the composers who used his texts being: Albinoni, Haendel, Hasse, Jommelli, Piccinni, Cherubini, Paisiello, Vivaldi, Gluck, Cimarosa, Pergolesi, Mozart, Porpora and Spontini.

Compared to the melodrama of the 18th century (where recitatives, *ariosos* and arias alternated according to the will of the author or as the action required), Metastasio will establish new, very precise rules, structuring the scenes in two parts: *the recitative* (which exposes the action) and *the aria* (in which the character expresses his feelings), and thus, in the deployment of the musical drama, he alternates the dynamic moments with the static ones, the moments of calm with the most tense, accumulating the emotional load from the recitative that will then release into the aria. The new approach to action and music makes these elements coexist within the melodrama, each developing freely, depending on the expressive sphere, but it is very clear that *the aria* is the queen of the opera, while recitatives, general or instrumental moments are elements of contouring and expressive support.

2. Beginnings – opera buffa

As a result of the reform and evolution of the opera series, at the beginning of the 18th century, a new genre of show built exclusively on comic situations and characters, namely: *Intermezzo* and *commedia per musica* written in Neapolitan dialect. Forbidden by Metastasio's reforms, *the commedia* finds its place between

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⁵⁶ The expressive force must be felt by the composer, cannot be taught in schools, there are no teaching rules, no learning, and everything consists of rhythm. The musical expression is in the rhythm, the power of music is in the rhythm. (t. a.).

two acts of the opera *series*, in those *Intermezzi* that have as subject farces taking place in a contemporary setting, designed for a couple of singers - actors expressing themselves in Neapolitan dialect.

The importance of these *Intermezzi* lies not only in proposing an entirely comic show, with specific situations and typologies of the *commedia dell'arte*, but in creating expressive forms that will be taken over by opera *buffa*, but also by the opera *series* later, and we refer primarily to the musical - psychological approach of the characters. Gradually, these *Intermezzi* will break away from the *opera series*, turning into independent performances, and thus the *opera buffa* is born.

In Venezia and Naples, comic representations developed the most among acts of opera *series* and were aimed at relieving *series* performances. The term for *Intermezzi* began to be used more and more often, being highlighted in the libretti of the works by a specific text. Comic moments were represented in short-term works, with two protagonists (maximum three), the same *Intermezzo* being often used in different works, coming in time to enjoy more success than the opera *series* with which they were associated.

Precisely to avoid these situations, the reform of Christoph Willibald Ritter von Gluck imposed the use of the poetic text by providing a very close link between music and word, discouraging further attempts to retrieve the same text.⁵⁷ Although the *opera series* enjoyed great success with the public, at the beginning of the 18th century the Enlightenment followers noticed the imperfections of the genre, especially regarding the lack of dramatic veracity, the absolute supremacy of the singers, the ignorance of the composers and the behaviour of the audience.

Francesco Algarotti⁵⁸ came up with an interesting proposal to renew the opera that encouraged librettists and composers to draw inspiration from the French lyric. This proposal was supported by several arguments: French opera was the only kind of show (until that time) that managed to stop the great success of Italian opera; the areas of French opera did not interrupt the dramaturgical development (as was the case in Italian opera); the denial of the privileged position of castrates in French creation compared to the Italian one; closer collaboration between the librettist and composer.

However, the magnificent French opera did not manage to impose itself in the important theatres outside the borders of France, but only in the Courts (in Italy, in Vienna) where, at the beginning of the 18th century, a genre of show similar to the French one had developed, but smaller in number of acts and characters, which took place on the occasion of the celebration of certain events (wedding, baptism).

These manifestations, known as *theatrical feasts*, *serenades* or *theatrical*

⁵⁷ Gluck's reforming ideas were aimed at: "disposing the Italian opera from the abuses of singers and composers; limiting vocal virtuosity in da capo areas; using texts that convey heart language, attractive, unitary and coherent passions and situations; eliminating the secco recitative and increasing the expressive role of the instrumentation; connecting the overture to the conduct of the opera; introducing performances with choir and dance; music to serve the literary text. Basically, the reform made by Gluck is an overlap of the elements specific to the French and Italian opera, to which new, original elements are added."

