

To the Problem of the Chamber Opera as a Specific Genre

Evidence from “White Nights”, the Opera by Yuri Butsko

Svetlana Voitkevich

Department of History of Music
Krasnoyarsk State Institute of Art
Krasnoyarsk, Russia
E-mail: art-vice-rector@yandex.ru

Abstract—The materials presented in the article are devoted to the development and establishment of the chamber opera as a specific genre of the national musical theatre in the 1960s-1970s. It is mentioned that “minor” forms were equally characteristic of both drama and musical theatres. The article explains the reasons why the authors concentrated on the individual personality and inner world. As a result, they turned to the treasury of world literature in general and to the works by F. M. Dostoyevsky in particular. The above-mentioned tendencies are reflected in the opera by Yu. M. Butsko, “White Nights”, which has become the material of the research. It is the evidence of the chamber opera genre peculiarities; the specific intonational, compositional and dramatic features of the work are considered. It is concluded that an important role in the opera is played by the Night theme, which opens up the opera and becomes the unique “intonational stock” for the further development of the work.

Keywords—F. M. Dostoyevsky; Yu. M. Butsko; “White Nights”; the Thaw period

I. INTRODUCTION

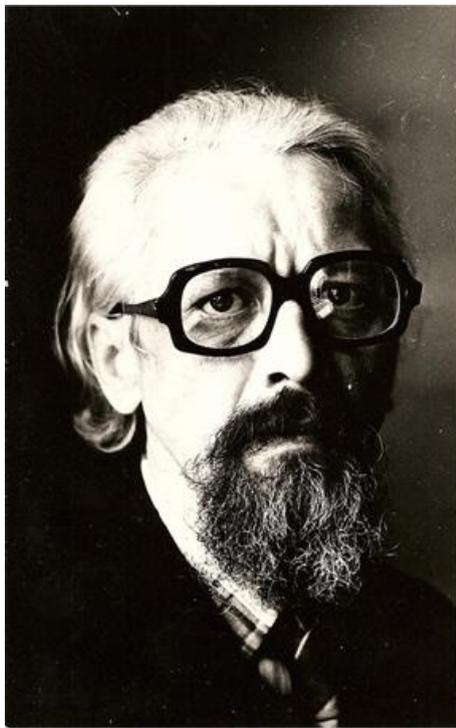
60-70-s years of the XXth century became a special phase in the development of Russian art, its beginning is usually called the period of “thaw”¹. It began after the death of Stalin I.V. and was famous for its “burst” of ideas, achievements generated by freedom of creative thought; people’s mind was open to everything new, bright and modern. These trends are reflected in all kinds of art: literature and Drama Theatre, cinema and applied arts and crafts. The intension to renewal of genres means of expression, writing techniques, and series of images influenced musical theatre, which replied to the remarkable life changes in the country in its own way. The width of research and experiments, the intension to go out of the established pattern, the development of various genre features went along with the creative atmosphere that dominated in the country during the “Khrushchev thaw”. It is

¹ The time period of the “Khrushchev thaw” is marked by dates from 1954 to 1968 years in the study of Smelyanskiy A.M. [14]. We should remind that the period got its name after the story of Ehrenburg I. called “Thaw”, published in the journal “Banner” in 1954, 5th release.

fair to mention that the authors of the collective work were right, saying, “to some extent, the artwork and, in general, the spiritual life were aimed to compensate the lack of the real social changes” [16. P.15].

A new wave of interest to the most important works of the Western and Russian literature, which depict the everlasting problems of human existence, breaks again since the second half of the 60-s in theatre, cinema and publicist writing. The works of Block A.A. and Bryusov V.J., Akhmatova A. and Bulgakov M. A. are reread again; “Hamlet” by Kozintsev G.M. appears on the screens. Domestic theatre pays great attention to the problem of moral research, personal life and family relationships that helps to reveal Efros A.V., Volchek G.B., Zakharov M.A. Heifetz L.E., who turned to the classics as to the spiritual ally in search of the roots of the present. Stage interpretations of Bulgakov M.A., Lermontov M.Y., Griboyedov A.S., Ostrovsky A., Chekhov A.P. and Fyodor Dostoevsky appear one after another.

