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AESTHETIC AND COMPOSITIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE DECLAMATORY-MELODIC RECITATIVE STYLE OF S. BARBER'S OPERA “VANESSA”

The purpose of the article is to identify and substantiate the principles of vocal language, features of vocal intonation in S. Barber's opera «Vanessa». **The methodology** of the work is formed by genre-compositional and stylistic approaches, includes aesthetic typological positions. **The scientific novelty** of the research is due to the sequential analysis and semantic typology of the content of S. Barber's opera «Vanessa», the rationale for the style-forming role of an opera recitative with its specific declamatory and melodic sides. **Conclusions.** This article allows detecting the main author's genre innovation by S. Barber in the opera recitative style, as well as revealing the complex figurative play of characters, the psychological depth of opera actant characteristics as due to the methods of vocal-recitative intonation.

Keywords: opera composition, declamatory recitative, melodic recitative, expressiveness, narrativity, style, S. Barber's work.

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Естетичні та композиційні засади декламаційно-мелодичного речитативного стилю опери С. Барбера «Ванесса»

Мета статті – виявити і обґрунтувати принципи вокальної мови, особливості вокального інтонування в опері С. Барбера «Ванесса». **Методологія** роботи утворена жанрово-композиційним і стилістичним підходами, включає естетичні типологічні позиції. **Наукова новизна** дослідження обумовлена послідовним аналізом і семантичною типологією змісту опери С. Барбера «Ванесса», обґрунтуванням стилетворчої ролі оперного речитативу з його специфічними декламаційною та мелодичною сторонами. **Висновки.** Дана стаття дозволяє виявляти в оперному речитативному стилі головне авторське жанрове новаторство С. Барбера, а також розкривати складну образну гру персонажів, психологічну глибину оперних актантних характеристик як обумовлену способами вокально-речитативного інтонування.

Ключові слова: оперна композиція, декламаційний речитатив, мелодичний речитатив, експресивність, нарративність, стиль, творчість С. Барбера.

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Эстетические и композиционные основания декламационного-мелодического речитативного стиля оперы С. Барбера «Ванесса».

Цель статьи – выявить и обосновать принципы вокального языка, особенности вокального интонирования в опере С. Барбера «Ванесса». **Методология** работы образована жанрово-композиционным и стилестическим подходами, включает эстетические типологические позициями. **Научная новизна** исследования обусловлена последовательным анализом и семантической типологией содержания оперы С. Барбера «Ванесса», обоснованием стилиобразующей роли оперного речитатива с его специфическими декламационной и мелодической сторонами. **Выводы.** Данная статья позволяет обнаруживать в оперном речитативном стиле главное авторское жанровое новаторство С. Барбера, а также раскрывать сложную образную игру персонажей, психологическую глубину оперных актантных характеристик как обусловленную способами вокально-речитативного интонирования.

Ключевые слова: оперная композиция, декламационный речитатив, мелодический речитатив, экспрессивность, нарративность, стиль, творчество С. Барбера.

The relevance of this article is due to the fact that the work of S. Barber is not sufficiently represented in the works of contemporary musicologists, both Ukrainian and Chinese. Among the works of American authors that are devoted to the analysis of S. Barber's work, one can distinguish S. Barbara Heiman's monograph “Samuel Barber: the

composer and his music”, in which the composer’s life and work are traced in detail, as well as various materials from interviews with the composer, letters, and memoirs of contemporaries. However, the analytical aspect in the study of the musical heritage of the composer is clearly insufficient.

Having studied the creative biography of S. Barber, it can be noted that in the process of development a composer’s personality, he tried himself in different genres, experienced the influence of various styles - romanticism, expressionism, neoclassicism. Unlike the general trends in the development of American music of the 20th century, Barber chose his own way (traditionalism, late romantic features) [4].

The works of the composer’s mature period (40–50 years) include: “Capricorn Concerto” for a flute, an oboe, a trumpet and a string orchestra; concerto for cello; concerto for a piano, Sonata for a piano. Barber’s ballet "Medea" (another name "The Cave of the Heart"), ordered by Martha Graham, is still the most famous among his theatrical compositions. The orchestral suite from this ballet was first performed in 1947 by the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Y. Ormandy. However, “Vanessa” opera is the top of this period, after writing of which the composer was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. This work is still little known in the vocal-performing circle, although it is among the most successful examples of expressionist musical and theatrical styles [6].

