

Theater and Music. An Epistemological Approach

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Abstract: *Since ancient times, whose stories are based on concrete archaeological sources and discoveries, the ceremonies that accompanied the great rites of passage of mankind - birth, marriage and death - have been structured according to ancient scenarios, with texts, pantomime, costumes and the music. However, in this paper we do not intend to make a history of music or theater performance, but rather to describe the dynamics of an evolution, which can be traced from antiquity to the present. In fact, any spectacular form, or one that was considered worthy of becoming spectacular, with the help of which an important moment in the life of the community was marked, was accompanied by the show. Basically, the music and the spectacular forms, regardless of the typology to which they belonged, evolved, up to a point, together, but not necessarily in parallel. Each of the two areas addresses the same senses and it is the composer's duty to carefully identify that sensitive line in the creation, according to which the two should be in perfect balance and to serve the stage and the show.*

Key-words: *Theater; Music; Spectacular; Performance*

1. Introduction

From ancient times known, whose stories are based on concrete archaeological sources and discoveries, the ceremonies that accompanied the great rites of passage of mankind - birth, marriage and death - have been structured according to ancient scenarios, with texts, pantomime, costumes and the music. However, in this paper we do not intend to make a history of music or theater performance, but rather to describe the dynamics of an evolution, which can be traced from antiquity to the present. In fact, any spectacular form, or one that was considered worthy of becoming spectacular, with the help of which an important moment in the life of the community was marked, was accompanied by the show.

2. Methodology

Basically, the music and the spectacular forms, regardless of the typology to which they belonged, evolved, up to a point, together, but not necessarily in parallel. The method of analysis we have in mind in trying to correlate ideas with the formal and their structural course is comparative analysis. Also, we do not intend here to answer the famous question "What came first, music or theater" (here "theater" being understood as a spectacular manifestation with a concrete date, the message and the representation having a very well defined purpose - na), because it is neither the place nor the time. But we cannot evade this first question of all stories, and we will try a brief explanation: „Songs, performed individually or in groups, are accompanied by the clapping of the palms and feet, confirming the oldest and simplest percussion instrument. Judging by the tools used in these peoples today (the ancient tribes of Ceylon, Sumatra or Papua New Guinea - n.a.), we conclude that the oldest were the percussion, used in the work process”². This explanation provides concrete details of this painting of the

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² Gh. Merișescu. 1964. *Curs de istoria muzicii universale*. București: Ed. Didactică și Pedagogică, p. 10.

beginnings: the movements performed by those who struck the instruments represent a spectacular first dynamic form that transmitted a message to the public. Along with the sounds, the message was complete, and its transmission was consistent from an emotional as well as a physical perspective.

3. Music and Theatre, the two dimensions of culturality

Thus, we can double the meaning of the appearance of musical instruments, beyond its obvious purpose and we can interpret it in the sense of props. Professor Gheorghe Merișescu thinks of the evolution of instruments and, implicitly, of music, as being in close connection with the community's activities. He explains how the hand was gradually replaced with wooden or ivory objects and how the primitive man, noticing the effectiveness of the objects to the detriment of the limbs, would move on to more complicated operations, such as stretching the skin on the hollow trunk of a tree. sounds louder than skin lying on your knees. „Thus, the inventive spirit of man, in close connection with the development of the forces of production, the necessity and the taste for beauty, opened the way for the improvement of instruments. String instruments appeared later and their development must be related to the appearance of the hunting bow. The stretched string, by rubbing or pinching, makes sounds. The development of stringed instruments took place in close connection with the human voice, which he sought to imitate or strengthen, and their refinement - the multiplication of strings or holes in the whistle - led to the widening of the range of execution. United with the voice, the musical instruments had the same destination in the work process”³.

The Romanian scientist Constantin Brăiloiu⁴, in his *Problems of Ethnomusicology* (1984), shows that, in the beginning, music had a utilitarian character, the aesthetic factor being secondary. He considered that the music was based on many social, material and spiritual factors. Referring to the genesis of sound art, Brăiloiu states that: “Regardless of the place, time and conditions in which music is born, it is based on a kind of order of things, which cannot be changed”⁵.

