MUSICAL THEATER IN SLOVAKIA (IN THE PERIOD FROM BAROQUE TO ROMANTICISM)

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Abstract: Opera as a musical-dramatic phenomenon crystallized in European music of Abstract: Opera as a musical-dramatic phenomenon crystallized in European music of the 17th century, began to develop in Slovakia relatively late. Factors that had an impact on the development of Slovak opera are primarily aesthetic and social. Stylistic and thought tendencies were connected with the possibilities of opera authors to compose in freedom and in its sense to apply fundamental aspects and compositional procedures in opera works, which are internally harmonized with it. This possibility was not a matter of course in all development periods of Slovak opera. In this paper, we provide an insight into the explored issues of the development of opera in Slovakia from the baryous to the remanticism. from the baroque to the romanticism.

Keywords: Opera, Slovakia, historical development, musical-dramatic form, musical

1 Introduction

Opera is a musical-dramatic form that presents a musically elaborate, theatrically presented story, sung by individuals, a singing ensemble or ensembles. It also consists of choir, ballet and orchestra. Opera, as a musical-dramatic form, has been forming and evolving for centuries.1 From a historical point of view, we date the origin of the opera to the period at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, around 1600. The sixteenth century, in the context of the origin of opera as a form, represented an important stage. It was a transition from the period of Renaissance music to Baroque music, a duel of linearly composed music, represented by the Renaissance polyphonic texture (especially polyphonic motets), and the monodic style. Camerata, a society of poets and musicians who convened in Giovanni Bardi's house (1534 - 1612), was founded in Florence around 1600. There, composers such as Claudio Monteverdi (1567 – 1643), Gulio Caccini (1551 – 1618), Vincenzo Gallilei (1520 – 1591), Jacopo Peri (1561 – 1633) or poet Ottaviano Rinuccini (1562 – 1621) studied ancient music and discussed the rediscovery of ancient Greek drama. The dominant position in it was represented by monodic music, an intelligible sung unanimity accompanied by a group of instruments. Members of the Camerata condemned the polyphonic music of the 16th century, which they accused of incomprehensible text. The meaning of a perfectly understandable word, expressing emotional content and affect, was to be paramount.2 For this reason, in their new musical form, they promoted an accompanying monody. This type of music was comfortably acceptable to listeners and quickly spread to European countries. Opera, as a separate musical-dramatic form, thus crystallized in European music of the 17th century.

However, in the territory of today's Slovakia, this phenomenon began to develop relatively late. Due to the political, economic and spiritual-cultural conditions in the country, this form did not have the conditions for its continuous development for many decades.4 Although more than 150 years of threat from Turkish invasions had made part of Slovak territory a refuge for many scholars and nobles, the consequences of the constant state of war have affected the cultural and social development of the whole country. Nevertheless, the musical and theatrical culture of Slovak cities was at a remarkable level. However, we still did not have the conditions to develop a domestic opera event. The period of feudalism had no preconditions for the creation of a national culture, and even the art that was cultivated bore the

marks of an Italian-German character. Therefore, Slovakia was still without theater, opera composers or performers.5

2 The beginnings of the development of opera in Slovakia

The 16th and 17th centuries in Slovakia were marked by school plays - first Protestant, later Catholic. These games thematically based on ancient mythology and the Bible, were intended to strengthen religious faith through a compelling story. They were played by lay people and students for invited guests. School plays were performed in the school auditorium, in the house of the mayor, or on an improvised stage in the square. We do not have much information about the musical component of the Baroque school theater - we only know that the individual plays were intertwined with musical inserts, composed by e.g. local cantor, who also took care of the realization of the songs. From the 17th century, Slovakia gradually became the seat of non-national nomadic acting companies, but their sporadic performances only included dramatic spectacles.

