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**DIALOGUE OF EPOCHS IN OPERA (ON THE ISSUE OF AN ARTIST  
PREPARATION FOR PRESENTATION OF THE ARTISTIC IMAGE OF AN  
OPERA CHARACTER)**

*The paper describes a plan of analysis of the artistic image of an opera character and analysis of possible cases of correlation between various epochs of opera scenes, creation of the primary source (if available), the book of the opera and the opera proper. If the historical periods of the above circumstances do not coincide, a dialogue of epochs arises which reveals itself to a various degree and in various spheres. At that it is certainly required to account for the national aspect: locality of the opera, the country where the initial source was created and the nationality of the opera creators.*

*Keywords: opera, character, artistic image, artist.*

Currently, so recently popular thesis of the supposedly dying opera, fortunately, was not confirmed. At the beginning of the XXI century opera is experiencing a real progress, its erstwhile popularity reborn among the various segments of the population. It must be admitted that a significant role in this was played by opera direction, striving to upgrade staging concepts and techniques and struggling with numerous opera cliches, developed over centuries of opera genre. A significant role in the revival of opera played an outstanding director and theoretician of opera of the second half of the last century B. A. Pokrovsky, which has defined the essence of the opera and the fundamental principles of its production. Its main provisions come down to the following theses:

1. “The Opera House – the most democratic platform for a serious conversation of musician with the people ...” [2, c. 41]. Note that Pokrovsky speaks about the musician, in the meaning of all creators of opera, including about the artist – the performer of the opera character.

2. “Opera is a theater! A special kind of theater, where the main expressing action is music” [4, p. 6].

3. “The original opera composer does not write music, but drama through the music” [2, c. 31].

4. “The only author-dramatist for the opera director is a musical drama-composer” [3, c. 27].

5. “The music of the opera – is not just music, but opera music, singing – not just singing, but opera singing” [3, p. 21].

To sum up these theses, we note, that the most important thing for Pokrovsky – the creation of an opera performance in accordance with the composer`s idea, not in spite of it. Wherein, in the process of staging the opera, the famous director assigns the honorable place for an artist – performer of opera role, noting F. I. Shalyapin innovation, the success of which, according to Pokrovsky, is “Brilliant prevision” of the opera and future opportunities, “because in the great artist teamed music, singing, expressive plastic and actor`s craft. It was a dawn, heralding a new day” [3, p. 29].

For the theme of our article the last point is extremely important, because it consists the position of the synthetic nature of the performing activity of the opera singer. The relevance of our research is seen in the fact that in contemporary opera practice has spread so-called “director's opera theatre”, whose representatives in an effort to involve the public to the art of opera with the help of cheap stage effects, contrary to his nature, and falsely understood modernity, often give performances of opera contrary to the author`s intention, but do not follow him, what obviously leads to a clearly negative results, without educating of listeners-viewers, without raising their level but pandering to their often low-brow tastes.

Making a start from the provisions made, it becomes clear, while preparing for the performance of the opera character, to understand the intention of the authors of the opera – the librettist and composer – you need to implement the music-theoretical and cultural analysis of as the whole opera, as the performing vocal part. There are numerous recommendations of outstanding opera singers, conductors and directors on the procedure of preparation of operatic part to the performance however there is no integral system in musicology and theatrical art literature. Therefore, the purpose of this paper – to develop a slender and clear plan of the opera party analysis of the opera character, without which, its full and highly artistic performance is impossible.

We suggest the following plan of opera party analysis:

1. Studying of the epoch in which opera scenes (action of the opera takes place) and related historic and art events develop.

2. Studying the art works of various forms associated with the epoch of the creation of the primary source of the opera (if any).

3. Studying the primary source (if any): ideological content, concept, analysis of the artistic image of the character according to the primary source.
4. The history of the opera.
5. The concept of the opera.
6. The opera genre.
7. Operatic forms.
8. The degree of rethinking the image of opera character compared with the initial source.
9. The book of the opera (opera libretto).
10. The role of this character in the opera. Relations with the other actors.
11. Vocal part analysis of the opera character: the general nature of the vocal part (recitative, cantilena), the opera forms, related to this character, thematism, (Leithmotif, musically-themed repetitions), the range, tessitura, fret basis, intervallic, rhythm.
12. Analysis of the orchestral part, related to this character: holding thematism, harmony, rhythm, orchestral style.
13. The relationship of vocal part and orchestra.
14. Performing analysis of the major performing opera interpretations in general and of this character.
15. Performing difficulties and ways to overcome them.
16. Creation of own interpretation, performing plan in conjunction with the general performing (conductor`s and director`s) concept.

