

REGIETHEATER – THE BIG CHALLENGE FOR THE OPERA OF OUR TIMES

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SUMMARY. In a postmodern² world where creative, aesthetic and social patterns are constantly reshaped or radically changed – a conservative, traditionalist view of lyrical performance can easily be categorized by some contemporary audiences as outdated and irrelevant. It is still possible that the opera, in its old costumes, to communicate any more interesting content – to modern man? This has been the dilemma of many opera directors who in the twentieth century changed their approach and often produced shocking performances for the public. The question remains open to the creators of the 21st century, the world of opera receiving more and more versions of shows that challenges the public with provocative solutions.

Keywords: Regietheater, Opera, modern stages, 20th century

Introduction

A complex mix of factors, musical and visual, interaction together and condition each other in the made of the opera show. The composer communicates his message to the audience, through performers. This message, expressed through music and text, needs a unifying approach that reproduces the general conception, and this is the staging or direction.

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² “The ideological, moral and psychological foundations of postmodernism include persistent skepticism about so-called traditional values (that is, the values of the modern time, including modernism); a belief in the crisis of authority and, consequently, epistemic uncertainty; the destruction of hierarchical systems and the rejection of the notion of the artist as a demiurge; an eschatological mood and sense of corrective irony; and a decentralized world model. We can say with confidence that director’s opera [Regietheater] is brought about by the phenomenon of postmodernism.” (Irina Yaskevitch, *Opera of Postmodernism and New Challenges of Opera Criticism*, The IATC journal/Revue de l’AICT – June 2020: Issue No 2)

Beyond the sound expression, the visual plays an extremely important role in the opera since its beginnings. The sumptuous montages, the scenery activated by the amazing machines, the costumes full of pomp, have always been part of the opulent taste of this aristocratic genre and later of each era. Only in the last century, however, the interest for dramaturgical subtleties and for the revelation of deeper layers of meanings of the musical-poetic text entered more obviously in the sphere of interest of the direction and scenography of the lyrical theatre. In this context, the various currents of opera directing have made a unique contribution to the show of the 20th century. *Regietheater* is the current that has provoked the most controversial reactions and the subject of this article.

The Director

In preparation for an opera performance, the director is the one who “orchestrates” the staging. He collaborates and coordinates an entire team in achieving this goal: soloists, choristers, instrumentalists, ballerinas, figurants, the set designer (who creates the image of sets and costumes), but also a large technical team of electricians, sound masters, machinists, props, costume designers, and so on – who are involved backstage in the show.

Constrained by budgetary restrictions and sometimes by the limited artistic and technical possibilities of the theatre, the opera director is obliged to propose a viable staging. The director is also involved in all stages of the process of creating the new show: from the first moments of sketching the directorial and scenography vision, he must start and supervise the works for costumes and sets, to choose the cast of singers (together with the conductor or artistic director) and to go through intensive rehearsals on stage with the artists. After the director complete the production itself and after the gong is announcing the first raising of the curtain – he becomes another spectator in the opera hall.

In the previous centuries the concept of “directing” an opera was not defined as such. The staging of the performances was provided by singers, librettists, conductors or even composers (from Claudio Monteverdi, Jean-Baptiste Lully, to Giuseppe Verdi, Richard Wagner). To the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, the importance of staging increased significantly, also the need for the director becoming more and more evident. David Belasco (1853-1931), Adolphe Appia (1862-1928), Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)³, Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), Max

³ Composer and conductor Gustav Mahler is not the only one who has been staging opera performances in the twentieth century. Conductors like Otto Klemperer, Herbert von Karajan, Egidio Massini, Christoph von Dohnanyi were also involved in staging.

Reinhardt (1873-1943), Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), Erwin Piscator (1893-1966), Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), Walter Felsenstein (1901-1975), Margarita Wallmann (1904-1992), Lucchino Visconti (1906-1976), Boleslav Barlogh (1906-1999), Jean-Louis Barault (1910-1994), Boris Pokrovski (1912-2009), Wieland Wagner (1917-1966), Václav Kaslik (1917-1989) și Wolfgang Wagner (1919-2010), they are among the first professional directors to approach the opera, imposing new concepts and directions in the vision of the show.

