

ON THE DEFINITION OF THE NOTION OF NATIONAL IN SLAVIC OPERATIC PRODUCTION

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Abstract: The study explores evolution of national element in selected Slavic cultures – Russian, Polish, Czech – in their history with particular emphasis on the 19th century, and in Slovak case from the 19th to the first half of the 20th century. It outlines common features of national emancipation movements among the above nations, as well as their differences. Particular focus is given to the effect of the quest for national emancipation on the development of national operas in the given countries. The authors examine the features that might, in the given context, define the operatic production as national. Given its utterly specific evolution, Slovakia receives particular attention: socio-political circumstances delayed national emancipation, hence the tardy emergence of national opera. That brought thought-provoking aspects to the nascent Slovak national opera and European music drama production of the first half of the 20th century.

Keywords: Slavic, history, state, national, culture, production, *The Whirlpool*

Introduction

In recent history operatic production evolved as one of major carriers, perhaps even agents of national element. The study explores the journey to national opera in four Slavic cultures: Slovak, Czech, Russian and Polish. Through the lens of transformation of national elements into the production of the supranational operatic genre one acquires better grasp of Slavic and Slovak contemporary history. The study explores the how and when of the articulation of national in operatic production by Russians, Poles, Czechs and Slovaks. The study also seeks an answer to whether at all the national aspect among these ethnic groups differed.

Particular focus is given to the evolution in Slovakia and/or the territory of Greater Hungary that corresponds with the present-day Slovakia. The paper examines the specific features that characterised the evolution in comparison with neighbouring Slavic cultures. Should the examination lend an affirmative answer, additional answer shall be offered as to the effect of the unique nature of evolution on operatic production. Opposite logic – the means by which operatic production created the national element in Slovakia shall also be addressed. The following a brief outline of national emancipation movements in the four Slavic countries and operatic production on their territory shall serve as the vantage point to the tasks set out above.

1 The emergence of modern nations and of national element in Slavic Europe

The development of nations within the context of emergence of national identity in Europe acquired major momentum in the 19th century. It experienced major leap forward at all levels of social and cultural life. Nation-state was conceived, national languages were codified, public interest in national principle became institutionalised, and national agenda was defined in politics. The evolution in Europe was continuous, including during the revolutions of 1848 – 1849 that affected the entire Europe. Unification of Germany and Italy was guided by the national concept. Slavic nations joined the process of national-liberation. In the quest for national identity they sought

confrontation within their own nation and as part of the struggle with their multinational monarchies. The principle of national federalism overlapped with that of the quest for national autonomy. In the 19th century Russians were the only Slavic nation that, also represented a state. Nonetheless, their journey to national realisation was no less unwieldy than that of the subjected nations. For Russia as a state, at the time of the advance of national emancipation and fulfilment, was no different from other monarchies in terms of political concept of preservation of state integrity. Russia was growing increasingly centralised and Russified, just as the Habsburg Monarchy was growing Germanised, or as Hungary was becoming Magyarised following the Austrian–Hungarian Compromise of 1867. The process, however, didn't ensue in the name of national emancipation of a given constitutional nation. Instead, it exploited the national principle to facilitate constitutional integration of multi-ethnic state. In most instances it didn't always aid the constitutional nations themselves in their emancipation. The historical process of national-liberation movement supports the point. For instance, Slovaks, Poles, Croats, Serbs, Ukrainians, Czechs, or Slovenes achieved the national principle in difficult circumstances of national subjection. Yet they developed all attributes of national symbolism, along with the content of cultural and political nation. It also brought along the evolution of the instinct of protection of own nation and the principle of respecting another nation. Though, in the long run, the latter might have been denied at times, or affected by supranational concepts of international politics. In terms of evolution of the national principle, centralisation of power based on constitutional nation not only suppressed national elements, but also its own national principle in the name of the more encompassing integration. That is also why the Russian nation as a national element kept and continues to evolve as hybrid product of the constitutional and national. Hence the perception of the national is different among the Russians than among other smaller Slavic nations. That is particularly manifested in the quest for their own identity and in the perception of integrity of another nation. It has been and remains vital for the evolution of nation whether the process occurs alongside the existence of its own state, or whether it preceded the foundation of such state (as in Central Europe within the multi-ethnic Habsburg Monarchy), and/or whether it follows the foundation of state (some of the so-called developing countries).

A number of definitions of nation highlight subjective factors of emergence (national consciousness or identification with nation that are essential for the emergence of nation), and objective factors (arrival of a large social group with its specific features and bonds that evolved through joint cultural and historical development). Evolution of nation is a long-term and open process. It may change in social interaction. Along with the rise of external (e.g. global) social communication it may acquire new shape or be transformed. That particularly applies to contemporary globalisation in economy, culture and communication.

Each movement for national emancipation endeavoured to raise social and cultural standards of its nation, to advocate codified language and implement cultural rights, to gradually achieve national sovereignty arising from the idea of nation state.¹ Individual national movements, however, often differed. Their nature was determined by political potential and ambitions, social background and ideology of leading figures, particularly by the interest in the issues related to culture, language and literature. Herder was the first to raise the nation above state. He deemed nation to be natural entity and state an artificial invention. Hence the states were to be subjected to national units. The leading Slavic representatives who attempted to resolve the issue of constitutional status of Slavs were Ján Kollár and Pavol Jozef Šafárik. It was largely due to them that the idea

¹ HROCH, M.: *European National Movements in the 19th Century* [Evropská národní hnutí v 19. století]. Prague: Svoboda, 1986.

of Slavic mutuality acquired comprehensive theoretical shape. Its ideal was anchored in cultural, literary and spiritual unity and unification of all Slavs. It emerged as defence against the threat of Hungarian and German assimilation of central European Slavs. Its adversaries named it pan-Slavism.² The key principle that affected ideological foundations of national-constitutional process among Slavs in Central Europe was Kollár's idea of special mission of Slavs, and new attitude to language as the fundamental value for the definition of nation, national spirit and culture.³

1.1 The Russians

The evolution of Russian nation was closely linked to that of the Russian state, though the former occurred much later. The specific feature of the early days of Russian state was the fact that its development underwent through two (and/or three) principal phases. The period of Kievan Rus territorially included the later Belarussian and Ukrainian national tradition. From the 13th century onwards, as a result of territorial and political disintegration, and the expansion of Mongols to Eastern Europe (the emergence of the Golden Horde and vassal dependence of most Russian principalities), Russian national tradition moved from its early phase to central part of Eastern Europe with Moscow becoming the new administrative and political centre. After it freed itself of the dependence, from the 15th century the Moscow Rus endeavoured to renew the former territorial integrity of Russian lands. Yet it lost its Ukrainian and Belarussian territories to the more powerful Lithuanian and later Polish–Lithuanian state. In the 18th century, Russia, by then an empire and European power, managed to acquire a substantial part of the territories of Polish–Lithuanian Belarus and Ukraine. Three divisions of Poland between Austrian, Prussian and Austrian monarchies also earned Russia extensive territories of the Polish State known as *Rzecz Pospolita*. That, in its constitutional form, was to disappear from the map of Europe for over a century. The developments thus brought into the multi-ethnic Russian Empire Poles and Ukrainians (apart from Galicia and Bukovina that were attached to the Habsburg Monarchy), Belarussians, and dozens other ethnic groups. The 19th century, epitomised by the rise of modern nations, thus found Slavic nations in two constitutional contexts: 1. subjection (Poles, Ukrainians, Belarussians), and 2. dominance (Russians). The evolution of Polish, Ukrainian and Belarussian nations in terms of culture and language, however, was far more dynamic than that of the Russian nation. The missing attribute of statehood was an incentive for the Ukrainians, Belarussians and Poles to proceed more vigorously in the quest for national identification and development of fundamental national symbolism. That was also facilitated, particularly in the first half of the 19th century, by the nationally passive Russian policy. It considered administrative, military and economic integration of the country to be a priority, whilst leaving the issues related to religious and cultural unification outside the central interest.⁴ The critical principle was to stabilise the power and demand loyalty from the subjects.

Culture, language and religion of the non-Russian residents remained largely intact. Though the multi-ethnic Russian state, from the second half of 19th century, started to gradually nurture the principle of Russian nation state, the very evolution of Russian nation proved quite slow. Relative simplicity of Russian folk culture proved quite conducive of the development of Russian nation. A number of Russian writers, historians and members of young Russian intelligentsia attempted to overcome the status gap between folk culture and that of the élites in literature, music and fine art. From the late 18th century they

began to seek Russian identity not in the state or religion, but in Russian history, language and folk. Those were typical manifestations of the emerging modern national consciousness. It attempted to use ideology to bridge the gap between élites and ordinary folk.⁵ The process of emergence of Russian language from spoken Russian enriched with numerous Slavic liturgical elements began in the 17th century to be completed by the end of the 18th and early 19th century. Major impulse to shape the Russian nation came from the works by Pushkin. Instead of in Russian language, Russian élites, communicated predominantly in French throughout the 19th century (French was preceded by German in the 18th century). This adds to the complexity of Russian national development. Russian Orthodox Church and its clergy didn't help the development of Russian national element, as the Church represented dynastic and imperial interests rather than national element. For instance, liturgical language used by the Church to communicate with wide strata of the largely illiterate population was that of Slavic liturgy. Its effect on church-goers was more old-fashioned and conservative rather than conducive of national self-awareness. In the first half of the 19th century the evolution of Russian nation drew philosophically and theoretically from S. S. Uvar. Subscribing to the thesis of unity between the tsar and ordinary folk, he delineated the path for intellectuals when contemplating modern nation in the sense of "official state ethnicity". Additional ideological groups in Russia included Slavophiles and "Westerners". The former concept of the Russian nation saw the folk rather than the Europeanised aristocracy to be the bearer of national unity. Ideas of Slavophiles were further advanced in the second half of the 19th century by new political ideology of modern Russian nationalism (Mikhail Katkov, Ivan Aksakov). It was to bring together the elements of the state (*Rossiyskiy*) and the people (*Russkiy*) within Russian national state. Analogously to the fate of the Slavophile concepts, theirs wasn't adopted by the ruling Russian circles. Nationalist concepts in Russia remained in between the realms of the struggle between the national–ethnic and nation–state principles.

1.2 The Poles

One of the main impulses of the Polish national movement was the theme of the reconstruction of the Polish state. Its former territory remained, throughout the 19th century, part of three powers: Russia, Austria and Prussia. Hence, individual parts of the former Polish state (*Rzecz Pospolita*) were dependent on the policy of the three states. Part of the Polish renaissance intelligentsia was in emigration (residing largely in France after the T. Kosciuszko uprising or that of 1830 – 1831). Voices of many Polish nationals were heard from abroad. Polish national movement was quite fragmented. Its core ideas echoed, with different intensity and content, from different corners of the divided Poland. The movement evolved along two essential lines: one group of nationals believed in armed struggle, whilst the other sought evolutionary path that entailed everyday development of national economy, culture, education, and raising political and national consciousness of constitutional sovereignty. The activity of Polish nationals was essentially underground. Its representatives included intelligentsia, Polish army officers and entrepreneurs. Adam Mickiewicz, one of the leading figures of the national movement, inspired with his patriotism, messianism and appeals to revolutionary deed also Slovak intelligentsia. Polish national liberation movement, particularly during the period of the uprisings in 1830 – 1831 and after its fierce suppression by the Russian tsarism, triggered severe crisis. It also created fissure in the Kollarian concept of Slavic mutuality. Whilst Kollár grew estranged from Mickiewicz, Slovak young, democratically minded generation kept celebrating and venerating him.⁶ After the suppression of the revolt and the exile of majority of Polish nationally-minded politicians, intellectuals and army officers led by Adam

² ŠKVARNA, D.: 'Slovak Constitutional Visions and Attempts' [Slovenské štátoprávne predstavy a pokusy], in: *Historický časopis*, 38, 1990/4, p. 481.