The same processes can be found in the opera theatre. The search for new forms and means of expression, genre variety is replacing the precision of the “big” opera. The authors wish to show the value of every single person, his uniqueness and originality that leads to extreme relevance of small forms operas this time. Weinberg M.S., Fried G.S., Butsko J.M. “Fig. 1”, Sedelnikov G.S., Kholminov A.N., Kobekin V.A. create works in the genre of monoopera, duoopera. The authors are eager to save the specificity of the prose text source, which contributes to the active renewal of opera genre by identifying previously unclaimed opportunities. On the wave of the search of “new character” and desire “to bring to the world what he has lost” [1. P. 22] the composers appeal to the complex philosophical rich, dynamic and expressive prose of Dostoyevsky F.M. “The composers and stage managers’ interest in Dostoyevsky can be explained by the fact that his works are extremely scenic with all their complexity and they are very musical, too” [21]. On one of the operas created on the subject of his work will be discussed in this article.



Yury Markovich Butsko (1938-2015)

Fig. 1. Photo of Yury Markovich Butsko

II. THE SITUATION IN MUSIC AND DRAMA THEATRE IN 1960S-1970S

60-70-s of the XXth century in the history of the musical theatre in Russia became a period of precise attention of the domestic composers to the chamber opera genre. As Kudryashov Y.G. fairly noticed: "The appeal to the chamber genre in the history of Russian-Soviet opera is a long-standing and constant tradition, harked back to the past of domestic music (Dargomyzhsky, Mussorgsky, Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninoff, and others)". At the same time, the researcher mentions that the interest to chamber genre is not stable; it is increasing or decreasing, "depending on the time, social events or musical-style processes" [10. P. 89]. 60-70-ies of the XXth century became the period of development in the domestic musical theatre when "minor" (small) opera appeared to be the one of the most adequate forms of expression. Moreover, it concerned both lyrical and comic opera [19. P. 51]. A significant and striking evidence of the chamber genre importance became the opening of the Moscow Chamber Theatre in 1972 by its founder and permanent head Pokrovsky B.A.²

The composers' interest to "minor" opera can be explained by various reasons. The first one is a kind of reaction to the dominance of "song" opera in the 30s-50s, that led to the "simplification of opera forms" according to B.V. Asafiev's opinion.

² The whole epoch in the development of the opera genre is connected with the name of this man and deserves a separate research.

We should pay attention to the fact that the same situation was observed in the dramatic theatre, where "schematism in solving vital problems, xenophobia in the arts, the inability to see the significant in the routine" [18. P. 80]. Epic, romance and epic novel genres were particularly popular in literature this period, it led to the fact that "many giant fakes appeared along with the world literature works" [17. P. 15]. At the same time the opera was surrounded with a large scale of demands such as monumentality that contributed to "the approval of the socialist realism method as the ideological basis of Soviet art" and the image of the "new man" who became "the main trend of the artistic activity, that meant the apotheosis of the regime achievements and the main figures of the country's leadership" [14. P. 16].

As if in contrast to a strong, convinced, uncompromising character romantic antagonist appears in the opera of 60s. He is restless, extraordinary man searching for the highest ethical ideals. Consequently, a chamber opera has become extremely popular as it responded to the artist's demands to turn to the inner personal world, to the individual, to uniqueness of each person, his desire to "peer" into the character, reflect the subtle nuances of the human psyche, the slightest movement of his soul. Similar changes are occurring in the drama theatre field. New works in the one-act-play genre appear in 60-s years. According to Vishnevskaya I., this genre gave "space to the writers' aspiration for the extreme action concentration, opened the possibility of particularly intense psychological research and satisfied the play-writers' desire to raise universal problems in the small volume works" [20. P. 10].

