



CHILDREN'S OPERA STAGING PRACTICE IN KHARKIV

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Abstract

In the article, features of performances of children's operas (with participation of children) in Kharkov are considered. The importance of such forms of work is determined in the light of the problems of interpersonal communication and Internet addiction. In the performance "Switch on the Night" by S. Banevich, directed by I. Ivchenko in the School of Modern Theatrical and Stage Directions, references to the works of K. Stanislavski-director are traced. This production refers to created according to the repertory theatre rules of the work - the collective of the school worked on it during the year with the involvement of the forces of the musical, theatrical, choreographic and artistic departments. Another form of staging was used in the performances of the projects "Holidays at the University" and "Children's Philharmonic" at the Kharkov National I. P. Kotlyarevsky University of Arts. The performances were accomplished in a short time (2 weeks for J. Dubravin's "Shool", 2 months for M. Lysenko's "Winter and Spring"). As practice has shown, this form of work puts forward to creative directors certain requirements: 1) detailed director's plan; 2) the most accurate instructions to children regarding the interaction of heroes among themselves, special actor reactions to the actions of partners; 3) mise-en-scenes should be frequently repeated and stay the same every rehearsal.

Key words: children's opera in Kharkov (Ukraine), children's psychology, J. Dubravin's musical, S. Banevich's opera, "express production", musical and theatrical compositions for children by M. Lysenko.

Introduction

The children's opera is now a genre with a rich stage practice on various stages of Ukraine and Kharkov in particular. This article deals with the Kharkiv productions of recent years in which participated the children only.

Methods

The study used the method of comparative analysis of the children's operas, staged at the School of Modern Theatrical Stage Directions, and within the projects "Holidays at the University" and "Children's Philharmonic" at the Kharkov

National I. P. Kotlyarevsky University of Arts. The choice of performances is conditioned by their importance for the stage practice, and because the author of the article was a direct participant of two of them (as a teacher).

Results

Children's opera, combining singing with its theatrical and playful embodiment, gives the opportunity to work in the team, which is especially important in our time. Despite the illusion of communicating with the world through the Internet, in fact, children have difficulties with overcoming the invisible virtual curtain: the subtle "painted veil" of the computer screen firmly separates youngsters of the same age from each other. The "singularity of the Internet world" attracts them but often this leads to the formation of Internet-addiction. As N. Oskina writes, one of the reasons provoking it was that in this network "reality becomes changeable, compliant, obedient", and a child has the opportunity to look better, cooler [8, p. 152] – "to seem, not to be" paraphrasing the expression of Stanislavski. Children's opera in this case, besides the tasks of aesthetic education and the formation of ideals, can become a kind of psychological therapy for children experiencing difficulties in communication. On the one hand, it makes it possible to "try on" various behavior and character types too, in other words, to try to create another version of one's self, on the other hand, it requires skills of interaction with partners, tolerance to the opinion different from one's own; moreover, there appear conditions for imitation of each other, which psychologists consider "as a condition for the transfer of children from physical object relations to each other to social, truly human relationships" [6, p.80].

Discussion

Regular performances of children's operas in the School of Modern Theatrical Stage Directions (SMTSD, Kharkiv) indicate that teachers take into account the beneficial influence of collective creative work on their students. The performances are prepared during the year with the involvement of all creative forces (students and teachers of the musical, theatrical, choreographic, art departments), as in the adult repertoire theater. Since 2008 to nowadays there were prepared S. Banevich's "Opera about The Kashka, The Cat and The Milk" (libretto by T. Kalinina after D. Mamin-Sibiriyak's fairy tale), Zh. Metallidi's "The Great Cockroach" (libretto by the composer after K. Chukovsky), V. Rubashevsky's "The Green Pharmacy" (libretto by the composer after P. Sinevsky), S. Gorkovenko's "The Fire Steel" (libretto by A. Amirova-Gorskovenko after H. K. Andersen's tale of the same name), N. Karsh's "Cockadoodledoo" (libretto by I. Tokmakova) and S. Banevich's "Switch on the Night" (libretto after R. Bradbury's story). The last composition (staged in 2015) is the most complex work performed to date. It is unusual for a children's work: it has "a complicated interval of vocal parts", there is no division into complete solo and ensemble numbers, which was noted shortly after the appearance of the opera in 1971 by the critic M. Goldenstein [3, p. 183]. At first, it seemed an insuperable obstacle, but children open to everything new successfully mastered the language of the modern composer. The possibilities of the music department of the SMTSD did not allow the orchestra to be involved, so its "shaky, mysteriously flickering sound" was pictured by the phonogram. Costume design emphasized the difference of the world in which the Boy, afraid of the dark, lives and the Night's