³ IVANTYŠYNOVÁ, T.: *Slavic Nations and Nationalism. Ideas and Issues*. [Slovanské národy a nacionalizmus: úvahy a problémy]. In: *Ján Kollár and Slavic Mutuality. Genesis of Nationalism in Central Europe*. [Ján Kollár a slovanská vzájomnosť. Genéza nacionalizmu v strednej Európe. Kolektívna monografia. Ed. T. Ivantyšynová. Slavic Studies 4. Bratislava 2006, p.7.

⁴ BECKER, S.: 'Contribution to Nationalist Ideology. Histories of Russia in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', in: *Russian History* 13 (1986), pp 331 – 335.

⁵ KAPPELER, A.: 'Notes on Shaping the Russian Nation' [Poznámky k formovaniu ruského národa], in: *Slovanské štúdie* 2/2004, p. 24.

⁶ MATULA, V.: 'Slavic Mutuality – National Liberation Ideology in Slovak National Movement (1835 – 1849)' [Slovanská vzájomnosť – národnoslobodzovacia ideológia slovenského národného hnutia (1835 – 1849)], in: *Historický časopis*. VIII, 2–3. Bratislava: 1960, p. 252.

Czartorysky, the nature of the struggle for Polish renaissance changed. The context of exile gave rise to Polish Democratic Union. Its agenda included national liberation along with the liberation of Polish peasants from alien oppression. The endeavours of the Polish National Union culminated in 1846 in the Krakow Uprising, which was, along with its leader E. Dembowski, drowned in blood.⁷ The Spring of Nations in 1848 – 1849 caught Poland deep in demonstrations and unrest. The events were fuelled by the idea of national unification and liberation of the peoples from feudal legacy of serfdom. Even after the revolutionary period, Polish lands were in dire straits of ethnic oppression by alien superpowers. Nonetheless, each revolutionary wave brought them ever closer to the longed-for national freedom and reconstruction of Polish statehood. That came to fruition after 1918 (for instance, Polish Uprising in 1863 – 1864, despite its being suppressed, forced the tsarist administration to legislate for agrarian reform that improved the status of Polish peasants). Unlike other Slavic nations, Polish national movement contained an element of political struggle for the reconstruction of the state, an endeavour that lost none of its vigour throughout the 19th century. The same period saw Polish emancipation strongly affect culture in all its manifestations. Influential representation of Polish emigrants in France, England and Belgium enabled Polish cultural progress to combine indigenous Polish elements, whilst absorbing a number of European cultural influences ranging from Classicism, through Romanticism, all the way to Positivism and Realism of the late 19th century.

1.3 The Czechs

Czech national movement (emancipation) evolved, similarly to its Slovak counterpart, on the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy. It dates from the last third of the 18th century until 1848. The leading force came from the Czech intelligentsia (scientists, artists, clergy, teachers, as well as many Czech entrepreneurs). They sought motives for the emancipation in ancient Czech history and Slavic mutuality. In the early stages, the interest among the nationals focused on refinement of Czech codified language and advancement of Czech science, technology and culture, along with extensive public education. As early as in 1774 the Royal Czech Academic Society (Královská česká společnost nauk) emerged. Czech publishing houses opened (Václav Matej Kramerius), as did Czech theatres (Josef Kajetán Tyl, The Nostic Theatre / Nosticovo divadlo), and Czech literature was on the rise. The leading figures in the Czech emancipation movement included Josef Dobrovský, Josef Jungmann, Karel Hynek Mácha, František Palacký, Božena Němcová, and Karel Jaromír Erben. Similarly to other Slavic nations, Czech national movement evolved through different stages of maturity. First, the agenda essentially involved defence of language and early signs of interest in science, theatre, literature and journalism. They sought vantage points for patriotism and inspiration in Classicism and Enlightenment. Political context emerged from the principles of resistance to the centralising tendencies on the part of the Monarchy. Second, in c. 1805 – 1830, in addition to the by then established national activities, the emancipation movement was marked by patriotic agitation and activation of the entire society. The third period, that of the so-called Palacký generation, brought the height of the emancipation movement.⁸ By then it acquired nationwide nature both in terms of cultural progress, and definition of political agenda (for instance Austro-Slavism). During the revolution of 1848 the national movement had clearly defined its national and cultural endeavour and political vision of constitutional federation of the Monarchy. Additional political concepts of the Czech national movement included independence anchored in Czechoslovak foundations, and the political principle of the Crown of the Czech Lands.

⁷ MATVEEV, G. F. – NENASHEVA, Z. S.: *The History of Southern and Western Slavs. Vol 1. Middle Ages and Modern Times* [Istoriya Yuzhnykh i Zapadnykh Slavyan. T. 1 Sredniye veka i Novoe vremya]. Moscow: Izd. Moskovskogo universiteta, 1998, p. 539.

⁸ HLAVÁČKA, M.: 'Shaping Modern Czech Nation 1815 – 1914' [Formování moderního českého národa 1815 – 1914], in: *Historický obzor*, 2009, 20 (9/10), p. 195.

1.4 The Slovaks

Slovaks, not merely in comparison with the Magyars as a nation, but also with other nations within the Habsburg Monarchy, faced adverse ideological and political potential for their national emancipation. The handful of positive sources for the development of national ideology and political agenda included the tradition of the Great Moravian statehood, and the tradition of the autonomy of Slovak territory during the reign of Matthew Csak of Trenčín in the early 14th century, plus the period of the 16th and 17th centuries when Slovakia, along with Bratislava, created political centre and the core of the royal Greater Hungary. Slovak national movement evolved through several phases. The dawn was epitomised by the ideas of the Enlightenment and French Revolution as advocated in Greater Hungary by Hungarian Jacobines. In the late 18th century they contemplated the transformation of Hungary into federal republic as defined by ethnic borders. Slovakia (Slavonica) was to be one of the four national provinces. Their constitutional ideas considered natural ethnic principle. Though they proved unrealistic at the time, they preceded the first Slovak emancipation generation in terms of political philosophy. Its members advocated the principle of ethnic equality within Hungary. Yet they never crossed the limits of unitarian Hungarian state and patriotism. Whilst the Roman-Catholic group surrounding the priest Anton Bernolák derived national autonomy from the ancient nature of Slovaks and Slovak language (Anton Bernolák, Juraj Fándly, Ján Papánek, Jozef Ignác Bajza), Protestant nationalists (of the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Creed) contemplated the concept of Czechoslovak linguistic and national unity (Aleš Hrdlička, Bohuslav Tablic).

The second generation of Slovak nationalists was largely influenced by the philosophy and concepts advanced by Ján Kollár. Their national interest continued to favour defence of the language, literature, folk culture and the rise of national consciousness. The theme of Great Moravia resonated (for instance the poetic opus by Ján Hollý). Slavic dimension in the opus by Ján Kollár had major effect on the process of growing self-consciousness of the entire Slavic kin. Nonetheless, the accentuation of the influence of Slavic unity has also negative effect on the Slovaks. National emancipation process was weakened by the absence of identity among the Slovaks, particularly in terms of political philosophy and the ideas of own statehood.

Change came with the onset of the third generation of nationalists represented by the group surrounding linguist and politician Ľudovít Štúr. They tuned down the accent on the all-Slavic ties and focused on local, domestic issues faced by the Slovaks and Slovakia, and the development of social life. The group openly sided with Slovak national sovereignty and embarked on designing sovereign national ideology. That naturally led to the adoption of new codified language that arose directly from folk context.⁹ The group saw the solution of the Slovak issue (within Greater Hungary) to be the only proper alternative. They thus signalled federalist tendencies. After the outbreak of the revolutions in the Spring of 1848, Slovaks had been able to present, for the first time ever, their demands for autonomy of Slovakia within Hungarian federation. Hence the manifestation of constitutional and political philosophy on the part of the Slovak emancipation movement. It left lasting imprint on national consciousness and future political designs of Slovaks that were to come to fruition in the following century.

1.5 Significance of national heritage trusts in national lives of the Slavs

Slavic national heritage trusts called *matitsa* played major role in national cultural life from the second half of the 19th century particularly within the multi-ethnic Habsburg monarchy. Slavs represented over sixty percent of the population in the Monarchy. Yet they didn't have their own cultural institutions

⁹ ŠKVARNA, D.: *op. cit.*, p. 493.

and publishing houses that would publish literary works in their national languages, or organisations to support national edification and consciousness. A number of the Slavic *matitsas*¹⁰ faced the challenge of developing literary language that was decisive for the creation of modern nations not merely as cultural, but also as political commonwealths increasingly claiming their rights. They promoted their national cultures and kept enhancing their Slavic mutuality. In principle, *matitsas* followed cultural objectives. They also aimed to promote economic development of the ethnic groups concerned by publishing instructional works on economy. Virtually all Slavic nations within the Monarchy had their *matitsas*. The first to emerge was the Serbian Matitsa srbska in 1826, to be followed, five years later, by its Czech counterpart, Matice česká. In 1842 the Croats founded their Matica ilirska. 1848 saw the opening of the Galician–Russian *matitsa* in Lviv. Moravian *matitsa* (Maticе moravská) was founded in 1849. Dalmatian *matitsa* opened in Zadar in 1861.¹¹ Slovaks founded their Matica slovenská in 1863 with Slovenes following the suit a year later. Poles had three *matitsas*. On the territory of Austro–Hungary, Polish *matitsa* opened in Lviv in 1882. The territory of Silesia that was part of Prussia received Schools Matitsa for the Principality of Tešín in 1885. Finally, the Polish territory that was part of the Russian empire was given the Polish Schools Matitsa that opened in Warsaw in 1905. In 1909 Bulgarians living in the Ottoman Empire opened their Bulgarian Matitsa in Constantinople.

Some of the *matitsas* disintegrated once national liberty or sovereignty had been achieved. Yet a number of them have adapted to changing circumstances and remain in operation until today. They engage in a range of responsibilities, the key being the preservation and advancement of national culture, science and education.

The history of the Slovak Matitsa (Matica slovenská) evolved in three phases. The first period lasted from 1863, when the *matitsa* was founded, until its forced closure in 1875. The second period of 1919 – 1954 is one marked by the activity of local clubs as the *matitsa* engaged in wide range of scientific activities and in art, along with popularisation of both.¹² It was the art that proved influential, as it gave rise, under the auspices of *matitsa*, to amateur art bringing the culture of theatre, literature and music to most Slovak municipalities. From 1954 until today, Matica slovenská is a state-run scientific and culture institution.

