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**TRADITIONS OF COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE  
(MASK COMEDY) IN EUROPEAN CULTURE  
(ON THE EXAMPLE OF OPERAS BY R. LEONCAVALLO,  
P. MASCAGNI, F. BUSONI)**

*The aim of the article is to identify the artistic and semantic features of the embodiment of the traditions of commedia dell'arte in European opera (on the example of the compositions of R. Leoncavallo, P. Mascagni, F. Busoni). The methodology of work is determined by the unity of aesthetic, historical and philosophical, semiotic, genre and typological, theatrical, operological and musicological analytical approaches, the combination of which creates a common interdisciplinary field of studying the phenomenon of the image-*

mask. **The scientific novelty of the article** is to identify the connection between the phenomenon of the mask-image and the concept of archetype, which reveals the mechanism of functional use of the figurative model of the mask in opera. This approach leads to the identification of the interaction of opera with national musical and theatrical traditions, in which the traditions of *commedia dell'arte* become one of the main representatives of the artistic complex in European opera music. **Conclusions.** In the general genesis of each national culture, characteristic artistic and stylistic features are always formed; they are united by the national idea and contain all the most significant achievements of the national culture. The phenomenon of the mask is a product of national and cultural tradition and reflects its main principles and artistic landmarks. The mask begins its history in archaic times and performs a ritual and ceremonial function, but later the mask passes into a new artistic quality and is interpreted as a carrier of deep cultural knowledge. The mask as a component of the theatrical tradition is significantly developed in the European art of the Renaissance, received its main artistic qualities in the Italian theater of masks - *commedia dell'arte*. It should be noted that an important feature of Italian folk comedy is its strong reliance on professional musical art. Professional musicians-performers are often among the actors-comedians who take a direct part in ballad performances.

**Key words:** mask, archetype, comedy of masks, *commedia dell'arte*, European opera, opera and theatrical tradition.

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**Традиції комедії масок у європейській культурі (на прикладі опер Р. Леонкавалло, П. Масканьї, Ф. Бузони)**

**Метою роботи** є виявлення художньо-семантичних особливостей утілення традицій комедії масок у європейському оперному мистецтві (на прикладі творчості Р. Леонкавалло, П. Масканьї, Ф. Бузони). **Методологія дослідження** визначається єдністю естетичного, історико-філософського, семіотичного, жанрово-типологічного, театрознавчого, оперознавчого й музикознавчого аналітичного підходів, поєднання яких створює загальне інтердисциплінарне поле вивчення явища образу-маски. **Наукова новизна** статті полягає у виявленні зв'язку явища образу-маски з поняттям архетипу, завдяки чому розкривається механізм функціонального використання образної моделі маски в оперному мистецтві. Цей підхід зумовлює виявлення взаємодії оперного мистецтва з національними музично-театральними традиціями, у яких традиції комедії масок стають одним із головних репрезентантів художньо-образного комплексу в європейській оперній музиці. **Висновки.** У загальному генезисі кожної національної культури завжди формуються характерні художньо-стильові ознаки, що об'єднуються національною ідеєю та містять у собі всі найзначніші досягнення національної культури. Явище маски є породженням національно-культурної традиції та відображає

її головні принципи й художні орієнтири. Свою історію маска починає в архаїчні часи й виконує ритуально-обрядову функцію, але згодом маска переходить у нову художню якість і тлумачиться як носій глибинного культурного знання. Маска як складник театральної традиції отримує значний розвиток у європейському мистецтві епохи Відродження, головні свої художні якості в італійському театрі масок – *commedia dell'arte*. Зазначимо, що важливою властивістю італійської народної комедії є її міцна опора на професійне музичне мистецтво. Нерідко серед акторів-комедіантів, які беруть безпосередню участь у балаганних виставах, є професійні музиканти-виконавці.

**Ключові слова:** маска, архетип, комедія масок, *commedia dell'arte*, опера, європейська опера, оперна і театральна традиції.

