

Theses of DLA doctoral dissertation

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Opera and Operetta of 1867 in Paris
(Verdi: *Don Carlos*, Gounod: *Romeo and Juliet*,
Offenbach: *The Grand Dutchess of Gerolstein*)

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PhD Theses

I. Research: An introduction

In my thesis I compare the following three writings: *Don Carlos* by Verdi, *Romeo and Juliet* by Gounod and *The Grand Dutchess of Gerolstein* by Offenbach, all premiered in Paris in 1867. The analysis of these three different genre yet closely related musical theatrical work is a good opportunity to show the similarities and the unusual qualities of contemporary operetta and opera by specific examples.

Compared to the opera, there is far less musicology analysis of the operetta as a genre. This fact could be explained by saying that the ambivalent feelings to the genre were determinative for the circles of musicologists and representatives of the classical music. The idea, that this genre of light music uses a form of language that focuses mainly success, selling and has no relation to the classical music writings, written by contemporary opera composers, predetermines the genre's faith which has negative influence on the scientific papers.

Most of the issued Offenbach publications contain rather bibliographical items than musical ones. Besides the book edited by

Schmierer (*Offenbach und seine Zeit [Offenbach And His Era]*, 2009) on the composer's life, musical achievements of the era, I used the major significant dissertation of Dörffeldt (*Die musikalische Parodie bei Offenbach [The Musical Parody of Offenbach]*, 1954), which approached to the composer's work according to the author's choice of subject, based on only musical parody.

I mostly relied on bibliography in foreign language regarding *Don Carlos* and *Romeo and Juliet*, both being grand operas. Looking at Gounod's work there is only one major study. This is Huebner's book (*The Operas of Charles Gounod*, 1990) which observes the opera from the analytical point of view. We have to mention the monography of Budden in Hungarian (*Verdi*, 2007) as a thorough analysis of the Verdi bibliography. The most important publication considering the formation of the opera is Günther's research which was also useful in the making of my thesis.

II. Sources

It was important to support my findings and observations with facts, regarding the writing's literary and historical background, authenticity, from the following books: Adam Anderle (*Spanyolország története*

[*History of Spain*], 2002; *Spanyol királyi dámák [Spanish Royal Ladies]*, 2002), Istvan Géher (*Shakespeare*, 1998) and Marcell Benedek (*Shakespeare*, 1963).

Considering the limitation of the Offenbach bibliography, while I was elaborating the relevant section I relied on the piano abstract of *The Grand Dutchess of Gerolstein*, the translation of certain song lyrics written by Karoly Babos and Bela Erödy for the premier in the Buda Folk Theatre in 1867 and the libretto translation made by myself. The chain of ideas was influenced by Peter Bozó's manuscript (*Offenbach operettjei [Operettas of Offenbach]*, 2010) which also functioned as study handbook for the preparation of my sessional examination and his articles published in the Music Journal (*Orphée à l'envers: Egy idézet a francia zenés színpadi hagyomány kontextusában [Orphée à l'envers: A Quotation In The Context Of French Musical Theatrical Tradition]*, October, November, 2010).

While searching for the truth, Schiller's drama (*Dramas*, 1980) wasn't the only source I used for the libretto of Verdi's *Don Carlos*, Marc Clémour (*Eine neuentdeckte Quelle für das Libretto von Verdis Don Carlos [A Rediscovered Source For The Libretto of Verdi's Don Carlos]*, 1977) was also essential for the same purpose.

Besides the monographies listed above, I used professional articles regarding genres and writings (*The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, *Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters*). I considered the contemporary librettos in Hungarian (in translation of

Ferenc Ormai and Viktor Lányi) and piano abstracts, scores as my basic source of information for the musical analysis of operas.

III. Methodology

The first and second chapter of this study is an introduction to discuss the analyzed writings in the thesis, the first one is a thorough summary for the characteristics of the genre of French historical grand opera, the second one is for the precedents of the operetta genre.

The analysis of the three theatrical writings, the bibliography and its findings were in progress at the same time but as the thesis was making headways it became more different from each other.

I tried to find research aspects in the subdivisions that in my point of view the most important, interesting and essential for the success of comparing analysis.