After the political and war situation had calmed down, it allowed for the conditions of domestic operatic life to develop, which in the meantime spread to public art for paying visitors of opera houses. The lag behind the operatic development of other European countries in Slovakia was manifested, for example, by the fact that while in the 18th century opera was a matter of aristocratic performances, in most European countries it was more of a bourgeois affair, i.e. intended for the general public. The beginnings and the first expansion of feudal opera in our territory dates back to about 1740, when the opera Artaxerxes by Johann Adolph Hasse (1699 – 1783) was performed in the newly built wooden theater building in Bratislava at the coronation of Maria Theresa (1717 – 1780). It was during the reign of Maria Theresa (1740 – 1760) that new aristocratic residences began to appear in the city, where concerts were played, but musical theater was also performed.

3 Opera in Slovakia in the period of Classicism (1760-1830)

In the period of Classicism, Slovakia occupied about a fifth of the territory of Hungary at that time. From the point of view of the history of musical Classicism, the greatest contribution was recorded in the years 1760 - 1785. In this golden Theresian age of the development of music in Slovakia, the new quality also manifested itself in the field of creation. Until the mid-1980s, Bratislava was the center of political, economic, religious and cultural life, becoming one of the leading music hubs. In the following period (1785 – 1810) due to heteronomous factors in the historical development of Hungary and changes in the patronage of music (the nobility is gradually being replaced by the bourgeoisie), we register a rather negative impact on domestic compositional production. Ultimately, the period after 1810 brought changes. Despite these facts, Classicism in Slovakia recorded a further formation of its own features of music culture, which could become an active part of the complex of European music culture.9

The opera appeared in Slovakia in the 1840s. Its beginnings are connected with the cultural development of Bratislava and the first "theater" building in which professional opera companies could be hosted. The first encounter with Italian opera was the arrival of Pietro Mingotti's opera company. 10 At the turn of the period in the years 1759 - 1760, theater was performed by the Girolamo Bono's theater company. Between 1764 and 1775, the musical theater was performed on the Main Square of Bratislava in the Grünes Stübel house, adapted for the needs of the theater.

¹ BARTKO, E.: Stručná encyklopédia tanečného umenia. Bratislava: Verbunk s. r. o,

^{2018.} p. 367. 637 p.

² HOSTOMSKÁ, A.: Opera – průvodce operní tvorbou. Praha: Státní hudební vydavatelství n. p., 1962. p. 12-14. 797 p.

³ SMOLKA, J. et al: Dejiny hudby. Praha: TOGGA, spol. s. r. o., 2003. p. 10. 657 p.

⁴ RYBARIČ, R.: Dejiny hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku I. Bratislava: Opus, 1984. p. 134. 231 p.

HOZA, Š.: Opera na Slovensku 1. Martin: Osveta, N. P., 1953. p. 15. 333 p.

HOZA, S.: Opera na Slovenska I. Nattin: Osveta, N. P., 1935. p. 15. 533 p.
 HOZA, S.: Opera na Slovenska I. Martin: Osveta, N. P., 1953. p. 20-22. 333 p.
 NOVAČEK, Z.: Hudba v Bratislave. Bratislava: Opus, 1978. p. 271. 505 p.
 MÚDRA, D.: Dejiny hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku II. Bratislava: Slovenský hudobný fond, 1993. p. 11. 316 p.
 ELSHEK, O.: Dejiny slovenskej hudby. Bratislava: ASCO Art & Science, 1996. p.
 20.144. 572 p.

^{139-144. 572} p. ¹⁰ DLHÁNOVÁ, V. *Dejiny*. [Online.] [Cit. 2021-12.14.]