**Relevance.** At the turn of the XIX–XX centuries, the theme of masks in connection with the traditions of the Italian theater of masks (*commedia dell'arte*) is addressed by many European composers, the panorama of whose work extends from samples of veristic drama “*Pagliacci*” by R. Leoncavallo, opera “*Le maschere*” by P. Mascagni, which synthesizes the principles of the opera buffa and *commedia dell'arte*, and the neoclassical opera by F. Busoni “*Arlecchino, oder Die Fenster*”. Most often, such a rethinking occurs due to the transfer of action to another era and another social environment, and sometimes to significant rethinking of the overall dramatic line, which takes away from the original idea of the composition.

Such retrospective appeals to the experience of past centuries for the opera and theater tradition are quite common – such “eternal” for the opera and theater tradition are ancient, mythological, biblical themes, as well as the traditions of folk theater, including Italian comedy masks, which have received multiple interpretations in compositional, theatrical, directing and performing art. Representatives of many creative professions turn to the traditions of *commedia dell'arte* with the emphasis on the archetypal properties of the mask, considering it as the basis of their innovative research, which allows to create relevant and socially sharpened compositions that reveal the most problematic areas of social and cultural order.

Therefore, the desire to determine the archetypal properties of the mask and its influence on the development of the European opera and theater tradition with the selection of Italian *commedia dell'arte* as one of the most important reasons for its development is an important task of modern musicology.

**The aim of the article** is to identify the artistic and semantic features of the embodiment of the traditions of *commedia dell'arte* in European opera (on the example of the compositions of R. Leoncavallo, P. Mascagni, F. Busoni).

**The methodology of work** is determined by the unity of aesthetic, historical and philosophical, semiotic, genre and typological, theatrical, operological and musicological analytical approaches, the combination of which creates a common interdisciplinary field of studying the phenomenon of the image-mask.

**The scientific novelty of the article** is to identify the connection between the phenomenon of the mask-image and the concept of archetype, which reveals the mechanism of functional use of the figurative model of the mask in opera. This approach leads to the identification of the interaction of opera with national musical and theatrical traditions, in which the traditions of *commedia dell'arte* become one of the main representatives of the artistic complex in European opera music.

**Review of the literature on the problem.** The study of the mask archetype led to a wide range of literature on the history of theater, without which a multifaceted examination of the Italian mask theater (*commedia dell'arte*) and its “successors” in the European opera and theater tradition would be virtually impossible. One of the first theater critics to write a study about the Italian theater of masks was K.M. Miklashevsky, whose work “*La Commedia dell'Arte. Theater of Italian Comedians*” presents different versions of the emergence of European professional theater and its heroes. This work still remains one of the most important studies in the history of mask theater [5].

Also, extremely important and methodologically significant are the studies of O. Dzhivegov and M. Molodtsova, who examined in detail the components of Italian masks in the process of their evolutionary development, their artistic and dramatic features [3].

**Presenting main material.** Masks *commedia dell'arte*, born in the tradition of Italian folk theater in the middle of the XVI century in Italy, became a powerful artistic stimulus for European masters of various arts. The dance and dramatic experience of the comedy on the square, with its distinctly bright, effective, playful beginnings, was borrowed not only by theatrical art in all its various modifications, but also enriched by the artistic vocabulary of painters, writers and composers of the following centuries.

Consideration of the mask as an archetype and identification of its properties is impossible without recourse to the carnival with its elimination of subjectivity and compaction of the structure of “I”, which appears in the carnival as a personification of anonymity, as many researchers write, including Julia Kristeva [4, p. 552]. The carnival person, according to the researcher, is impersonal, deprived of the usual boundaries of the identical, has many faces and masks. In the carnival there is no I-one, I-identical, but there are many images, masks, in which it flashes, leaving its mark. So, in these masks-images “I” is doubled, dramatized. The carnival mask destroys the ontological unity of the subject, acting as a stop in being and the possibility of a new experience of being. The mask, as presented by J. Kristeva, is “not-yet-being”, the mask is an expression of the possibility of being, which has not yet happened as a pure “being possibility” [4, p. 552].