The main content of the work. “The expressive nature of Barber’s musical talent is mostly romantic, lyrical. That is why he was not attracted by any of the “systems” in the period of creative development, that appeared in the music of the 20th century, neither Stravinsky's neoclassicism, nor atonalism, nor Schoenberg’s dodecaphony. Barber preferred the expressive means of the XIX century, and on this basis he managed to early develop a technically perfect style, the main features of which can be considered objectivity and neutrality” [1, p. 495].

It is interesting that the search for a suitable libretto took Barber about two decades. When he was asked why he had postponed the creation of his first opera for so long, the composer replied: “All thirty years, during which I attended the opera house, I seriously thought about creating my own opera. But before I wrote it, I wanted to prepare thoroughly, namely, to master the writing techniques necessary for writing an opera. How to write for an orchestra, how to write for a choir and a ballet, how to write for a voice and an orchestra? Only having answered these questions, I was ready” [7, p. 375].

The opera was ordered to the talented and successful American composer by the Metropolitan Director. In 1942 Barber was offered commissions for creating two operas, but he refused one of them, as the Metropolitan Opera insisted on using the libretto by Christopher La Farge, which Barber found “not inspiring” [7, p. 378].

Barber invited his friend and a composer Menotti to be a co-author for compiling the libretto, he had a literary gift and wrote texts for his own operas. The plot is based on the book by the extraordinary Danish writer Karen Blixen “Seven Gothic Tales”, published in 1934 under the pseudonym Isaac Dinesen.

The opera-melodrama initially consisted of four acts, but later (in 1964) was reduced to three. The action takes place in Northern Europe in 1905. The story unfolds around two women: Vanessa, the “lady of extraordinary beauty”, who has been waiting her only love, Anatole, to return each winter for twenty years; and her beautiful young niece Erica. Suddenly, his son Anatole appears and reports on his father’s death. Anatole begins an affair with Vanessa’s niece Erica, he seduces her. But then, taken a fancy for Vanessa, he abandons his beloved and leaves with Vanessa for Paris. Erica is desperate. She understands that she has to face the same test of expectation as Vanessa had.

A very difficult task is to determine the genre type of Barber’s opera. “Floyd’s opera “Susanna” and Barber’s “Vanessa” are rooted in the genre of the 19th century lyric opera, they are the examples of psychological drama with motives of loneliness and unhappy love” [1, p. 495].

According to the type of plot, the number of characters, “Vanessa” corresponds to the genre of psychological chamber opera, but at the same time it is created in the style of a large-scale symphony composition. Thus, the composer uses the traditional quadruple composition of the orchestra (flute piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 French horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, a tuba, a kettle-drum, percussion, a harp and a string group). The ambiguity in determining the genre features of “Vanessa” also arises because of its scale. The opera consists of three acts and four scenes (two scenes in the first act, two scenes in the third act). The first action is the longest, each picture of which is equivalent to the two subsequent actions in scale.

The end-to-end type of development is used in the opera. Each part has its own individual intonation sphere (sometimes there are several of them), within the framework of which vocal monologues and dialogues are built. It is also the core of the entire orchestral

part. There are intonations-emblems that pass through the whole opera along with such intonation spheres.

The vocal style of "Vanessa" corresponds to the type of a chamber recitative opera, where a special role is given to melodramatic principle. It is interesting that despite the initially defined timbre differences between the parties of Vanessa and Erica (soprano and mezzo-soprano), this difference is "smoothed out" in a particular musical embodiment, thus the composer "removes" the isolation of these heroines, closely links them with each other.

In general, the opera has a predominantly active tempo-rhythm, vivid contrasts, frequent changes in meter, tempo, and the use of polytonality; there are no functional contradictions between consonance and dissonance. The composer uses the traditional rhetorical methods (passus duriusculus, catabasis, lamento intonations, etc.). The sound-depicting techniques are also important (the sound of bells in the first act).

In Barber's operatic style, the influence of such eminent masters as R. Wagner (with his developed leitmotif system), G. Verdi, and G. Puccini is felt.

In the opera "Vanessa" we can single out three main characters - Vanessa, "lady of extraordinary beauty" (in her late thirties), Erica (her niece, a young girl of about twenty) and Anatole - a handsome young man (in his early twenties). Among the secondary characters there is the Old Baroness (Vanessa's mother and Erica's grandmother), Doctor. The other actors are Nicholas, the majordomo; Lackey, Young pastor, servants, guests, peasants, their children, musicians.

