

GIOACHINO ROSSINI - IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA (ROSINA). STORIES, PERSONS, ARTISTIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The work of Rossini *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (*L'Inutile Precauzione* or *Almaviva*), written on Cesare Sterbini's libretto in 1816, originates in the play *Le Barbier de Séville* or *Précaution inutile* by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. Stendhal states that it is "a masterpiece". About the Rossinian work, and Grigore Constantinescu defines it as "a model of concision and musical and theatrical logic whose freshness was not shadowed by nearly two centuries of existence. Although Rossini uses many fragments of his previous works, the way he has built his architecture impresses through the unity of expression and the coherence of solutions".

Keywords: *comic opera, character, libretto.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Although the premiere at *Teatro Argentina* in Rome (February 20, 1816) had a remarkable cast - Gertrude Giorgi Righetti (*Rosina*), Manuel Garcia (*Almaviva*), Luigi Zamboni (*Figaro*), Bartolomeo Botticelli (*Bartolo*) and Zenobio Vitarelli (*Don Basilio*), the show was a memorable *fiasco* (equaled only by the premiere of Verdi's work - *La Traviata*), especially due to the incidents on the stage: the tenor Manuel Garcia was not in good fit voice; then, while he was playing the guitar (*Serenada*), a string of the instrument broke. Not long after, Don Basilio slips, falls into the stage and the blood begins to flow trippingly out of his nose; towards the end of the show, a black cat crossed disoriented the stage, to the audience's delight. All these adventures generated an indescribable confusion, which is why the work was considered buried forever in Rome. At the next performance, Rossini refuses to appear, but he is brought by force to the cheers of the crowd, the masterpiece *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, this time being a resounding success. Ioana Ștefănescu believes that "Rossini's *Barber* is rightly among the undeniable values of the musical theater, because along with the great

beauty of music, along with the logic and coherence of the stage action in Sterbini's libretto, permanently thrills the vibration existing in everyday life, with its happenings and emotions, with the unexpected clarifies." (CONSTANTINESCU et al., 1971)

2. THE SUBJECT OF THE OPERA

First act, the first scene takes place at night in Seville. Count Almaviva has called a small orchestra in front of doctor Bartolo's balcony to play a serenade for Rosina (his pupil). Figaro (former Count's servant) appears expressing his gratitude for his life.

Almaviva reveals him that he is in love with Rosina and asks him to facilitate his entry into the doctor's home. At Figaro's advice, the Count introduces himself to Rosina (through a serenade) with the name Lindoro, a poor and very much in love student; the girl makes her appearance on the balcony and lets a note slip from her hand in which she notifies him that she wants to know him better. Figaro proposes the Count to come home to Don Bartolo dressed in soldier clothes, pretending to be drunk and with a note in his hand to be quartered in order to remove any suspicion.

Second scene: In the doctor's house, Rosina unveils her love for Lindoro and characterizes herself through the famous aria *A voce poco fa*. Don Bartolo grumbles at Figaro - who has turned his house into a hospital, and Don Basilio (Rosina's music teacher) announces the presence of Count Almaviva in Seville, who is believed to be Rosina's lover. Basilio proposes as a weapon to fight against Count the slander, then the two retreat to prepare the marriage plan between Rosina and Don Bartolo.

Figaro, who has eavesdropping the conversation, informs Rosina about the intentions of the two; at first she thinks that it is a joke, then promises revenge and asks for more information about the young man who sang the serenade under the balcony. Figaro's visit is uncovered by Bartolo, who becomes more suspicious than ever, because of Rosina's hesitant answers. Almaviva appears "drunk" at the guardian's home and asks him for lodgings, but the old man refuses, the conversation heats up and Rosina, confused, makes her appearance. Almaviva takes advantage of a moment of lack of attention of the old man and hands a note to the girl. Because of the scandal that has broken out, the city guards appear, but Almaviva reveals his identity with discretion, so the guards retreat to the astonishment of all those present.

The second act: While Don Bartolo expresses the bewilderment about the identity of the soldier who entered his house, the Count makes his appearance in a new disguise: "Don Alonso - the student of Don Basilio" who came to teach the singing class instead of his master who, he says, is sick. To win Don Bartolo's trust, he offers Rosina's love note, then proposes a slander against the Count. Bartolo recognizes Don Basilio's way of thinking and allows Don Alonso to teach Rosina the singing class.

