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Implementation of Instrumental Theatre Principles in Yuri Kasparov's Opera-Monodrama "Nevermore!"

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This article discusses the specific features of the instrumental theatre, which organically penetrates into the opera-monodrama genre, given the example of "Nevermore!" opera-monodrama by the contemporary Russian composer Yuri Kasparov. Such synthesis is of a special research interest while it is a unique phenomenon in the musical culture and outlines new ways of modern musical theatre development. Due to the mutual enrichment of genres within the work, the boundary between a soloist and instrumentalists is erased. Therefore, instrumentalists face a completely new challenge: they become the characters of the stage action. Their actions play a significant role in the drama action of the whole play. However, some of the instruments are involved in the play as decorations. Using them in such a way is symbolic, the meaning of this technique is disclosed in this work.

Keywords: instrumental theatre, opera-monodrama by Yu.S. Kasparov "Nevermore!", genre synthesis, opera directing.

Research area: art history.

"The art of the twentieth century is full of different kinds of innovations connected with contents, forms and language manner of their implementation to such an extent that one gets the impression of a stylistic dissonance in it. Under these conditions, there is a number of genre or form shaping constants, which organize these innovations around themselves. Among them, of course, there is instrumental theatre, the range of which is extremely vivid in its technique of implementation" (Petrov, 2010:3).

Instrumental theatre as a genre, which appeared in musical art after World War II, has manifested itself in music of many composers. Among them are: representatives of the American

school of composers Tom Johnson, John Cage, George Crumb, Frederic Rzewski; German composers Karlheinz Stockhausen, Mauricio Kagel, Helmut Lachenmann; the composer from Slovenia Vinko Globokar; Dutch composer Martijn Padding; composers from the former Soviet republics: Peteris Vasks from Latvia, Valentin Selvestrov from the Ukraine, Dmitry Smirnov from Belarus, Russian composers Sergei Slonimsky, Edison Denisov, Sofia Gubaidulina, Rodion Shchedrin, Faraj Karaev, Vladimir Martynov, Nikolai Kondorf, Victor Ekimovsky, Vladimir Tarnopolsky, Ivan Sokolov, Sergei Zagny and others. In this paper, we consider the implementation of some features of the genre of

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instrumental theatre in the opera-monodrama by Moscow composer, Honored Artist of the Russian Federation, Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters of France, professor of the Moscow State Conservatory, Yuri Kasparov.

The opera-monodrama "Nevermore!" is written for the text of the famous poem "The Raven" by American writer Edgar Poe. It is notable that in the process of his work, the composer used the English original text, and only later, to be performed in Russia, the Russian text of the poem in translation by N. Zenkevich was put on the finished musical material. In the original poem, the protagonist narrates about a bird that flew inside his house, which throughout the narration from an occasional guest turned into a fatal harbinger forever remaining in this house. The protagonist of the poem is a well-to-do, educated, well-read man, who has recently experienced the death of a beloved woman named Lenore. The central theme of the work is the inability to achieve happiness; the typical romantic idea of loneliness is reflected, when the loss of love is equivalent to death. However, in Poe's poem, and later in the opera by Yuri Kasparov, the tragic nature of this plot motif is further aggravated: the protagonist having lost his beloved one, loses any hope of reuniting with her, even in the afterlife.

*Tell this soul with sorrow laden if,
within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom
the angels name Lenore –
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden
whom the angels name Lenore."*

Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

[Edgar Poe, "The Raven", verse 16]

The authors' definition of the genre "opera-monodrama for a baritone and 17 instrumentalists" is already an obvious indication of the important role of each of the performers. It would seem more logical to write on the title page of the

score "opera-monodrama for a baritone and an orchestra or an ensemble", but the composer elects exactly 17 instrumentalists as the musical accompaniment of the vocal protagonist. This structure includes: a string quintet (first, second violin, viola, cello and double bass), woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone and tuba), piano, harpsichord, celesta (one performer), harp and two drummers (they play bells, vibraphone, marimba, glockenspiel, cymbals, gongs, tam-tam, temple blocks, slide whistle, flexatone, toms, rototom, raganelli, tambourine, antique cymbals, timpani and etc).