Erica is a romantic nature and an idealist, a psychologically central character who undergoes great changes in the development of events in the opera. Initially being a sensible and calm young lady, she gradually plunges into the abyss of intense and painful experiences, at the end of which she completely adopts the image characteristic of Vanessa.

Vanessa is a neurotic personality type. Her excessive emotional arousal is one of the characteristic features of the heroine. In contrast with Erica, her strong feelings are made public, the "external" figurative plan. Vanessa is the image of a woman pending, locked up, in isolation, preparing for great love. Leaving, she "frees up space" for Erica who always unconsciously longed for this.

Anatole is careless, young, handsome, but being left without a fortune, he is not deprived of self-interest. However, bright negative qualities are not peculiar to him. An open, honest Anatole does not have a sense of high. He is a realist, a materialist, not wandering in

dreams, conscious of the real world, modernity (as the Baroness called him - “the modern man, the man of our time, looking for easy ways”). Anatole is the antipode of Erica in this context, as a neutral character he is stable, poised, with the absence of sudden mood changes, strong emotional experiences. Any opposing feelings are not indicative for him, unlike female images. However, Anatole’s life is also far from cloudless. He casually tells Erica his sad story (the mother has poisoned herself and his father).

The Baroness is the “guardian” of morality who stops communicating with people, who have violated moral laws and frameworks (after Vanessa had an affair with a married man; or in the case when Erica gets rid of a child).

At first glance, the three main characters form a typical love triangle. As I. Martynov notes: “The content of an opera, telling about the fate of a girl abandoned by her lover, is simple and even trite” [3, p. 285]. However, the plot of Barber’s opera seems to be more ambiguous and deeply psychologized.

The action takes place in Vanessa’s country house in the northern country: “It is night at the beginning of winter in the luxurious living room of Vanessa. A small dinner table is laid (on the stage to the right). All the mirrors and a large picture above the fireplace in the room are covered with a cloth. A wide French window overlooks the darkened winter garden. Vanessa is sitting by the fireplace, her face is covered by a veil. The Baroness is sitting in front of her and remains motionless throughout the whole scene. A group of servants, led by Nicholas, the major domo, is standing in front of Erica in the middle of the room; she gives them orders. There is a blizzard in the street” (indicated in the score). The orchestral introduction is quite interesting, where the initial five bars form the leit-theme, which is included in the musical complex of Vanessa’s image in the first scene of the first act and serves as the basis of her vocal part. Separate motives that make up the intonation core of the opera are distinguished from this theme, and in the sixth bar one more leitmotif appears:

The three main motives are the quintessence of musical thematism of not only the first scene, but of the entire opera. Having sounded linearly, these motives are subsequently combined vertically forming several layers. Thus the first (in double bass and tuba) and the third (minimalist character in clarinets) motives sound in parallel in the sixth bar. At the same time, a kind of “timbre game” takes place, where different instruments exchange themes between themselves. Barber ingeniously uses the techniques of polyphonic writing

(including the polyphony of layers), thereby creating a rich orchestral matter from short melodious songs. The orchestral introduction ends with a transparent chord sound of the violins which is one of the constituent components of Erica's music complex. Thus the main motives of the opera are exhibited in the introduction, which characterize the state of one or another character, depending on the context. Thus, Vanessa's impatient expectation is represented by using pizzicato in low strings and a short motor motive in the volume of the third of the clarinets (reflecting messing around, external clutter of servants).

Starting with Vanessa's first remark ("No, I cannot understand") in Vanessa's and Erica's expanded dialogue, the vocal intonation basis of her party is the emblem theme from the intro, the second motive giving an idea that Vanessa is tormented by conflicting feelings; anxious thoughts are picked up by the orchestra.

The next Vanessa's remark ("Has no message come?") is built on the first motive, the orchestra completes its line with the sound of the second element, thus vocal and orchestral parties embody the leitmotif from the intro in unity.

Strong dynamics (f), acceleration of tempo (with motion), frequent changes of meter and rhythmic pattern reflect the psychological state of the heroine, her emotional excitement, anxiety. Reducing time, the rapid tempo create an almost physical feeling of impatience of the protagonist: "Why has not he come yet?". Vanessa wishes good night to the Baroness (she remains silent) and tells Erica to go to bed ("I shall wait along").