Other prominent names of directors of the twentieth century, who work in the lyric theater, in a very wide range of styles, proposing very different productions, traditionalist or avant-garde are Giorgio Strehler (1921-1997), Erhard Fischer (1922-1996), Franco Zeffirelli (1923-2019), Peter Brook (born in 1925), Filippo Sanjust (1925-1992), Ruth Berghaus (1927-1996), Lotfollah Mansouri (1929-2013), Peter Hall (1930-2017), Otto Schenk (n.1930), Götz Friedrich (1930-2000), Tito Capobianco (1931-2018), Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-1986), Jean-Pierre Ponelle (1932-1988), Jonathan Miller (1934-2019), Harry Kupfer (1935-2019), Michael Hampe (b.1935), Pierre Chéreau (1944-2013), Peter Sellars (n.1957). Among the Romanian directors: Jean Rânzescu (1909-1996), Anghel Ionescu-Arbore (1924-1995), Hero Lupescu (1927-2007), George Zaharescu (1927-2007), Andrei Șerban (b.1943), Cristian Mihăilescu (b.1944), Petrikă Ionesco (b.1946), Silviu Purcărete (b.1950), Mihai Măniuțiu (b.1954), Alexandru Darie (1959-2019). There are currently only a few opera directors in the world, who are exclusively involved in lyrical theater.

Most directors came from the theatre or cinema, most of them without any background of musical training. Especially after 1960, the contribution of theatre directors in opera was increasingly requested, for the revival of the lyrical show considered in “crisis”. However, this option opened the “Pandora’s box” and a lot of new experiments appeared. While some saw in the rise of director’s influence in the lyric theatre a new renaissance of the genre of opera, others, on the contrary, reacted vehemently, pointing out the excesses that tend to alienate modern staging, removing it more and more from the authentic spirit of the work.

Updates and experiments in opera direction in the twentieth century

For the last decades, opera directing is no longer a simple illustration of the work, simply staging its content, but often carries a message, a vision that the director proposes to artists and audiences. If traditionally, the director proposed a staging that respects the time and place of the action indicated by the librettist and composer, the style and

the main message of the work, as well as a coherence in the stage development of the show – after 1960, for most of the new productions, the mainly target seems to be an “updating” the message of the work, aiming to make it more “accessible” to the sensibilities of the modern public. The obedience of the director and of the scenographer towards the original score was gradually eluded, considering that the musical and scenic parameters can be more flexibly followed, trying more or less not to contradict the ideas that led to the triggering of the compositional act.⁴ The aim was also to stimulate the singer-actor to a more natural and convincing stage play, and to introduce modern technologies in the show (in achieving visual and sound effects, through sound amplification, light and image projections).

But the common point of the increasingly avant-garde and unconventional “readings” applied to musical drama, was the modification of the time and place of the action after the free inspiration of the director. Between innovation and imposture, modern directing has taken a winding path, triggering passionate reactions among the public, artists or critics, arousing enthusiasm or revolt and opposition.

Sometimes producing masterpieces but also numerous failed experiments or kitsch shows, modern directors have embarked on a courageous endeavor to re-interpret and re-create the lyrical show in the twentieth century - often diverting the composer’s original message.⁵

In his biography⁶, the Romanian director Andrei Șerban, a disciple of the famous Peter Brook, defines his attitude towards the art of performance and of interpretation: a living phenomenon, well determined in its temporal coordinates, which uses decodable symbolism only in a certain space and time, related to a certain target audience to which it is addressed. From this perspective, each new staging is unique because it is addressed to a certain audience, from a certain place on the globe and from a certain time in an era. A resumption of the same title, in another cultural space, in front of another audience, at a certain distance over time, will inspire a new staging, perhaps in a much different key. These coordinates personalize the director’s vision of the ephemeral interpretive act, anchoring it more strongly in contemporaneity.