The companies of Joseph Felix Kurz and Domenik Zamperini performed here. In 1776, a stone theater building for 800 spectators was built and made accessible for this purpose, located approximately at the premises of the opera house of the Slovak National Theater. However, due to the city's financial difficulties, none of the theater companies persisted here extensively. The theater was also disrupted by the Napoleonic Wars. Joseph Glöggl (1906 - 1977), Karel Frierich Hansler (1759 - 1825), Ignaz Hildebrandt (1690 - 1772) and August Stöger (1791 – 1861) should be considered successful directors of the post-war period, already marked by the taste of the bourgeoisie.11

The greatest prosperity of the opera in Bratislava was marked by the eighties of the 18th century, thanks to a collaborator and personal friend of J. Haydn (1732 - 1809) - Karel Wahr (1745 -1798), who worked alternately in Bratislava and Eszterháza, who contributed to the premiere of several Haydn's musical-stage works. In the last third of the 18th century, the opera buffa was increasingly replaced by the more artistically penetrating singspiel. ¹² K. Wahr's promotional activities were closely K. Wahr's promotional activities were closely connected with the private opera company of Count Johann Nepomuk Erdödy, which can be considered the most important aristocratic theater scene of Classicism in Bratislava. Over the course of forty years, it has presented several dozen of premieres of a wide range of styles and genres. The rich repertoire also included current opera buffas, Italian operas of the series and Viennese singspiels. The Hungarian premiere of W. A. Mozart's opera (1756 - 1791) Die Entführung aus dem Serail, in 1785, can be specifically mentioned as an interesting feature. 13 The intense cultivation of music by the nobility is evidenced by several laudatory records in the periodical press. The Pálffy Theater also played a vital role in the theater period of Classicism in Bratislava. 14

Another important center of music in Slovakia in the period of Classicism was the city of Košice. However, the opera arrived to Košice relatively late. It was first introduced by predominantly German nomadic companies, which appeared in the city more regularly from the second half of the 18th century. 15 One of the first was a group of Gertrude Bodenurg and Hilverding. Companies such as Joseph Mayer, Joseph Dietelmayer, Albert Bienfait and Barbora Göttersdorf can also be mentioned. Due to financial difficulties, none of the mentioned companies managed to stay in Košice for more than two to four seasons. An important musical figure of the city – F. X. Zomb (1779 – 1823), emphasized in the first development period (since 1771) the importance of the birth of musical theater in addition to aristocratic and church music and in the second period (since 1789), the need for Slovak opera and reproduction. The situation was not completely resolved by the permanent opera house, which was built in Košice with the support of the city and the nobility in 1789. However, the era of temporary theater buildings and the display of operas on the market or behind the city walls ended. The first tenant of the building was Heinrich Böll, a native of Prague (1917 – 1985), who based his repertoire on the Prague experience. He also included the singspiels of Divided of (1739 – 1799) and Mozart in the program. ¹⁶ At the turn of the century, theatrical plays by the opera company of Philipp Berndt, Ignaz Stöger and L. Fournier were also performed in Košice. The regular performance of operas did not occur until the era of director Václav Mihule (1804 - 1807), and it was thanks to him that the audience could witness Mozart's Don Giovanni, The Abduction from the Seraglio, The Magic Flute and The Marriage of Figaro were seen. The repertoire was

further expanded by the well-known theater director Philipp Zöllner (1813 – 1816). 17

4 Music and theater events outside the two main music and cultural centers

Other notable musical centers include cities where performing arts have been presented through companies, but rarely in buildings designed for this purpose. Within Western Slovakia, in addition to Bratislava, we can highlight:

- Holíč especially the Holíč Castle, which Maria Theresa chose as a summer residence where comedies and opera buffas were performed in her presence;
- Trnava opera events. Since 1831, Trnava also had a permanent theater building, in which the music and theater company of Daniel Mangoldt performed up to 23 performances in the very first year;
- Nitra students of the Piarist school performed school plays with music.

Within Central Slovakia, it is necessary to mention:

- Ružomberok, Liptovský Mikuláš Jesuit schools performed school theater performances and had an amateur music and theater club;
- Banská Bystrica theatrical events, presented only sporadically in the Jesuit church and monastery. 18

Within the Spiš region's area of music and cultural events they

- Levoča, Spišská Nová Ves, Kežmarok, Spišské Podhradie theater companies (especially German) coming from Košice:
- Smolník with one of the oldest stone theater buildings with modern theater technology and a prosperous permanent amateur company, which also performed singspiels.