world: the clothes of “night indwellers” are created from shimmering dark fabrics, and the Boy wears classic light pajamas; when he became the friend of Darkness, his costume is supplemented by elements of black color.

The director I. Ivchenko faced with a difficult task: to make the audience feel a mysterious atmosphere in a small space of the SMTSD stage, in the absence of any mechanical stage equipment and with minimal material costs. However, we note that the director approached the solution of this problem with all earnestness, taking advantage of the experience of the famous director K. Stanislavski, and this seems to be natural. Over time, a tendency has developed to take a serious approach to the production of children’s operas without going into false primitiveness with allowance for the “childishness” of works. Only this style of work provides a high level of performance and its aesthetic value for young spectators. When working with the opera “Switch on the Night”, I. Ivchenko turned to limelight solutions and stage decor which cause associations with K. Stanislavski’s fantastic productions – *Hannele* by G. Hauptmann and *The Blue Bird* (French *L’Oiseau bleu*) by M. Maeterlinck. But if in *Hannele* the atmosphere was created by a single ray of bluish light, in which the bodies of the actors “seemed silhouettes, and their shadows were running, gathering, dispersing ... <...> and the actors lost themselves among them and seemed like shadows” [10, p. 191–192], for the performance of the SMTSD I. Ivchenko created a whole “light score” with the help of several expressive techniques. Among them are the following: 1) the use of ultraviolet light qualities in the “Dance of the Clock” – white elements of dancers’ costumes (sleeves to the elbow and

tights) glow in it, black elements are lost on the black background, and dancers’ movements give birth to associations with the hands of the clock movement; 2) the knock of the Darkness is duplicated by rhythmic flashes of light; 3) shadow theater, designed to show children playing in the window at the house across the street – there is a strong light source behind the actors who are hidden by the white screen, and the stage is into darkness; 4) visualization of the starry sky when the night comes – a placher of garlands imitating the constellations, on a black velvet backdrop; 5) fireflies-flashlights glowing with greenish light, in the hands of Darkness’s companions. To make such a palette of light effects play with all colors, the director completely “dresses” the scene in total black velvet clothes – a method discovered by K. Stanislavski when working on *The Blue Bird*. Black velvet allows you to “hide the depth of the stage and create in its portal a one-colour black plane of not three, but two dimensions” [10, p. 359] and paint on this canvas. As a result, a minimalistic and at the same time bright performance, interesting both for the spectators and for the young artists themselves, was produced.

There is also another way to introduce opera compositions written for children to children in Kharkov – in the format of short-term productions involving, however, great artistic forces. Before proceeding to the analysis of these performances, it seems to us necessary to briefly outline the cultural context in which such actions became possible. More than a quarter of the century The International Festival of Classical Music “Kharkiv Assemblies” exists. It was created in 1991 on the initiative of the rector of Kharkov National I. P. Kotlyarevsky University of Arts, People’s