⁴ “It arrives in result, at a show built in parallel with the conductor’s show, these two shows have in common only the simultaneity of the performance.” Daniel Pralea-Blaga, *Evoluția conceptului de regie în teatru liric* (“The evolution of the concept of directing in lyrical theater”), Ed. Amurg sentimental Publishing House, București 2010, pag.12.

⁵ Daniel Pralea-Blaga, op.cit, pag.6.

⁶ Andrei Șerban, *O biografie*, (“A biography”) Ed. Polirom Publishing House, București 2006.

It is a trend embraced by many directors, towards the end of the last century, which has generated a real fashion in “updating” the shows, even with the risk of losing the substance or the original meaning⁷. In order to make them intelligible to a contemporary audience, many directors created controversial shows aiming to update the opera productions. Changing the time and the place of the action was one of the “keys” very used and the main “apple of discord” that divided the opera direction of the late twentieth century in two opposing paths: a “realistic” current, with a more traditionalist approach (apostrophized by some as “old fashion”) and other heterogeneous and avant-garde currents, which explores multiple forms of manifestation, with unconventional approaches and often abrupt derailments from the original message of the work. The *Regietheater* is the most radical of them.

Moving the action from the epoch in which the subject of the work was conceived in the contemporary socio-political ambiance, raises several problems. The difficulties are related to the authenticity of the interpretative act and to the perception of the public.⁸ The first refers to the diversion of the initial meaning of the text and music, as well as to the stylistic inadequacy⁹ that arises from such a directorial approach.

⁷ “Today, we have accumulated vast experience in critical analysis and evaluation of postmodern theatre productions. That is why it is not particularly difficult to find their common features: the transfer of the time and place of the action or refusal to specify them (the phenomenon of transculture, a new postmodern chronotope); stylistic eclecticism with a mixture of types and genres of theatrical performance; ironic attitude towards the original source, its plot and characters; the widespread use of grotesque, clowning, caricature and buffoonery; the combination of performative classicism with elements of mass culture; increased attention to “low” subjects such as sex, crime, marginal lifestyles and deviant behaviours (especially among the young); putting the production together with collage or film editing techniques; coexistence of traditional sets with the achievements of high technology; minimalism, extreme selectivity and laconicism in both linguistic expression and conventions of stage action; displacement of curtains and backstage area by enclosed pavilions; the huge role of video projections and technical devices in general.” (Irina Yaskevitch, *op.cit*)

⁸ “Modern opera productions represent a wide and diverse field of interpretations. To fully understand and evaluate the productions of this new opera, the operagoer and the critic must have additional knowledge, a general understanding of the wider theatre context and theatrical sign-decoding skills.” (Irina Yaskevitch, *op.cit*)

⁹ Piso: “The neglect of style (the case of many “modern” staging) corresponds to an artistic cacophony. Because a musical masterpiece creates a whole, the interpretation must respect it. The elements that compose it cannot be just a random encounter but must constitute an organic unit in which they condition each other. If anything could be “staged” for a music (as, unfortunately, many like-directors practice), it means that that music has no character, and its composer lacks personality; not to mention style. Or, more curiously, the disregard for organic unity, in many current stagings, takes place especially when it comes to the masterpieces of lyrical music.” (Ion Piso & Doru Popovici, *Antifonar epistolar* (“Antiphonal letters”), Albatros, București 2004, pag.225, 226)

The second problem is that modern audiences don't have the same cultural references as the people who lived a few centuries ago, for example, when an opera by Händel, Mozart, or Verdi was written. As a result, they may lose many of the subtleties of the score, as well as the specific fragrance of the epoch described by the work. And even the logic of certain actions of the characters, explainable only in terms of a certain philosophical, political, social or religious context of a time. The director's preoccupation to find an optimal formula for staging the work, in which the cultural context is preserved, has been considerably reduced in postmodern times. But in this way, the auditorium loses also the reference to the authentic environment of a certain epoch, that could offer its own answers to the tensions that arise in the dramatic action of a certain work.