The purpose of this paper is to identify areas of analysis of the artistic image of an opera character and analysis of possible cases of correlation between various epochs of opera scenes, creation of the primary source (if available), the book of the opera and the opera itself. If the historical periods of the above circumstances do not coincide, a temporary dialogue of two, three and sometimes four epochs together arises which reveals itself to a various degree and in various spheres. At that it is certainly required to account for the national aspect: opera locale , the country where the initial source (initial sources) was (were) created and the nationality of the opera creators.

Let us first consider the question whether there is a need to study the epoch in which the opera scenes, and if so, why and in what measure? Some luckless performers, especially beginners, are ready to answer this question negatively.

But B. A. Pokrovsky quite convincingly explains: “The greatest works of opera art kind of generalize, concentrate in itself all the best of epoch`s spiritual achievements, enriching, deepening, clearing its style features of all small or casual... In this sense, the opera drama art has never been apart from common historical path of development of arts... It naturally gravitate to subject, language, forms, methods of processing of dramatic material, specific to the ruling at this time artistic direction... Therefore studying operatic works, its drama, its stylistic features, cannot be without a parallel exploring of the epoch, spawned the style” [4, p. 6].

As we can see, from the response to the question of an outstanding opera director it follows that, certainly, it is necessary to study not only the historical events in the epoch in which the action takes place in the opera, but also cultural and artistic, so in other words to have as far as possible, complete, versatile notion of the given historical period in general. This multifaceted study of the epoch of opera scenes is necessary for a proper understanding and interpretation according to the author's of the opera intention by artist preparing to create the scenic embodiment of an artistic image of the opera character.

On this in due time also wrote *F. I. Shalyapin*: “If the character is fictional, the creation of the artist`s imagination, I know all I need and what is possible to know about him from the score, - it's all in this work. Side-light on his personality, I do not find. And not looking. It is another matter if the character – a historic person. In this case, I must appeal more to the history. I must to explore which real events have occurred around him and through him, what he was different from others of his time and around him, how he has seemed to contemporaries and how historians draw him. What is it for? After all, I should play not the history but the person pictured in this artwork, no matter how it was contrary to the historical truth. Here is what it is necessary for. If the artist is in complete agreement with the history, history helps me to read his intent more deeply and comprehensively; if the artist evaded history, entered into conscious contradiction with it, then the knowledge of the historical facts for me is even more important than in the first case. Just here, on the artist`s deviations from the historical truth, you can catch the most intimate essence of his plan” [5, c. 66].

And this is what the great artist tells how he prepared the role of Ivan the Terrible in N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov`s “The Maid of Pskov” (“*Pskovityanka*”): I did not sleep nights. I

read books, watched in galleries and private collections of portraits of Tsar Ivan, watched the pictures on topics related to his life” [5, p. 58].

It is not enough to know the epoch of opera scenes. If it has a literary (or any other) source, it is necessary to explore an epoch of its creation. And this is what for? – may ask the beginning singer (in this case we cannot say “artist”) especially if the concept of the opera and the interpretation of its characters differ significantly from the original source of the opera. Outstanding artist E. E. Nesterenko categorically stated: “The answer is unequivocal: to know the literary sources is essential. And not only know, but also carefully study them, because only that way you can be able to better and deeper understand the composer’s intent, to determine which aspects of the work attracted him, determine why he retreated from literary source text, changed it, or used only some part” [1, c. 35].

But this is also not enough. For the artist, embodying certain artistic image of a character it is necessary to imagine an epoch of the creation of the opera in its entirety, and also the story of creation of an artwork and personality and features of the style of the composer – author of the preparing for staging opera. About that also wrote Nesterenko: “It is always useful to learn (in our opinion, absolutely necessary. – V. B.) the history of creation of the source and the music, the inspired by him: “when and why was created the tragedy “Boris Godunov” by Pushkin and for which reason and in what conditions first national musical drama was written by Mussorgsky? ... If you take into account the optimal alternative, it is necessary not only to study the history of the artworks and to know the biography of the composer, but it would be also good to realize him as a living, familiar person and the creator” [1, c. 41].

Thereby, even before the analysis of the artistic image of the character of the opera and vocal, it is necessary a thorough study of the epoch of the event happening in the opera, the time of creation of literary source, if it exists, the historical period of the creation of the opera (the libretto and music separately, if they were written at different times, which is quite rare). Sometimes in the opera it may appear a display or even a comparison of completely different epochs and geographical locations, as in “Master and Margarita” by S. Slonimsky; in this case, you have to know about both epochs and countries. We emphasize that in determining the degree of immersion into this or that epoch and study of it by the opera performers must take into account a genre of the work: “If the opera is historical, then, of course, the study of the events, illustrated in the work, should be more careful, in other

genres of opera – less, even though, in any case, ignoring the age of the opera is unacceptable even in the comic opera, which seems to be less associated with a certain historical period. Of course, it is necessary to take into account locale of opera, so the study of the epoch combines with the knowledge of the country in which the events occur in the opera.