Artist of Ukraine, PhD in musicology, professor Tetyana Vyerkina. The motto “Resistance to Evil with Art” reflects the long-term program that formed the basis of the festival – popularization and propaganda of classical music of various genres in live performance. In 2013 under the aegis of the festival, the Charitable Fund of the same name was created, primarily to support the young gifted musicians of Kharkiv. Conquering new admirers of classical music among the children’s audience became one of its main tasks. For this purpose the cycles of the concerts “Musical Dynasties”, “Conversations on Music”, the musical and theatrical salon “I Want To Know ...”, the projects “Holidays at the University” and “Children’s Philharmonic” were created on the basis of the Kharkov National I. P. Kotlyarevsky University of Arts (the organizers are PhD in musicology, associate professors of the university Irina Sukhlenko and Yulia Nikolaevskaia). The latter project aims not only to introduce good music to children, but to awaken the taste for performance and creation on stage in them. This educational program continues traditions that have developed in our city: for several decades the Kharkiv Philharmonic Society organizes concerts for the children’s audience, both in its halls and away of them. Since 2005, 5 annual concerts are held on the “Children’s Philharmonic” season ticket.

After 2 years the organizers of the university Children’s Philharmonic decided to master theatrical-musical space along with the purely musical projects (children’s concerts). This decision does not seem random; the leaders relied on the experience of child psychology. The theatrical action combined with music stimulates a deeper perception of the surrounding reality relying on natural

properties which, according to the researchers, are laid in the child from birth. The first of them is a dramatic instinct, a “special form of motor existence” according to P. Chubb. The researcher notes that “this dramatic expression is complex. Its basis is an imitative or mimic instinct for which instruments are used: sound or vocalization, facial expressions and gestures, and generally movement in a broad sense” [2, p. 11]. The second property we name as “Muses-origin core of the child” (according to E. Nikolaeva). It shows itself at all phases of small person development. At first (8-10 months) this is a “speech-singing” (T. N. Ushakov) when a child “can intone, rhythmically reproduce the mother’s phrase and simultaneously move the whole body, making by this time not chaotic but rather smooth movements” [5, p. 151]. Then the song obtains more familiar outlines accompanying the children’s life in different situations: as a spontaneous song arising in the moments of activity; as a fluid (amorphous) song that is born from crowing and exists only for the child as a certain sound background of the game (for example, sounds of transport); as song-formulas – teasers, agreed signals gathering for a game etc.; children also use adult songs transforming them (primarily text) in accordance with the game requirements [5, p. 151–153].

The children’s opera, invariably combining the theatrical element (to which the dramatic instinct responds) with singing (consonant with the “Muses-origin core” of the child), becomes a natural expression of children’s inner nature. From this point of view, I. Sukhlenko and Yu. Nikolaevskaia’s choice for the production in summer of 2016 seems persuasive. They decided on the musical of St. Petersburg composer Jakov Dubravin “Shoo! or The History

of Filofey the Cat” after Valery Zimin’s fairy tale of the same name for children and adults with verses by Victor Gin. It is unlikely that the organizers thought about that, chronologically arranged, programs of “Holidays at the University” in miniature reflect the development of the children’s theater, in particular, the musical one: passive perception of art – theatrical experience – theatrical-musical experience. We remind that in 1776 the countess de Genlis founded in her estate an educational theater for children. She “believed that

through the wise cultivation of the dramatic instinct children could be taught not only such lessons of language and history as education demanded, but the ‘elementary lessons of life,’ – things of the heart and spirit not contained in textbooks” [11, p. 12]. Stephanie de Genlis wrote plays for her children herself. This practice has spread throughout Europe, cultivated by the tradition of Hausmusik, which became popular in the XIX century. Under its influence, dramatic plays were enriched with musical numbers, and thus a new genre – the children’s opera – was formed in the last third of the XIX century. Such performances were popular in the houses of noblemen and educated people of that era. For example, F. Shalyapin three times a year held balls and staged musical performances for children in his mansion. Liubov Orlova, well-known Soviet actress in the future (and noblewoman by birth), at the age of seven performed the part of Redka in the A. Buchner’s children’s opera “Mushroom Tumult”. Work on the musical part was conducted by the teacher of music of the Shaliapins older children who also took part in the production. Although it was a home children’s play, they approached very seriously to design the production: the costumes were

ordered from the professional designer N. Lamanova, the backdrop was painted by B. Kustodiev, the playbill was developed by L. Bakst [9, p. 11].

