

OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Boryana Lambreva

Prof. „Pancho Vladigerov” National Academy of Music professional field 8.3. Music and Dance

Arts

of the

doctoral thesis of

Tsvetanka Gueorguieva Potchekanska

Igor Stravinsky and the European Musical Theatre between the Two World Wars

(Renard and Oedipus Rex)

for the award of Doctoral degree in professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Arts

Dissertation advisor: Prof. Dr Albena Kehlibareva

Tsvetanka Potchekanska is an alumnus of the Prof. „Pancho Vladigerov” National Academy of Music in Sofia, holding a Master’s Degree with three majors – Performing Arts, Music Pedagogy and Musical Theatre Directing. She holds two other Master’s Degrees – in Cultural Studies from the Southwest University in Blagoevgrad and Theatre – Theory and Technique from the Università Iuav di Venezia. These degrees are followed by further studies and specializations at the National Academy for Theatre and Film Art, at Teatro Atlante (Palermo) and the Silvio D'Amico Academy in Rome, as well as several qualification programmes, courses and master classes in various cities across Italy. The candidate’s professional profile is further enriched by her experience as playwright and director of theatre and musical theatre productions in Bulgaria, Italy and South Korea. She has written and directed two shorts – Sangria and Eva and is the author of projects for the short film Double Reflection and the feature film A Beautiful Day. She has worked as assistant-director for opera and theatre productions in Bulgaria, Italy and Spain.

The thesis Igor Stravinsky and the European Musical Theatre between the Two World Wars (Renard and Oedipus Rex) was presented by the candidate and approved at a session of the Music Department of New Bulgarian University on 29.09.2020. The thesis comprises 250 pages and includes an introduction, seven main chapters divided into two sections, a conclusion and a list of inputs and appendices. The bibliography includes textbooks, papers, dictionaries, scientific works, links to websites and other interactive sources – a total of 104 titles in six languages.

The first section of the thesis reviews and analyses the state of music arts at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century – a period which precedes and determines the shifts and changes in European musical theatre, and, more particularly, in the musical theatre works of Igor Stravinsky. In the course of three chapters the candidate outlines the main trends to spur radical reorganisation of musical theatre genres in the period between the two world wars. The main highlights in this portion of the thesis are the trend towards the epic, both in music and in theatre as a whole, and the dehumanization of the arts as a result of the collapse of the humanistic ideal.

The actual research begins in the next two chapters, part of the second section of the thesis, in which Tsvetanka Potchekanska performs an in-depth, detailed analysis of the two main musical theatre works of Igor Stravinsky, on which her study is focused – prominent bearers of the new trends and genre shift – Bayka or Renard and the opera-oratorio Oedipus Rex.

The analysis of the musical, dramaturgical and structural techniques used in *Renard* reaches several significant conclusions regarding the characteristics of the new trends in Stravinsky's works:

- Reference to the traditions of Russian balagan theatre which strongly influence the narrative's structure and impose a new, revolutionary form on musical and dramaturgical presentation. It is precisely in the image of the balagan 'ded' (grandfather) that the figure of the Narrator emerges, which, at this stage, is still hidden and invisible, but will, in Stravinsky's subsequent works, mature into an important character ensuring detachment from events and enabling the spectator to follow the action in the form of a story, i.e., the characters narrate the facts instead of acting them out.

- The use of texts from various sources and their montage serves to fragment the work's structure and distances it from the classic dramaturgical form. Montage, as an organizing principle, is also evident in the separation of roles into vocal and mimic.

- The presence of epic features and dramaturgy in *Renard* as a result of the emerging shift in both drama and musical theatre works outlines a new direction in Stravinsky's musical theatre works and lays down the foundations for the trends which the author will follow and apply in his subsequent works.

In Chapter Five, *Evolution and Strengthening of the Epic Form in the Opera-Oratorio Oedipus Rex*, the candidate further discusses the new trends and highlights the presence of epic features and methods in *Oedipus Rex*, examining the extent of their manifestation. In this sense, the most important characteristics of *Oedipus Rex* are:

- The amalgamation of two genre characteristics – that of the opera and oratorio. The author makes use of different musical models, which he involves in his quest for new expressions and allusions through a modified, revolutionary attitude towards musical theatre traditions. The new 'hybrid' genre is the first significant sign for the different compositional and dramaturgical methods with which Stravinsky seeks to implement the transformational theatrical concept in the field of the musical theatre.

- The characteristics of the oratorio are apparent both in the important role of the choir and in the figure of the Narrator, which can be linked to the figures of the Evangelist or the Prophet in the oratorio genre, and through which the composer delineates the boundaries of dramaturgical action. In *Oedipus Rex* Stravinsky enhances this role and its significance – in contrast to *Renard*, the choir is now visible to the audience and its interpretation marks a certain gradation in the presence of epic characteristics. Its role is to reduce and deform the emotional impact of the tragedy; this it achieves through commentary on the action, often tinted by irony. Another specific device used by Stravinsky to achieve detachment from the plot – a device which is typical of the epic form – is the direct address of the Narrator to the audience.

-*Oedipus Rex* demonstrates features inherent to both the opera and the oratorio, albeit manifested and refracted in a new way. “Creating a distance from what is presented provokes a certain attitude and reaction in the spectator which prevents the direct effect and allusions on the audience and counters the spectators’ emotional attachment and empathy through the so-called „alienation effect“ (Abstract, page 16). This alienation effect is aimed not only at the spectator but is also evident in the characters and the actors’ play. Its impact is aided, not least, by the use of Latin which ensures a certain inertness of the action and weakening of the emotional impact. The emotional element is expressed mainly through music and musical forms. “... by eliminating the text’s potential to express its contents in an understandable form, the composer accentuates the external, the method and manner of processing in the course of the phonetic perception, which creates auditory images without affecting the text’s meaning.” (Abstract, page 15).

An important contribution of the thesis is the identification of a uniform „marker“ for the epic type of theatre; in order to define this marker, the candidate has synthesized and summarized the characteristic features of the two main works analyzed in the thesis – *Renard* and *Oedipus Rex*. The marker is then applied in the analysis of other musical theatre works by Igor Stravinsky (*The Soldier’s Tale*, *Mavra* and *Perséphone*) and is used to pinpoint the general aesthetic and structural principles, evidencing the presence and specifics of the „epic type of theatre as part of the process of identification and aesthetic manifestation of Stravinsky’s principles in his musical theatre works beyond the ballet genre.“ (Abstract – p. 23).

I find the contributions of the thesis to be reliable, well-grounded and practicable.

The abstract properly reflects the essence of the thesis and provides an accurate and concise overview of its scientific body. The candidate has published four papers on the reviewed topic.

Based on everything discussed so far, on the documents presented and my overall impression from the candidate, I propose to the honorable Scientific Jury to confer to Tsvetanka Gueorguieva Potchekanska a Doctor's Degree in professional field 8.3 – Music and Dance Arts.

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Prof. Dr. Boryana Lambreva /..... /