To be more precise, in the score written in English, instrumentalists are named 'performers'. In this regard, the definition of the instrumental theatre genre given by V.O. Petrov is notable: "instrumental theatre, which belongs to a kind of musical actionism along with the musical happenings and multimedia events, is a special genre generated by the evolution of the musical thought of the twentieth century: it has its purpose, its place of performance, meaningful and linguistic specificity" (Petrov, 2010:8). The researcher examines the genre as a form of musical actionism or, in other words, musical performance. Thus, already in the title of his work, Yuri Kasparov gave the idea of instrumental theatre. It manifests itself in the opera at various levels. Let us indicate them:

The instrumental theatre principles apply to:

- Appearance of the performers;
- Importance of the instruments in the context of musical drama;
- Their role in the organization of the stage space;
- The way of interaction of instrumentalists at the stage.

In the preface to the score of the opera, the composer prescribes in detail how instrumentalists should be dressed. "It is advisable for the

musicians-performers to be dressed in something black, and for the tuba player, who appears in the middle of the opera, to be dressed in some contrasting clothes: it can be a white or a yellow suit. The singer can be dressed in something bright enough, may be coloured trousers, suit, shirt". Thus, the composer divides all the performers into 3 groups by colour: musicians dressed in all black, the singer-protagonist dressed in bright clothes, and the tuba player associated with the image of the Raven in the opera, dressed in white or yellow.

In the context of the play, the tuba player becomes the embodiment of this important drama "character". His external isolation, the first appearance on the stage, which coincides with the appearance of a bird in the house of the protagonist, as well as all further actions prescribed in detail by the composer of the score, do not leave any doubt that this performer personifies the image of the fatal guest.

His importance is shown especially in the key moments of the drama music piece. Thus, in the climax of the opera, when all the other 16 artists take sound imitating percussion instruments and randomly move with them around the stage freely reproducing the sounds, the tuba player

with his instrument goes to the center, and on the background of the overall sonoric sound plays a completely independent, clearly distinguished musical material (see Fig. 1).

In the finale, when all the musicians, including the baritone having completed his final lines, leave the stage and only the tuba player remains of the performers, who personifies the image of the Raven, a bird which embodies the fatal force having absorbed all the living space of the protagonist (see Fig. 2).

Besides the tuba player, another instrumentalist has a similar function. It is the performer of the bassoon part, who acts as a sort of an "alter ego" of the central character of the opera. First, he appears in such a capacity on the stage when the singer goes to meet an imaginary guest. To listen to the sounds coming from the outside, the housemaster leaves the armchair and approaches the door (see Fig. 3).

Then the bassoon player occupies his place and begins to perform the part of the protagonist (see Fig. 4).

If up to this point all the actions of instrumentalists were aimed at the soloist sitting in the armchair (see Fig. 5 and 6), a whole performance is now being played in front of his