In view of the aforesaid the production of a children’s musical performance, which took place within the “Holidays at the University of Arts” framework, appears not only as an educational beginning, but also as an action that revives the traditions of the past. Despite its apparent simplicity, J. Dubravin’s work has a number of features that allow to refer it to a children’s opera. These are solo and ensemble forms of utterances, musical characteristics of the personages, instrumental episodes. Conversational dialogues – a distinctive feature of a significant number of such works – are a specific trait of the children’s opera. It originates in two different genre-style models of the comic opera – French *opéra-comique* and German *Siengspiel*. However, the composer gives a clear genre definition – “the musical”. The very nature of musical numbers, their genre prototypes (a song, including a pop one, *chastooshkas*), harmony colors show the direct influence of modern popular musical culture. This is not surprising if you recall the origin of “the musical” genre, because it absorbed and synthesized several directions of different genres and styles. T. Kudinova points at the dominated role of jazz music in the final forming of the musical: “It was jazz in the artistic synthesis of the musical that became an effective catalyst for the interaction of elements of various genres – ballad opera, minstrel theater, burlesque, vaudeville, revue, operetta” [quotation on: 7]. In the XX century, the boundaries of the opera were so expanded that the works of the most varied types turned out to be included in its composition and dramatic field. This applies equally to the children’s opera,

which is living and continually developing genre and not only follows the steps of the development of the opera, but makes the matrix from all its latest achievements overworking them in its own way.

We remind that musicals usually are performed either with sound recording or with an orchestra (instrumental ensemble) accompaniment, so the piano part in J. Dubravin's composition they decided to arrange for an instrumental ensemble. The instruments were chosen in accordance with the heroes of V. Zimin's play, in which homeless Cats have their own temper, behavior, the ability to communicate with others, and this often causes associations with human character. An unusual combination of timbres was chosen: accordion, flute, clarinet and acoustic guitar added bright details to the sound of the string quintet and piano. The children became the members of the ensemble; piano part was performed by an experienced accompanist Nina Ivanova. She took the role of the leader who could help young orchestra players not to be confused in all the difficult situations that arise at the stage. The work on the musical lasted eight working days, but in fact the preparation had begun long before the holidays: instrumentalists, choir members and vocalists received their parts at the beginning of the spring semester. In other words, a new composition was mastered on the model widespread nowadays, when all the material is learned in advance, and the production itself is conducted in a short time, in the "express mode".

When the direct realization of the "Holidays at the University" project began, it was time for the rehearsals in groups under the guidance of the teachers-curators. Each rehearsal day was scheduled accurately: lessons with the teachers, a workshop on the stage

movement, combined rehearsals. As a recreation classes in the English language were conducted. There children in a playful form got to know the English "cat's" poetry (let's not forget that the musical came to us from English-speaking countries). But another pleasant surprise waited for the participants of the play: they were given the opportunity not only to perform in it, but to become the artists-decorators. This method could be used (at least in part) by the chiefs of other productions, because through drawing the creative abilities inherent in children become apparent. Psychologists say that the drawing of the child "generalizes the understanding of the world order made by the child's mind" [5, p. 96]. In addition, if we consider a children's musical performance as a subsidiary therapy for Internet addiction problems, making painted scenery can also help to get rid of the accumulated emotional tension, because "drawing is a kind of emotional relief: the accumulated impressions are thrown out of the reservoir of memory, and first of all what overflows this reservoir and especially disturbs the inner feeling" [5, p. 96]. In the musical "Shoo!" 4 sheets of paper (format A0) with stylized cats images were used as symbolic scenery. The children painted them at the hour of rest between classes, and during the performance, they became a picturesque background of action (symbolically, as they hung on balustrades of the balcony above the stage). The costumes were arranged in a democratic style and made up of the participants' everyday clothes: blue jeans and a T-shirt or a checked shirt. Some particular elements stand out against these costumes and emphasized the hero's belonging to the world of people – a Grandmother's patterned shawl or an elegant dress of a Girl, cat's

owner. The makeup of the entire “cat” group – mustache and a dark nose – supplemented hero’s images.