⁵⁸ Count Francesco Algarotti (December 11, 1712 – May 3, 1764) was a Venetian polymath, philosopher, poet, essayist, Anglophile, art critic and art collector. He was a man with extensive knowledge, an expert in Newtonianism, architecture and opera. He was a friend of Frederick the Great and crucial figures of his time: Voltaire, Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens, Pierre-Louis de Maupertuis and the atheist Julien Offray de La Mettrie. Lord Chesterfield, Thomas Gray, George Lyttelton, Thomas Hollis, Metastasio, Benedict XIV and Heinrich von Brühl were among his correspondents. Source: https://hmn.wiki/ro/Francesco_Algarotti, accessed on March 3, 2022.

actions, were short (in two or three parts), had few characters, the subjects were inspired by mythology and presented the elements specific to French music (the presence of choir and ballet, a greater share in the use of accompanied recitatives compared to *secco*, the closed forms, refined instrumentation predominate). On the linguistic plane, the distinction is made between the *opera series* and the *opera buffa*. In the *opera series* the main language is that of the previous era (Petrarch and Tasso) and from the phono morphological perspective. Thus, one can notice the lack of letters at the end of the verse, of diphthongs in words such as *core*, *foco*, etc., the use of unstressed pronouns (*il* instead of *lo*, *gli* instead of *li*, etc.), the use of distant past and diminutive, avoiding rare or overly courteous words.

In *opera buffa*, the language of comedy is obvious at the syntax level, where the polyvalent features of speech are valued, the vocabulary is closer to contemporaneity, solecisms and speeches inspired mainly by trendy words in French (*madama*, *signorina*, *monsu*) or idioms of Tuscan comic tradition are introduced. Characteristic of the genre of *opera buffa* is the use of onomatopoeia, interjections (*ohibo!*, *poffarbacco!*) or the type of writing of duets or quartets in which music transcends the verbal component.

The intention that the authors of the texts had in mind was related to the popularity or action that involves ordinary people and the way to make the sung text intelligible for everyone the world. This was at odds with the musical tradition, which after the Gregorian chant switched to rigid and formal schemes with Latin or German texts that were not understandable to the public. By abandoning these foreign languages, the audience began to decipher the words spoken by the characters, and the story combined with music became understandable for all.

3. Evolution – opera buffa

Naples was the first city where couples of actors - singers specialized for the interpretation of comic texts. *La serva padrona* by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi⁵⁹ is the most famous work in the genre *Intermezzi buffo*, a very clear example of the style of the time. The work was first represented on August 28, 1733 in Naples, being included in the *opera series* of the same composer - *Il prigionier superbo*, a symbol of the revolution of the opera. Following the representation of the opera in Paris (in 1763), *querelle des Bouffons*⁶⁰ paved the way, with French intellectuals preferring the naturalness of the Italian opera to the trendy French opera. Pergolesi's name remained the most important in the sphere of composers of his era, especially for the works: *La serva padrona*, *Stabat Mater*, *Adriano in Siria* and *L'Olimpiade* in which we find some of the most beautiful scores of the 18th century.

From the gallery of male characters of these *Intermezzi* we mention: Uberto

⁵⁹ *Intermezzi* that Pergolesi wrote in his debut opera – *La Salustia* (1732) – did not have a specified title; His last *Intermezzi*, *Livietta e Tracollo* were introduced in *Adriano in Siria* (*dramma per musica*). Pergolesi was at that time appreciated especially for his success with his comic works in Neapolitan language (*Lo frate 'nnamorato*, 1723).

⁶⁰ *La querelle des bouffons* (literally *the dispute between buffoons*, from the names of Italian itinerant theater companies) is a controversy between two factions of the Paris of the 18th century. The subject of the controversy was whether the primacy of the contemporary musical theatre belonged to traditional French opera or to new musical currents of Italian origin and, above all, of Neapolitan origin. It is also known as *guerre des coins*, that is, *the war of the corners*, because the supporters of French supremacy stood next to the king's box (*coin du roi*) and those of Italian supremacy next to the queen's box (*coin de la reine*). Source: https://koaha.org/wiki/Querelle_des_bouffons, accessed on 21.03.2022.