There was one more equally important reason that motivated the composers to turn to the "minor" genre. Despite all the significant achievements of Dargomyzhsky A.S., Mussorgsky M.P., Rimsky-Korsakov N.A., Rachmaninoff S.V., it didn't have any established "canons" and provided much more composition and dramatic decisions freedom to composers in comparison with the traditional opera. "The possibility for free experiment with unusual composition of the performers out of the conventional big opera stage, a special mobility of minor operatic forms", Danko L.G. explains the preferential attention to this genre [4. P. 15]. Thinking about the advantages of a minor opera, Kholminov A.N., the author of two "chamber" dialogues – mentions two main features of the genre. Firstly, in the form of chamber composer can afford more daring attempts than in the "big" opera, burdened with the steady "weight" of traditions. Secondly, "the chamber opera is the genre, where the composer mainly can play the role of the researcher who is eager to penetrate deeply into the inner world of the individual, to convey subtle nuances of his emotions" [15. P. 17].

Here is one more statement. This time – the words of an English composer Britten B., "I consider Chamber Opera to be more flexible for the expression of intimate feelings. It gives an opportunity to concentrate upon human psychology. It is the very theme that has become the first in modern progressive art"[2. P. 63]. This quote of a British author appeared within our thinking not accidentally. The invitation

of foreign theatre companies - both dramatic and musical has become one of the positive trends of the Soviet policy during "thaw" period. B. Britten's Opera theatre visited Moscow in 1964 and presented the audience composer's chamber opera. Their visit showed how nominal the concept of "small" opera and how much one can express through it. English theatre performances became an accelerator to intensify the interest of domestic musicians to the chamber opera genre³.

Finally, we should mention an entirely economic factor, which contributed to composers' interest in minor forms. According to Butsko Yu.M., chamber opera is "social phenomenon", as a small amount of performers is mobile, does not require large financial support and able to cover the costs of production completely⁴. Moreover, a small structure allowed to present opera outside the theatre as guest performers; for example, on the concert stage, sometimes without decorations and without any damage to the author's concept.

Despite all the variety of forms, performing compositions and composite solutions that characterize the chamber operas of different composers, they are united by the intention of authors (in most cases, a composer is also a librettist at the same time) to use prose texts as a literary source. It can be explained by a wish of the artists to "get rid of" the conventions and pathetic of a "big" opera, return to naturalness and spontaneity of the routine speech.

Along with this tendency, the fact that composers appeal to the Russian classics looks natural, they appeal to that "universal stock of universal ideas" (Baeva A.A.). Pushkin A.S., Gogol N.V., Dostoevsky F.M., Chekhov A.P., Bulgakov M.M. are considered as great teachers of spirituality, morality and humanism. Baeva A.A. notes several reasons for such interest in her study. The main reason is a desire to fulfill the "spiritual needs of a modern man, that could find only partial response in Soviet literature due to imposed taboos" [1. P. 24]. Besides, musicians were attracted by ideological and philosophical side of the Russian writers' prose, their harmonious creative aspirations, aiming to recreate the image of the "little man" in the artwork.

We should remind that the first appeal to this subject in the art became possible in the XIXth century conditions, that according to the opinion of A. Mikhailov, "brought us a very special, unique, previously unpredictable experience ... in the sphere of naturalness and spontaneity of any cultural presence", without which "there would not have been great French painting of the XIXth century, no great Russian literature and music of the XIXth century, there would not have been Dostoevsky or Tolstoy, because their creativity is possible only when the very naturalness of life, the very immediacy of life dictates the forms and themes, and the whole nature of artistic creativity" [12. P. 490].

³ The author was told by Butsko Yu.M. and Kholminov A.N. about considerable influence Britten group arrival and his opera productions had, they recalled this event with a special sense and called it one of the strongest impressions of their life.