This is followed by Erica's aria "Must the winter come so soon?" which is one of the brightest lyrical episodes in the opera. Against the background of the previously noted musical complex, characteristic of Erica (chord pedal at the string group), the diatonic cantilena melody sounds, a psychological portrait of a young romantic girl, simultaneously sympathetic, compassionate and sad, is formed. A new musical material arises in the orchestra, it is a pictorial theme that represents the gradually increasing ringing of bells that is announcing the traveler's approaching. There is a small orchestral episode based on the third motive: Vanessa is at the height of her excitement before meeting with Anatole. She asks Erica to leave them alone when he comes.

Vanessa's first aria "Do not utter a word" is built according to the type of aria da capo. The aria is pierced with chromatism and is in contrast to the intonational complex of Erica. The theme of the cross sounds in the first section; the melody is developed sequentially. This intonation passes through the entire opera. In general, the first section is characterized by a

calm tempo rhythm; a common set of musical expressive means, akin to the musical sphere of Erica (using the harp as an imitation of the musical characteristics of Erica). The second section “oh how dark!” is quick and agitated and has a vividly expressive character. Vanessa recalls twenty painfully long years, which she spent in silence and solitude, waiting for Anatole. The third section “unless you still love me” is a reprise. Vanessa turns around for the first time and is horrified, seeing a stranger: “Oh, no! Who are you? Impostor! Help me!”. Erica runs in and leads her almost senseless aunt out of the room. The motive of intro is interally modified and becomes more gloomy.

Erica runs in and escorts Vanessa to her room. This is followed by the dialogue between Erica and Anatole. She is excited and asks the uninvited guest to leave the estate. The diatonic is sharply broken in Erica's party which is a kind of omen of a succession of events connected with Anatole, which will subsequently change her image. In turn, the traveler said that he had not lied, his name was Anatole and he came here shortly after his father's death. In the arioso episode - “I heard this name throughout my youth: “Vanessa”. Anatole tells his sad story: “my father lost a fortune, dreaming, and his mother bought poison and destroyed his dreams. Now I can only drink other people's wines...” The first scene ends with an orchestral episode with an emphasized hard move of the flutes, which marks the tragic outcome for Erica.

So there are themes that become Vanessa's leit themes in the first scene of the first act in the orchestral intro; a short motive at the end of the orchestral introduction (pedal in strings) is a musical characteristic of Erica. In our opinion, the central character of the first scene is Vanessa in view of the dominance of her intonational complex. Vanessa's and Erica's spheres are clearly demarcated, vividly contrasted with each other. The declamatory and melodic recitatives that prevail in the opera language and characterize its main intonation plan¹ are built on the basis of orchestral themes (sounded in the introduction), and a new thematic material is introduced in arioso episodes. For example, in the dialogue scene of Erica and Vanessa, vocal declamation is built on the basis of leit-motifs, while the aria “Must the winter come so soon” is a new musical material.

The same type of thematic development is also used in subsequent actions, reinforcing the planned contrasts of the characters as a pretext for their final convergence. Thus, the second scene is completed by an instrumental episode in which the themes of Vanessa (the

¹ About recitatives as a component of operatic poetics see: [2; 5].

theme of the cross from the first act, the theme of love) and Erica (the first leitmotif) interact. The emblem theme (synthesis of the first two motives) becomes a characteristic not of Vanessa, but of Erica. Most likely, Erica can be called the central character of the second scene, where her leitmotif sounds from the first bars. The “exchange” of the musical characteristics of Erica and Vanessa begins (motive A is transformed, it already becomes indicative for Erica) from the second scene of the first act. The second scene is less dramatic, the most discharged in emotional tension in comparison with other scenes.

The Doctor can be called the "end-to-end" character of the second action. He "discharges" psychological tension, introduces features of laughter, buffoonery (including ironic mockery). The duet of Vanessa and Anatole is a striking lyrical episode, contrasting with the general tense atmosphere of the second act. In Anatole's party the theme of love (from the second picture) sounds, in the party of Vanessa the intonational sphere of Erica is used.

The third action is the denouement of the tense psychological relations of the characters of operatic action, it turns out to be the exposition of their new stage, which is even more paradoxical. The emblem leitmotif from the first act sounds in the introduction to the third act. Thus, the effect of a musical-themed frame is created, which gives the effect of the integrity of the entire musical composition.