Apart from Košice, the Eastern Slovak area of music and cultural events fell under:

- Prešov its own theater, which hosted mostly German nomadic theater companies. Among other things, they performed Mozart's operas Don Giovanni, The Marriage of Figaro and The Magic Flute;
- Bardejov (The Bardejov Spa) hosting theater companies from Košice and Prešov. The stone building of the theater, which allegedly existed before 1817, is also mentioned in the literature. 19

5 Theater repertoire and composers of operas in the period of Classicism in Slovakia

The theatrical repertoire in Slovakia was represented within the theatrical performances of opera, singspiels, but also ballets. These were works by mostly German and Italian authors who also performed in Slovakia. From the musical-stage genres, Baroque Italian opera of the Neapolitan type was initially established. It drew ideas from the lives of its contemporaries, especially the aristocracy, which it copied. The singspiel that came to Slovakia from Germany gained general popularity. Domestic production was represented exclusively by composers living in Bratislava in the last decades of the 18th century. The first known opera composer of Slovak origin was Matej Kamenický (1734 – 1821). However, Kamenický belongs to the history of Polish opera, so his first opera Nedza uscześliwiona (Poverty Made Happy), composed and premiered in 1778 in Warsaw, is also the first Polish opera. In addition to this opera, Kamenický also composed four operas based on the Polish texts

¹¹ MÚDRA, D.: Dejiny hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku II. Bratislava: Slovenský

hudobný fond, 1993. p. 22-23. 316 p.

¹² MÚDRA, D.: *Dejiny hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku II*. Bratislava: Slovenský hudobný fond, 1993. p. 22. 316 p.

¹³ SMOLKA, J. et. al.: *Dejiny hudoby*. Praha: TOGGA, spol. s. r. o., 2003. p. 394. 657

p. 14 MÚDRA, D.: Dejiny hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku II. Bratislava: Slovenský hudobný fond, 1993. p. 19-20. 316 p. 15 VAJDA, I.: Slovenská opera. Bratislava: Opus, 1988. p. 13. 366 p. 16 HOZA, Š.: Opera na Slovensku I. Martin: Osveta, N. P., 1953. p. 103-109. 333 p.

MÚDRA, D.: Dejiny hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku II. Bratislava: Slovenský hudobný fond, 1993. p. 27. 316 p.
 ELSHEK, O.: Dejiny slovenskej hudby. Bratislava: ASCO Art & Science, 1996. p.

^{146-149. 572} p.

¹⁹ MÚDRA, D.: *Dejiny hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku II*. Bratislava: Slovenský hudobný fond, 1993. p. 18-38. 316 p.

Sophia, or Country Courtship, Virtuous Simplicity, Tradition Resolved by Humour and The Burgher's Ball, which premiered in Warsaw, and two German texts. However, operas with a German text were never performed. 20

In the literature we can also find mentions of music-stage works:

- František Xaver Tost (1751 1829) opera Die Werbung auf dem Jaahrmarkt (1792), singspiels Der edle Eifer (1796), Das Dorf im Gebirge (1798), Mann und Frau, Witwer und Witwe, Der Sonderling and Der Lügner;
- Jozef Chudý (1753 1813), who continued the traditions of Viennese singspiel - the singspiels Pikkó Hertzeg és Perzsi Jutka subtitled the Sad-merry Opera, which is also the first Hungarian opera (1789), and Der Telegraph oder die Fernschreibmaschine, however they were not significantly successful;
- Ján Anton Zimmermann (1741 1781) singspiel Narcisse et Pierre (1772), melodramas Die Wilden performed in 1777 in Bratislava, Andromeda und Perseus (1781), Leonardo und Blandine, Zelmort und Ermide;
- Juraj Družecký (1754 1819) opera Mechmet.

