

OPERA AND OPERETTA. SIMILARITIES AND CONTRASTS.

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Abstract

Lyrical theatre is an infinite resource of communication between the audience and the artists. Based on its musical and vocal primal instruments it has been reaching out to public of all social classes throughout history. This universal artistic language is expressed on stage through various representations expanding in different genres and subcategories, defined by their historic periods and ages. This communication is realized through the human voice; this wonderful and mysterious weapon of artistic creation cannot be tuned to the standards of physical playable instruments, but can surely be the vessel that brings the audience an emotional and powerful experience. This form of artistic performance is full of spiritual and timeless emotion. No doubt a great contribution to cultural life to many civilizations of the world, its message is direct and always straightforward aimed at audiences all around the globe.

Keywords: *voice, theatre, communication, opera, operetta, performance, musical.*

The musical lyric scene is an artistic form present all over the world, in every corner and city that manifests cultural life and creative activities. It is a special and unique genre of art that transcends through history and the passing of time, its birth place dating back to medieval ages. One can say that many great cities based their cultural evolution on preserving this art form through institutions of display and education, like theatres, schools and universities. At a closer look, a pertinent and curious observation is that ex-communist countries have developed a special and respectful approach to this kind of artistic creation. Without having the consumerist agenda of old capitalist systems and being exposed for the first time to foreign investors and corporations, many of these countries concentrated their new found freedom in human studies, mostly art, exercising their imagination and creative potential. A good and immediate consequence is that new schools and universities all over the world started exchanging

their knowledge through teachers and students. Capitalist countries set their eyes on middle-eastern European teachers and masters of the craft, offering them a possibility to practice their art in a new and friendly environment. Subsequently the competition between academic institutions grew, helping art form evolve and reach new heights. One thing will be ever so similar in capitalist or communist regimes alike; art is a direct expression of life and truth, like a mirror resembling social dilemmas, protests and needs. Played out on a stage through conventional means of the genres, one can understand the struggle and history of a civilization through its art. Though the production value and final presentation may vary from a place to another, it is the combined work of a group of people like grips, stage and light designers, make-up and costume artists that reaches out to the people and sends them the message. An interesting comparison would be one between the effect of art and the effect of religion on one's mind. Somehow religion is more of a boundary-setter than an liberator of thought. Art lets the mind go beyond the simple philosophy of sinner and saint, revealing the beautiful shades of grey that put the mind and soul to the test. Art can spark revolutions. It is a well known fact that many art forms evolved in a church-oriented environment, but when the moment came they flew away like a baby bird following the natural course of life which is to cultivate and explore the maximum potential of your being.

Perfection in art is defined by imperfection, by human condition in its primal form. The emotional roller coaster provided for the audiences takes them on a journey where they experience fear, happiness, truth, betrayal, cries and laughter. The result of a story and the cycle

of an artistic creation is through itself perfection, and this idea creates a whole new church. The comparison is applied even to the architectural side of the matter. Theatres and ballrooms in great places around the world are a display of creativity without restraint. They celebrate the place where people go to detach themselves from everyday problems and needs. Churches and religious buildings however manifest a certain conservative approach in architecture. With the passing of time, many theatrical lyrical genres were born by the social classes that commissioned them. When these forms of art started catching on to the high courts as well as the streets, the fundamental difference was set by how the authors tackled subjects; the comedy-drama ratio was very important, as well as who turned out to be the obvious victor in the end.

Whatever the variation of these creations, the stage always won. Let's focus on two genres that apparently are almost the same. Both focusing on music as their primal element of expression and using similar exposure methods through stages, props, acting, costumes, and accompanied by orchestras: Opera and Operetta. Differences between these genres are not set only by the different musical scores that they use, but also by their different "perfection" goals. Opera focuses on the exploitation of the voice, and taking it to the highest level possible to communicate with the audience, whilst Operetta uses a kind of spoken word singing that does not require the singing artists to go far from their comfort zone when performing. Opera tends to become a little slow in comparison to Operetta as the ladder through its dynamics is more entertaining for the audience. Both use theatricals and acting, this playing a very important part in the appeal of the genres and being an important aid to the storytelling part of the composition.

Opera has a dramatic storyline. Voices in Opera are given a lot of power and personality. Characters have conflicts, they can be kind and gentle, they can beg and they can be demanding, sometimes even command armies in their roles. But the personality of the character is given by the singer/actor that portrays it. That's why in many occasions the audiences come to the theatre wanting to see how the singer finds the technical and professional means to take on the character.

