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CRISTÓBAL HALFFTER DON QUIXOTE OPERA: TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATORY IN THE INTERPRETATION OF “ETERNAL” CHARACTER

The article analyzes ideological and compositional, dramatic foundations and style criteria of Don Quixote Opera of modern Spanish composer Cristóbal Halffter. The opposition of atonal (sonorant) and tonal (stylization of baroque music) of the layers literally shows the conflict essence - two central characters' fight - between Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and Don Quixote and aggression and soullessness of the world around. The character sketch of Don Quixote, intensified by the pair character, namely, the image of Cervantes (=the writer) is interpreted by Halffter as a tragic one, common to all mankind, but at the same time able to transform the reality, in other words, carrying out a distinctive - cultural and creative - mission.

Keywords: Don Quixote character, Cervantes character, quixotism, Spanish, polystylistics.

A long list of authors, referring to the character of Don Quixote in their creative works, shows the significance of Don Quixote for the Spanish people. Among them there are Santiago Ramón y Cajal, A. Castro, Salvador de Madariaga, Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, Antonio Machado Ruiz, Federico García Lorca etc. This is non-exhaustive list of sophists, pointing to the fact that Don Quixote for the Spanish is embodiment of soul and nature of the Spanish people, a symbol of moral and justice.

If in the symphonic music the character sketch of Don Quixote is represented by a wide list of the Spanish composers, among which there are H.G. Roman (Don Quixote Resurrection, 1994), F.A. Barbieri (Don Quixote, 1861), H.F. Guerra (Three Moments of Don Quixote, 2005), Gerardo Gombau (Don Quixote, Looking for Weapon, 1945) etc., then in the opera art this story (curiously enough) was not so popular.

Only in the XX century there is awakening of the Spanish composers' interest to Don Quixote as a theatrical character (in this context the difference between the Spanish music art and the West-European one is emphasized). Among the popular works there are music of Manuel de Falla to the stage play Don Quixote (1923), lyric drama Don Quixote by Cristóbal Halffter (1999), and lyric drama Don Quixote's Dulcinea by Agustín Castilla-Ávila (2010).

The opera Don Quixote by Cristóbal Halffter, written by 70-year-old composer to the libretto by Andrés Amorós, represents rather fantasia on the subject of the original work. It is one of the outstanding and artistically significant works of the modern opera.

Halffter's creative work related to operas is associated with cultural trends, within which modern opera art develops as a whole. In particular, new genre kinds are generated;

theatrical and musical polystylistics and thirst for the extreme “actualization” of content became stable stylistic dominants (the term by A. Schnittke).

Having started the work on the composition of Don Quixote, Halffter created the knight de la Mancha character in the context of the myth about Don Quixote as a hero, combining the Spanish and universal, the history about which was to some extent an “introduction” into the global history of Spain.

The opera was premiered in the Royal Theater of Madrid on the 23rd of February, 2000. This is one act opera, consisting of six acts, prologue and final movement. The total duration is about 110 minutes.

In the opera Don Quixote Halffter appeals to the Germany musical tradition, represented by the line of Richard Wagner - Richard Strauss - Alban Berg [5].

In Halffter’s opera “the constant modulation between the word understanding and its latent content” prevails in vocal technique [5]¹. Meanwhile, a word, verbal text frequently has phonetic significance, when its meaning is strengthened by a peculiar sound “delivery”. Such technique promotes escalating dramatic tensions. “...I, the composer says, was searching for absolute clarity, when wanted to, to make text clear not due to the events, contained in, but due to its meaning content” [5].

C. Halffter makes free use of the expressive writing in the style of Schoenberg and Berg. Meanwhile, big atonal layers, creating element of surprise and contrast, stand against the “melodic” (Hauptstimme), that after all prevails in the opera.

Not only a pair of characters Don Quixote - Sancho Panza is guiding metaphors of a certain interpretation of the Spanish reality. Halffter shows also certain duality between Cervantes as a hero-” transformer’ of the reality (by means of the creative work) and Quixote as a myth, which is a figment of the imagination and projected into the future. This duality is resolved in the dramatic opposition at the beginning of the six act between the creator and creature, where death of Cervantes, in order to open a way for the final transformation of Don Quixote into the myth, is pronounced in the verse fragment by Jorge Manrique from *The Coplas on the Death of His Father* (“I readily meet one’s death, because a wish of human to live, when God wants him to die, is madness”). Therefore, there is a semantic arch

1 In this and further cases, references to Halffter’s indirect quoting are taken from the doctorate thesis of the Spanish musicologist German Gan-Quesada [5] in our translation. - V.M.

from the first act, where the poem *Death, Delusion and Madness* by Cervantes is cited, to this, sixth act; in addition, due to Manrique's verses, unbelief is substituted by hope for the future, and cathartic outcome can be noted.