⁴ If there is no reference to a specific publication, the information was obtained from personal interviews with Butsko Yu.M. on the 8th of February, 2005 in the walls of the Moscow Conservatory.

Such artistic direction of the XIX century was so harmonious with the creative desires of domestic composers that in the remarked period of the XXth century especially increased attention to the creation of the classics, and in particular, to the works of Gogol N.V. and Dostoevsky F.M. who discovered the existence of the depth of a single person. Such operas as "The Diary of a Madman" by Butsko Yu.M. (1964), "Poor people" by Sedelnikov G.S. (1970), "Opera about the story how Ivan Ivanovich quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich" by Banshchikov G.I. (1971), "Carriage" and "The Overcoat" by Holminov A.N. (1971), "Boboc" by Semenov V.N. (1976) were created during this period.

III. OPERA "WHITE NIGHTS" BY YU. M. BUTSKO

Opera of Butsko Y.M. "White Nights" (1968) on the novel by Dostoevsky F.M. is one of the representative works of that time. This work was written at the request of the outstanding singer Dorliac N.L. for Pisarenko G. and Mischevskii A., who were the first performers of the work. "White Nights" were supposed to be staged as a film-opera. The performers already knew their roles and were preparing for shooting, Rozhdestvensky G. had rehearsals, scenery was placed, but the head of the television has changed and a new chief "struck out my opera from the list with his red pencil along with other writings, saying that Soviet people didn't need Dostoevsky" (Butsko Yu.M.). The opera was performed in a concert version in Moscow in 1969. The world premiere of the work was in Dresden in 1973. It was directed by Kupfer G.

It is an interesting fact that the external "order" by Nina Dorliac coincided with the inner intention of the composer to arrange "self examination" (Butsko Yu.M.). This need had a number of reasons, but we will mention just one. Opera "The Diary of a Madman" on the novel by Gogol N.V. was created in 1964 by Yuri Butsko and made him famous, it is highly estimated at the moment and is perceived as one of the first samples of a chamber genre, but that time it did not lead to any further orders. Four years later, the composer, being a graduate student of the Moscow Conservatory, responded to the request of the well-known singer and, by his own confession, he decided to "check himself for professionalism", "to write without the piano and use the piano only for testing". The opera was born as a result of a creative "exam" where Butsko Yu.M. was the author of music and the libretto.

While searching for a literary source composer turned to the novel of Dostoevsky F.M. called "White Nights" finished in 1848. This early work of the writer is obviously influenced by romantic literature, which is indicated by the author genre definition (sentimental novel, the memories of the Dreamer) and an event time (the story takes place during four nights and one morning). Even in one of his first major works Dostoevsky F.M. raised the problem of enormous universal importance, but presented it in a romantic form. Sensitive, "sentimental" content of the novel, combined with the problems of human loneliness, society alienation, the intensive moral search of the protagonist, became, in our opinion, valid reasons to explain the choice of literary fundamental principle of the opera.

Moreover, according to Butsko's Yu.M. words, "White Nights" did not require large processing, significant changes and "the text was almost ready and he could adapt it by his own means". As it correctly observed by researcher, "The interpretation of literary source in the form of sound is caused, first of all, by the artistic target, set by the creators of the work. The losses and the acquisitions will inevitable occur" [10. P. 471]. Taking the text of Dostoevsky's F.M. novel as a basis, the composer made corrections caused by both the genre specifics and his own concept.

The changes are mostly connected with the opera composition. Five parts of the "sentimental novel" became the basis of the opera consisting of three Nights and a Morning. We should pay attention to the fact that the composer, following the literary source, calls pictures using novel terms. In this regard, it is worth to mention that the composers, applying to the creativity of Dostoevsky F.M., tend to maintain a composite unit of a literary source as the picture title. Butsko J.M. used the night, Sedelnikov G.S. in the opera "Poor people" used the letter, Kobekin V.A. in the chamber opera "N.F.B." based on the novel "The Idiot" used the chapter.