According to M. Bakhtin, in carnival the body is deprived of the boundaries of the individual, identical, in the element of carnival it exists as a grotesque, hyperbolic, ecstatic body: “It is never ready, never completed: it is always built, created and is building and creating another body; in addition, this body absorbs the world and is absorbed by the world” [2, p. 195]. Images of ecstatic carnival bodies are found in Dante's “Hell”, where they appear as allegories of human qualities, for example a liar depicted with his head turned back, or an angry man stabbing himself. The ecstatic body lives on the border, where there is a comparison between “no longer a body” and “not yet a body”, so this body can be understood as a metaphor, as a transformation or as an image. In this sense, the carnival person can be considered as a dual entity, because two bodies coexist in it: one dies – the former, pre-carnival body, the other is formed and born – a carnival character. The modus of theatricality assumes that the subject (his body) is completely hidden behind a mask, immersed in the role, and transformed into a character.

Theatrical play provided a view from the outside of the reality presented in the stage action; it can be compared with the view of another person who has gone beyond this reality – his former existence. During the carnival holidays, the performer-actor, instead of emphasizing his social status and himself, is kind of trying to hide them, disguise them, always appears different.

The image-mask becomes an expression of a specific character played out in the carnival, such as the figure of Arlecchino or Colombina. In the play, the individual is always disguised, always

takes a different image, represents another (his character), goes through, changes masks, hiding behind the mask of a clown, comic hero or death. So, the individual, hiding, covering under different masks-characters, creates an ontological formula “the same, but always different”. Thus, in the carnival there is a main rule according to which each person is someone else, and no one is himself.

Thus, the mask, hiding the former appearance of the individual, gives birth to a new state of his being, being under the sign of the mask. The mask is a way and form of acquiring a new kind of artistic existence of an individual who acquires new qualities in the carnival, and in fact is completely reborn through the mask. The mask grows to the original pre-carnival person, interacts with him and removes, replaces and excludes him, demonstrating the absence of any original single person; the image-mask becomes a new form of human existence, his real face in the carnival.

The mask in the space of the carnival is a way of removing and renouncing a person from the former experience of existence connected with the space of social norms and relations. The image-mask is an expression of the true form of otherness of the image created in the carnival. This image opposes any experience of self-identity and the principles of monologue, which is a product of the functioning of a set of social norms. The mask expresses the liberation of a person from the experience of the identical and the movement to another way and another form of existence. A person wears a mask in the carnival to disappear, to leave the former coordinate system in a new state, devoid of any solid foundations and boundaries that could fix the subject and his position in the world. The mask acts as an active principle that elaborates on human existence, allowing fulfillment, laughter and play as modus of human expression. It is the mask, born in laughter and play, that concentrates in itself the experience of these modus of existence, actualizing them, giving them the opportunity to manifest, come true, sound, becoming a symbolic form of their implementation.

According to M. Bakhtin, “the mask opposes the completed being, it is a stop, an attempt to present being as an unfinished process...”. And further, describing the mask as a metamorphosis of existence, Bakhtin writes: “The mask is associated with the joy of change and reincarnation, with a cheerful relativity, with a cheerful denial of identity and unambiguity. With the denial of a stupid coincidence with itself; the mask is connected with transitions,

metamorphoses, violations of natural borders, with changes, with a nickname (instead of a name); the mask embodies the playful beginning of life” [2, p. 35].

The mask as a “cultural archetype” (S. Avernitsev) grows from the very “basis of the unconscious”, natural and cultural features of the people's existence in history [1, p. 54]. The archetype of the mask in an extremely concentrated form contains the principles of choosing models of thinking and unconditional imperatives of behavior inherent in a particular opera and theater character. The mask, the mask-character, the image-mask symbolically formalizes the experience of play and laughter, takes a person beyond the empirical, everyday, hiding and denying his former face.

Thus, the mask takes human existence beyond experience, it means, it attracts to the realm of the transcendent and also carries the opportunity for a person to become different, to move to another kind of being, acting in the carnival as the principle of ontological transformation of a person. At the same time, the mask gives a person a new face as a sign of a new experience of existence – carnival existence. The person who wears the mask represents the world as a space of transformations, metaphors, endless play, formation, which in principle knows no end.

A significant contribution to the promotion of the traditions of the Italian mask theater (*commedia dell'arte*) on the opera stage belongs to three prominent European composers of the XIX-XX centuries R. Leoncavallo, P. Mascagni, F. Busoni.