The idea of *matitsa* was popular among Slovaks at home and abroad. After its forced closure in the city of Martin in 1875, Slovak expatriates founded Slovak Matitsa in America (Matica slovenská v Amerike) in Cleveland in 1893. The interwar period (1932 – 1940) saw Matica slovenská in Yugoslavia which then reopened there after 1990. The list of Slovak *matitsas* wouldn't be complete without the Slovak Matitsa Abroad (Zahraničná matica slovenská) that opened in Argentina in 1954 upon the initiative by exiled Slovak intellectuals who left Czechoslovakia largely after the Communist coup of February 1948.

For decades Slavic *Matitsas* remained the convenors of national life. They provided space to engage in cultural life. It was only natural that they become all too often a thorn in the eye of the ruling administration at times of oppression. It was also due to the activities of *matitsas* that Slavic peoples reached, by the end of the 20th century, the dawn of their national sovereignty. *Matitsas* made special input into the common culture of Europe. Their specific feature is that they belong at the same time to the East and the West, drawing strength from these sources of common heritage.

2 The birth of national opera in Russia

Russian music is an inseparable and instrumental part of Russian culture. Like other types of art, it reflects all phases of life of Russian society, as well as the evolution of Russian philosophy and aesthetics. The history of the Russian peoples and the idiosyncrasy of Russian nature and ordinary life are portrayed in multitude of forms and manifestations of music. By the same token, Russian music is a vital part of world culture. It cannot be perceived as detached from overall music philosophy or the flow of styles in European music context. Any marked success of Russian music carried its international significance. It is this very extent of international ties within the scope of this study – that of the high of Russian music – that became the defining feature of Russian national music. The very tie earned Russian global music recognition and made it one of the driving forces of European music.

Russian music is major part of Slavic culture, for it had long been closely related with the culture of the other Slavic nations as is manifested by intonation connected to the music of fellow Slavs. A number of Russian composers of the 17th century serve as the case. Their opuses contain Ukrainian and Belarussians intonations, or those arising from folk culture of Southern or Western Slavs. Mutual influences had major effect on shaping music language in Russian music which was determined by additional factors. Russian historian M. N. Tikhomirov remarked that the “history of the Slavs and that of Russia, when presented as detached from the history of orient, of Western Europe, that of Byzantine Empire and of the Mediterranean countries shall always come across as indistinct and somewhat random.”¹³

An examination of the evolution of national element in Russian music must explore the early days of the development of music in Russia as intertwined with social and historical developments. The end of the 14th century in Russia was marked by the victory of Russian troops led by Dmitri Donsky over the Tartar – Mongolian hoards. This gave rise to the myth of Russian invincibility. The events also served as an impulse to the rise of national consciousness and creative rise in art.¹⁴ Differentiation from Belarussians and Ukrainian culture along with the quest for common national features in Russian art proved to be important as the art evolved from idiosyncratic manifestations of Russian language. The period is marked by specific intonation related to the development of folk culture. Drawing from two types of Russian heaving folk song (lyrical and historical), new type of Russian melos emerges, the idiosyncratic Russian bel canto. The foremost tradition of Russian art of music was shaped in line with the evolution of the Russian nation. Over the subsequent centuries, music drew from these sources and further developed the initial trends.

Given the scope of this study, focus shall now move a few centuries forward to shed light on the development of the national within the intentions of classical and Romantic art within the context of development of European music. From mid-17th to the early 10th century, Russian music experienced a number of milestones. In the late 17th century throughout the early decades of the 18th century new music philosophy emerges. It is epitomised by deviation from Byzantine orientation of the early period and an inclination to the West. The decades between 1730 and 1750 bring revival of ties of Russia to other countries. It became manifested in Italian influence on the one hand, on the other by the endeavour to enhance national element in music. Synergy of the two influences is illustrated in the opera *Cephalos and Prokris* (Tsefal i Prokris, 1755) by the Italian composer Francesco Domenico Araja (1709 – 1770)¹⁵ to the libretto by Russian

¹⁰ Transl. note: *matitsa* is a transliteration of the word *matice*; its Slavic etymology denotes mother.

¹¹ ELIÁŠ, M.: *National Heritage Trusts of Slavic Nations* [Maticе slovanských národov]. Bratislava: T.R.I. Médium, 1996, p.6.

¹² ELIÁŠ, M.: *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹³ See: TIKHOMIROV, M. N.: *Russian Culture in the 10th – 18th centuries* [Russkaya kultura X – XVIII vekov]. Moscow, 1968, pp 395 – 396, based on ORLOVOVA, Y. M.: *Chapters in History of Russian Music* [Kapitoly z dejin ruskej hudby]. Bratislava: OPUS, 1962, p. 8.

¹⁴ This period is characterised by the effort to unify the fragmented feudal Russia led by the Moscow Principality.

¹⁵ Francesco Domenico Araja as the representative of *opera seria* brought this type of opera through the opera *Forza dell'amore e dell' odio* to the imperial court in St.

author Alexander Petrovich Sumarokov (1717 – 1777). In the opera, as well as in music language of other compositions of the time, the tradition of metric models of foreign dances comes hand-in-hand with distinctly national tendencies of Russian chant¹⁶ culture.¹⁷ Between 1760 and 1770 national consciousness evidently evolves along with the expansion of international ties. Italian and later French culture play an important role in Russian culture. At the time Russian music produced new element – urban folk song. It synthesised the melody of peasant song with homophone – harmonic structure of West European music. Urban song came to serve as the intonation base for Russian operas of the end of 18th century. The last two decades of the 18th century were epitomised by the development of the first professional Russian national school of composing as represented by such figures as Vasily Alexeievich Pashkevich (c. 1749 – 1797), Yevstignei Ipatyevich Fomin (1761 – 1800)¹⁸, Maksym Sozontovich Berezovsky (1745 – 1777), Dmytro Stepanovich Bortniansky (1751 – 1825), and Ivan Yevstafievich Khandoshkin (1747 – 1804). Each brought into Russian music his own style of music language and left an imprint on the constitution of Russian professional music. The composers were also linked together by shared creative tendencies: drawing from Russian song whilst adopting the latest in European professional art. They endeavoured to master professional composing, methods and forms used elsewhere in Europe.

The entire 18th century has come to play major role in the overall evolution of Russian music. It brought a multifaceted adoption of different types and sources of national intonation, with Russian urban folk song playing major role. Through the works by international composers, Russia saw revival of Italian opera (first *seria*, later also *buffa*), later French opera comique, and the works by German and Czech composers. By the same token, music by non-Russian composers who were based on Russian imperial court was penetrated by intonation of the then popular Russian urban music. It was through their music that the Russian phenomenon gradually made it beyond Russia. This is illustrated by the work by Italian composer, organ player and conductor Catterino Cavos (1775 – 1840) who spent over forty years in St. Petersburg where he also died. He played major role in the development of Russian opera.¹⁹ As conductor, Cavos brought to Russian audiences operatic works by Luigi Cherubini, Étienne Méhule, Carl Maria von Weber and others. Cavos was the first to try to use explicitly Russian features in Russian operatic production. The plots in his operas often draw from Russian history or tales. In 1815, preceding Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka by twenty years, Cavos presented the opera *Ivan Susanin*,²⁰ which is deemed to be the first Russian opera. The

plot is based on Russian historical facts.²¹ Simple peasant becomes the lead character, and the music contains Russian folk melodies.²²

Roots of Russian opera lay in musical plays as they contained ample songs popular at the time, opera (as is evidenced by the preserved librettos or fragments of oeuvres).²³ The best known and perhaps most popular play with folk instructive melodies was *The Miller Who Was A Wizard, Cheat and Matchmaker* (Melnik – koldum, obmanshchik i svat, Moscow, 1779) with music compiled by theatre violinist Mikhail Matvejevich Sokolovsky.²⁴ The period also saw the arrival of pieces with original music, though even that sometimes borrowed popular melodies.²⁵ Among the above composers, the most gifted proved to be Yevstignei Ipatyevich Fomin. He brought on stage luscious, utterly Russian play *The Coachmen at the Relay Station* (Yamshchiki na podstave, 1787), Italian opera *buffa* entitled *The Americans* (Amerikantsy, 1788) and duo-drama with closing ballet *Orpheus and Eurydice* (Orfei i Evridika, 1792). Early stages of Russian professional operatic art lay largely in the extraordinary oeuvre by Alexei Nikolajevich Verstovsky (1799 – 1862), particularly his operas *Vadim* (1832) and *Askold's Tomb* (Askoldova mogila, 1835).

It is curious that in shaping the national element in Russian opera of the 19th century critics at the time²⁶ tended to side-step the influence of the 18th century, particularly that of the Russian urban folk song. They saw it as breach to the ancient Russian peasant song traditions, subjecting the composers who used the intonations from urban folk song to harsh criticism. Nonetheless, one of the major Russian music theorists of the 20th century, Boris Vladimirovich Asafyev (1884 – 1949) pointed out wider context of the evolution of Russian national music and opera, accentuating multilateral influences on Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka and on shaping national opera in Russia. The ties of Russian music to Italian and French culture, the influence of Ukrainian and Russian folk songs, including urban folk song, and coexistence of different style trends were often discernible in opuses by a single composer.²⁷ Asafyev suggests that “Glinka captured the fundamental and substantial of what Russian music lived to in the 18th century: the inevitable integration of tunes of polyphonic song culture of ancient Russia into the progressive urban culture of West European instrumentalism.”²⁸ Historiography of the birth of Russian national opera thus has to take into account the laws of evolution of music in the 18th century as marked by the adoption of West European vocal and instrumental music. Inevitably, this was penetrated by the established and traditional customs of Russian vocal music with its logic of developing accompanying voice with its inimitable melismatic technique. It was the foundation on which Glinka built. His creative height, mature period opens with the opera *Ivan Susanin* (1836).²⁹ Glinka attached new meaning to folk

Petersburg. When he left Russian in 1762, other representatives of Italian music visited the court: Baldassare Galuppi (1706 – 1785), Tommaso Traetta (1727 – 1779), Giovanni Paisiello (1740 – 1816), Giuseppe Sarti (1729 – 1802), Domenico Cimarosa (1749 – 1801), and Vincent Martín y Soler (1754 – 1806). Italian came to dominate Russian opera for nearly five decades.

¹⁶ Russian music in the second half of the 17th century is epitomised by two closely related genres: partesan singing (liturgical polyphonic singing) and chant (polyphonic singing) which directly touched upon the melody of folk song and dance). They are characterised by new expressions within melodic and harmonic language and new shaping principles. Despite the polyphonic expression, secondary harmonic vertical axis comes to the forefront, strict metric, intense constitution of major – minor tonality as the foundation of tonal philosophy. At the same time, they began to show typical secular element, concertante principle. Theatre forms, particularly school plays where music played an important role, were instrumental for the development of secular music in the 17th century.

¹⁷ A number of music genres contain references to *canto* (oratoria, cantatas, symphonies, as well as opera), including the finale of Glinka's *Ivan Susanin* where the celebratory character of the *canto* is linked with the intonations of znamenny chant in the hymn celebrating the victory (*Epilogue. Allegro maestoso*).

¹⁸ In an attempt to support local works, the Empress Catherine II sent two of her subjects, M. S. Bortniansky and M. S. Berezovsky to study in Italy. Berezovsky composed here opera *seria* entitled *Demofonte* (Leghorn, 1773), and two additional pieces. Bortniansky composed in Italy opera *Creonte* (Venice, 1776) and, on return to Russia, he composed for the imperial court two small *opéras comiques*: *Le faucon* (1786) and *Le fils rival* (1787).