Composer does not use the third part the novel, where after conversation with Nastenka dreamer discovers his total solitude, and this terrible "discovery" throws him into depression, "that he had never had before" [5. P. 75]. It anticipates the denouement of events and the end of the novel. "My nights ended in the Morning. The day was bad. The dull rain was falling and knocking at my windows; it was dark in the room and gloomy in the yard. I had headache and felt dizzy, the fever was creeping up my limbs" [5. P. 139].

Opera final is absolutely different. Composer's remarque prescribes stage designed to be a kind of "fantastic town in the crown of the light", which creates a vivid contrast with the previous pictures⁵, against which the "Morning" decoration symbolizes enlightenment of the Dreamer's soul, his spiritual insight perceived through the meeting with Nastenka.

Lyrical and psychological storyline has the leading role in the novel and opera. The author's attention is concentrated upon the discovery of the characters' inner world, their emotions. Dreamer and Nastenka are presented in "close-up", which is dictated, on one hand, by the specificity of the chamber opera genre, but on the other hand by composer's talents features, characterized by "acute psychology of artistic thinking and romantic essence of the creative personality", according to Bobrowski J.P. [3. P. 17]. It can explain why Butsko Y.M. applied to the most poetic work of Dostoevsky F.M., according to Kudryavtsev's Y.G. opinion.

The action of the opera, as well as in the novel, takes place at night, because only that time the hero can turn away

⁵ Night One: Town. Night. Channel embankment is empty. Night Two: A view of the same embankment, but from the side. Bench. Night Three: The Square is closed by houses corners. The Channel is no longer visible. It is obvious that according to the composer's plan the decorations of each picture narrow stage space gradually, indicating that the situation is getting worse and inner tension of the characters is increasing.

from the outside busy world and understand his concerns. The artwork of Dostoevsky F.M. describes a special, mysterious white night of Petersburg. It becomes the time when the character can reveal his real, true "Ego" regardless to conventions of Petersburg's life; but it also initially suggests a special ordinance that must happen that night. The ambiguity lies in the sense of duality, even incompatibility of the concept of "white night". Is it possible to see dark light or light darkness? The multidimensionality of the space is created by Dreamer's imagination whose fantasies carry him out to another world—"fabulous, fantastic", "to the seventh crystal heaven", "to the realm of dreams". The meeting with Nastenka happened during the white Petersburg night not accidentally; the Night creates a special atmosphere and adjusts to the intimate tone, a mystical way at the same time.

Night is the time that rises the character's desire to comprehend his life, to reflect on the complex issues of being, it tunes up for atmosphere of sincere heart recognition. Butsko Y.M. realized it and preserved semantic richness of the image of the Night in his work, which is reflected in the musical theme, the opening opera. Let us define it as the theme of Night. It is extremely important to the drama of the opera because it gives "growth" to all the main thematic material of the opera.

The Night theme opens the first picture, performing the function of the introduction into the specific scenic situation. Following one of the fundamental traits of Dostoevsky F.M. poetics, that is confession, the composer retains the speech "from the first person" recreated in the novel. The story is told on behalf of the protagonist—Dreamer. He is not just recalling the past, but immersed into it, starting from a certain moment to relive again the incident as the author of his own biography, and as a direct participant in the events. Note that the composer keeps unchanged the phrase of the Dreamer, which he uses to apply to the audience: "Dear reader" (underlined by me—S.V.). The emphasis is put on the special character of the action: the protagonist is not simply telling the story – he is writing his memoirs, presenting the audience a passage from his autobiography. At the same time, along with the confession we can talk about a special time of the event and the dual role of Dreamer, who is in two time dimensions simultaneously: the past and the present.

Such a complex emotional and psychological condition is recreated in the main theme, which has "artistic and semantic ambivalence" [7. P. 26]. On the one hand, cello timbre, entrusted first conducting threads, enters the atmosphere of warm, intimate narrative. The core of the theme is the downward movement from "A" to "E" by the sound of the Phrygian turnover. Slowness in deployment of musical material, which is based on the principle of variation on the motivic level, rhythmic non-periodical, give to the theme sound length and turnover:

Example 1 "Fig. 2".