The originality of Halffter's opera plot is beyond exception, since in this composition there is dialectical meeting between Cervantes and Don Quixote, the creator and the creature, on one hand. On the other hand, the introduction of a new character of Aldonza, who is Dulcinea herself, is of particular interest.² In the score the parts of Dulcinea-Aldonza will be united, inseparably associated, and rarely will be heard as solo.

The composer includes in the opera dramaturgy the scenes from the novel such as adventures with wind mills, which Don Quixote takes as giants (act 4), the history with herd from the Mancha, that he takes as solders (act 5), in other words, the scenes, where we can observe split of the reality itself.

In the stage projection this split is developed in dual opposition between the characters (Dulcinea - Aldonza, Cervantes - Quixote, Quixote - Sancho), which share in the first two cases the same vocal tessitura (Dulcinea and Aldonza - soprano, Cervantes and Don Quixote - baritone) and are provided with the leit-timbre feature (Don Quixote - violoncello, Cervantes - harp and harpsichord).

Further, analyzing the opera, we will rely on the video clip of the Royal Theatre in Madrid, 2000 (performed under the supervision of the composer's son Pedro Halffter³).

The scenography (G. Wernicke production) is based on the books, that throughout Halffter's opera direction are described as "physical reality", symbolizing Cervantes "personal confrontation with the global culture" [5]. The books for the composer are both metaphor of the need for artistic freedom as a human inception concentrate, positive, creative human activity, protecting them against the violence and abuse influence.

Cervantes comes on the scene, citing (reading) ovillejo⁴ from the novel (the first part, Chapter XXVII) "Quien me causa este dolor..." (that is referred to as «Muerte, mudanza y locura» ("Death, Delusion and Madness").

2 Dulcinea del Toboso (in Spanish Dulcinea del Toboso) is Aldonza Lorenzo. Choosing as a true knight, ladylove, Don Quixote set his heart on a usual girl from the neighboring villages El Toboso, namely, Aldonza Lorenzo, who he called Dulcinea del Toboso, the most beautiful women.

3 The performing musicians are E. Baquerizo (Don Quixote), J. Miguel Ramón (Cervantes), M. Rodriguez (Aldonza), E. Santa María (Sancho), D. Tiegz (Dulcinea).

Then the overture comes. The neighbouring sounds, more specifically, B flat, C, B, G etc. are accumulated on the sounding on *pp* A in the clarinet - in various orchestra instruments, covering wider range, engaging various orchestra groups and intensification of dynamics, forming, thus, long-lasting, seemed endless, sonorous layer, where the undertone “A” - “B flat” is well-marked. According to Halffter, here he tries to render dark life panorama of the Spanish society during the XVI–XVII centuries, in other words, during the life of Cervantes [5].

The orchestral sound at the moment of the highest emotional tension on *ff* is joined by the chorus, which imitates the micro polyphonic “stratification” of the initial times of the entrance, in this case, starting with the note “E”. Verbal text basis of the chorus consists of the same *ovillejo* lines. Sharp dissonant soundings in chorus parts are followed by sliding and cluster sonorities of the orchestra with the strengthened group of the percussion instruments. After the culminating point there is a return to the initial “melismatic” increase (“fouling”) of “A” sound in the orchestral part, against which Cervantes repeats many times “Who? Who?”, as if he is reconstructing the process, looking forward to the birth of the creature originating in his head.

The first vocal part is a detailed scene - Cervantes monologue. The sound is an allusion to baroque opera arias and stands in sharp contrast towards the previous musical content. The voice part of the hero is lyrical, tender, melodious. The further Cervantes entrances are accompanied by the orchestra, involving harp, harpsichord, flute, and string instruments. The sound of the bell, overlapping the overall “baroque” sound in another tonal “level”, adds the expressiveness and can be interpreted as a kind of the author’s mark (= sign of the modern sound), emphasizing the distance between the past and present.

Periodic inclusion of choral replicas into the score, with their usual saturated dissonant sound, provides the parties of Cervantes and orchestra with disharmony.

Tonal, melodic cantilena of Cervantes’ vocal part throughout the entire scene conflicts with atonal, hard, sharp sound of the chorus and orchestra. In our opinion, it becomes an expression of not only the inconformity of the writer’s bright aspirations to the gloomy atmosphere of the Spanish society, where he lived and worked, but also unhappiness - mental illness (insanity) of his hero Don Quixote, which is an integral part of the latter and

4 *Ovillejo* is a stanza, consisting of ten lines: the first six form three pairs (question and answer), and the last four generalize disclosure the sense of verses.

acts as a method of its alienation from the reality. This thought is confirmed by the words of Cervantes from the aria, which are repeated several times: “Death, delusion and madness” for the sound amplification, echoed by the chorus.