¹⁹ Catterino Cavos composed his first Russian operas in the first decades of the 19th century: *The Invisible Prince* (Knyaz-nevidimka, 1805), *Ilya Bogatyr* (1807), *Zephyr et Flore* (1808), *Ivan Susanin* (1815), and *Firebird* (Tsar-Ptitsa, 1822). The main librettist of his operas was Alexander Shakhovskoy, director of Imperial Theatres.

²⁰ On 27 November 1836 Glinka premiered his opera *Ivan Susanin* (later renamed to *A Life for the Tsar*) at the Bolshoi Theatre in St. Petersburg, home theatre to C. Cavos. Cavos received the new opera with utter delight and conducted its première.

²¹ Yet the librettist A. Shakhonskoy altered historical facts: Susanin doesn't die a hero; instead, he continues to wander across the country.

²² Choral scenes composed in style to be later advanced by Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin are of import in this context. They reached the highlight in Mussorgsky – ground voices (bases) became the bearer of the main melodic line.

²³ That is how, for instance, only the libretto has been preserved from the single-act opera *Anyta* (Tsarskoye Selo, 1772); a fragment of the music text has been preserved from the opera *The Lover – Magician* (Lyubovnik-koldun, 1772), whose author is believed to be Josif Kerzelli, conductor of Moscow theatre. Those were mostly compilations and arrangements of popular songs in style of *English opera ballads* or French *vaudeville*.

²⁴ ABRAHAM, G.: *Brief History of Music* [Stručné dejiny hudby]. Bratislava: Hudobné centrum, 2003, p. 433.

²⁵ Such were the oeuvres *Rozana and Lyubim* (Rozana i Lyubim, Moscow, 1778) by Josif Kerzelli, *Misfortune from Owning a Coach* (Neshchastie ot karety, St. Petersburg, 1779) *Saint-Petersburg's Bazaar* (Sanktpeterburskoi gostinnyi dvor, 1782) and *The Miser* (Skupoi, 1782) by Vasily Alexeievich Pashkevich. The empress Catherine II even wrote libretto to his opera *Fevei* (1786). The empress is known to have provided librettos to additional musicians as well.

²⁶ Including A. N. Serov (1820 – 1871), V. V. Stasov (1824 – 1906), V. F. Odojevsky (1804 – 1869) and G. A. Laroche (1845 – 1904).

²⁷ See ASAFYEV, B. V.: *Russian Music and the Early 20th Century* [Russkaya muzyka. XIX. i nachalo XX. veka]. Leningrad, 1968. And his other works. Based on ORLOVOVA, J. M.: *op. cit.*, 1962, pp. 109 – 113.

²⁸ Based on ORLOVOVA, Y. M.: *op. cit.*, 1962, p. 112.

²⁹ To compare, European music in this period saw emergence of the following operas: J. Meyerbeer *Les Huguenots* (1835), V. Bellini *Norma* (1831) and *I puritani* (1835), G. Donizetti *Lucia di Lamermoor* (1835). At the time of birth of his second fairy-tale opera, *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842) the following operas emerged: R. Wagner *Rienzi* (1841) and *The Flying Dutchman* (1841), G. Verdi *Nabucco* (1841).

nature of art and ethnicity in music, and introduced the principle of symphonic philosophy into all genres of music. Intonation inspiration sources include first of all the Russian peasant folk song, Ukrainian and Belarussian folk songs, znamenny chant (znamenny razpev) and chant (kant), urban folk song and romance, dance music of different kinds from the early 19th century on, and ultimately inspirations from Italian, French and German music. Glinka mastered the transformation of the wealth and diversity of inspirations to create a new meaningful synthesis. He is considered to be the founder of Russian national music whose legacy was further advanced by composers of the second half of 19th century, as particularly represented by The Mighty Handful.

3 Polish national opera

Given its size and cultural maturity, Poland has repeatedly played a major role in history of Europe. Its music achieved remarkable standard as early as during Renaissance and Baroque. The fate of more recent history, however, was cumbered by the presence of superpowers (Prussia and Russia) that gradually led to the demise of Polish independence.³⁰ The adverse social circumstances prevented Poland from making any significant mark on European music until the period of Romanticism. 19th century, however, brought the rise of nationalism. In the culturally mature, yet politically fragmented nations, it was opera to have become a powerful symbol of cultural unity. To many nations the production of own sovereign opera was among the priorities when proving their cultural maturity, independence and equal status. Adverse circumstances prevented development of symphonic forms in Polish music. Instead, traditions of national music had been retained. Only a few suppressed nations mastered to link national sentiment and romantic self-expressions as was the case of the Poles. They awaited every instant of relaxing censorship to fight with new enthusiasm for Polish oeuvres, language and artists in order to preserve national sentiment among the wide community.³¹

The first impulse for the emergence of Polish musical drama came only in the second half of the 18th century, when bourgeois society and national consciousness arose. The foundation of the first Polish National Theatre in Warsaw in 1765 sent out an impulse for the development of Polish opera. Its major boom coincides with the reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski.³² It was the very period that saw the rise of more remarkable names who largely drew from French and Italian opera. Polish composer Maciej Kamieński (1734 – 1821), originally from present-day Slovakia, is the best known among them. His singspiel *Poverty Made Happy* (Nedza uszcześliwiona, 1778) to the lyrics by Wojciech Bogusławski earned him widespread success. In terms of art, his was less mature composition as he tried to accentuate Polish national character by using Polish language and melodies leaning on national song. The success of the opera inspired the emergence of other oeuvre of similar nature. Folk tune also characterises the opera *A Miracle of Love, or Krakowiaks and Goralis* (Cud Mniemany czyli Krakowiacy i Górale, 1794) by the native of Prague, Jan Stefani (1746 – 1829). The opera *A Miracle of Love, or Krakowiaks and Goralis* has seen several stagings.

Polish nobility was closely involved in shaping modern art, as is illustrated by Antoni Jerzy Radziwiłł (1755 – 1833) with his successful attempt to compose music to Goethe's *Faust*. Another nobleman who made a marked contribution to the development of Polish music was Michał Kleofas Ogiński (1765 – 1833). The core of his work contains a number of patriotic songs, dominated by the song, *Poland Has Not Perished Yet* (Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła) which has become the national anthem.³³

Social changes on the break of the 18th and 19th centuries markedly changed the status of opera. Along with its then representative and entertaining role, opera acquired additional purposes – social, instructive and political. Operatic stage became the sole place where native tongue was used. Russian tsarist régime never attempted to destroy opera altogether and strip it of its national character (Russification was indeed contemplated), though the forms of censorship and terror were diverse and shrewd (such as the elimination of Polish singers and titles, preference given to international repertoire and interpreters, ban on featuring Polish singers at charity concerts outside opera, removal of funding and stipends, etc.). Virtually every struggle by Polish intendants, conductors and artist was one for the Polish peoples.³⁴

The onset of Romanticism brought along the idea of opera as the supreme, synthetic art form. Members of local operatic audiences thus expected the first Polish operas seria to equal the European standard for music drama productions. The pressure exerted on operatic composers to seek deeper artistic ambitions was already palpable in the first half of 19th century through the activities of Józef Elsner and Karol Kurpiński.³⁵ Józef Elsner (1769 – 1854), native of Silesia, spent time in Brno and Lviv to permanently settle, in 1799 in Warsaw. Elsner composed nineteen operas (first German, later Polish), operettas and ballets. Within his extensive opus stands out particularly the opera *King Elbow-high* (Król Lokietek, 1818).³⁶ Karol Kurpiński (1785 – 1857) headed, for three decades, Warsaw opera, having composed for the house a number of nationally coloured operas. He also made his name as author of operettas and ballets. The most successful piece in his opus magnum is the opera *Zabobon* (1816) and *Castle on Czorzstyn* (Zamek na Czorzstynie, 1819).³⁷ Neither Elsner or Kurpiński shied away from composing for special occasions. Their academic and publishing activities helped rise aesthetic standards within the community of local composers and gradually shift focus on composing.

Following the failed November revolution, 1830 brought the closure of a number of Polish institutions, including the conservatoire founded by Elsner. Further deterioration of the situation significantly undermined artistic freedom of expression.³⁸ Artistic political correctness was constantly monitored by censorship. After the November revolution music life was virtually silenced for some twenty years.³⁹ During this period Polish intelligentsia incessantly tried to use art for social and political purposes in the struggle for preservation of national identity. Still, it wasn't until the late 1850s that artistic standards in original opera acquired new strength to rise.⁴⁰

It was only the première of Moniuszko's *Halka* (to the libretto by Włodzimierz Wolski, 1858), to mark the breakthrough in the evolution of Polish music drama. During the reign of Tsar Nikolai, *Halka* didn't make it through censorship. Moniuszko revised the opera, adding a number of arias and extending the number of acts to four.⁴¹ *Halka* carries a strong social charge. It tells the story of a girl from poor home, seduced and abandoned by young nobleman. Unable to bear her fate, she takes her life.⁴² The plot is based on the bitter sense of conflict between nobility and serfs. The charm of Moniuszko's *Halka* laid in combination of Italian operatic type (melody, layout of scenes, melodrama) and extensive use of Polish music elements, particularly mazurka and polonaise rhythms, and harmonic details.⁴³ *Halka* also made it abroad. In Bohemia it was first staged as conducted by Bedřich Smetana in the Temporary Theatre (Prozatímní divadlo) in 1868. After the première of *Halka*, operatic houses in

³⁴ HRČKOVÁ, N.: *op. cit.*, pp 450 – 452.

³⁵ ZIEZIULA, G.: *Between Utilitarian and Autonomous: Polish Opera in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*. In: *De musica disserenda* III/1, 2007, p. 39.

³⁶ ŠAFAŘÍK, J.: *op. cit.*, p. 64.

³⁷ ČERNUŠÁK, G. *et al.*: *op. cit.*, p. 238.

³⁸ ZIEZIULA, G.: *op. cit.*, p. 39.

³⁹ HRČKOVÁ, N.: *op. cit.*, pp 450 – 452.

⁴⁰ ZIEZIULA, G.: *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁴¹ TVRDOŇ, J. – HRČKOVÁ, N.: *History of Polish Music* [Dějiny polské hudby]. Bratislava: Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo, 1967, pp 33, 35.

⁴² ŠAFAŘÍK, J.: *op. cit.*, pp 264, 265.

⁴³ TVRDOŇ, J. – HRČKOVÁ, N.: *op. cit.*, pp 33, 35.

³⁰ ŠAFAŘÍK, J.: *History of Music: 19th Century*. [Dějiny hudby: 19. století]. Vol. II. Věrovany: Nakladatelství Jan Piszkiwicz, 2006, p. 63.

³¹ HRČKOVÁ, N.: *History of Music V* [Dějiny hudby V]. Bratislava: Ikar, 2011, pp. 450 – 452.

³² ČERNUŠÁK, G. *et al.*: *History of European Music* [Dějiny evropské hudby]. Prague: Panton, 1974, p. 237.

