

Opera – Pop – Culture

Mariusz Treliński, when receiving the International Opera Awards prize for the most prominent representatives of operatic art in 2019, said that the opera is "a genre that can change the world". We want to use the Polish director's opinion as the starting point for the following conference project.

There is no doubt that since the appearance of operatic art at the end of the sixteenth century in cultural communication, it changed not only the image of music, but culture in general, affecting the theatre, literature, painting and fashion. Derived from the literary and theatrical tradition, intended as an attempt to resurrect the ancient and syncretic Greek theatre, the opera spread very quickly in European culture, filling the space between elite and folk culture, becoming a form of entertainment. A special role in this aspect was played by the Italian opera, which influenced – with varying intensity at different times – the European culture. Today it's difficult to imagine a world of music without Rossini, Verdi or Puccini, and without them also German or Austrian musical achievements.

The "Italianness" evoked here is as understandable as it is significant for this project. It seems that the opera brings together many features attributed by using stereotypes to Italian culture, i.e. emotionalism and theatricality of behaviour, externalising emotions with the accompanying very suggestive body language, a large intonation span and loud verbalisation. One can, therefore, look at the opera from the perspective of identity as a form, in which a certain type of culture is expressed, a characteristic identity that strengthens the stereotypes embedded in the common perception.

It's assumed that the universal influence of the opera ended with the 19th century and the emergence of modernity. If, however, the opera would just come to its end, it would be possible to designate its appropriate place on the archaeological cultural map, and thus make it a dignified burial. The amazing thing is, however, the strong resistance that are put up against these kinds of intentions by operatic institutions, its ghostly posthumous existence – it not only keeps it alive, but also continually supports its development. Currently, the opera is a much broader and more complex phenomenon than it ever was in its lifetime. The more dead it is, the more it flourishes....

The opera, however, did not "die" at the beginning of the 20th century. On the contrary, it was one of the most vital genres, and composers often and willingly referred in it to mythological themes (Orff's Prometheus, Rautavaara's Apollo contra Marsyas and many

others), created were operas expressionistic, impressionistic, or based on new objectivity. In addition, in the 20th century, new forms appeared – revues and media spectacles, exploiting what's most spectacular in the opera: entertainment, show and pleasure coming from listening and watching at the same time. Looking at this shift of the operatic form to other media, it can be concluded that the opera has not so much died, but rather changed the way of its presence in culture, especially popular one. It became a part of syncretic media statements: musical (e.g. Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*), videoclip (e.g. Madonna's *La isla bonita*), television (e.g. programs like *The Late Show* or *Tutti Frutti*) multimedia (e.g. transmissions of opera performances in cinema halls: Met- opera). Interestingly, it's still widely recognised as a sign of high culture, as evidenced by numerous references in popular texts: such as Henning Mankell's crime novels with inspector Kurt Wallander, who listens to *La Traviata*, or the movie *Bel Canto* by Paul Weitz about the opera singer who, while being held by rebels, builds a plane of communication with the aggressors through music. One could cite numerous examples. Nevertheless, the influence of opera on culture remains a visible and significant phenomenon.

Starting from this recognition, in the project of a joint scientific reflection we would like to emphasise the influence of the opera: musical, literary (e.g. of libretto) and cultural. Mladen Dolar and Slavoj Žižek write that, although "Philosophers did not often go to the opera. Its glamour, splendour of court performances, a pomp of national myths, sentimental melodramatics seemed like something quite far away from what was the proper object of their interests", yet "Kierkegaard has succumbed (...) to the charm of the opera to such an extent that he regarded it as a model of any aesthetic sensual fascination".

This fundamentally comparative perspective wants to allow reflection on the interpenetration of opera and other texts of culture: painting, literature, non-musical theatre and performances, audiovisual forms, etc. It wants to look at the interaction and crossing between various forms and musical traditions in the opera. It also proposes to examine the influence of the impact of Italian opera on authors of operas from other countries, in historical and contemporary perspective. Undoubtedly, we are most interested in today's perspective, showing new forms of the opera's presence in culture, using contemporary, often media-based, artistic solutions. Also, interesting seems to be the direction of the imagological study, which would reflect on the "Italianness" of the opera, showing contemporary citations and references to the Italian opera tradition in non-Italian performances.

In connection with the above, we want to invite researchers: teatrologists, musicologists, cultural experts, literary scholars, philosophers, sociologists, media experts and

everyone who seems to be interested in taking part in the planned project. The conference, organised by the Polish Academy of Sciences centre in cooperation with the Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa and Università L'Orientale in Naples, is planned for September 2020 in Rome.