The most avant-garde trends were received differently by the public in various cultural spaces, being sometimes encouraged, sometimes arousing adverse and even violent reactions. In the former Soviet Union, initially welcomed as a refreshing change of the old interpretive patterns¹⁰, those trends were later repudiated. Vsevolod Meyerhold, a prominent exponent of theatre and opera directing in the first half of the twentieth century, paid dearly for his courage to stage avant-garde shows between constructivism and futurism, not following the communist aesthetic and Stalinist directives. Arrested and executed in 1940, he was rehabilitated by the Supreme Court of the USSR in 1955. At the opposite pole, a few decades away, in a space of German culture and with a not so violent outcome, precisely the lack of a "modern" innovation attracted an attitude of hostility and disapproval. In 1983, the only collaboration of the conductor Georg Solti (appreciated for his performances of Wagnerian operas) with the Bayreuth festival was consumed. Because Solti disliked abstract directing and modernist reinterpretations, he imposed a classic staging of Wagnerian tetralogy (directed by Peter Hall and screenwriter William Dudley), but received very coldly from German critics who expected radical reinterpretations.

Among those who kept a balanced attitude between the multiple experiments in directing director Margarita Walmann has cultivated the authenticity of staged works, while she approached a variety of styles in staging: realistic, veristic, stylized, fantastic, traditional or anti-traditional. In her view, opera directing was a meditation "in depth on the musical laws that govern the work; the director studies the plot, the psychological

¹⁰ "Regietheater, in its literal translation, was borrowed by the Russian language, but, for Russian critics, "director's opera" (режиссерский оперный театр) at first had no negative connotations. On the contrary, new stage interpretations of classical operas were perceived by many as a breath of fresh air, overcoming the stagnation that was so apparent in all areas of life in that late USSR." (Irina Yaskevitch, *op.cit*)

environment, the relationships between the characters, the historical data (the era in which the action takes place and the one in which the work was written), the literary, religious, political implications.”¹¹

Regietheater

In the twentieth century, avant-garde productions caused multiple controversies and scandals in the lyric theatre, not once being suspected of being a premeditated policy to provoke earthquakes and intense reactions¹². *Regietheater* – the German term for “directors’ theatre” (or the dominance of directors in theatre) - refers to an artistic current so called since the 1950s in the German and later international press, where it is sometimes maliciously known as “Eurotrash” and is associated in many cases with a negative meaning¹³, even aggressive¹⁴. *Regietheater* is characterized by the unlimited freedom given to directors to make major changes in elements related to the geographical location and original time of the action, often involving political or social messages, and diverting the original subject of the work represented, many times abstracting the scenography and exacerbating violence and sexuality. *Regietheater* seem to propose the opposite of valuing masterpieces and rather blurring hierarchies, erasing the demarcations between value and non-value, between coherence and skepticism, questioning everything¹⁵.

¹¹ Margarita Wallmann, *Pridvoarele cerului* (“Balcones del cielo”), Ed. Muzicală Publishing House, București, 1981, pag.104.

¹² “The opera stage must challenge spectators in such a way that they are drawn to the very edge of their seats, wide awake, and are each compelled to risk a private debate with what they see and hear, with every aria, every fugue, and movement” This remark was made by opera director Hans Neuenfels to *Der Spiegel* in 1982 following the scandalous production of *Aida* in Frankfurt with which he laid the foundation for what is now referred to as “Regietheater” in opera. (Clemens Risi, *Opera in Performance: “Regietheater” and the Performative Turn*, *The Opera Quarterly* Vol. 35, No. 1-2, pp. 7–19, sept.2019, Oxford University Press)

¹³ “In the European cultural context, it is quite often used in a negative sense, accentuating the undesirable radicalism of the new generation of directors, the provocative nature of the work and the perceived looseness in their treatment of classical heritage, which often fail to meet the expectations of the conservative part of the public.” (Irina Yaskevitch, *op.cit*)

¹⁴ Ulrich Müller, *Regietheater/Director’s Theater*, *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, Edited by Helen M. Greenwald, Oxford University Press, 2014.