During the lesson, the old man falls asleep, and the two lovers take the opportunity to confess their feelings and the desire to run together. Meanwhile, in order to pave the way for the fugitives, Figaro steals the door key from the balcony, but Don Basilio appears and ruins their plans. With great difficulty they succeed to convince the professor that he is very ill and that he must return urgently to bed; he leaves only after he receives a money bag. Taking advantage of the of the barber's lack of attention, Bartolo catches moments of tenderness between the two lovers and finds out Don Alfonso's true identity; in a rage, he chases them all out of the house, then goes after the notary to speed up the marriage of Rosina. Bartolo tells the girl that Lindoro is going to hand her over to Count Almaviva and brings the ticket she sent to the Count as proof. Overwhelmed, Rosina reveals their run-away plan, and the old man leaves immediately to look for help (CÂMPEANU, 1975).

Figaro and the Count get into the house through the balcony door and remain stunned by Rosina's attitude. The Count reveals her his true identity after having listened to all the accusations of the girl; The two youngsters, happy and content are ready to run together, but they find that the balcony staircase has disappeared. But here are Don Basilio and the notary who make their appearance, the barber takes advantage of the occasion, and witnesses for Rosina's marriage contract to the Count will be Figaro and Don Basilio. Don Bartolo has nothing to do but to accept the facts and find that his precautions were futile.

3. CHARACTER CHARACTERIZATION

Analyzing the characters of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, we will notice that Rossini has drawn concrete features, placed on a human and familiar plan that has nothing in common with the aesthetic conventions of the eighteenth century. Luigi Rognoni said about the Rosinian characters that "they have gained a new rhythm, a terrestrial and more realistic psychology. They are the everyday's mirror" (DE USCĂTESCU, 1989).

Figaro is the sympathetic and clever character of the Rosinian comic style, the binder that leads to the marriage of the young people; he is known throughout the city, everyone asks for his help - which he offers with great pleasure, his philosophy being very simple: to get tired as little as possible, to have fun as much as possible and to have his pocket full of money. Exuberance, cunning and spontaneity bring him closer to the young and the chase for money to the elderly. Figaro never loses his head, not even in the general confusion created at the end of the first act. An enumeration of his professional qualities (in all spheres) he does in the famous aria *Largo de factotum della cita* when he proclaims his success in the city. Figaro is the engine of all actions, he is clever, intriguing, he is a great fighter against the privileges of the rich - whom he treats as peer to peer, but he is much more cunning than them. In order to complete the portrait of Figaro, we must emphasize the money-related aspect, namely gold - the most powerful catalyst of the bourgeois society that he recognizes as being addicted to and that makes him happy.

Figaro's relationship with the Count is distinctive, considering that they are representatives of two different social classes: the aristocracy (endangered) and the ordinary townsman (the future bourgeois).

Rosina is the image of the girl, who desires very much to know the true love and to escape the guardianship of an elderly eager to marry her only for her wealth. In the description of *Una Voce poco fa* aria, Rosina reveals her ambivalent character; hidden under a mask of gentleness and ingenuity Rosina reveals us as a firm, stubborn and persevering personality when it comes to fighting. She threatens the guardian and confesses that behind the obedient, respectful, sweet and loving face we will discover a new face of her character – that to stubbornly resist the will of others, turning it into a viper when in need; it is enough to be contradicted and she immediately bursts into a storm of baffles. Rosina wants to achieve her dream of love, but her guardian, with whom she always quarrels, keeps her under close supervision.

Count Almaviva is a noble youngman of high rank, handsome, rich, sympathetic who is fascinated by the beauty of Rosina whom he has accidentally seen at Prado, falling in love with her at first sight. He has serious intentions with Rosina, but he wants to make sure she's not interested in his noble origin or his material situation.

Aria *A un dottor della mia sorte* reveals the aggressive, angry and wild character of Don Bartolo – the old doctor, the boring torturer of Rosina, who set his mind up to marry her against her will because she is young, beautiful and has a rich dowry. He is afraid of his rival – the Count, because he is young, handsome and rich, and he trusts no one except Don Basilio – his only confident and accomplice.

Don Basilio is the hypocritical teacher of music, lazy, flattering, humble, jerky and sluggish, who is part of the greedy clergy of money. He supports Don Bartolo in his projects in the hope of a minimal financial gain but is ready to betray him on the first occasion if he benefits from it.

4. MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Opera Buffa appeared as *Intermezzo* between the acts of the operas, gradually turning into an autonomous musical genre, a follower of

Aristophanic traditions, Roman mimies and Italian comedy, which reflects life with all its ridiculous aspects, in reality being a musical parody or satire. The typical opera buffa characters are taken from the prototypes and patterns of the inspirational source: the old and stupid gourmand, the fearful captains, the pedantic doctors, sly men-servent, kept women-servent etc. In the actual *buffa opera*, fast and realistic dialogues do not allow abusive use of vocalizations (as in the series *opera*) and thus, the *recitative* becomes the genuine, natural language of the new genre (BUGA & SÂRBU, 1999).