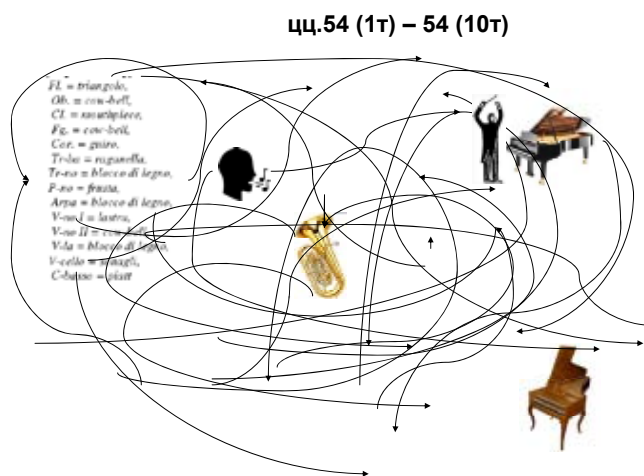


Fig. 1

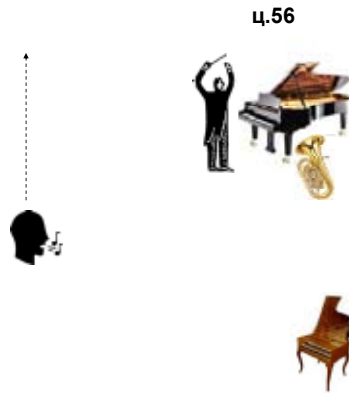


Fig. 2

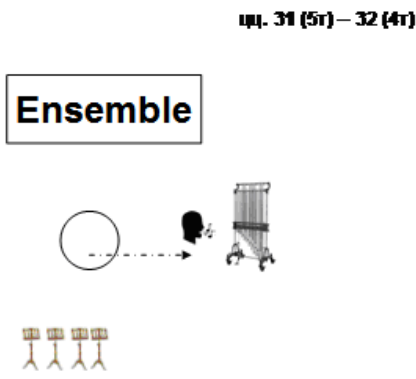


Fig. 3

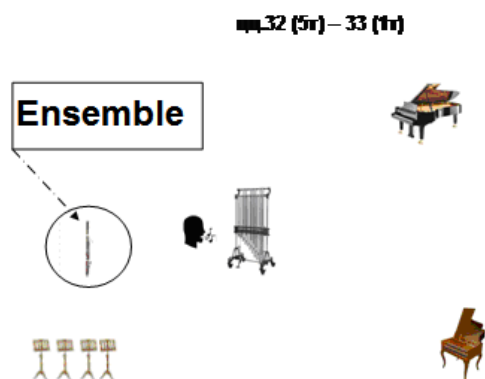


Fig. 4

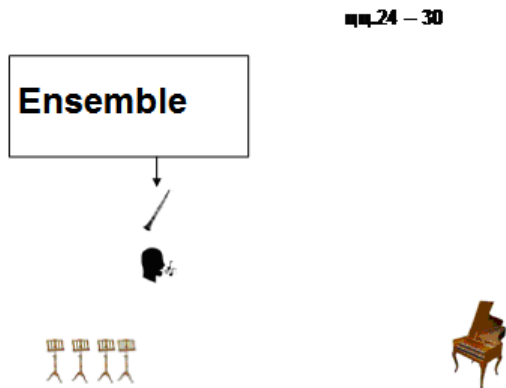


Fig. 5. The clarinet player approaches the singer and plays solo, directing the instrument towards the singer

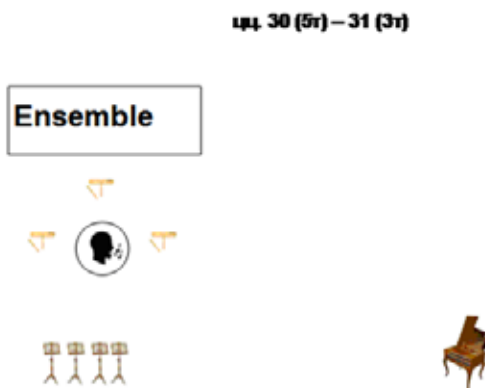


Fig. 6. The French horn player, the trombone player and the tuba player take woodblocks into their hands and come to the armchair, where the singer is sitting, and play surrounding him from three sides

eyes, but with the bassoonist as the main character (see Fig. 7 and 8).

This role is assigned to the bassoonist until the tuba player appears on the stage. Later he joins other instrumentalists and follows the guidelines in the score. Apparently, this is due to the fact that the appearance of an intruder discovers another facet of the protagonist's personality, embodied in another "alter ego" – the Raven. With his appearance, the tendency of the main character of the opera to discouragement, depression and inactivity is revealed. The fatal bird becomes a faceless double of the protagonist. That is why at the end of the poem he remains to live forever in the shadow of the Raven.