¹⁵ “In director’s opera, the commitment to blurring the distinction between the sublime and the base, and between elite and mass culture is clear. It should be noted that classical opera, in the minds of the modern spectator-listener, is an elitist phenomenon. Therefore, any attempt to combine it with mass culture may be considered a manifestation of postmodernist pluralism, a tendency to destroy binary oppositions.” (Irina Yaskevitch, *op.cit*)

Here is an example from a production of the opera "Rigoletto" in Florence in 1986, directed by Jurij P. Ljubimow, told by the tenor Ion Piso¹⁶: "In Mantua, at the court of the Duke of Gonzaga, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Mussolini, Napoleon appears on the stage. During the duet with Sparafucile, Rigoletto dressed in Napoleon's cloak and wearing a cap on his head hops on stage imitating the walk of Ch. Chaplin. The companionship of a Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, extracted from the horrors of the twentieth century, with Marullo, in "Rigoletto" makes either proof of abstinence from the use of intelligence, or that of a robust lack of culture. Music dies in this context, with it the drama and with both the interest of the spectator. What tension can introduce Chaplin's comic hop into the atmosphere of the Rigoletto-Sparafucile duo? In this case, as in the other "ingenious" association, is in fact only a banal confection according to fashionable clichés, aimed only the effect of shock on the public, with the unfortunate result of take it out of the atmosphere created by the music." The above description no longer shocks anyone with novelty (such experiments being increasingly common in the world of opera after World War II), but only with absurdity and incompatibility with the original meaning of the work in question.

Despite all the obvious opposition¹⁷ by those who accused the new current of sensational thirst, lack of genuine creativity and negligence related to the values of the musical text, *Regietheater* exponents continued their activity unhindered, influenced by the rise in the 60s of the new concepts of Deconstructivism (Peter Sellars, David Alden).

Patrice Chéreau, the signer of the production of the Tetralogy in Bayreuth in 1976, became a leading exponent of the *Regietheater*, succeeding in scandalizing public opinion through political insertions (especially with anti-capitalist, Marxist) that led to the establishment of the Wagner Protection Society. According to Chéreau's conception, Wagner's daughters of the Rhine became three prostitutes working near a hydroelectric dam, the gods are a family of wealthy industrialists from the end of the 19th century, and Siegfried uses an industrial hammer to forge his sword.

Other directors frequently associated with the current *Regietheater* in opera: Gérard Mortier, Hans Neuenfels, Jonathan Miller, Luc Bondy, Richard Prince, Walter Felsenstein, Christopher Alden, Calixto Bieito, Harry Kupfer, David Pountey, Claus Guth.

¹⁶ Ion Piso & Doru Popovici, *op.cit.*, pag.66-69.

¹⁷ "Just because our age looks at the great ideals with cynicism, yet it does not give us the right to elude them from the great creations of the past." This is one of the conclusions of a large critical exposition of the *Regietheater* current in the article signed by Heather Mac Donald "The Abduction of Opera", published in the summer 2007 edition *City Journal*.

For sure, not all modern staging that offer different perspectives from the “traditional” path are impostures or failures¹⁸. But much of these innovative arrangements are far from the original intentions of the composer and librettist. This is the result of dethroning the score from the top of the hierarchy when it comes to the sources of inspiration for an opera performance. For centuries, for the interpretation of a musical work, the score was the “Bible” of the artist and the center of reference (among other landmarks, for example the various interpretive traditions to which he could relate). Now the score has become only one from a puzzle of many possible sources of inspiration for the modern opera show, being old-fashioned to be considered alpha and omega¹⁹. Although critical reactions have always been present²⁰ both in the press and among artists who refused to play in productions that distorted the content of ideas of the work – the fashion of nonconformist directors is still strongly supported in the world, both in major opera houses and traditional festivals (Bayreuth, Salzburg).

