

MULTIMEDIAL CHAMBER OPERA *BOOKS OF SILENCE (LES LIVRES DU SILENCE, 2004)* BY ANDRIS DZENĪTIS: INTERACTION OF THE POETIC TEXT, MUSICAL STRUCTURE AND TEXTURE

Jelena Garkavchenko

Summary

Keywords: Oscar Milosz, hidden dialogue, contemporary opera, texture, the cycle

A multimedia chamber opera for eight voices, instrumental ensemble and electronics, *Books of Silence*, is the first stage work by contemporary Latvian composer Andris Dzenītis (1978). This opera is dedicated to the Latvian composer and sound director Mārtiņš Tauriņš (1978–2003), and its text is based on seven poems by French-Lithuanian poet Oscar Vladislav de Lubicz Milosz (Oskaras Milašius, 1877–1939).

Andris Dzenītis' interpretation of the genre is unusual on both the content and structure levels. The opera is created for an ensemble of eight voices, not for soloists, though remote soloistic hints can be found: for example, the electronics solo in movement III, the mezzo soprano solo in movement V, as well as the bass clarinet solo in movement II and the bass solo in movement VI.

There is no traditional libretto or action on the stage – *Books of Silence* is a static concert opera. The poems and their fragments, selected by Andris Dzenītis according to the postmodern principle of text montage, have a common emotional plot with exposition, development, climax and recapitulation. The emotional plot emphasizes the closeness of love and death, even though the opera lacks a sequential story, traditional for the genre. There are no individual characters – the first-person narrative mostly comes from the vocal ensemble, but, taking into account the ambivalence of this person's gender (male in movement I *L'Étrangère* and movement IV *Quand elle viendra*, female in movement V *Solitude* and neutral in other movements), it is possible to speak about a hidden dialogue. The poetry of Oscar Milosz is also manifested as a dialogue between real and unreal spheres – namely, the text, which is sung by the ensemble or soloists and text declamation, recorded on the tape. The comprehensibility of the text meaning varies in accordance with texture. In homorhythmic or declamatoric solo episodes, the meaning of the word is emphasized, but very often the word loses its sense and turns into a specific color: if the texture becomes polyphonic, declamation is superimposed on the sung text and the ensemble is whispering or dividing words into phonemes. The French language, which is not fully understandable for a non-native speaker, itself is a step towards sonorism.

⁷ I. *L'Étrangère*, II. *Sonatine*,
III. *Le jardin descend vers la mer*,
IV. *Quand elle viendra*, V. *Solitude*,
VI. *Adieu dans le soir*,
VII. *Symphonie inachevée*.

The cyclic structure of the opera (seven movements⁷) brings it closer to a song/choir cycle, which is not a coincidence, considering Andris Dzenītis' oeuvre. Parallels can be found with his *Four Madrigals* by E.E.Cummings (2000) for eight voices and *Seven Madrigals* by E.E.Cummings (2004) for mezzo soprano and instrumental group, as well as the madrigal itself – an early predecessor of the opera genre. Cyclicity as a principle appears on various levels: text and texture arches between outer movements of the opera, as well as structural organization of the composition overall. Concerning the musical forms, the even movements (II, IV and VI) are ternary, movements I and V – strophic, but variations can be found in movements III and VII. According to the use of voices and instruments, the whole composition is based on a rondo principle with alternation of tutti and solo episodes. Movements I, IV, VI and VII are tutti sections (though the full ensemble is used only in the outer movements of the opera) with solo sections in between: movement II – bass clarinet solo, movement III – tape solo, movement V – mezzo soprano solo.

In music theatre history, experimental tendencies of the avant-garde were vividly manifested in the 1960s. For example, Luigi Nono added electronics to his opera *Intolleranza* (1960), György Ligeti replaced a meaningful text with phonemes in his operas *Aventures* (1962) and *Nouvelles aventures* (1962–1965); later Bruno Maderna created a chamber opera *Satyricon* (1973) which consists of 16 movements, played in random sequence with recorded music in between. Nowadays, opera has gone far away from its traditional form, and the genre continues to develop. New tendencies in Latvian music mostly became relevant at the turn of the century, in the oeuvre of the composers born in the 1970s. Still, Andris Dzenītis was one of the first composers who has created a contemporary form of opera.

Literatūra un citi avoti

Adlington, Robert (2005). Music theatre since the 1960s'. *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*. Edited by Mervyn Cooke. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 225–243

Dzenītis, Andris (n.d.). *Complete List of Works*. <http://dzenitis.webs.com/listofworks.htm> (skatīts 2017. gada 8. novembrī)

Dzenītis, Andris (2004a). *Les livres du silence / Tavas klusēšanas grāmata*. Nepublicēta partitūra (datorraksts). Glabājas komponista privātarhīvā

Dzenītis, Andris (2004b). *Tavas klusēšanas grāmata = Les livres de ton silence*: CD albums (buklets ietver operā izmantotos Oskara Miloša dzejoļu tekstus un Jāņa Elsberga veiktos tulkojumus). Rīga: Latvijas Radio, LRCD046