In the dialogue between Vanessa and Doctor she speaks about her warm feelings for Erica: her attitude towards her is akin to the attitude of a mother towards her own daughter. Vanessa and Anatole leave for Paris, she bequeathes the estate to Erica. Erica orders the majordomo to close the gate, curtain off all the mirrors in the house. She understands that now she has to face the same test of expectation as Vanessa.

It is interesting that in Erica's intonation sphere, the musical means that are used in the third act were first characteristic of Vanessa. That is, *Erica's leit themes, starting with the second scene of the first act, are reinterpreted into Vanessa's leit themes*, and are finally consolidated in its sphere by the third action. Thus, the leitmotifs are not portrait characteristics, but a reflection of various aspects of the relationship. It is a peculiar "relay race" between images, a dialogue between two female characters, which change places, replace each other, which is embodied in a musical way.

In general, it was the declamatory-melodic recitative style that became significant of S. Barber's opera "Vanessa". The composer created the author's version of the opera

recitative, which combines (or synthesizes) two main aesthetic (and hence semantic) qualities - narrativity and expressiveness. The usual differentiation is practically absent in the opera: aria - recitative, statics - dynamics, external development of the action and the inner experiences of the characters.

The recitative becomes deeply psychologized in "Vanessa", thus acquiring features that are not entirely characteristic of it. Its main function of the "plot mover" is simplified, since the development of the action is due to the melodramatic principle, and the "plot" is reduced to the transfer of experiences, states of consciousness of the opera heroes.

To create a realistic, natural embodiment of characters' relations, Barber uses the end-to-end musical and thematic development, in which the recitative performs functions of both the development of an action (reproducing the external world) and revealing the conflicting feelings of the characters (describing their inner world). External environmental factors (up to the decorations of the room) are either consonant with the state of the hero, or are deliberately contrasted, emphasizing the isolation of the character in a certain context.

The internal plan is realized through the external one in the operatic composition, not due to individual arias, in which the emotional states of the characters would be transmitted, but thanks to almost continuous dialogues (where only its participants change) - "sorting things out", revealing the essence of the characters of the main heroes, the dynamics of their transformation. Expressiveness most clearly determines the melodic principle, narrativity determines the epic character of the declamatory musical utterance.

As the examples that confirm this, let us point out the following: the melodic recitative is found mainly in the party of Vanessa, which is connected with the hypertrophied expressive nature of this character ("No, I cannot understand" from the first scene of the first act). An example of an epic recitative is the scene of dialogue between Erica and the Baroness in the second scene of the first act.

The narrative style is more peculiar for secondary characters as a whole, and sometimes completely excludes a melodic principle, directly turning into speech (in the Doctor's party, the engagement announcement scene from the second act).

Thus, the opera "Vanessa" by S. Barber is a landmark for the United States Musical Theater as the first staging of the *American Opera* in the Metropolitan Opera in the period from 1947 to 1958.

The following imaginative aesthetic properties and compositional techniques are characteristic of it:

- according to the nature of the relationship between the characters, opera can be attributed to the type of psychodrama (definition of the opera genre as melodrama, combining elements of a psychologized chamber opera and a big opera);

- declamatory and melodic recitatives in the opera are built on the basis of orchestral themes, and a new thematic material is introduced in the arioso episodes;

- the use of polyphonic writing techniques allows the composer to create a rich orchestral matter from a small number of short melodious songs (basic motives);

- the leitmotifs given in the introduction are not permanent portrait characteristics, but a reflection of different aspects of the relationship between the characters;

- a complex of fourths and sequential development play an important role in the theme of the opera by S. Barber;

- the initial distinction between the musical spheres of Vanessa and Erica is carried out by contrasting diatonic (as an indicator of a balanced emotional state, stability, tranquility) and chromaticism which is the embodiment of drama, intense emotional state;

- the declamatory-melodic recitative style is the basis of the entire operatic composition; the composer creates a new author's version of the opera recitative which combines two main aesthetic and semantic qualities - narrativity and expressiveness.

In general, **the scientific novelty** of the study is due to the sequential analysis and semantic typology of the content of S. Barber's opera "Vanessa", the justification of the style-forming role of the opera recitative with its specific declamatory and melodic sides.

Conclusions. This article allows to detect S. Barber's main author's genre innovation in the opera recitative style, as well as to reveal the complex figurative play of characters, the psychological depth of opera actantial characteristics as due to the methods of vocal-recitative intonation.

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