Soprano Ileana Cotrubaș has often shown in her career critical attitudes towards the exaggerations of modern directing to which she also dedicates numerous reflections in her book, *Opernwarheiten*²¹. In her opinion, but also of many other singers or opera lovers, modernist staging should be applied to contemporary opera creations. Many of these titles, belonging to composers like Debussy, Ravel, Dukas, Orff, Hindemith²² however are rarely

¹⁸ “Too many modern directors take liberties that distort, damage or eliminate crucial plot devices which, far from illuminating the drama, actually make it obscure or even ludicrous. Settings of operas in such things as insane asylas, cocktail lounges, mousetraps, ersatz outer space settings, 19th-century libraries, or worst of all, some sort of updated Nowhere world with the characters dressed in business suits or tuxedos. A lot of nudity, cross-dressing, or perversions of religious symbols. Such productions say much more about the psychosis of the director’s own mindset than they do about the work in question.” (Lynn René Bayley, *Eurotrash Revisited: The Academic Version*, The Art Music Lounge - An Online Journal of Jazz and Classical Music, 23.02.2019)

¹⁹ “..the hierarchy that takes the score as both start and end point for an analysis of interpretations or performances. Instead, I would like to suggest a change in focus. In the study of contemporary opera performances, I propose that we treat the performance not as an interpretation of a score, but instead conceive of the score as one of many materials used to produce a performance.” (Clemens Risi, *op.cit*)

²⁰ “The premieres of such “Regietheater” stagings are frequently (although not always) accompanied by vocal audience reactions, ranging from simultaneous approval and disapproval to protests, scandals, and outrage. Perhaps no other theatrical form is capable of producing such intense reactions, either positively or negatively, seems to collect the most diverse and extreme expressions of a performative interaction between stage and audience.” (Clemens Risi, *op.cit*)

²¹ Ileana Cotrubas, *Opernwarheiten (Operatic truths)*, Ed.Gebundene Ausgabe, Holzhausen 1999.

²² “Hindemith’s *Mathis der Maler*, Szymanowski’s *Krol Roger*, Schoeck’s *Penthesilea*, Orff’s *Gisei – Der Opfer*, Martin’s *Le Vin Herbé*, Dukas’ *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*, the charming one-act operas of Ravel (when was the last time you saw a production of *L’Enfant des Sortilèges?*) or

staged, because there is a fear that with them the opera hall will remain empty. Opera managers prefer to schedule in the current seasons only the classical titles, or already established works, which “bring the public”. This is one of the major reasons why the classical repertoire is left to be the target of experiments that disfigure it. It is also the context that does not encourage contemporary opera creations at all. The public’s appetite for twentieth-century musical creations is low and they are not even encouraged to explore.

It has been consistently written about the *Regietheater*. Beyond many dedicated articles and chapters in opera encyclopedias²³, two recent books try to spread light on this phenomenon: musicologist Barbara Beyer interviewed some of the most influential opera directors in her book “Warum Oper?”²⁴ and Axel Englund follows the dangerous slips from the *Regietheater* current in his book “Deviant Opera - Sex, Power and Perversion on Stage”²⁵, published in 2020.

Singers and directors

For centuries, most opera performances were quite static, singers – the divas, the extravagant stars of the opera – were focusing almost exclusively on displaying vocality and virtuosity, as well as lavish toilets. Gradually the importance of vocal and acting qualities tended to become equal, lyrical artists of the last century being concerned more and more to express the artistic emotion both through sound and a true play. In addition to the contribution of some famous artistic personalities of the lyrical theatre (such as Feodor Şaliapin, Enrico Caruso, Maria Callas, Plácido Domingo), the spectacular evolution of opera directing has an important contribution in this, revealing subtleties of the opera’s message²⁶, revolutionizing the stage

Martinů’s Ariane, all of which could clearly withstand good, imaginative modern staging, it’s small wonder that modern directors choose to pervert older classics.” (Lynn René Bayley, *op.cit*)