Interesting cases arise while ignoring by the authors of an opera national characteristics of the country and features of the time of action what is most often due to the naive notion of creators of the composition (this becomes evident in our time). For example, in such operas of the past centuries as “Les Indes Galantes” by Jean-Philippe Rameau, “Americans” by E. I. Fomin, “Fernand Cortez, or The Conquest of Mexico” by G. Spontini, “Ivan the Terrible” by Bizet and many others (in historical operas G. Donizetti, for example) events are represented far from reality with a significant distortion of customs of the country and the epoch portrayed. It seems that in those cases at staging of an opera there is no need to stick to ethnographic accuracy, and for actor-performer – to strive to veracity in translating the images of characters which is portrayed in the opera far from the historical truth; it should rely on the musical drama of the work art performed, without entering into conflict with it. However, in these cases, knowledge of even conventionally portrayed epoch and locale of the opera is necessary, and the decision to what extent should follow historical and ethnographic features, remains with the performers.

When setting a symbolic musical drama (such as “Pelleas et Melisande” by K. Debussy) or opera-fairy tale (“Snow Maiden”, “The Tale of Tsar Saltan”, “The Golden Cockerel” by N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov) the need of studying and realization of a particular historical epoch and a possible opera scene disappears, however in this case it is necessary to strive to such a degree of generalization when staging and performing techniques still do not contradict existing instructions of the authors of works embodied in the libretto, and especially in the music; fairytale operas of Russian composer have nevertheless strong national definiteness. Such a national identity, but in Chinese culture, finds also “Turnadot” J. Puccini, which has in its basis a fairy tale. But the “Love of Three Oranges” by S. Prokofiev has largely the international nature what may affect the staging of an opera and its interpretation by the performers.

Let`s compile a table of possible matches and mismatches of historical epochs, taking into account the duration of the opera, the time of creation of the original source, and the

libretto of the opera. Here we will not take into account a significant difference in time (a few decades) as it is usually the same epoch. In the following table the same numerals indicate the same epoch, and unequal figures show differences, dash – the absence of a primary source that is creation of the opera based only on specially written libretto, what occurs much less frequently.

To complete the picture, we present all the possible cases of dialogue of epochs, including as well uncreated by existing operas librettos, and without it both.

Examples	Primary source	Libretto	Opera	Examples of the operas
1	1	1	1	Many opera buffas, “La Traviata” by G. Verdi, “Carmen” by Georges Bizet, many Soviet time operas
1	2	3	4	“Armida” by C.W. Gluck
1	2	3	3	Opera-seria, Grand opéra, “Der Ring des Nibelungen” by Richard Wagner, “The Queen of Spades” by Tchaikovsky, “Boris Godunov” by M. Mussorgsky, “Hamlet” by S. Slonimsky
1	1	2	2	“Khovanshchina” by M. Mussorgsky, “Prince Igor” by Borodin, “The Brothers Karamazov” by Smelkov
1	–	2	2	“Gallant Europe” by Campra, “Les Indes Galantes” by Rameau, “Aida” by J. Verdi
1, 2, 3	–	3	3	“The Children of Rosenthal” by Leonid Desyatnikov
1, 2	1 (3)	4	4	“Master and Margarita” by S.Slonimsky
1	2	2	2	“Voivod” and “The Sorceress” by P. Tchaikovsky, “Life with an Idiot” by Alfred Schnittke
1	2	2	3	Examples are missing
1	–	2	–	Libretto by Mikhail Bulgakov to the unwritten by them operas “Black Sea”, “Minin and Pozharsky”, “Peter the Great” (of today)
1	1	2	–	Libretto by Mikhail Bulgakov to the unwritten opera “Rachel” (of today)
1	1	–	–	The ideas of uncreated operas via the existing primary source (examples are numerous)
1	–	–	–	The ideas of uncreated operas without a primary source - “Pugachevshchina” by M. Mussorgsky

In “Master and Margarita” by S. Slonimsky action develops in two vastly distant by time epochs, however one of them coincides with the creation of literary source – the M. A.

Bulgakov`s novel, so we used a double numerical notation in the first two columns. In “Children of Rosenthal” the action covers three different historical periods, consistently changing each other, which is expressed in the use of three numerals in the appropriate column.

Let`s analyze some typical cases, differentiating cases of the presence or absence of a literary source, cases of match of epochs of creation of the original source with an opera, or vice versa, and also distribute opera compositions according to their proximity to their primary sources.

Usually the time of creation of the libretto and the opera itself are the same. A rare case of a mismatch of the time of writing – C. W. Gluck`s “Armida”. The great reformer of the opera about a hundred years after J. B. Lully, who wrote the opera on a libretto by his contemporary F. Kino, used the text again to create his own opera.