The first musical and theatrical experience within the walls of the University of Arts, which gained considerable success with the public, revealed “bad reefs” for the creative group. In particular, in spite of the fact that the young director A. Volostnoy tempted the children with work at the acting trainings, the children experience was not enough to project the received knowledge into a stage image, especially for a small number of rehearsals. As history shows, children, due to the psychological characteristics of their age, require the most accurate and detailed instructions on the nature of movements, the heroes’ interaction among themselves, special actor reactions to the partner’s actions. In this case, the director’s plan of the teacher should be similar to the orchestral score, in which the actions of each participant, from the main party performer to the actors of the mime ensemble and the choir, are described in detail. Another key to success is the *mise-en-scène* perfecting by repeating them many times. This method, as we know, is used at rehearsals by adult actors, especially it is necessary for children. The actor’s organics and the improvisation freedom are given to a few people; the others can achieve freedom within the given framework by the accumulation of skills.

This experience the organizers realized during the preparation of the next performance – the fantastic opera by M. Lysenko “The Winter and The Spring, or The Snow Beauty” (1892). Of the operatic triad for children, this opera is the most difficult one in form and in music. This is two-act composition with solo entrances, duet, choral numbers written on the basis

of Ukrainian folk ritual songs, which, as N. Andrievskaya says, Lysenko had already collected and arranged for children’s musical performance [1, p. 40]. The plot shows the change of the seasons in accordance with the folk calendar. The fifth-year theatrical department student of the University of Arts Sofia Melnikova was invited to be the director of the performance (this work was her diploma project), and she also acted as a scenographer and a designer. By the beginning of the rehearsals, the director already had a detailed plan of the *mise-en-scène*, and that, taking into account the experience of the previous production, helped the children to get used quickly to the scenic space. Sofia approached the material of the opera creatively and put into action a group of mimic characters – The Summer and The Forest Spirits. The Summer performed a mime sketch with The Autumn on the music of the overture visualizing the images embodied in the music. The Forest spirits – the composite image of the heroes of Ukrainian folklore (*mavkas*, *chugaysters*, *lisovyks*) – performed plastic bridges between the episodes, on the one hand; on the other hand, they became the assistants of the director on stage and kept young actors focused on the order of numbers. When thinking over scenery, S. Melnikova took into account the space of the hall and the material base of the “Children’s Philharmonic” and the large-scale set was replaced by a simple but multifunctional construction that was easily changed. There were several cubes of different sizes, and The Winter’s throne, the platform on which the “winter” characters (The Icy-Roads, The Snowstorm, The Old Snowman, The Breeze) were placed, or the pedestal for The Spring were built from these cubes. In addition, the change of tracteries on

different sides of these figures marked the changing seasons. The costumes were designed in an interesting way: the director decided to emphasize the opposition of different groups of characters, contrasting other tones in the costume of The Autumn to white clothes of The Winter and her retinue and to floral motives in The Spring's dress.

Like the musical, it was decided to perform M. Lysenko's opera with an instrumental ensemble. Its players were again the children – the students of Kharkiv Secondary Specialized Music School, children music schools № 1, № 14; the cello and double bass parts were assisted by the students of the University's orchestra faculty. For "The Winter and The Spring" performance, the choir of the School of Teaching Practice was joined with the choir ensemble of the children music school № 10 (the pupils of the conductor E. Yastrub). Among the singers-soloists, this time there were also adult participants, which did not contradict the composer's intention: during the first home

performance, the Frost part was sang by the nephew of M. Lysenko. It is caused by the tessitura features – the image of the master of the cold requires a low, not a childish voice. The production process this time took two months, the children visited rehearsals every Sunday like the real actors of an adult theater, and this work was not in vain – the performance received a hearty welcome from the audience at the opening night on December 25, 2016.