From among the works of Slovak authors, Zimmermann's melodrama Andromeda und Perseus has successfully spread on European stages.²¹ We have only one documented musical-stage work from the country, the comic singspiel by František Hrdina Der Bettelstudent. There are also mentions of the operas of Andrej Bartay (1825 – 1901) and the operas of Ján Jozef Rösler, a native of Banská Štiavnica who operated in Prague (1771 -1813). However, in most cases, the only reports of the existence of works from the music and stage genres of the home province have been preserved in the periodical press or performance announcements. Among the musical-theatrical works of European composers, the following are significant in Slovakia in the period of Classicism:

- J. Haydn the premiere of the opera La Canterina in 1767, its libretto was published by the Bratislava librettist J. M. Landerer
 - the premiere of the opera Der Zerstreute in 1774,
 - the premiere of La Fedelta opera in 1785,
 - the premiere of La vera Constanza in 1786,
 - the premiere of the comic opera Orlando Paladino in 1787.
- W. A. Mozart the opera Die Entführung aus dem Serail, thanks to J. Chudý, premiered in Bratislava in 1785, thanks to H. Bull in Košice,
 - the premiere of the opera Le Nozze di Figaro in 1810/1811 in Košice,
 - the premiere of the opera Don Giovanni, premiered two years after its creation thanks to the company of Hubert Kumpf, in 1825 through the company of August Stöger, in 1806 and 1811 also in Košice and the performance of the opera by the theater company of F. Neubauer in Prešov is also mentioned.
 - the premiere of the opera Die Zauberflöte, in Košice in 1794, 1808 - 1810, 1831 and in Bratislava in 1814 and 1825.
 - opera La Clemenza di Tito, premiere in Bratislava, 1809.²³

6 Opera in Slovakia in the period of Romanticism

At the beginning of the 19th century, other socio-political changes shaped the musical life in the territory of today's Slovakia, and the Napoleonic Wars paralyzed the development of the entire country. The period of post-war riots and the stabilization of conditions reflected in the music culture by the growing promotion of the taste of the bourgeoisie. The struggle for national identity and civil liberties resulted in the revolutionary years (1848 - 1849).²⁴ A large number of the Slovak population emigrated to foreign countries, and the nobility and the great bourgeoisie of German and Hungarian origin remained the decisive strata. Socio-political conditions in our country meant that the largest opera stages in the newly built theaters in Bratislava and Košice continued to predominantly serve German and Hungarian theater companies. Since the archives of theater companies operating in Bratislava have been preserved only in fragments, we can only learn information about the history of theater in Bratislava until 1918, reconstructed from a fragmentary source base.

The only remnant of information about theater in Košice is that in the last quarter of the century, the opera duel ended in a deep crisis caused by several factors. Since 1863, the interests of the audience in Košice have been represented by the Hungarian National Theater Commission, made up of representatives of the Hungarian aristocracy and yeomanry, often intervening in the theatre's internal affairs beyond their statute. 25 One of the basic problems was the question of the dramaturgy of professional singspiel theater. As early as 1865, the Hungarian National Theater Commission released the directors of theater companies from the obligation to maintain the opera part of their ensemble, and later that year also to maintain the operetta ensemble. The Commission planned to support the development of Hungarian drama. However, there was no interest in it in the second half of the 19th century, thus the directors continued to attract the audience by staging operettas. The city of Košice had problems with casting talented soloists and with providing a quality orchestra that was able to operate only with the support of a military orchestra. All this resulted in a deep crisis of the musical component of the professional theater in Košice, culminating in 1880 - 1898. By opening of the new theater building in 1899, the theatrical life of Košice, especially the musical theater, was supposed to flourish. The audience in Košice did not experience this until 1902, when the actor János Komjáthy (1865 – 1949) became the director, with a creative personality and taste, who restarted the operatic life of Košice by inviting foreign guest ensembles.²⁶ In addition to Bratislava and Košice, operas were also sporadically heard in other cities - Banská Bystrica, Nitra, Prešov and Trnava.