Verdi's *Don Carlos* is considered as the typical grand opera of the French history, so I tried to emphasize these characteristics and analyze the opera as *opéra-comique*. I found it necessary to elaborate the sources of libretto for the exact understanding of the opera history.

Romeo and Juliet's story was very popular in literature and music as well. Chapter four is focusing on several writings, the differences between libretto and drama and the analysis of the story's four love duets.

In chapter five I write about the theatre's life of the Offenbach's era in Paris. In this period of time the institutions were regulated by privilege system in a way that its characteristics were shown in the composer's one-act play. These plays had such an importance that the first classic operettas could evolve such as *The Grand Dutchess of Gerolstein*.

The last chapter of this thesis is comparing the three musical theatrical writings from three different genres so we can see how the analyzed characteristics apply to another genre's play.

IV. Conclusions

My personal experience as a performer inspired me to be engaged in the analysis of operetta and opera, their relation to each other. It's a fact that when we say operetta we generally think of *The Gypsy Princess*, the *Countess Mariza*, *The Merry Widow*. We consider the play of Kálmán, Lehár, Strauss and Huszka as operetta. In the 19th century, when operetta as a genre was born, it was not that simple to categorize. The „classical” representatives of the genre were very different in the style of music and content from operettas today.

The purpose of the research was to explore and prove that there was no clear boundary between the analyzed writings and the still running plays

besides the different function, genre and musical style. Both genre follow the classical music models. The operetta assimilated the opera's solos, duets, bands, choirs, supported by funny and tuneful music and the opera used the type of song and style applied primarily for the *opéra-comique*.

In Verdi and Guonod's operas the exposition-ballad and the *couplet* form of song were good illustrations that the operetta's characteristics were preferably used by composers of the grand opera.

Past or present events is illustrated in the writings as *grand opéra* or operetta and the audience feels like they are their own. But the two genre have different approach to reality. While the historical grand opera is focusing on the stately style and emotion, the operetta is mocking it. In Offenbach's plays there is mixture of dry, satirical symbols, cruel irony, caricature and melodiousness. His early plays still show the requirements of the theatre's privilege system, but the musical structure of *The Grand Dutchess of Gerolstein* – apart from the prosaic parts – has great similarity to Verdi and Gounod's play except the play contains the parody of „classical” music's forms and methods with opera allusions.

My method may be considered original because I reached conclusions by analysis and comparison of the three different genre's plays, premiered in the same year, and I tried to prove the statement that there was no big difference between the two genre back then unlike nowadays.

V. The activity connected to the subject of the dissertation

Verdi: A Masked Ball – Amelia

18, 21, 24 April 2010. Szeged National Theatre

Conductor: Tamás Pál, Sándor Gyüdi

Verdi musical evening

29 March 2010 Eger, Chapel

Don Carlos: Elisabeth's romance (Act 2), Aida: Aida's aria (Act 1),

A Masked Ball: Amelia's aria (Act 2, Act 1).

Accompanied by piano: Judit Gábos

Verdi musical evening

19 September 2005 Eger, Calvin House

Don Carlos: Elisabeth's romance (Act 2), Aida: Aida's aria (Act 1),

Duet for Aida and Amonasro (Act 3).

Contributed: Sándor Sólyom-Nagy, Accompanied by piano: Imola Pogány

Verdi musical evening

19 August 2001. Kőszeg, Castle Theatre

Aida: Aida's aria (Act 1), Duet for Aida and Amonasro (Act 3), A Masked Ball: Amelia's aria (Act 3), The Troubadour: duet for Leonora and Luna (Act 4).

Contributed: Zoltán Bátki-Fazekas, Conductor: Armand Tóth

Accompanied: Szombathely Philharmonic Orchestra

French musical evening

18 June 2007 Eger, Chapel

Gounod: Faust – Marguerite's aria, the Jewel Song

Accompanied by piano: Judit Gábos

I was playing in 270 operetta performances as leading star between 2001 and 2008 (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Netherlands, National Theatre of Miskolc, Jókai Theatre of Békéscsaba), the most significant ones are the following:

Strauss: Der Zigeunerbaron, Die Fledermaus. Lehár: Das Land des Lächelns. Kálmán: Gräfin Mariza, Die Csárdásfürstin, Die Bajadere, Der Zigeunerprimas. Ábrahám: Victoria, Ball im Savoy. Dostal: Die ungarische Hochzeit.