³³ ŠAFAŘÍK, J.: *History of Music: 19th Century* [Dějiny hudby: 19. století]. Vol. II. Věrovany: Nakladatelství Jan Piszkiwicz, 2006, p. 64.

Warsaw and Lviv kept increasingly reaching for artistically challenging operas.

Another successful Moniuszko opera, was the comic piece *The Countess* (Hrabina, 1860) set in the context of nobility.⁴⁴ During the January uprising (1863), Moniuszko composed his third opera, *The Haunted manor* (Straszy dwór). It was also received to high acclaim on stage the opera house of the national Theatre in Prague in 1891. Despite its success, the opera was removed from the repertoire after the third performance. That set in motion incessant chain of repressions. Foremost Polish singers were removed from the opera house and Moniuszko was even forced to rewrite some parts of *Halka* that was kept on stage as replacement title in the event an Italian or other title couldn't be performed.⁴⁵

Moniuszko's proved to be major contribution to the rise of artistic standards in Polish music. As he never emigrated from Poland, he had been able to respond to the needs and interests of Polish society. He created Polish song and opera. Operatic authors – composers, librettists and stage directors – haven't then yet paid much attention to operatic style and dramaturgy. In many a case, music thus slid to be simple accompaniment to the oeuvre. Moniuszko changed the situation, having developed music action and drama. National song and dance, particularly polonaise and mazurka, remained at the core of the oeuvres. Operas by Stanisław Moniuszko represent the cornerstone of Polish repertoire and also made their way abroad.

At the end of the 19th century (1898), Władysław Żeleński, member of the Moniuszko generation, tried to resurrect national opera. Yet his work wasn't to play the historical role that played Moniuszko's operas. Żeleński composed four operas: *Konrad Wallenrod* (Lviv, 1885), *Goplana* (Krakow, 1896), *Janek* (Lviv, 1900) that drew from the melody of Sub-Galician songs, and *Stara Baśń* (Lviv, 1907). All of his operas are epitomised by romantic elements, folk stories and songs.⁴⁶ The last of the Moniuszko generation was Roman Statkowski (1860 – 1925), author of two operas: *Philaenis* to the libretto by Hermann Erler and *Maria* to the libretto by Antoni Malczewski. In both oeuvres Statkowski used some Wagnerian elements.

Despite the major effort on the part of Polish operatic composers, at the end of the 19th century, Warsaw, Lviv or Poznań were several decades behind European repertoire. At the time, Polish opera failed to produce oeuvres comparable to those of Russian or Czech origin.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the tradition that strove to preserve Polish music, hence also the nation, did prove of import and brought worthwhile impulses.

4 The nascence of Czech national opera

Czech singspiel and operatic culture arose from two fundamental pillars. The first was the extensive local folk music and theatre tradition. The second pillar embodied the ties to European production. The influence of Mozart on Czech culture context since Classicism is well known. It hasn't lost its currency until these days. In the 18th century the major figure in music drama was Jiří Benda (1722 – 1795), author of fourteen singspiels inspired by German Singspiel and melodrama. He was soon joined by Josef Mysliveček (1737 – 1781), whose twenty-one operas tend to lean more towards Italian examples. In addition to the two composers, the Czech Lands, known during Classicism as the conservatoire of Europe, gave birth to a range of authors who were less affected by Classicistic models.

The beginning of the 19th century brought change in these trends as doors started to open particularly for Prague-based audiences to the latest international works. This was in part due to Carl Maria von Weber, who briefly served at the time as kapellmeister in Prague. He brought there Beethoven's *Fidelio* (1814) or Spohr's *Faust* (1816). The creative impulses from

abroad naturally joined forces with Czech national emancipation. The endeavour bore fruit in the first attempts at original Czech musical drama that set out to equal its European counterparts. František Škroup (1801 – 1862) composed singspiel *The Tinker* (Dráteník, 1826), which was still quite filled with German, French and Italian influences. For when Škroup “embarked on composing *The Tinker*, he had no precursor or role model in Czech music.”⁴⁸ His other operas, *Oldřich and Božena* (Oldřich a Božena, 1826) or *Libuše's Marriage* (Libušin sňatek, 1835) didn't bring any breakthrough. Neither did František Bedřich Kott's operas *Žižka's Oak* (Žižkův dub, 1841) or the piece by Škroup's brother Jan Nepomuk Škroup (1811 – 1892) *The Swedes in Prague* (Švédové v Praze). Any marked rise in original Czech operatic works wasn't prevented merely by the in-existent relevant Czech examples, but particularly the pressure from German culture on theatre administration to present German works. For instance, the reputed Estates theatre (Stavovské divadlo) considered Czech singspiel performances were seen as lower folk entertainment and were “merely side discipline of German operation.”⁴⁹

There was indeed some discrepancy between local tradition and higher ideals of Romanticism: “Romanticism was, in the Czech lands, linked throughout with German Romanticism. Here, unlike in such countries as Germany or England, it lacked sufficient ground in local philosophical context. The first Romantic aesthetic views related to the idea of national emancipation and all-Slavic idea were defined on the eve of the 1848 revolution.”⁵⁰ In such context the natural musicality of Czech authors tended to focus on song and choral works fitting the atmosphere of Romanticism. Drama theatre came largely from the widespread works for amateur companies that were no short of plays with songs. The fate of national operatic culture, the emergence of emancipated Czech music drama production had to wait until the notion of national was more accurately defined. That, however, could only emerge from the major developments within the society and the arrival of outstanding creative artists.

Bedřich Smetana (1824 – 1884) proved to be the first of the kind to bring into the history of Czech operatic production the long-expected breakthrough. His personal and artistic growth were determined by many fortunate circumstances, particularly the opportunity to study in an inspiring context (namely under the tutelage of Josef Proksch who introduced Smetana to the finest examples of music of the time), societal dynamics of the revolutionary year of 1848, as well as the sabbatical in Göteborg (1856 – 1861), where the young artist matured. Additional factors include his extensive contact with orchestral practice and his personal relations with whole range of outstanding figures of the era. Exceptional talent, combined with inherent ability to dramatically develop music material naturally arose in Smetana an ambition to become operatic composer. His first operatic piece, *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia* (Braniborů v Čechách, 1866) already signalled his composing maturity. Nonetheless, the piece also drew appeal with the choice of theme that “won the opera almost revolutionary reception. It was largely due to [...] the libretto exploring national theme. The author, Karel Sabina, was one of the leaders of the 1848 revolution.”⁵¹ Despite such focus of Smetana's operatic debut, a number of critics accused the young composer of excessive style affinity to Wagner.

Smetana offered an answer in *The Bartered Bride* (Prodaná nevěsta, 1866), an opera again composed to the libretto by Karel Sabina who developed a simple folk story. *The Bartered Bride* is an authentic piece (it contains only a single quotation of a well-known Czech dance) that synthesises the fruit of European Romantic production with local folk inspirations. Smetana “was

⁴⁴ ŠAFAŘÍK, J.: *op. cit.*, p. 264.

⁴⁵ HRČKOVÁ, N.: *op. cit.*, pp 450 – 452.

⁴⁶ TVRDOŇ, J. – HRČKOVÁ, N.: *op. cit.*, pp 38, 40.

⁴⁷ ŠAFAŘÍK, J.: *op. cit.*, pp 264 – 266.

⁴⁸ ŠÍP, L.: *Czech Opera and Its Authors* [Česká opera a její tvůrci]. Prague: Supraphon, 1983, s. 15.

⁴⁹ ČERNUŠÁK, G. et al.: *op. cit.*, p. 279.

⁵⁰ ČERNÝ, J. et al.: *Music in Czech History* [Hudba v českých dějinách]. Prague: Editio Supraphon, 1989, p. 332.

⁵¹ EÖSZE, L.: *The Ways of Opera* [Cesty opery]. Bratislava: Štátne hudobné vydavateľstvo 1964, p. 464.

able to avoid the pathos of grand opera, as well as simplistic frivolity of ordinary farce.”⁵² Another dimension that Smetana mastered, was the balanced and fresh relationship between lyrical and comic scenes.

The historical operatic fresco *Dalibor* (1868) demonstrates Smetana’s effort to use music flow of prosody of the Czech language, something that was vital for the emancipation of the Czech within global context of opera. Smetana worked thoroughly with distinctive motives. Yet, unlike Wagner, he developed them extensively and varied them along with the development of the plot, situations, characters and their relationships.

By 1872 Smetana presented yet another grand historical fresco, the opera *Libuša*. Though in both cases he reached for major themes in the history of the Czechs, which he developed into fine orchestral and vocal piece, the dramatic plot seemed to have been stuck in both oeuvres. They resemble instead generous epical platforms that miss some attributes of authentic music drama composition.

The paradox in Smetana’s work lays in that after he grew deaf in 1874, he composed four fresh operas set in folk context: *The Two Widows* (Dve vdovy, 1874), *The Kiss* (Hubička, 1876), *The Secret* (Tajemství, 1878) and *The Devil’s Wall* (Čertova stěna, 1882). These, as “his final works, are characterised by classical maturity. Lyrically tuned, simple folk-like and fresh, *The Kiss* – to refer to Hanslick – was a soothing balm for the nerves of the audience exhausted by Wagner’s music drama. [...] In a number of respects, *The Kiss* represents the height of the great master’s dramatic art.”⁵³

Interestingly, though Smetana first intended to articulate new Czech national opera against the background of great themes from Czech national history, he fared better when working with simple images from ordinary life.

One could arguably ask where does, after all, lay Smetana’s contribution, given that such works are well-known in a whole range of folk plays, such as those written in style of German singspiel. It is largely the brilliant music language that brings together the grasp of international production with marked individual inventiveness. Moreover, Smetana made his mark as an outstanding music dramatist able to develop the storyline hand-in-hand with the flow of music. The two thus shape each other in surprisingly effective music drama result. Ultimately, Smetana managed to give his operatic stories (particularly those set in the simple folk context) an imprint of existential authenticity and deep ethical message. Smetana, when developing the national element, seemed to have fared better in the field that built upon the tradition of comic opera. That might be also attributed to the nature of Czech audiences. The very simple themes from folk context enabled Smetana to advance the national element in his works. They also stirred him away from the inspirations that affected at the time the monumental stories of, say, German mythology.

Antonín Dvořák (1841 – 1904) was the second composer who substantially influenced the development of Czech national opera. Similarly to Smetana, Dvořák was also given musical schooling in the Czech context that offered, in the 19th century, a range of inspiring impulses. Along with his engagements as violist and organist, he was also a tutor. As composer he made his debut with the first series of *Slavonic Dances* (1878) that opened door for him on international stages. Indeed, his oeuvre is universal with his finest works being part of European repertoire.