The second scene - an expositional for the women pair - belongs to the heroines Dulcinea and Aldonza. There is no forceful part, the main attention is focused on the duett of two young women, who encourage Cervantes in his creative writing in order to, first, make him be a witness and exercise criticism of his epoch, reflecting the events, second, praise the beauty of the world. Moreover, they call on Cervantes to create in his future creative work a female character similar to them (at this time a hero is sleeping on the stage). In the middle section (Cervantes wakes up) the duett is transformed into the tiercet.

The heroines' part is atonal, with wide instrumental kind leaps, and the accompanying orchestral part continues the development of the line established in the first stage, including in such a way dissonant sound, sonorities, clusters, overlapping etc. In the writer's part in the middle section, the composer uses a quote - a fragment of an anonymous medieval lyric poem called *Malferida iba la Garza*. It is particularly remarkable that the same quote, being, apparently, an element of musical feature of the women's pair of characters, will once again appear in the fifth and sixth scenes.

The third scene is an exposition of Don Quixote's image. His appearance is preceded by the chorus, performing the Spanish carol *Oy comamos y bebamos* by Juan del Encina⁵. Solemn and festive nature of the music and verbal text, being highlighted by rich, vigorous orchestration, with the inclusion of a group of the brass instruments, - the means used by the composer for the representation crowd, mass, which is a musical choir - in opposition to the reflexive individualization of Cervantes and of Don Quixote himself. The carol can be heard once again forth, in two last scenes and performs suspending function.

We can clearly hear in the carol general sounding bass drum beats, conflicting with the melodious accents. The increased importance of the accented timbre color in the further music development of the opera can be met when passing to the last (the sixth) scene and further, when both heroes abandon life, where the drum with dull and obsessive rhythm produces great dramatic effect.

5 Juan del Encina (July 12, 1468 - the end of 1529, the beginning of 1530 or 1533) is a Spanish poet, playwright and composer, often called “the father of the Spanish drama”.

The carol sounding is “smoothed” by the dissonance complex, emphasizing the first appearance of Don Quixote.

Since the introduction of the knight into the act his leit-instrument is violoncello, the sounding of which will be accompanied by his first recitative, and as part of the other instruments of the string group the aria *Oh, Senhora*, addressed to Dulcinea.

The last part, namely, the moment, when Don Quixote becomes the knight, plays an important dramatic role in the third scene. This scene is built on the chaconne allusion. According to G. Gan-Quesada, while maintaining meter and time signature 3/2, peculiar for this genre, Halffter’s chaconne deviates from the original model, that is primarily indicated by the isorhythmic peculiarities [5]. At the same time the bass sounds slowly, triumphal, and is always in the dynamic *pp*.

The musical “line” of chaconne is overlapped with the countermelody in term of Don Quixote’s requests «No me levantaré» (arioso “I will not get up”) to the owner of the inn to dub knight.

As an answer to what is going on we can hear scolding replies of Dulcinea «Bendita locura...» (“Holly insanity ...”), moreover, as in the second scene, her vocal party is an integral part of Aldonza’s part, who sings with her a duet, at the same having independent musical content (both parts are atonal).

The chorus again appears on the scene, mercifully scolding “Lord Have Mercy!” (“Kyrie. Dominus vobiscum. Sursum Corda»). At this time a cross appears on the scene and chorists clap their hands (we can hear sounds of organ).

The orchestral episode, wide enough, is a bridge from the third scene to the fourth scene. Its music is accompanied by the appearance of Sancho on the scene. Chaconne bass from the third scene is heard here with some changes, now in the setting of the entire string group on *fff*.

In the fourth scene describes the adventure with wind mills. In the orchestral score Halffter uses sound-simulating techniques, namely, we can hear wind roaring, making mills’ wings move. Against this background we hear Don Quixote and Sancho sung dialogue.

The fifth scene is filled with action in comparison with the previous scenes. Its events are set in two dimensions: there are Don Quixote, Sancho (laying defeated), Dulcinea and Aldonza (Aldonza heals the wounds of Don Quixote, he obtained in the fight with mills, and Dulcinea performs soaring lyrical “woman’s” theme «*Malferida iba la garza*») on the

foreground; supporting characters are on the back burner (nephew, Ama girl, barber, bachelor and doctor), who, watching the defeated and wounded Don Quixote, sing: «De todas estas locuras solo los libros son los culpables... Todos hacen daño grave...» (“Blame only books in all this insanity...” All of them injure badly...”).

Don Quixote calls on Sancho to see the fundamental importance of poetry in the human experience. Precisely it allows to discover many-sidedness of the surrounding world, whereon the priest answers: “Poesía, ¡no! ¡al fuego!... y lo que es peor, hacerse poeta que es enfermedad muy grave, incurable y pegadiza“(Poetry? No! Into the fire! And what is worse is to become a poet! This is terrible, fatal illness!”). Herewith the episode with the books burning begins.