In the external contours of the comedy, with which first begins the opera, R. Leoncavallo introduces the tragedy, which unfolds in the second act of the opera “*Pagliacci*”. Comedians, who are presented in two guises - as a real person and as a mask of Beppe – Arlecchino, Nedda – Colombina, Tonio – Taddeo and Canio – Clown (*Pagliaccio*) are involved in the “production”. The script of the play, which takes place in the middle of the opera as a “theater within a theatre”, is as schematic and simplified as possible. The musical embodiment of “comedy” contrasts with the general tragic line of the opera, as G. Toradze pointed out when he said that “the composer creates a subtle stylization, full of grace and sad humor” [7, p. 45].

It should be emphasized that R. Leoncavallo sought to recreate the historically accurate sound of the orchestra of the first half of the XVIII century, which was characterized by a fairly transparent texture. This is very important, because this period is known to be the heyday of the *commedia dell'arte*, and therefore the compos-

er's idea is quite obvious. The transparency of the texture as well as the acoustic effect of “chamber” is achieved by eliminating heavy copper and reducing the composition to the pair one with the traditional division of timbre functions and the leading role of the violin part. Characteristic features of the early classical style can also be seen in the predominance of the homophonic type of texture, which often imitates the “Albertian basses”.

Within the inner performance – “comedy”, the composer minimizes the demonstration of some images-masks, focusing on the disclosure of the images of Arlecchino and Colombina, who seem to play the role of lovers – *amorosi*. It is no coincidence that their characteristics are made through the use of genre models of the XVIII century – *gavotte* and *minuet*. At the same time, the affiliation of Arlecchino and Colombina to the group of servants becomes obvious, thanks to some parameters. First of all, their social position is evidenced by the unpretentious text of the serenade, which sounds quite simplistic in comparison with the high examples of secular lyrical poetry, which is reflected in its musical level. The serenade is written in the spirit of an Italian folk song, in which the strophic structure, square phrasing and syllabic movement are expressed in relief.

The musical language that characterizes the images of Arlecchino and Colombina has a deliberately “puppet” character with a predominance of quiet, soft sonority, and light, fragmentary touches (*pizzicato*, *staccato*) in the orchestra; the image of Colombina herself is drawn with the help of graceful passages of a group of stringed instruments. The contours of the portrait of the servant Taddeo are more blurred, although they also deserve attention. At first glance, the mask of Tonio – Taddeo is always superfluous and constantly gets into awkward positions, which is fully consistent with the traditions of *commedia dell'arte*. Therefore, his language is characterized by such comic techniques as extreme hyperbole in comparison with patter, as well as through the use of sublime poetic lines and their use in everyday conversational style, which is musically emphasized by the sudden inclusion of expressive phrases in the spirit of *arioso* in song and dance thematism. The tragic component arises from the undivided love for Colombina, which allows us to draw a parallel between him and the traditional representative of the characters of the Italian mask theater – Pedrolino, who is one of the closest “relatives” of Pagliaccio.

The general characteristics of Pagliaccio from his first appearance indicate a great tension of feelings, so it immediately contrasts with the generalized-stylized “comedy” – through the sudden exclamation of a sharp chord of copper with cymbals on *ff*, which immediately adds a disturbing tone to the play and portends a possible tragedy. Further, the expressiveness of Canio-Pagliaccio’s manifestations is significantly enhanced and is expressed in the enhanced orchestral sound of tutti and the depressing and dark color of the timbre. As M. Rudko points out, “intense dynamic development leads to a tragic culmination, at the moment of which there is a final switching of action from the playing field to the realm of real drama” [6, p. 35–36].

Another representative of the stylistic direction of verismo, P. Mascagni, following R. Leoncavallo, showed interest in the Italian theater of masks and created the opera “Le maschere”. This opera demonstrates a completely opposite approach on the part of the composer and librettist to the construction of the general concept of the work: unlike “Clowns”, the author creates a real Italian comedy of masks.