*And the Raven, never flitting, still is
sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above
my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a
demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming
throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that
lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted – nevermore!*
[Edgar Poe, "The Raven", verse 18]

Here, in our opinion, the implementation of the idea of duality can be found, which is a typical feature of romantic works. And in the opera-monodrama by Yuri Kasparov, and the original poem, there are two images of the protagonist: as the participant of the action, and as the author of the narration. Due to the use of specific means of instrumental theatre, the implementation of the idea of "double time" becomes evident (*Podoroga*, 1996:89). On the stage, the protagonist is in two temporary spaces, in two images at the same time.

In Yuri Kasparov's opera, besides images' personification, instruments play an important role in the organization of the stage space. In

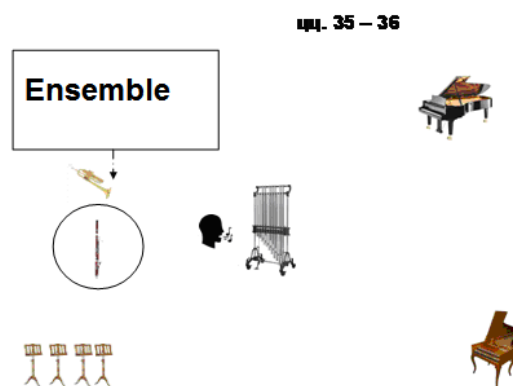


Fig. 7. The trumpeter comes to the armchair and, stopping behind it, plays his part so that the bell was placed over the head of the bassoonist sitting in the armchair

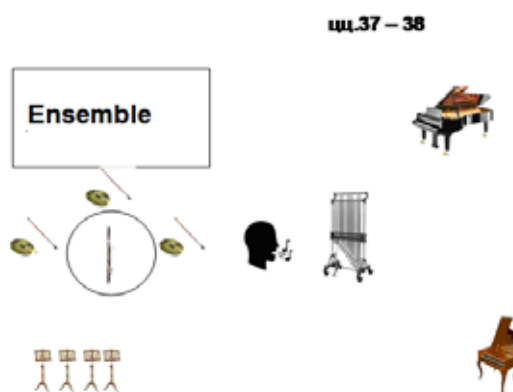


Fig. 8. The trombone player, the contrabassist and the drummer playing the percussion, take antique cymbals with bows and surround the armchair. When playing the instruments, they keep the cymbals over the head of the bassoonist, moving the bow along the cymbals upwards

other words, they act as decorations. First of all, this function is assigned to the bells. They start to "act" in the opera, when the protagonist intends to meet the guest, which disturbed his sleep (see Fig. 3).

If we literally reproduce the text written in the score, it will look as follows: "the singer rises, approaches the 'guest'. He approaches the bells and stops in front of them as an insurmountable obstacle." During further course of actions, the

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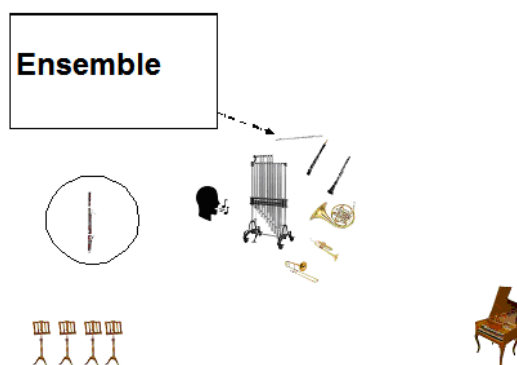


Fig. 9

bells gain the value of a line between the two worlds. The mise en scene, when performers of the parties of wind instruments line up behind the bells, opposite to the singer, is particularly revealing in this regard. At this point, the theme symbolizing the fatal forces invading from the outside, destroying the protagonist's life, is played (see Fig. 9).

The bells serve as a kind of a boundary between the two worlds until the dialogue between the protagonist and the Raven begins. Having come into contact with the visitor from the other world, the protagonist erases the symbolic boundary, and the decorative role as an instrument that separates the stage space, is exhausted.