In the same epoch can be combined the creation of the story by V. Yerofeyev “Life with an Idiot” (1980; content of the story foretells the epoch of perestroika), and his libretto on the original source and also opera by Alfred Schnittke (1990 - 1991 years). But the period of the action of the story and the opera refers to previous eras – before perestroika.

The “Khovanshchina” has one author (referring to libretto and music) - M.P. Mussorgsky. The literary source is missing, the libretto written by the composer himself on the basis of historical documents. Therefore, to compare the characters of the opera you can only with their historical prototypes by the works of historians and painters` paintings. In opera appears a unique case of a dialogue of several epochs, when the action takes place in the same historical period (the end of the XVII century), but in fact the opera faced two epochs: Pre-Petrine Ruthenia, and a new way of life peculiar to the following epoch. At the same time there is a roll as with a modern for Mussorgsky`s epoch (remember the statement of the composer – “The past in the present - that is my task” [1, p. 100]), and with the present as the product is relevant also for our time.

The basis of I.F. Stravinsky`s opera “The Rake's Progress” (Premiere - 1951) laid, as you know, engravings of famous painter William Hogarth – his series “Career Mota” (1735). In this case compares the artwork, the libretto (the creators of it – W. Auden and C. Kalman) and the opera itself. Librettists greatly enriched the plot outlined in the engravings, introduced new actors and created their own original concept. The interpretation of the main character of the opera – Tom Rockwell – became immeasurably deeper and more versatile as



compared with the primary source. However, visual acquaintance with engravings allows the actor playing Tom imagine the appearance of his hero, costume, manners (the engravings very expressively capture facial expressions and poses adopted by the character).

When analyzing an opera character image it is necessary, of course, to determine the extent of its proximity to the literary source, if any. It should be compared three works – the literary source itself, the libretto, written on it, and the opera itself. The comparative analysis of the works of such diverse genres will allow make certain conclusions about an opera character image and significantly deepen its understanding and interpretation, and also more brightly reveal the dialogue of epochs.

The greatest proximity to the literary source reveals the opera which libretto completely (or almost completely) matches to it. It is, as you know, “The Stone Guest” by A.S. Dargomyzhsky, “Marriage” M. P. Mussorgsky, “Mozart and Salieri” by N. Rimsky-Korsakov and others. In these cases it is interesting to trace the differences between interpretation of characters by the playwright and composer, and as well as the verbal texts are the same, then this becomes possible only through the music. Composer can enhance or smooth

certain features of the personality of the character, but any more or less significant differences are out of question. So, it seems that Don Juan in the opera of A. S. Dargomyzhsky shows deeper and more varied than that of A. S. Pushkin. It is thanks to the music, you can believe in the sincerity of feeling of so windy fan of women to his latest lover – Donna Anna. In this convinces the comparison of his feelings for Laura. Judging by the music, Laura – one of the casual interests of Don Juan, when to Donna Anna, he feels really deep feeling, which can be called love.

In those cases where there is the libretto, written by existing literary source, the closeness to it may be different in terms of creating of an image of the character. For example, the images of Tatyana Larina in the novel of A. S. Pushkin and lyrical scenes of P. I. Tchaikovsky are almost identical (at least in the final version of the opera), while in “The Queen of Spades” by the same authors Hermann in the narrative and Herman in the opera – a completely different personalities. Perhaps the last case is the most radical reinterpretation of the image of the literary character in the opera art. And the music even more strengthens the fundamental differences in the interpretation of the character compared to the libretto –

music convinces us of the sincerity of feelings of Herman to Lisa, while the libretto can leave some doubts.

If there is no literary source, such as in “Aida” J. Verdi, only comparison of the libretto and opera becomes possible. As it is known, the plot of opera laid an ancient Egyptian legend, outlined by the French scientist-egyptologist O. F. Mariette. The script of the opera (i.e. the presentation of the plot), does not have artistic value. A. Ghislanzoni created libretto of the opera, however as the composer was actively involved in the creation of a verbal text, so to talk about the differences in the interpretation of images of characters of poet and composer is not necessary. In “Aida” there is a dialogue of ancient Egyptian epoch and modern, which is clearly revealed in the music – “Easter” scenes with its desire to create an archaic and non-european colour in their musical language is significantly different from the main written by language of contemporary composers with their distinctive artistic style and the italian national specific. As a result, the main conflict in the opera – between the state as an apparatus of violence and oppression, and the world of human feelings – is seen as relevant to all times and nations.

The framework of the article does not allow more detailed review and cover all possible cases of arising dialogue epoch in the opera; we have identified and classified them. This issue requires further development. However, without any doubt, for performing groups, including actor-singer, is necessary to penetrate deeply into the time of dialogue, embodied in the opera, moreover to take into account the national specific. The artist has to envision exactly the opera character embodied on the stage, what he was created by the opera authors considering the time and place of action, with all the features of temporal dialogue.

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