“Dvořák’s art, similarly to Smetana’s, represents a particular Classical – Romantic synthesis. His own extensive fund, firmly anchored in folk music, is manifested by fresh melody, elemental rhythm, clear harmony, smooth horizontal flow of

music language, and rich sound. Dvořák’s artistic growth was influenced by Beethoven and particularly Schubert, later by Liszt and Wagner, as well as by Smetana and Brahms. They provided fertile ground for Dvořák’s authenticity. His attempt at Slavic touch often gave his music special tint [...]”⁵⁴

In terms of international reception, Dvořák, author of nine symphonies, numerous concertos, concert preludes, programme compositions or chamber pieces, did surpass Smetana. His extensive operatic opus, upon which he embarked, as he explained “not because of being hungry for fame, but because I consider opera to be the most beneficial work for the nation,”⁵⁵ naturally shows signs of phenomenal mastery of composition. That, however, doesn’t always coincide with matching perfection in terms of the relationship between music and storyline. From among his operas (*Alfred* – 1870, *King and Charcoal Burner* / *Král a uhlíř* – 1871, *The Stubborn Lovers* / *Tvrď palice* – 1874, *Vanda* – 1875, *The Cunning Peasant* / *Šelma sedlák* – 1877, *Dimitri* – 1882, *The Jacobin* / *Jakobín* – 1888, *The Devil and Kate* / *Čert a Káča* – 1899, *Rusalka* – 1900, *Armida* – 1903) it is no doubt *Rusalka* to stand out. The piece, to the libretto by Jaroslav Kvapil, existentially reaches beyond the fairy-tale world to raise a question about human existence. This approach proved to be an excellent opportunity to exploit Dvořák’s eruptive creative mind. Given the universal nature of the theme, *Rusalka* speaks to audiences worldwide.

Zdeněk Fibich (1850 – 1900) as major composer complements the opuses by Smetana and Dvořák within the context of the strive for the articulation of Czech national opera. His operas *Bukovín* (1871), *Blaník* (1877), *The Bride of Messina* (Nevěsta mesinská, 1883), *The Tempest* (Bouře, 1894), *Hedy* (1896), *Šárka* (1897) and *The Fall of Arkun* (Pád Arkuna, 1898) represent yet another major input to the evolution of Czech national opera.

The above portrait focused on authors who stood at the birth of Czech opera. Instead of offering a comprehensive summary or comparing their works and qualities, the analysis examined national criterion in their operatic works. That enabled spontaneous public consensus in adopting their operatic works as national. Therefore, when speaking of Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride* as a universally accepted national opera of the Czechs, the reality isn’t directly related to the quality – better or poorer – of the piece. The national criterion, as outlined in the opening parts of this study, is heterogenous one. An assessment thus lays far from the evaluation of music and dramatic qualities of the oeuvres concerned.

5 Operatic production in Slovakia from early days to the emergence of Slovak national opera (1778 – 1948)

“The beginnings of opera in Slovakia are linked to the cultural development in Bratislava that was strongly affected by Vienna [...]. It is likely that Bratislava became acquainted with opera before 1740. Yet what can be considered to be an invasion of Italian opera only dates to the arrival of the outstanding operatic company of Pietro Mingotti in 1840s [...].”⁵⁶ Historical documents also speak of productions by operatic companies in the environs of Bratislava. Since 1871 there are reports about operatic performances in the city of Košice in Eastern Slovakia. Operatic performances, however, were exclusively related to international authors.

Late 18th century brought new oeuvres created on the territory of present-day Slovakia. Polish operatic composer Maciej Kamiński (1734 – 1821), who was born in Western Slovakia, composed the opera *Misery Made Happy* (Nędza uszcześliwiona) that premièred in Warsaw in 1778. As suggested

⁵⁴ ČERNUŠÁK, G. et al.: *op. cit.*, p. 289.

⁵⁵ ŠÍP, L.: *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁵⁶ CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, M.: Theatre in Slovakia in The Period of Feudalism (12 – 18th Centuries) [Divadlo na Slovensku v období feudalizmu (12. – 18. storočie)]. In: *Chapters in History of Slovak Theatre. From Ancient Times to Realism* [Kapitoly z dejín slovenského divadla. Od najstarších čias po realizmus]. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1967, p. 143.

⁵² EÖSZE, L.: *Ibid.*

⁵³ EÖSZE, L.: *op. cit.*, p. 466.

earlier in this study, it is deemed to be the first Polish opera. Kamiński composed an additional six operatic pieces, of which four to Polish and two to German librettos. Polish music theorist Zdzisław Jachimecki characterises Kamiński's music language as follows: "The motives ... create language that is common to the entire Europe of the time, a language without too a specific vocabulary. In the generally used dialect one only exceptionally finds an individual means of expression."⁵⁷

Another opera that deserves particular mention is *Count Pikkó and Jutka Perzsi* (Pikkó Hertzeg és Jutka Perzsi, 1793) by Jozef Chudý (1751/3 – 1813), whose surname is Slavic or perhaps even Slovak. The piece is considered to be the first Hungarian opera. The opera *The Escape of Béla* (Béla futása) by Jozef Ružička (born c. 1775) that premiered in Buda, was also written in Hungarian.

Even though the above authors came from Slovakia (whilst there is no certainty about their Slovak origin), it is not enough a reason to consider their works to be Slovak. The factors for the argument also include the fact that the oeuvres were written in other language than Slovak. Furthermore, their composition style was universal, whilst essentially referring to Italian and possibly Austrian inspirations. Even the hints at Hungarian folk culture in Jozef Ružička don't support any Slovak ambition for his appropriation.

19th century brought to Slovakia extensive amateur activities in culture. They largely focused on drama theatre of all kinds and standards, and on plays with songs. "Romanticism of the 19th century that set in motion, virtually all across Europe, the emergence of national operatic schools. In Slovakia political and social conditions weren't conducive for the production of original operatic productions. The territory of Slovakia – at the time called Upper Hungary – lacked institutions that would have facilitated development of the supreme of musical drama genres. Though members of Slovak intelligentsia did contemplate the creation of Slovak national opera (such as Ján Kollár [...] or at least they thought of using folk elements in authored works (Svetozár Hurban Vajanský) [...]), there weren't authors competent enough to create a concrete artistic artefact, and institutions to present it to public."⁵⁸

In the 19th century, two recognised Slovak authors composed operatic pieces. Alexander Kapp (1820 – 1876) composed school opera *The Sons of Jacob* (Jakubovi synovia) to the Hungarian libretto based on the *Book of Genesis*. The piece fails to show any signs of major creative distinction. The delay in the emergence of operatic production in Slovakia is also illustrated by the fact that the above late Classicistic opus premiered in 1867, when Verdi composed his grand romantic historical fresco *Don Carlos*, and Wagner's portfolio already contained *Tristan and Isolde*,⁵⁹ an oeuvre that signalled the transformation of Romanticism to modern music drama. Hence, Slovakia was nearly two style periods behind.

Ján Levoslav Bella (1843 – 1936) was another 19th-century Slovak operatic composer. Perhaps inspired by Smetana's *Libuša*, he started composing, in the second half of the 1870s, the opera *Jaroslav and Laura* to the Czech text by Václav Pok Poděbradský. Yet Bella's language did not meet the criteria of musical drama composition. He thus stopped the endeavour after having completed the first few scenes. Slovak music theorist Ernest Zavorský writes about Bella's fragment: "the composition is de facto a lyrically elevated aria rather than a dramatic scene. Nothing happens. [...] The core of the composition doesn't lay as much in vocal performance, but in the orchestra instead."⁶⁰ Different fate awaited another Bella's oeuvre, the opera *Wieland*

the Blacksmith (Kováč Wieland, 1890), which he composed based on German master by Oskar Schlemm (*Drei Damen*). The German text and the theme that draws from ancient Nordic tales signalled Germanising style of the piece. Indeed, Bella's music language does approach Wagner's composition style. The libretto is too complex and the storyline incomprehensible. Some scenes are unnecessarily lengthy and cover multitude of issues, whilst the storyline on stage is quite modest, virtually none [...]. The characteristic of roles is not thoroughly refined, what also applies to the lead character."⁶¹ Though the opera does contain some rather successful dramatic scenes and offers humanistic message, when it comes to its aspiration to be the national opera, these pros cannot outweigh the cons. The same applies to the Alexander Kapp opera *The Sons of Jacob*. The opera in the style of Vienna Classicism written in Hungarian, or the other one, *Wieland the Blacksmith*, in Wagnerian style with Germanic theme and in German, can hardly be identified with Slovak national element.

The adoption and legitimation of national element in the nascent Slovak national opera was (at least in part) four-fold through the use of 1. national language that evidently arose from the traditions of Slovak national music (meaning folk music, as older authored works were inexistent), 2. theme linked to Slovak national history, 3. language of libretto, and 4. national institution to present the oeuvre. Alas, none of the criteria applied to the above oeuvres. At the end of the 19th century, fellow Slavic cultures – Czech and Russian – enjoyed extensive national production and identified evident features of their national opera. Meanwhile, Slovak operatic culture wasn't de facto even in the cradle yet. The development of national element in opera proved increasingly difficult. The issue arose about how to construct the national within the context of foreign musical drama genre, and where to find stepping stones along the quest. An additional dilemma was the possibility of traditional Slovak national culture with its rustic roots to be in fundamental conflict with the artificial nature of opera. In just a few decades the Czech culture, when articulating its own operatic production, was able to rely on a more extensive tradition of older theatre opus and staging practice linked, to part, to traditional music (for instance plays with songs originating from rural and urban context, performances by comedians, extensive puppetry tradition, etc.). Moreover, it had at its disposal more extensive network of ties with current European production. A question thus arose whether the synthesis of Slovak folk element with the principles of operatic theatre might prove fundamentally unattainable. The quest for the answers went on to the subsequent century.

An attempt by Slovak composer Friso Kafenda (1883 – 1963) to create a new operatic piece *Vilín* to the libretto by Slovak author Svetozár Hurban Vajanský failed at the outset: Vajanský died before having completed the libretto. It is unclear what result arose from yet another attempt, that by the Slovak US-based physician Miloslav Francisci (1854 – 1926) to create Slovak romantic opera entitled *Rhea Silvia*, as no related material has been preserved.

The opening of the opera house within the Slovak national Theatre in 1920 proved to be a milestone in the history of Slovak operatic practice. In 1926 it hosted the premiere of Bella's *Wieland the Blacksmith*, moreover with Slovak libretto as translated by a major literary figure, Vladimír Roy. That, however, did not change the Wagnerian non-Slovak nature of the piece.

Another operatic attempt in the 20th century was *Detvan* (1926, premiered at the Opera of the Slovak National Theatre in 1928) by the Slovak composer Viliam Figuš-Bystrý (1875 – 1937). The piece is based on the epic lyrical poem by one of the major figures in Slovak literature Slovak, Andrej Sládkovič. Libretto was written by yet another foremost Slovak author, Emil Boleslav Lukáč. Figuš-Bystrý aimed to create piece that would prove, in nature, genuinely national. When composing he relied

⁵⁷ JACHIMECKI, Z.: *Polish Music in Historic Development* [Muzyka polska w rozwoju historycznym]. Vol. I, part II. Krakow: 1951, p. 58.

⁵⁸ VAJDA, I.: *Slovak Opera. Operatic Works by Contemporary Slovak Composers and Their Predecessors* [Slovenská opera. Operná tvorba súčasných slovenských skladateľov a ich predchodcov]. Bratislava: Opus, 1988, p. 16.

⁵⁹ VAJDA, I.: *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁶⁰ ZAVARSKÝ, E.: *Ján Levoslav Bella. Life and Work* [Ján Levoslav Bella. Život a dielo]. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1955, p. 209.