²³ Ulrich Müller, *Regietheater/Director’s Theater*, in “The Oxford Handbook of Opera”, Edited by Helen M. Greenwald, Oxford University Press, 2014

²⁴ Barbara Beyer, *Warum Oper? (Why Opera?)* Gespräche mit Opernregisseuren Sebastian Baumgarten, Calixto Bieito, Paul Esterhazy, Karoline Gruber, Claus Guth, Andreas Homoki, Tilman Knabe, Peter Konwitschny, Martin Kusej, Nigel Lowery, Peter Mussbach, Christof Nel, Hans Neuenfels, Sergio Morabito und Jossi Wieler, Alexander, Berlin 2005.

²⁵ “*Deviant Opera* seeks to understand this phenomenon, approaching the contemporary visual code of perversion as a lens through which opera focuses and scrutinizes its own configurations of sex, gender, power, and violence.” Axel Englund, *Deviant Opera - Sex, Power and Perversion on Stage*, University of California Press, Oakland, California 2020.

²⁶ “Despite the ambiguity of assessments of the current stage in the development of opera, one cannot help but notice that new readings of famous operas reveal unexpected meanings, reflect the thinking of contemporary people and attract the interest and attention of the general public.” (Irina Yaskevitch, *op.cit*)

play approach of singers and also having direct consequences in the vocality specific to the twentieth century (in the direction of capturing the expressiveness of the human voice in the service of “stage truth”). Thus, virtuosity, voice colors, expressive accents, silences, were increasingly exploited with a well-defined dramatic purpose, in shaping a character or a stage situation.

The singer was increasingly asked to adapt their singing and stage gesture to an increasingly personalized directorial vision. Versatility, flexibility, naturalness and permanent adaptation, here are some qualities imposed on lyrical performers, apart from which the singer-director relationship would not have managed to evolve in an authentic creative process. On the other hand, the opera director must also consider certain particularities imposed by the lyrical theatre, from the rigor and constraint determined by the musical tempo and rhythm to the particularities of the singing technique²⁷. In the increasingly dynamic stage play, the soloist was forced to find technical means to master the correct breathing and emission of the most difficult vocal passages, even in awkward body positions and often even the intelligence to turn some defects or mistakes into expressive effects²⁸. Stage “truth” and finding convincing vocal and scenic solutions in the embodiment of a character were some of the targets and the concerns of great singers who worked in the last century. Imposing personal imprint through their professionalism and unique interpretative vision some of them succeeding in imposing landmarks and standards in the interpretation of the great opera roles. More and more opera singers of the twentieth century have been challenged to put their vocal and stage data in the service of experiencing the most daring directorial visions, often overcoming their limits, inertias, or fears.

In the new theatrical territory open to free experiments of all kinds, both inspired contributions and radical solutions have emerged, some extremely difficult to accept by the public and even by performers. In the

²⁷ Romanian director Ionescu Arbore points out “Singing involves an effort that the utterance does not require, the naturalness of the actor who sings is of a different nature than that of the one who utters the word.” (A. Ionescu Arbore, *Realizarea spectacolului liric* (“The making of an opera show”), Ed. Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor și Muzicologilor din România, București 1992, pag.28)

²⁸ “Like other performers, Maria Callas is sometimes faced with technical difficulties ... color inequalities in timbre and some opacity in high notes. When she sings out loud, sometimes the high notes vibrate in an unpleasant way, and this obviously happens when the Diva is not in shape. But no one can be perfect. Maria Callas fixes these technical limitations and is smart enough to realize for herself that when she fails to correct her mistake, to use it giving it a subtle meaning and integrating this mistake totally in the role and character” (Iosif Sava, *Contrapunct liric* (“Lyrical counterpoint”), Editura Muzicală, București 1987, pag.100).

last century, the stage of lyrical theatre often became the arena of tensions and scandals that maintain a tense state between directors and singers or conductors. On the one hand, the soloists were once again upset by the directors' claims to persuade them to sing their difficult arias by constantly moving²⁹, or placed in the most uncomfortable positions (knowing that the vocal technique is based on a certain use of the body and especially the respiratory system), or even hidden behind the scenes, with their backs to the audience, in "dead" angles from the point of view of acoustic view.