No doubt, it is not accidental that the composer used the bells as a mystical door. First, out of the variety of the symphony orchestra instruments the bells best suit this role by appearance. Second, the choice of the author was significantly affected by symbolism, which is fixed to the instrument.

Let us recall that the history of the bells extends back over four millennia. Almost all varieties of these instruments have been an integral part of ritual celebrations. In ancient Greece, the bells were used as an accompaniment for dancing priestesses who came into contact

with the forces of the underworld. In Judea they decorated the clothing of the high priest, who was considered the anointed of God on earth. For ancient Slavs, bells were important and were mainly used during the rituals of "transition" (wedding, funeral processions), during calendar periods when one time of the year was replaced by another (Maslenitsa week, Todorova week, autumn and winter holidays), as well as in the days considered to be dangerous because of the special activity of evil spirits (St. Nicholas day, St. Lucia day, Kupala night, St. Peter's day, Christmas Eve, Mermaid week). During these events, the sound of the bells acted as a kind of a talisman against the forces of the other world. Thus, the above examples show the use of the bells as a symbolic border between the two worlds – the real and the surreal.

Another instrument – "decoration" in Kasparov's opera is the grand piano. Its use in such a way has a special meaning. In the opera, as in the poem by the English writer, the plot is about the romantic protagonist, and the action takes place in the 19th century, when no conversazione, no literary-musical evening was incomplete without a piano. The presence of "the king of instruments" in the house witnessed the cultural level of its inhabitants, the desire for

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Fig. 10

enlightenment. It was a sign of belonging to the artistic strata of the society.

From the very beginning of the play, the grand piano is located in the far right corner of the stage (when viewed from the audience). The protagonist turns to the instrument only in the middle of the opera, having survived the first wave of anxiety, after meeting an unexpected guest in his house (see Fig. 10).

Deep in his thoughts, he sits down at the piano and is about to play, but the cry of the bird distracts him. In this connection, it is notable that the composer instructs the conductor to perform solo on piano. At the climax of the opera (see Fig. 1), the maestro sits down at the piano and imitates playing, and in the final scene when the protagonist leaves the stage, the conductor performs the solo part (see Fig. 2).

Thus, in the finale of the opera, the intent of the composer becomes obvious, according to which the characters generated by the memories of the protagonist, gradually come to life, take shape, begin to exist independently, interact with each other and, in the end, push the “author” out of his own personal space. Maybe the implementation of this idea planted in the poem itself, pushed the composer to the idea of combining the genres of opera-monodrama and instrumental theatre. However, it should be noted that to date the opera “Nevermore!” by Yuri Kasparov is the first and only example of this genre in the history of the synthesis of the national musical culture. And thanks to this innovation, the range of the expressive tools needed for making an opera, which a priori supposes a small number of performers, significantly expands.

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Претворение принципов инструментального театра в моноопере Ю.С. Каспарова «Nevermore!»

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В данной статье на примере сочинения современного русского композитора Ю.С. Каспарова «Nevermore!» рассматриваются специфические черты инструментального театра, органично внедряющиеся в жанр монооперы. Подобный синтез вызывает особый научный интерес, поскольку представляет собой уникальное явление в музыкальной культуре и очерчивает новые пути развития современного музыкального театра. Благодаря взаимообогащению жанров внутри произведения стирается граница между солистом и инструменталистами. Вследствие этого перед оркестрантами встаёт абсолютно новая задача – они становятся персонажами сценического действия. Их действия играют значимую роль в драматургии всего произведения. Вместе с тем некоторые из инструментов задействованы в спектакле в виде декораций. Их использование в таком качестве имеет зашифрованные символические значения, смысл которых раскрывается на страницах данной работы.

Ключевые слова: инструментальный театр, моноопера Ю.С. Каспарова «Nevermore!», жанровый синтез, оперная режиссура.

Научная специальность: 17.00.00 – искусствоведение.