The Rossinian style is distinguished primarily by a special rhythmic glow, the musical pages being customized by a frenzy that clearly carries the imprint of the composer. The famous *Rosinian crescendo* gives music an unreal, even crazy, character that blends perfectly with the comedy theater, although the composer achieves equally convincing and original results in the *series*. "The vitality of the Rosinian music results from the simple but alert rhythm, from the fluent and particularly telling, although sometimes with vocal ornaments. The melodic lines often have instrumental contours, rich vocal acrobatics and vocal agility passages. Dynamism, as well as the varied instrumental color of orchestration, provides its works with undeniable success" (PASCU & BOȚOCAN, 1995).

The opera *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* is the triumph of the song that puts the voice in the spotlight. Primadona and the tenor become the main characters of the lyrical theater, and their melodic lines represent the beginning and the end, the basis and the top of the genre, proving that Rossini used the song as expressive means of high quality comic. When Rossini signed the contract for this opera, he made a commitment to finish the first act in time and to adapt the music to the voices of the singers, and then make the changes that will be required.

It is said that the work might have been composed within two to three weeks, but part of the themes used had previously appeared in the works *Aureliano in Palmira* (December 26, 1813) and *Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra* (October 4, 1815). Written in a solemn *Andante maestoso*, the *Overture (Symphony)* of the opera is memorable and fascinating through its creative force,

unceasingly to this day. (G. Rossini - *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, canto-piano reduction, Casa Ricordi, Milan, 1997, *Symphony*, p.1, ms 1-9). The sweet, noble and tender character of the introduction brings us without a transition to an agitated, alert, comic and ironic *Allegro vivo*, from which the theatrical directions progressively develop. The overture presents two Rosinian successive *crescendos*, the second leading to a short *coda* (*Più mosso*) which concludes in a cheerful character.

Rossini did not hesitate to introduce *series* moments in the musical dramaturgy, alike the everyday life. His role in the development of the *buff* genre was to attract public attention to the dramatic truth presented in the musical buff genre. He adopts the *aria of bravery* (representative of the stage reached by the accompanied monodia), his music being very well identified with the literary text and the character of the characters. For example, the comic of character is obviously present in Figaro's *Cavatina* (*Largo al factotum della cita!*), (Rossini - *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Casa Ricordi, Milano, 1997, Act I, Scene 2, Figaro's *Cavatina: Largo al factotum della citata*, p. 49, 186-190), but also in the duet Figaro - Almaviva (G. Rossini - *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Casa Ricordi, Milano, 1997, Act I, Duetto Figaro - Rossi - *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Casa Ricordi, Milan, 1997, Act I, Scene 5, Rosina's *Cavatina: The All'idea di Quel Metallo*, p.76, One voice poco fa, p.102, pp. 56-67) (ROSSINI, 1997).

From the musical language of the slander aria there stands out the true translation of all the indications present in the Beaumarchais' comedy (*pianissimo, rinforzando and crescendo*). We will hear the same serious notes (voice and orchestra) that are simultaneously sung on the word *calunnia*, and as the rhythm becomes more alert, the voice gradually rises amplifying the propagation of slander and gaining in dynamism, to eventually *come un colpo di cannone* explode in the end (PINGHIREAC, 2003). (G. Rossini - *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Casa Ricordi, Milano, 1997, Act I, Scene 8, Basilio Area: *La calunnia è un venticello*, p.121, ms 54-62) (SÂMPETREAN, 2007). Gradually, everything calms down, *E il meschino calunniato, avvilito, calpestato* is destroyed under the public disdain. (Rossini - *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Casa Ricordi, Milano, 1997, Act I, Scene 8, Basilio Area: *La calunnia è un venticello*, p.127, ms 80-88) (ROSSINI, 1997).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The characters created by Rossini have the advantage of being accompanied by an extremely well-personalized instrumental language with a rhythmic and dynamic character, the vocal soloists being responsible for achieving the expressiveness of the work. The opera lives first and foremost through the power of music, but also through the temperament of the characters involved in action, through the immense force and dedication of the performers able to engage their whole body and their whole energy to control the vocal instrument in order to transmit the emotions of the art of singing. This art needs artists equipped with sensitivity, personality, charisma, desire and passion, capable of transforming their own defects, or even physical appearance if necessary, in order to penetrate deep into the soul of art receiver. Gioacchino Rossini dominated the first half of the nineteenth century by the complexity of his unique musical genius. Although the anecdotes about the great composer say he was a proverbial laziness and a great gourmand, at the same time he composed music with frenetic rhythms and was able to build an opera in a few weeks.

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