(the rich old man, in love with his maid), Pantalone, Balanzone, Pancrazio, Contele Barlacco, Don Chilone, Grullo, Don Tabarano, Don Pomponio, Don Galoppo, Don Corbolone. Before Serpina (the young woman with a modest social status but very intelligent), in the gallery of female characters we met: Erighetta, Modestina, Dorilla, Dorina, Luilla, Moschetta, Grilletta, Lisetta, Vespetta, Vespina or Serpilla. They are joined by a mute character, Uberto's servant Vespone, who plays an important role in triggering the ending. The two *Intermezzi* are composed symmetrically - one aria for each character and one duet on both sides and have a discrete orchestration.

With the installation of Charles de Bourbon⁶¹, the era of these Neapolitan *Intermezzi* ended and the affirmation of a new kind of comic opera began. Since 1725, the comic couple reveals an independent story of the main drama, thus preparing the emancipation of these *Intermezzi* as stand-alone comic operas. *Commedia per musica* (in the Neapolitan dialect) enjoyed great success in the 18th century Neapolitan theatre and in the light of the fact that he approached the modern representation of everyday life with ordinary, popular situations and characters. *Neapolitan commedia* and then *opera buffa* will have close relationships with the spoken theatre from which long recitatives, dialogues and narrative moments interspersed with closed strophic numbers develop.

Opera series, unlike *commedia per musica*, develops some expressive solutions in *concertato* moments, when several characters sing simultaneously, in dialogue or expressing their own thoughts with a different, surprising dynamic. This method will be deepened in the *opera buffa* itself, the overall moments having the ability to express the confusion scenes given by certain unforeseen situations in the end of the act.

Comic opera comprises two distinct textual and linguistic typologies: pure comic specific to the genre (with traditional subjects) and sentimental comic (in addition to traditional characters, ridiculous, emotional and even tearful situations appear). The genre is evolving rather quickly towards a less realistic ideological theatre; gradually the dialectical language will be removed in favour of the Italian or the Neapolitan - Italian combination, from which will result a multilingual dramaturgical performance, specific to the 18th century, which implies a diminution of the realistic impact of the first texts in favour of the verbal caricatural comic of the *opera buffa* and highlighting the social - dramaturgical differences between the characters.

Opposing the stylistic features of the *opera series*, *opera buffa* aims to transform opera into a genre in which ordinary people find their correspondent in resembling the characters in the scene, allowing the access of the regular audience to performances. The music of the *opera buffa* was written expressly for the typology of the audience to whom it addressed, complementing the comic moments with novel imitative solutions and subtexts that will influence the psychology of the characters. Thus, the areas become more dynamic, the overall moments acquire new development valences, and the characters form well-defined psychological typologies, generally associated with soprano and bass voices, to which are often assigned texts to be intoned by spelling in an extremely fast *tempo* with comic effect.

⁶¹ Charles of Bourbon restored Naples to the status of capital of the kingdom after 230 years.

So, the genre increasingly requires a lot of veracity of the vocal expression correlated with the vivacity of the stage play and an effective mimicry, as a prototype of the comic character, the bass *buff* voice being used initially. The contrast between the female and male voices of the *buffa* creation will influence the dramaturgical development of the 19th century opera. With a shorter duration than opera *series*, opera *buffa* involves a limited number of instrumentalists, performers, simpler decors (low costs compared to the *opera series*), and this allowed for the widespread of the genre not only in Italy, but throughout Europe.

4. Conclusions

In the evolution of the Italian theatre, opera *buffa* played a very important role in contributing to the diversification of roles resulting in a simpler and more dynamic musical discourse, distinguishing by the great endings of the act in *concertato* style; in this sense, we must not forget the undeniable genius of Mozart (the final act assemblies of *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*). In the 18th century, the superiority of the Italian language as a language for opera creation was theorized, as a result of the importance that Italian phonetics attaches to vowels (sounds). The success achieved by Italian opera is also demonstrated by the propagation of the musical terms at international level, including the libretti written in verse, which constitute the text of the opera. The same libretto could be approached by several composers, and the original text could undergo various modifications (cutting, additions, replacement of some areas, *area da baule*).

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