Having a dramatic storyline, almost all Operas have a sad ending. Opera Buffa is the so called "happy" Opera; it has a happy, positive ending to the storyline. Lovers always unite at the end, in spite of everything that's happened to stop them, and characters that through storyline get the appeal of the audience come out on top. Even the Opera Buffa authors are told to have been positive and uplifting people. Two of them that stand out in mind are Gaetano Donizetti and Gioacchino Rossini. Their creation had a great commercial appeal as they were true entertainers through their art form. Some dramatic Opera authors have created Opera Buffa compositions, like Giacomo Puccini and Giuseppe Verdi. Somehow you can feel the touch of a dramatic author even in these creations, being smarter and more profound in their expression. Without a doubt, the emotional bond that appears between audience and character is something very strong and very unique in Opera. The performance is the one that gives out the energy needed to create such a bond. People gasp when characters pause, they fight through it emotionally when it comes to the characters struggle, they await the end even when most of them know the story already. What goes on the stage becomes your only point of attention. You are taken on a journey that visually can grip you harder than the experience of a film. Once you go out the theatre you have a certain look back moment when you realize that it is all over and the show ended, and you have to get back to reality. Centuries of this art form are the reason of its necessity.

Operetta does not solicit the audiences' energy in this manner. The storyline is always lighter, with an end that is expected by development. The intensity of the vocals is set to a medium, as the viewer gets the feel of a conversation being played out in song. The subjects that are taken on are friendlier as they are filled with comic relief and satire, and the props and costumes have more of a flashy feeling, being more entertaining and less needy of attention and emotional focus. They take on romance with dancing moments, and the dynamic is faster, more rhythmic without being easy. Social classes are depicted humorously by the characters, and the viewers always relate. The ballet has an important role in the breathing spaces of the

development. The Operetta ballet is characterized by its entertaining value whilst in Opera, the choreography is a direct helper to the dramatic value of the creation. Its goal is to amplify the drama factor, without taking the attention point off the singer. A modern form of expression is the Musical. Born and developed at the maximum on the North American continent, it is a complex and powerful art form that tackles on more personal matters with a hands-on approach. Being dramatically more similar to Opera, emotional wise, and having the entertaining value stretched out to a maximum, it can take the viewer on a crazy ride. Musical actors/singers have to participate in choreography ensembles. Dancing is a very important element in Musical theatre creations; the dynamics of such a development are staggering. Singing and dancing at the Musical rate is very breath taking. Personal subjects that are modern and closer to the viewers' knowledge helps them relate more to the creation. Musical is more of a confession than a lesson; its all about the show and getting it done properly on the stage, without focusing on the voice or on the poetry of the spoken word of Operetta. It is beyond doubt a form of art inspired by these two old classics, but a stand alone nonetheless. Tailored for new audiences and designed to have the freedom and personal identity of motion pictures it is a very important form of expression, that in a century of existence has established a few classics and famous authors. Choreography in Musicals is special. Not having

the classical elements of ballet that we find in Opera and Operetta, the modern dance techniques help for a more personal "pop" influenced delivery. Backing vocals help the stage but they do not have the same important role of the classical choir. They are planned only to help harmonics and aid in the mood set of the play, rather than being a separate and elaborate structure like in Opera or Operetta. Without a doubt, evolution and progress will always be active in the lyrical arts as well as in everyday life. Forms of art appear and are catered to the needs of the public. Some of them fade away in time, but the ones discussed earlier stood the test of time and have aced it with flying colors. To sum up, if the people still queue in line at theatres and music halls, there is a necessity and a thirst for art. Even if it is centuries old, or a new born, a form of art can be valued through the people that relate and consume it. The only hope we have is that the preservation of value is a thing that will not be forgotten, and the need of culture and expression is passed on generation to generation, even though the modern tendency is to easily forget and walk by without noticing how much artistic creation can uplift us as human beings.

*"Some moments in music history have been attributed to myth. Like the old contest between the lyre and the flute has been attributed to the tragic conflict between Apollo and Marsyas, a conflict with a clear social correspondent. In the end, the popularity of the Dionysian rhythms ensured a higher quality, equalling if not surpassing the lyre and the flute."*¹



Fig. 1. Title: "Apollo Flaying Marsyas" Artist: Jusepe De Ribera (1591-1652) Country of Origin: Spain Date Of Creation: 1637; Place of Creation: Naples, Italy; Style: Tenebrism; Genre: mythological painting; Technique: oil; Material: canvas; Dimensions: 202 x 255 cm Gallery: Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium^{2,3}

Endnotes

1. Tănase, Alexandru, *O istorie a culturii în capodopere*, Vol. 2, Bucharest: Univers Publishing, 1988, p. 357.
2. <http://www.museumsyndicate.com/item.php?item=12680>.
3. <http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/jusepe-de-ribera/apollo-and-marsyas-1637-1>.