⁶¹ VAJDA, I.: *Ibid.*

on quotations from nine Slovak folk songs. The potential for the piece to be Slovak laid – to a point – in the choice of Slovak theme, Slovak language and in the attempt to quote Slovak folk music. Yet if *Detvan* ends up being deemed to be an attempt, it is because its musical drama qualities do not meet stricter criteria: “Figuš-Bystrý, lyricist by nature, didn’t manage to master the technique of what makes a piece feature-length. He arranged individual fragments utterly mechanically in hope that the simple sum results in a grand form. It ended up creating a conglomerate of rather disparate elements without inner thread.”⁶² Figuš-Bystrý could have leaned on the harmony of ancient modes, such as lydian or mixolydian scales, that are characteristic for the Slovak region of Detva where *Detvan* is set. Yet he did not grasp even this opportunity.⁶³

In addition to *Detvan*, 1920s saw the emergence of additional oeuvres: *The Arrival of Slovaks / Goldilocks* (Príchod Slovákov / Zlatulička, 1925) by Jozef Grešák (1907 – 1987) and *Radúz and Mahuliena* (Radúz a Mahuliena, 1926) by František Dostalíka (1896 – 1944). The fragments of his opera *Herod and Herodias* (Herodes a Herodias, 1927), have never been found, similarly to the score to the opera *Mal'ka* (1934) by Ján Fischer-Kvetoň (1896 – 1963). On the contrary, the score has been preserved from the later opera *The Lad / Jánošík* (Junák (Jánošík, 1938) by Ferdinand Steller-Šteliar (1897 – 1982). These operas either haven’t been preserved or failed to meet the basic criteria for operatic composition.

It is characteristic for the oeuvres of the period that, though they have already been emancipated as Slovak (librettos in Slovak, attempts to quote folk songs), they weren’t of adequate quality. This applies to the highly productive composer Jozef Rosinský (1897 – 1973). He composed the singspiel *The Comedians of Romania* (Rumunskí komedianti, 1927 or 1926) and operas *Mataj* (1931, premièred in the Slovak National Theatre – hereafter referred to as the SND – in 1933), *Matthew of Trenčín* (Matúš Trenčiansky, 1934, premièred in the SND in 1936), *The Death of Love* (Smrť lásky, 1936 – 1937 or 1938), *Čalmak* (1938, premièred in the SND in 1940), *Lambert* (1937 or 1940), *Palmýra / By The Rivers of Babylon* (Palmíra / Pri vodách Babylónie, 1939 – 1941 or 1938), *The Exile* (Exulant, 1938 – 1939 or 1942) and others. “Rosinský’s operas contain a number of remarkable passages /arias, ensembles, choral scenes, dance and/or choral-dance sections) with primarily lyrical or dance character. Rosinský lacked a sense for drama, as is demonstrated by his choice of themes and approach to libretto. The lack inner drama, desired literary-dramatic standard and greater originality. His is largely an eclectic neoromantic stream [...]”⁶⁴

Ján Móry (1897 – 1978) composed three musical dramas for children and youth: *Buckelpeter* (*Hrbatý Petriček*) (1926, performed by professional and semi-professional companies in the Slovak region of Spiš), a play with songs *The Madonna of Levoča* (Levočská Madona presented in 1935 on Brno radio) and *Goldilocks* (Zlatovláska, 1943, never performed).

Major contributors to the attempt at late constitution of Slovak national opera include the representative of Slovak music Modern Alexander Moyzes (1906 – 1984) and Ladislav Holoubek (1913 – 1994). Moyzes’ radio opera (and/or oratorio-cantata) *Svätopluk* (duration less than an hour, also performed on Bratislava radio and at the SND opera in 1935) was inspired by the eponymous epic by one of Slovakia’s foremost literary figures Ján Hollý. “In his oeuvre Moyzes managed to confidently link the storyline of the opera and the resultant vocal parts with the demands for logical formal construction of symphonic piece. He thus proved his dramatic abilities, though the extent of the composition didn’t allow for their further development. Given the historical theme of the piece, we see in

Moyzes ... archaizing tendencies, particularly in terms of tonality, which he resolves by new means. His archaizing is closely linked to the intention to create a Slovak historical opera, along with the deepening of national character of music,”⁶⁵ says about the piece Slovak composer and music theorist Ladislav Burlas. Another music theorist, Igor Vajda adds: “In terms of music language, *Svätopluk* represents Moyzesian style that builds upon the fruit of Impressionism and Expressionism particularly in harmony, melody and orchestration. Meanwhile, the rhythmic aspect and form are rather Classicistic (and/or neo-Classicistic). Overall oratorical concept was probably inspired by comparable works by Stravinsky from his neo-Classicist period (*Oedipus Rex / Oidipus Rex, The Psalm Symphony / Žalmová symfónia*). This demonstrates Moyzes’ ability to promptly respond to the developments in the world of music, namely one of the then modern developmental trend in European music, though not by mechanical adoption, as he undeniably remained faithful to himself.”⁶⁶ Yet Vajda instantly adds that despite the definite positive aspects of the oeuvre, the radio or concert stage form of *Svätopluk* couldn’t fully fill the space earmarked for Slovak national opera as stage musical drama.

Among the works by Ladislav Holoubek, composer and long-term conductor at the SND Opera, three of his finest deserve a mention. Opera *Stella* emerged in three phases: in 1937 – 1938, 1948 – 1949, and in 1954 – 1955. Since only the last of the three versions has been preserved, being written after 1949 (when Slovak national opera was already articulated), it shall not be subject to further analysis herein.

From among all opuses mentioned in this part, Holoubek’s *Dawn* (Svitanie, 1940, premièred at the SND in 1941) approaches most closely the ideal of modern musical drama, the libretto of which is linked to Slovak theme, whilst the music also draws from Slovak traditional sources. Holoubek was drawn by the poem *Herodes* by Svetozár Hurban-Vajanský that bears wholly dramatic theme: deportations of Slovak victims in the final years of Habsburg Monarchy to the lower regions of Greater Hungary in order to convert them to Magyar culture and language. The libretto by Jarko Elen-Kaiser is, except for a few scenes, concentrated with fine knowledge of musical drama composition. Holoubek was positively inspired by Czech neo-Romanticists, namely Smetana and Foerster. He skilfully quotes motives and themes from Slovak and Czech folk songs. The opera “stands out with exemplary declamation of sung word.”⁶⁷ “The inclination to music form of the so-called absolute music, folk colours and ballade-like elements make the *Dawn* the precursor of *The Whirlpool*”⁶⁸, though the music language of the opera doesn’t cross the limits of major – minor tonality and functional harmony.”⁶⁹ Another notable Holoubek piece is the opera for children *Longing* (Túžba, 1944). As a title designated for child audiences, this opus shall not be considered among broader attempts at the national opera.

The development of Slovak operatic production has been significantly influenced by the composer and outstanding music theorist Jozef Kresánek (1913 – 1986) with his opera *The Gold of Kremnica* (Kremnické zlato, 1945). The oeuvre bears a number of fresh transformations and imitations of Slovak, largely dance folk intonations.⁷⁰ Alas, its musical drama construction didn’t prove a success.

Rudolf Macudziňský (1907 – 1986) also deserves a mention for his artistic endeavour. His opera *Monte Christo* (1949) demonstrates his maturity as composer able to draw inspiration from a range of sources. It comes across through the neo-Romantic language of the opera, along with a number of

⁶² VAJDA, I.: *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁶³ KRESÁNEK, J.: ‘Evolution of Music Life and the Struggle for Modern Positioning of Slovak Music in the Independent State’ [Rozvoj hudobného života a zápas o modernú orientáciu slovenskej hudby v samostatnom štáte]. In: *History of Slovak Music* [Dejiny slovenskej hudby]. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1957, p. 388.

⁶⁴ VAJDA, I.: *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁶⁵ BURLAS, L.: *Alexander Moyzes*. Bratislava: Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1956, p. 145.

⁶⁶ VAJDA, I.: *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁶⁷ BUKOVINSKÁ, J.: *An Artistic Portrait of the Composer and Artist-Laureate Ladislav Holoubek* [Umelecký profil dirigenta a skladateľa zaslúžilého umelca Ladislava Holoubka]. Master’s thesis at the Department of Music Theory, Bratislava: Faculty of Music, Academy of Performing Arts, 1982, p. 63.

⁶⁸ That was destined to become the Slovak national opera; note by P. Smolík.

⁶⁹ VAJDA, I.: *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁷⁰ VAJDA, I.: *op. cit.*, p. 34.

quotations of fellow composers. Though it cannot be deemed an eclectic piece, the opera doesn't show sign of marked musical drama synthesis.

6 National element in Russian, Polish, Czech and Slovak operatic production: preliminary summary

The above text characterised the evolution of the national element in selected Slavic countries with the focus on the 19th century and its influence on the national operatic production in the countries in focus. Even though social and political circumstances in Russia, Poland, the Czech Lands and Slovakia differed, the genesis of their national element is marked by a number of shared moments.

First and foremost, national element emerged everywhere. It was connected to the wider European context where new circumstances developed in mutual interaction of territorial redefinition of states and socio-cultural classification of modern nations.

Second, the four cultures in focus essentially experienced nationalist movement through the same means: principally associations, clubs, *matitsa* activities etc.. Hence, the driving forces emerged largely from the grassroots level along with the natural maturing of national consciousness.

Third, in all four nations, national trends gradually surfaced in competition with other interests. They were internal – the pressure on constitutional arrangement competing with national criteria, and external – the pressure from other state and/or national cultures eliminating that of the nation in question.

Four, all aforementioned nations struggled with the challenge of how to link national mentality embodied in traditional folk culture with the global and supranational nature of operatic genre. In practice it meant coming to terms especially with the specifics of Italian, German and French influence.

The differences in the evolution of national element were determined by the state of affairs in each particular nation. Russians represented a powerful and in principle autonomous state unit. The Poles, despite their size and deep historical roots, lived under the administration of Austria, Russia and Prussia. The Czechs, though a relatively small culture, enjoyed relative independence. That, however, was altogether absent for the Slovaks.

These circumstances were reflected in culture were examined here through the lens of development of national operatic cultures. The principal criterion for the evolution of these cultures was their opportunity to be confronted, over long time, with the widest possible range of international influences. When thus comparing the development in, for instance. Between the Czech Lands and Slovakia some enormous differences become instantly apparent. When it comes to music and theatre culture, the Czechs were more open to Europe since the 18th century. From the early 19th century they enjoyed major influx of international influences. That was closely related to the degree of liberty, hence to the criterion of power. The extent of liberty determined the degree of national emancipation. Without its theatres, namely the Estates Theatre (est. 1783), the Temporary Theatre (est.1862) and the National Theatre (est.1881), Prague would have no platform to stage international music drama works. The city would have thus found itself in a situation similar to Slovakia with its limited opportunities. The extent of state and national liberty thus determines the degree of cultural potential and its effect on wider positive confrontation with international context. It was this particular confrontation that rose awareness of the vital role it plays in cultural progress of a nation.

Slovakia was hardly accepted in Greater Hungary as a cultured minority. It had fatal effect on the development of Slovak operatic production in comparison with the Czech Lands. Before the Czech national movement was able to rise in the 19th century, the fusion of international and local elements occurred

quite naturally, and Czech national opera emerged. Slovakia had to go through the long operatic history up to 1948 without being able to convincingly present any oeuvre to be considered, on the basis of national emancipation and music drama criteria, representative of national element in opera. In 1948, in terms of creating national opera, Slovakia lagged a century behind the Russians, Poles or Czechs. At the time it still stood at the very starting point. The breakthrough came in 1949 when Slovaks were at last given their national opera.