7 Contemporary musical and dramatic works in Slovakia

Within the domestic context, it is also necessary to include three stage works by Heinrich Marschner (1795 - 1861), which were created during his time in Bratislava. In addition to one singspiel, there are two three-act operas. The works of Saidar and Zulima premiered here in 1818 and Heinrich IV. premiered in Dresden, staged by C. M. von Weber (1786 - 1826). Other stage works by domestic authors were probably created in the second half of the 19th century.²⁷ An end to the traditions of school plays is the school opera by Alexander Kapp (1799 -1869) in two acts from 1867 - The Sons of Jacob, with the theme of the first biblical book of Genesis. It was demonstrated several times by students of the Trnava grammar school. The libretto published in the press and part of the vocal and instrumental parts in the manuscript have been preserved, the arias are missing. From a stylistic point of view, this is a compositional work of late Classicism without much peculiarity (the author apparently expected more or less amateur performers). It is the first opera by a Slovak composer, which does not belong to the musical-dramatic history of our neighbors in the north or south. The composers in Slovakia who composed operas mostly belonged to the supporters of the opera reform of Richard Wagner (1813 - 1883). In particular, they received suggestions on instrumentation, provided that the importance of the orchestral component would be strengthened. Wagner was also admired by K. Mayberger (1828 - 1881), who created the four-

VAJDA, I.: Slovenská opera. Bratislava: Opus, 1988. p. 12-15. 366 p.
 MICHALKOVÁ, C.: Tradícia a inovácia v koncepte hudobnodramatických kompozícií Antona Zimmermanna. [Online.] [Cit. 2021-12-14.] p. 9-11.
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^{153. 572} p.

²³ MÚDRA, D.: *Dejiny hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku II*. Bratislava: Slovenský hudobný fond, 1993. p. 51-55. 316 p.

²⁴ SMOLKA, J. et. al.: *Dejiny hudby*. Praha: TOGGA, spol. s. r. o., 2003. p. 323. 657

p. ²⁵ ELSHEK, O.: *Dejiny slovenskej hudby*. Bratislava: ASCO Art & Science, 1996. p. 206. 572 p.

²⁶ HOZA, Š.; *Opera na Slovensku I.* Martin: Osveta, N. P., 1953, p. 117-129, 333 p.

²⁷ ELSHEK, O.: *Dejiny slovenskej hudby*. Bratislava: ASCO Art & Science, 1996. p.

act opera Melusine. 28 The complete performance of the work took place in the Bratislava theater in 1877. The theme of this opera is a typically romantic story about a beautiful nymph and a nobleman Raimund, especially popular in the 19th century. Currently, only the piano arrangement of this opera is available. He also wrote the burlesque opera, or operetta Princess Europe, and did not complete the opera Who Reigns. We also consider Ján Levoslav Bella (1843 – 1936) to be an important composer who contributed to Slovak opera.29

8 Conclusion

In operas, the world of music is combined with acting, stage images and movement. Opera productions often depict historical, mythological, fairy-tale or comic themes, which are complemented by magnificent music and brilliant singing performances. Most of the characters (or all of them) sing all the time, which gives the opera a touch of grandeur. In some cases, it can even evoke mysterious feelings, which is why people have considered it exotic in history. Opera continues to gain new audience, because it is this form of classical music that can change us physically, emotionally and intellectually.³⁰ In the presented study, we therefore decided to approach the development of Slovak opera and opera life in Slovakia until the Romantic period. Another stimulus was the fact that Slovak opera is gaining more and more importance in the music world. With this contribution we want to add to the deepening of the international knowledge of Slovak musical theater. This paper represents a starting point for further research of the outlined issues, with emphasis on the period of the 20th century and contemporary opera.

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