In the context where the sound emitted from the orchestra pit creates a strong competition, the lyrical artists cannot have the same "mobility" in the opera as the actors have in the stage space of a classical theatre. They must constantly refer to the ideal of a true game, as well as to the acoustic principles (of resonance of sound) and to the musical factors that enter the equation in each given stage moment.

On the other hand, the directors want the action to take place as naturally and credibly as possible, and the opera singers to meet not only the musical conditions but also the physical ones necessary for distribution in a role. They are upset by static attitudes to which singers often abandoning themselves (supported by conductors³⁰) in favour of an easier sound emission, but in the detriment of the fluence of the live show. The solution, however, can be found when there is goodwill and openness on both sides, to the experience and the perspective of the other.

The great opera singers of the twentieth century were often excellent actors, overcoming their limits and bravely experiencing some of the most daring visions of directors. However, it is equally true that more than once, singers or conductors have taken a stand against the exaggerations proposed by some directors.

²⁹ "The director who knows what a voice means will always consider that the artist's breathing to not be tired of a too busy stage play, because the character's moods are expressed first through voice and then by gestures and movement. Always a character rendered by the expressiveness of the song and by the mobility of the face will impress the audience more than the one rendered by agitated walks on the stage. Too much agitation tires both the actor and the spectator." (George Niculescu-Basu, *Cum am cântat eu*, ("How I sang"), Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor din R.P.R, București 1960, pag.146, 148)

³⁰ Andrei Șerban also talks about the conductor-director relationship: "Usually the conductor and the director are like a dog and a cat, because one only looks at the score and would like those on stage to come as close to the ramp as possible, to move less as possible and just to look at the conductor, and the director wants the other way around - the soloists to move constantly, to be often behind the scenes (where you can't sing), to perform lying a difficult aria, with your feet up, etc., so obviously they make things impossible. I often have conflicts with the conductors, because if they don't love theater, it's a problem." (Andrei Șerban, *Eu pun în scenă în primul rând muzica* ("I stage music in the first place"), Observator cultural, Bucharest 2005)

Conclusions

Total Work of Art, Opera, proposes a synthesis of the multiple artistic forms: vocal and instrumental music, theater, literature, ballet, painting, lighting effects. They receive coherence in the show, through the unifying vision of the director. That is why the subject of staging is an extremely sensitive one, because it has been demonstrated in these decades that directing can substantially modify and distort the initial meaning of a work.

A mirror of the conquests but also of the social and political earthquakes of each era, the opera is an artistic space of metamorphose. Although there has been much talk about the imminent death of the opera genre, between traditional and avant-garde productions the lyrical show evolved in the twentieth century towards a great freedom of expression (sometimes transformed into libertinism) and an unprecedented diversity which does not leave its audience indifferent³¹.

New interpretation of the old texts in another mental patterns and the free creativity are healthy and vital processes in theater or opera. But what is undesirable and leads to mediocre or scandalous productions, is the exacerbation of vulgarity, ignorance, inculturation and the taste of making experiments for the sake of originality at any cost. Unfortunately, many directors have made and still create “modern” shows in these coordinates which remain, however, only in the best case, some mediocre productions.

Regietheater shook the classic image of the opera, sometimes bringing original perspectives but also proposing enough monstrosities. As if opening the Pandora’s Box in the lyric theater, the *Regietheater* performances continue to reveal new interpretations but also to shock and to revolt the audience. If the goal of this current is to arouse strong feelings in the public, it has certainly reached it.

³¹ “Director’s theatre has made everyone talk about it as a new socio-cultural phenomenon, as the next phase in the evolution of opera. It is possible that new themes will lead to new aesthetics, and critics and opera reviewers probably need to prepare for the new challenges that opera will have in store for them in the coming years.” (Irina Yaskevitch, op.cit)

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