The libretto of P. Mascagni's opera “Le maschere” was created by the well-known Italian librettist and playwright Luigi Illica, who collaborated with many important composers, including Puccini, Giordano, Franketti, Luporini, etc. At the same time, despite the impressive experience in this field, some researchers have pointed out that although “Illica’s libretto was the result of a careful study of the laws of commedia dell’arte, the opera script was dramatically weak and split into a series of episodes” [191, p. 139]. In our opinion, this statement is too categorical, but, of course, it has a right to exist; what is more, the opera was not very successful.

The premiere of the opera “Le maschere” took place during the carnival celebrations of 1901, when at the same time in six major cities of Italy (Rome, Milan, Genoa, Venice, Turin, Verona) the opera was staged, but the expected positive reception of the opera did not take place.

In Mascagni's opera there are typical characters of commedia dell’arte: zanni (Arlecchino, Brighella, Colombina), the elderly (Pantalone, Tartaglia and Dr. Graziano), lovers – *amorosi* (Florindo and Rosaura), and Captain Spaventa. Arlecchino and Brighella are fighting for the right to be considered Colombina's fiancĳ, joking about the bully-Captain, as well as for fun interfere in the relationship between lovers – Florindo and Rosaura.

The connection with the traditions of the Italian mask theater in P. Mascagni's opera "Le maschere", as in the case of R. Leoncavallo's opera, can be traced in its general structure, which, again, begins with a prologue. "Le maschere" open a typical musical theme for an ancient Italian overture, which sounds when the curtain is raised, but the development of the traditional overture is abruptly interrupted on the tenth bar [6].

From a musical point of view, the overture to the opera "Le maschere" is unique and sets a careful tone to the whole work. The main factor of its uniqueness is the absence of any acting cues written in the libretto and giving full freedom to the performers, which allows us to define this overture as an improvisational prologue that fully reproduces the traditions of Italian mask theater. Following the introduction "Prima della commedia", there is a rather long vocal and orchestral episode, consisting of "Parabasi", "Sinfonia" and "Prologo", and the solemnity of raising the curtain as a sign of the beginning of the performance (again as a manifestation of "theater in theatre") is emphasized by the sustained sound of dominant harmony, the effect of crescendo which is enhanced by the consistent inclusion of orchestral voices.

The general drama of the opera is based on the number principle, and important for the composer are the principles of genre themes, associated with the disclosure of the inner essence of the characters, their belonging to a certain type of masks and social status. Thus, the servants are mostly characterized by an appeal to instrumental themes in combination with the sharply characteristic ancient Italian dances – an incendiary forlan in the second act of "E la bella di Brighella" and a tarantella at the final bow of the participants. The aristocratic couple in love – Florindo and Rosaura – is represented by an appeal to the genre forms of elegant court dances of minuet and pavana, and their vocal and intonation material and general musical characteristics are based on aria principles. This applies not only to their vocal parts, but also to the orchestral theme in which the influence of melodic melodies is clearly felt, which is especially noticeable in the episodes preceding the appearance of lovers.

F. Busoni's opera "Arlecchino, oder Die Fenster", also known as "Theatrical Capriccio", was an important step in renewing approaches to embodying the principles of Italian commedia dell'arte in opera. The composer, who was also the author of the libretto, places the action in the natural timeframe for Italian com-

edy and plot unfolding – in Bergamo in the XVIII century. Most of the characters are typical of the *commedia dell'arte*, but the main character, Arlecchino, has to be played by an acrobatic dramatic actor, and the Captain, who sometimes appears on stage, is a “mask in a mask” because he is Arlecchino in a Captain's mask.

First of all, F. Busoni is a famous pianist and composer, whose work is usually associated with the art of piano. But many musicologists have recognized that turning to the branches of composition that go beyond the piano art, on the one hand, the composer brings them the features of piano, on the other – significantly enriches the principles of piano writing through the inclusion of new elements. Thus, G.M. Gatti points out: “It is not useful to consider any one activity of the artist separately from others. After all, they all represent a single action and are closely intertwined in his personality. With Ferruccio Busoni, this approach seems futile even more than usual. The diversity of his spiritual activity in itself is the main characteristic of his artistic personality, and the study of all of them together is necessary for a full understanding of each individually” [8, p. 267].