7 The Whirlpool – late fruit of Slovak national movement

In 1949, Slovak composer Eugen Suchoň presented his opera *The Whirlpool* (Krútnava). "Slovaks were catching up on what they had missed. It doesn't mean, however, that they would have experienced the same cultural development as had been the case for other, more, bigger nations throughout the 19th century. Though the [Slovak] National Theatre was named after its Prague-based counterpart, the circumstances surrounding its foundation and further evolution were altogether different. Slovak operatic production, too, had to build upon different foundations than those upon which the Czech national opera emerged a century earlier. Eugen Suchoň, thirty-three-year-old composer and tutor at the conservatoire in Bratislava, was well aware of the situation when, in 1941, he started to work with the librettist Štefan Hoza on his first opera *The Whirlpool*. He was also aware that he would only win Slovak audiences, if he didn't drop his artistic standards and ambitions, and managed to bring together inspiration arising from folk song with modern methods of composing. He also realised that his theme had to draw from the life of ordinary Slovak folk, if the piece were to comment on serious and everlasting issues of human existence."⁷¹

Suchoň and Honza reached for a story which, though set in folk context, bears moral legacy that reaches beyond the set framework. *The Whirlpool* is a crime story: on a hill behind a village, villagers find the body of Ján Štelina. He left behind his beloved Katrena who soon marries Ondrej Zimoň. She is pregnant. The father of the deceased, Štelina senior, hopes that the child is his son's. The old man grows suspicious that it was Zimoň who murdered his son in order to win over Katrena. Štelina decides to prove this. Yet, driven by conscience, Zimoň confesses to the crime. Though it turns out that the child's father is Zimoň, Štelina accepts the child as his in a highly cathartic (though no 'cheap') gesture. After all, the child's father is to spend long time in jail.

The theme – had it inspired an opera that would have emerged in Slovakia a few decades earlier – would carry every potential to come across as trite. Nonetheless, Suchoň together with Hoza did their best to avoid the risk. First, they set the storyline that takes place between the two lead characters into confrontation with choral scenes. Chorus doesn't come across simplistically as village folk, but it also serves the role of narrator. Suchoň employs an approach which evokes the ancient principle in Antique drama (where chorus is the narrator and often the tribune of the evolving events). He thus gains quasi-epical distance from the utterly dramatic story. The distance enables him to highlight the plasticity of the piece. As dramatist, he thus also gained two additional bonuses. First, he hinted at the epical principle that moves the piece towards progressive means of expression as used in some European drama of the time. Second, in terms of the role of the chorus as dramatic character, the folk (the bearer of traditional moral values within Christian world) becomes the carrier of moral categorical imperative. That means a definite dramatic and content accent carried by legible formal means of the quasi-Antique chorus.⁷² In addition to the dramatic

⁷¹ ZVARA, V.: *The Whirlpool Fifty Years On* [Krútnava po päťdesiatich rokoch]. *The Whirlpool*, Bulletin of the Opera of Slovak National Theatre. Bratislava: SND, 1999, pp 8-9.

⁷² The authors decided to enhance the epical frame of the piece with drama characters of the Poet and Double, the Poet's alter-ego. Their acts are placed in between individual operatic scenes. The two characters then contemplate the most fundamental issues of human existence. The storyline is so captivating that such frame seems to pose a barrier to it and doesn't help the oeuvre. After all, it is also something that most producers realised who removed the characters of the Poet and Double from the story.

methods that make *The Whirlpool* a live and fresh modern piece of the time, the oeuvre benefits from natural contemporary language spared of artificially-sounding archaisms.

Suchoň's philosophy of music language deserves special mention, as explained by the music theorist Igor Vajda: "In terms of the use of composing methods, the music form of *The Whirlpool* presents an original synthesis of earlier evolution of European music (with the exception of the Vienna school and its followers) and the understanding of principles of opera. Suchoň inimitably linked romantic inspiration and passion with classical structure, including the pre-Romantic styles, particularly Impressionism on one hand, with polyphonic work of the height of Baroque on the other hand. Together with the modal elements of the older Slovak folk song (tetrachordal and kvintachordal), he transformed them into signature music language."⁷³ Vajda adds: "Musicians and dramatists are drawn to *The Whirlpool* largely by its original solution of the eternal dualism of music and drama in operatic form. History of music has only a handful of exceptional authors who managed to bring together the two components into an ideally balanced whole. *The Whirlpool* is among them. Suchoň implemented the idea of structuring musical drama as scheme in the so-called absolute music form. Probably inspired by R. Strauss, F. Busoni and A. Berg, he decided to assign the entire piece the foundation of a sonata in a wider sense, without falling into the Procrustean trap of adapting drama to music."⁷⁴

An additional strong point in Suchoň's music language is his use of declamation. The music theorist Markéta Štefková compares it to Janáček's *Jenůfa*: "From among Janáček's oeuvres it is *Jenůfa* that seems to be the closest to the poetics of *The Whirlpool*. It is illustrated, inter alia, by the accent attached to the natural declamation determined by the monumental mental state of characters."⁷⁵ Štefková, however, also points out that the two oeuvres are related, in a sense by "the use of quasi-folk material, dominance of the vocal element or the proximity of some dramaturgical moments."⁷⁶

A range of earlier Slovak operatic pieces did quote folk songs and dances. The method was the consequence of the vain attempts to create Slovak national opera. As long as Suchoň intended, in mid-20th century, to compete with mature European music drama, he couldn't satisfy himself with folk quotations only. He opted for a more stimulating and reliable method: to compose *The Whirlpool* he defined harmonic melodic material on the threshold of freely understood tonality and modality. It were the very modal methods, his own and those used in Slovak folk culture to give *The Whirlpool*, quite naturally, its folk character. Suchoň was then able to proceed composing – within the limits of the material – utterly freely and creatively in the original sense.

The première of *The Whirlpool* in 1949 in the Opera of the Slovak National Theatre, and shortly afterwards in Prague, brought an apparent breakthrough in the history of Slovak operatic production. Slovakia was at last given its national opera, as most critics realised instantly at the first première and others soon followed the suit.

Communist censorship in Czechoslovakia curiously affected the fate of *The Whirlpool*. As the libretto contains references to Christian culture, the censorship forced the author to change the passages. It even achieved change in the storyline, demanding to remove the cathartic (Christian) moment of the selfless act of Štelina's forgiveness and his adoption of the murderer's child. The authorities established that the child was the offspring of the

murdered Štelina Jr., an extramarital offspring. That suited the anti-Christian attitude of the Communist régime, wishing to thus violate the original version. It took years for some producers to gather the courage to return to the original version.

"The circumstances under which *The Whirlpool* made it gradually abroad, to the East and West, were quite curious. Along with the performances in Leipzig, Tbilisi, Budapest or Moscow, it was the presentation of the oeuvre on the other side of the Iron Curtain that made a major contribution to the promotion of Slovak art. Naturally, circumstances in the East and West were diametrically different. The East practiced strict doctrine of Socialist Realism dictating the Zhdanovian theses of partisanship, class and folk identity. Through the lens of such ideological scheme, the universally comprehensible themes arising from the context of simple folk seemed acceptable, even desirable. In this sense, there is some continuity in operatic production with traditional forms of Romantic opera. Given the inability of analytical reflection on the part of the wardens of ideological values of Communism, *The Whirlpool*, after the revisions, was deemed to be the exemplary opus of Socialist Realism. As such, it features on a number of stages across Eastern Bloc.

In the West, the situation was fundamentally different after 1950. Articulation of national cultures was largely deemed to be a relic. Music trends emerged that were to help the way out of the difficult situation in which music culture found itself in the first half of the 20th century. The crisis of tonal system and exhaustion of traditional tonal music that was past its zenith, plus the agony in late Romanticism and verismo called for a solution. Authors sought it in structural and expressional means of serialism, multiserialism, punctualism, aleatory, or alternative electroacoustic music. Against the background of these trends, *The Whirlpool* might have come across as somewhat lifeless anachronism. Yet, an increasing number of Western intendants of operatic houses were captured by the score and decided to stage the piece. The reception of the productions of *The Whirlpool* was often more positive than were the general and theoretical deliberations about the inclusion of the piece into the context of European works. The irrefutable music quality and music dramatic credibility largely overshadowed formal objections."⁷⁷

Conclusion

Even if this study were to define the notion of the national in Slavic and Slovak operatic production, it would fail at that, for such category is a notion related to a range of social, political, historical, cultural, religious and – in this particular case – artistic aspects. As such it can rather be outlined, or mapped, rather than precisely characterised. The opening of the study does that as it peeks into Russian, Polish, Czech, and Slovak history. Subsequent parts explore more closely the effect of universal developments of the national element as applied to specific operatic production in the cultures in focus, and vice versa. The material summarised the findings in a context that isn't often addressed. It also presented the special story of Slovak national opera. Its shape was long sought to be eventually articulated in Eugen Suchoň's *The Whirlpool*. At this point, the study differentiated the perception of national opera as a reference point in the quest for national identity in music drama production, and of national opera as a specific genre that came closest to the above reference point.

The Whirlpool emerged later than national operas in other Slavic countries. Hence it had to reconcile with altogether different circumstances. On the one hand, it faced anachronic expectations by the culturally astute public, hoping the Slovaks would at last receive an oeuvre that would seal their national identity. On the other hand, the new opus, unlike the 19th-century works composed by Slovakia's neighbours, it had to come to terms

⁷³ VAJDA, I.: *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁷⁴ VAJDA, I.: *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁷⁵ ŠTEFKOVÁ, M.: The Foundation of Music Language in Suchoň's *The Whirlpool* [Podstava hudobnej reči Suchoňovej Krútiavny]. In: *Volume from the International Music Studies Conference Creative Legacy of Eugen Suchoň Within the Context of Place, Era, Development and the Oeuvre of His Age-mates* [Zborník z muzikologickej konferencie s medzinárodnou účasťou Tvorivý odkaz Eugena Suchoňa v kontexte miesta, doby, vývoja a diela vrstovníkov]. Bratislava: Katedra hudobnej vedy Filozofickej fakulty Univerzity Komenského, 2009, p. 241.

⁷⁶ ŠTEFKOVÁ, M.: *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ SMOLÍK, P.: Circumstances Surrounding the Emergence and the Fate of an Oeuvre. *The Whirlpool* [Okolnosti vzniku a osudy diela]. *The Whirlpool*, Bulletin of Opera of Slovak National Theatre. Bratislava: SND, 1999, pp 28-29.

with the challenges of modern music theatre as articulated in the second half of the 20th century.

In the apparent deadlock, Suchoň came across as composer who was remarkably learned (responding to the need to build upon what was already in place), unusually creative (the inevitability to create something new and authentic), and as an inventive strategist. In *The Whirlpool* he creatively merged the very best in earlier and more contemporary European music, with music material that was, at the core, of folk nature, however, without quotations. Suchoň mastered a functioning dramatic whole with resonances of modern theatre methods. He left eternal ethical legacy that identifies Slavic national element with the Christian one which is legitimate in respect to Slovak history and tradition.

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