While a huge burial mound is being prepared, we hear drums and horn, which announce of the appearance of the flock of sheep. Don Quixote is fighting, as he thinks, with a big army, while Sancho sees only sheeps and lambs.

The chorus, symbolizing the duality “herd/crowd, mass”, sings the second time “Oh, let us eat and drink” carol with the increasing militancy. (Therefore, we find out extreme closeness of the musical content of the orchestral episodes of this scene with the third one.) The chorus is joined by the nephew, cantiniere, bachelor, and doctor to pick up the slack, in other words, to burn the books. Protesting Don Quixote again suffered defeat.

The last, sixth scene, the largest one, in our opinion, is a dramatic culminating point of the opera, where all characters and plotlines (or hints thereto) meet together. This scene is also generalization of the musical content, that was met earlier, more specifically, here are “*Malferida ...*” (now in the Aldonza’s part), and the strings’ chaconne, and the carol, “*Oh, let us eat and drink,*” and “*Blessed madness.*”

Suffered a defeat in the reality confrontations, having lost his books, Don Quixote became the knight on the bed of death. The hero blames Cervantes and wants to know the reasons, why he was created like that. Cervantes answers him: “You are not a man, you are a myth, and myths are born under the laws of nature, they are born out of fantasies and live in the people thoughts, who fight against the injustice and for introduction of laws and rights in this world”.

Hereafter there is a tercet of Sancho, Aldonza, and Dulcinea. Sancho, devoted (infected with the madness) to his master, begs Don Quixote with emotion to get up, not to die. Now Aldonza, as Dulcinea in the fifth scene, sings «*Malferida iba la garza*», that is

represented by sound metaphor of transformation of pragmatic kind of Aldonza into the dreamy, tender kind of Dulcinea.

The tiecec is followed by the duett of Cervantes and Don Quixote, continuing to disclose the whole sense. It is opened by Cervantes' arosio "*A velar*" ("This is a proof"). Cervantes' second arosio "*Y consiento*" ("I agree") is accompanied by typical ensemble (as in the first scene of the opera) harp - harpsichord, together with the group of string instruments. Both Don Quixote and Cervantes accept their fate, and they are meant to die: "A man wants to live, when the God wants him to die, it drives crazy". The duett of the principal characters is accompanied by the rhythmed, dull drumming, emphasizing the dramatic nature of the scene.

Suddenly we hear explosion of the dissonant colors on *fff*, against the background of which the sextet is heard (the nephew, Mosa, Ama, barber, bachelor, and doctor) "Aquí está nuestro triunfo» ("Here is our triumph"). The chorus joins the sounding of the sextet. The chorus, symbolizing crowds, sings "*Oh, let us eat and drink*", but in a new choral and instrumental version.

The opera is ended with the orchestral "epilogue", the leading voice in which belongs to violoncello, repeating *A largo* against the background of the orchestral accompaniment, that can hardly be heard. The viloncello sounding here is perceived as affirmation of the quixotism idea.

Let us summarize. The cultural significance of the book of Cervantes has for the composer deep social and historical meaning. Halffter introduces the writer itself as one of the key characters. Also, referring to the motives not only the legendary novel by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, but also to the other Spanish poets, the composer intensifies, thus, the Spanish inception in the quixotism theme.

Also Halffter implements in the opera text the dialectical unity of the opposites, presenting in one composition such pairs of characters as Cervantes - Don Quixote, Don Quixote - Sancho, Dulcinea - Aldonza.

The musical language of the opera represents an original alloy of the modern layer (sonorism) based on the classic tradition of the opera art (stylization of baroque music) with specific sounding, peculiar for every of the poles.

The idea of the opera, in our opinion, consists in the acceptance of the need of quixotism in the present-day world, which nowadays acquires a particular *cultorological*

meaning, being a way of active participation in the transformation of the reality by means of art (according to Halffter, it possesses an ability to “place an ideal order over the reality” [5]).

“Utopian” meaning of Don Quixote, his ability to be “another”, resistant to the reasonable uniformity, are aesthetic and ethic nuclear of the opera by C. Halffter. “I set myself the task through this opera to wake up modern society by means of sensuous communication with music; since the Utopia, high ideals, knighthood... and culture still remain the principle ideas and ideals in our life, and all this background is in one of the most significant books of the humankind, the composer writes. The symbol of Don Quixote and everything, that I tried to reflect therewith: utopia, culture, traditions, knighthood, idealism, interpreted reality, creative imagination, literary creativity and much more, this symbol standing over the ruins and ashes of the books, exists as long as the bell calls, again and again, and it seems that there is no end to it, and symbolizes the hope for existence, despite all the failures, the transcendent utopia in the human being, in the continuity of time” [5].

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