Lento, espressivo Город. Ночь. Набережная канала пуста.
V-c. solo

Fig. 2. Example 1

Such a multi-faceted field of the event time caused intonational and semantic richness of the Night theme that opens the opera and becomes a source of thematic material.

This principle is fully coincides with the creative aim of the composer: “Each element of the sound matter must be gradually transformed during the work” [6. P. 50]. The Night theme performs an architectonic function in the opera and sounds in the introduction and the conclusion of the first Night, in the postludes of the second and third pictures. This principle of the intonation and thematic organization, tending to monothematism, is one of the features of modern chamber opera, according to Sabinina M.D. [13. P. 48].

Implementing in music the plot of Dostoevsky’s F.M novel, the young author unwittingly was effected by the powerful influence of the Russian writer poetics and showed its basic features in his work by the musical means. In particular, the image of a Young man in the opera is interpreted as a Dreamer double, as a result, the performance of the two parties is entrusted to a single actor. Dreamer is the image, whose spiritual transformation takes place in front of the viewer’s eyes: from a man “without no any stories”, he becomes a person capable to evaluate “a minute of bliss”, presented him by the girl. The image of the Young man, on the contrary, is static. However, in the opera, as well as in the novel, its significance in the development of the conflict, of course, is great. The Young man unwittingly becomes an obstacle to the Dreamer’s happiness with his girlfriend, because of Nastenka’s ban–“Do not fall in love with me ... You should not do it!”–is identified with this person in the mind of the main character. Consequently, the image of a Young man sharpens inner lyrical and psychological conflict of Dreamer. In addition, the existence of the double within the event, describes him as a kind of a fatal force, that poses on the protagonist’s sense and does not allow openly confess his love. It is symbolic that this alter ego of the main character–that is, in fact, he himself–becomes an obstacle to the happiness achievement.

At the level of architectonic the idea of duality appears in the concentric structure of the first two Nights form, and on the level of re-theme of “fraternal compassion” and episode of “love ban”. Meanwhile, the form “of the second plan” reveals in the composition of “White Nights” basing on the principles of the sonata allegro. The first Night is an analogy to the exposition, where Dreamer and Nastenka can be equal to the main and auxiliary parties; The second–including the development, where the emergence of the Young man is marked by a special episode. The third Night serves as a recapitulation and the Morning–codes of the enlightenment. In the last picture the final aria of Dreamer, which can be

called a prayer becomes the most significant “event”. It sounds like the quiet culmination of the whole picture.

Example 2 "Fig. 3".

134 Мечтатель *molto cantab.*
(как молитва)

Fig. 3. Example 2

Soft tertian “wobble” of the violins’ party, giving the theme similarity with the lullaby, “flowing” strumming of harps, melodious theme of wind instruments, echoing melodies of the vocal parties, create a sense of wonderful boundless peace. The use of extreme registers of the orchestral score helps to create a huge sound volume, which dynamics, however, does not exceed the pianissimo.

Only in the final bars of arioso delight and ecstasy Dreamer “broke” in the phrases “Oh, bliss!” and, as if applying to the audience: “It is enough for the whole human life, isn’t it?” An orchestral episode, which ends with the third part of the “Morning”, is brief but very bright, dynamic and full of dramatics. It reveals the depth of character’s emotions and feelings.

Thus, the certain features of Dostoevsky F.M poetics specific of the “minor” genre, and Yuri Butsko style features are implemented in the opera “White Nights”.

IV. CONCLUSION

Chamber opera got its “rebirth” in the last third of the XXth century and is still attractive to composers. It is gradually changing during the time, but preserves its relevance and unique identity, that is confirmed by the creation of new “small forms” works of domestic and foreign authors.

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