Conclusion

We think the children's opera is a creative projection of the child's two natural properties – a dramatic instinct and a "Muses-origin core". The Kharkiv productions practice shows the relevance of such works to nowadays, a rich genre palette, which makes it possible to choose an opera for staging considering the age of the performers and their musical skills. This, in turn, demonstrates the modernity of the genre and its relevance to the reality surrounding us.

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ХАРЬКОВТА БАЛАЛАР ОПЕРАСЫНЫҢ ҚОЙЫЛЫМДЫҚ ТӘЖІРИБЕСІ

Аңдатпа

Мақалада Харьковте балалар операларының (балалардың қатысуымен) спектакльдерінің ерекшеліктері қаралды. Мұндай жұмыс формаларының маңыздылығы адамдар арасындағы қарым-қатынас пен Интернет-нашақорлықтың проблемалары аясында анықталады. И.Ивченконың қазіргі заманғы театрлық және этаптық бағыттар мектебінде режиссер С.С.Баневичтің «Түнді қалай қосу керек» пьесасында Станиславскийдің директорлық жұмыстарына сілтеме жасалды. Бұл шығарма жұмыс ережелеріне сәйкес құрылған репертуарлы театрға жатады - музыкалық, театрлық, хореографиялық және көркем бөлімдердің күштерін тарту арқылы жыл бойы жұмыс істеген мектеп ұжымы. Өндірістің тағы бір түрі И.П.Котляровский атындағы Харьков ұлттық өнер университетінде «Университеттегі демалыс» және «Балалар филармониясы» жобаларындағы көріністерде пайдаланылды. Қойылымдар қысқа мерзім ішінде жасалды (2 аптада – «Брысь!» Я. Дубравина, 2 айда – «Қыс пен Жаз» Н. Лысенко). Тәжірибе көрсеткеніндей шығармашылық жетекшілер алдында мұндай форма бірнеше талаптарды алға тартады: 1) толыққанды режиссерлік жоспардың бар болуы; 2) кейіпкерлердің қарым-қатынасының, серіктерінің іс-қимылына актерлық реакциялардың балаларға нақты нұсқаулық ретінде; 3) мизансценаны қайталау арқылы ұтымды қою.

Трек сөздер: Харьков қаласындағы (Украина) балалар операсы, балалар психологиясы, Я. Дубравин мюзиклі, С. Баневич операсы, «экспресс-қойылым», Н.Лысенконың балалар үшін музыкалық-театралды шығармалар.

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ПРАКТИКА ПОСТАНОВОК ДЕТСКИХ ОПЕР В ХАРЬКОВЕ

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются особенности постановок детских опер (с участием детей) в г. Харькове. Определяется значимость таких форм работы в свете проблем межличностного общения и интернет-зависимости. В спектакле «Как включали ночь» С. Баневича, поставленном режиссёром И. Ивченко в Школе современных театрально-сценических направлений, прослеживаются отсылки к режиссёрским работам К. С. Станиславского. Данная постановка относится к созданной по правилам работы репертуарного театра – коллектив школы трудился над ней в течении года с привлечением сил музыкального, театрального, хореографического и художественного отделений. Иная форма постановки использована в спектаклях проектов «Каникулы в университете» и «Детская филармония» в Харьковском национальном университете искусств имени И. П. Котляревского. Постановки осуществлялись в короткие сроки (2 недели – «Брысь!» Я. Дубравина, 2 месяца – «Зима и Весна» Н. Лысенко). Как показала практика, такая форма работы выдвигает перед творческими руководителями определённые требования: 1) наличие подробного режиссёрского плана; 2) максимально точные инструкции детям относительно взаимодействия героев между собой, особых актёрских реакций на действия партнёров; 3) оттачивание мизансцен многократным их повторением.

Ключевые слова: детская опера в г. Харькове (Украина), детская психология, мюзикл Я. Дубравина, опера С. Баневича, «экспресс-постановка», музыкально-театральные сочинения для детей Н. Лысенко.

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