F. Busoni's appeal to the traditions of the Italian mask theater, and in particular to the image of Arlecchino, in many respects continued the traditions of European art of that time, and, at the same time, reflected the characteristic features of the composer's style. The general compositional construction of the one-act opera consists of four pictures and a playing Prologue. The protagonist Arlecchino “changes the mask” many times throughout the opera and appears in front of the audience in four contrasting masks: in the first scene, “Arlecchino, the Scam” (“Allegro”) appears under the guise of a rogue lover of Annunziata; in the second scene, “Arlecchino, the Warrior” (“Heroic March”) appears in the form of an imaginary officer disguised in military uniform for his own salvation; in the third scene, “Arlecchino, the Man” (“Scherzoso”) appears in the image of a deceived man who found his wife Colombina in the arms of a gentleman Leandro; in the fourth scene, “Arlecchino, the Victorious” (“Final Triumph”), the hero appears as a brave conquering soldier.

F. Busoni, taking as a basis the creative work of composers of the XVIII-XIX centuries, in many cases uses established operatic situations with a certain amount of irony and ridicule, which enhances the comic effect (this can be seen in № 2 – the duet of Abbot and Doctor). The heroes walk in front of Matteo's house

and reflect on highly scientific philosophical topics, remembering the “beautiful Annunziata”. Their attempts to call Matteo end with Matteo carefully peering out of the window to see if those they represent really came. This action is accompanied by a number of musical techniques, including the pattering of bass buff, which creates an unsurpassed comedic effect.

The harmonious and melodic fabric of F. Busoni's opera is constructed in such a way that it is possible to state the impossibility of abandoning the duality, unity and plurality of levels: there is *bel canto* (especially in the parody sound of Leandro and Colombina's love song), there is declamation and recitative, there are long passages from expressive tonal constructions. Thus, although F. Busoni's opera “*Arlecchino, oder Die Fenster*” can not argue in demand and popularity with “*Pagliacci*” by R. Leoncavallo, but it played a significant role in the stage interpretation of stage images of Italian *commedia dell'arte* and opened the theatrical focus of the composer.

**Conclusions.** In the general genesis of each national culture, characteristic artistic and stylistic features are always formed; they are united by the national idea and contain all the most significant achievements of the national culture. The phenomenon of the mask is a product of national and cultural tradition and reflects its main principles and artistic landmarks. The mask begins its history in archaic times and performs a ritual and ceremonial function, but later the mask passes into a new artistic quality and is interpreted as a carrier of deep cultural knowledge. The mask as a component of the theatrical tradition is significantly developed in the European art of the Renaissance, received its main artistic qualities in the Italian theater of masks – *commedia dell'arte*. It should be noted that an important feature of Italian folk comedy is its strong reliance on professional musical art. Professional musicians-performers are often among the actors-comedians who take a direct part in ballad performances.

The artistic significance of the phenomenon of the mask is extremely growing at the turn of the XIX–XX centuries and inspires artists to turn to it in the tradition of the Italian mask theater (*commedia dell'arte*). This theme is becoming extremely popular not only among musicians and theater figures, the phenomenon of the mask is becoming popular in the literary, artistic and choreographic spheres of art. Among European composers, the phenomenon of the mask can be found in the veristic drama “*Pagliacci*” by R. Leoncavallo, the opera “*Le maschere*” by P. Mascagni, which

synthesizes the principles of opera buffa and commedia dell'arte, and the neoclassical opera by F. Busoni “Arlecchino, oder Die Fenster”. This demand for the phenomenon of the mask in various artistic directions suggests that the figurative features of the mask – “image-mask” allows artists to outline the character and psycho-emotional features of the real personality, to allow the listener to penetrate into the spiritual world of the hero. On the one hand, the “mask-image” establishes a parity relationship between the living and playing worlds, on the other – it opens new forms for self-expression of the performer, who gets ample opportunities for an open story about the secret. We should also emphasize the visual significance of the “mask-image”, where one of the main unique manifestations is the appeal to the realm of the senses. The plastic component of the “mask-image” belongs to the forms of non-verbal communication and helps to capture the changing course of the character traits of the character.

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