And if the usefulness of music in the work process cannot be questioned, its presence in spectacular ceremonial events is just as certain. Long before the show could be defined as we understand it today, it represented a set of stage movements, accompanied by music, with appropriate attire, in a special space, with participants and spectators, with texts and interpretations ... that is. a show. The difference of perception towards this term between then and now is the utility, the role itself of the artistic production. If then the goal was to create a connection with the divinity, to tame, worship, thank, ritualizing all aspects of social and religious life, today the role is strictly entertainment, often emptied of content, serving personal or pecuniary interests more more important than the very purpose of spectacular achievement.

However, the specialist quoted above, Prof. Merișescu, goes further and, beyond this aspect, explains, in the extremely obvious paradigm of the requirements of his time, that, beyond the extreme and demonstrable importance of the influence of music in the production process, there another aspect, just as important, which the specialist strictly assimilates to the insufficient level of development, ie to primitivism, barbarism. The sounds, in their incipient

³ *Idem.*

⁴ Constantin Brăiloiu (1893-1959), composer, music critic, ethnomusicologist, folklorist and Romanian teacher from the first half of the twentieth century, animator of musical life, with a significant role in the development of the Romanian school of music composition and pedagogy. He is also considered the theorist of modern ethnomusicology.

⁵ Constantin Brăiloiu. 1984. *Problems of Ethnomusicology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 68.

form, formed a rhythm, a series of musicalities that were accompanied by the stage movement, which was also at the beginning. They served a higher purpose than increasing labor productivity, namely, they dimensioned the message to the divinity, to the gods, whether it was a prayer, a celebration, or even a threat. Thus, whatever the messages to the divine world (that aspect incomprehensible and feared, which is part of the forces of nature, says Prof. Merișescu), they were accompanied by music, stage movement and text. The healer (the shaman, the high priest or whatever he called the spiritual leader of the community), was the owner and leader of these manifestations, simpler or more complicated, depending on the historical period to which we refer. Initially, however, the text was the prerogative of this spiritual leader, and the sounds and stage movement belonged to the whole community, varying according to the type of activity to which they were destined.

There is therefore no doubt about the accompaniment of these two arts since ancient times and concerns (proven by specialists) of people.

Theater and music are closely linked to the very history of humanity, whether we refer to the economy, politics, spirituality, society in general, or to that of the community in particular, whatever it may be and in whatever age it may live, initially marking, after as we have shown above, the most important rites of passage of society, the ceremonies organized in connection with them, as well as all the other manifestations of a mystical, religious or social character, which gathered around them the whole community.

„Music, as a form of social consciousness, forces musicologists and historians to study in depth the general laws of the development of society as well as the internal, specific laws of music development. (...) Music, like philosophy and literature, presupposes a rich practical and theoretical experience, transmitted by its predecessors and from which it starts. We must also take into account the different artistic-ideological currents, the advanced traditions, the artistic experiences accumulated over time, which played an important role in their time. Only on the basis of these traditions will we understand ...”⁶, emphasizes Professor Merișescu. Music, as a form of social consciousness, means more than a testimony of a period, the determination of a group mentality or way of thinking. It is a social characteristic with the value of community internal law, recognizable in general, as well as in personal plan by all those close to it and not only.

Theater cannot be discussed in the absence of music. “Theater needs music; it cannot be conceived without music. This is a *sui generis* meaning. Music, in the sense we are referring to, is not immediately music of opera, of instrument, of song proper; it is - so to speak - a music, general, of words and phrases, that is, an artistic handling of sounds and silences, of speech and pauses, through which words come to reproduce the movements and the intimate color of sensitivity. Without the contained melody of such music, a melody that results both from the composition of the dramatic text and from the utterance of the acting actor, the logic of the stage action would remain cold, the state of illusion would not come into being and the whole atmosphere of the show lights up, the more it would cool down”⁷.

Music is the interstitial fluid that encompasses the inner sensitivity of rhythm, meaning and expression of meanings contained in words, and these, in turn, contain the intrinsic dynamics that any artist wants to get to express in the modulations of voice and movement. Thus, music can also be perceived as the sound space beyond words, in a general or particular way. The music ends up giving the rhythm of a phrase or a suite of movements and if the actors' scores (an expression often used in theater - n.a.) are correct, then the show is a harmonious whole, a unitary whole, receptive as such.

⁶ Gh. Merișescu, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁷ Ion Zamfirescu. 2001. *Istoria universală a teatrului*. Craiova: Ed. Aius, p. 8.

Another researcher stops on the same language of interpretation, finding and completing the two mentioned so far. It is about Vito Pandolfi and his *History of The Universal Theater*. „The show is born from the varied modulation of the sounds in which the recitation and the singing take place, its natural transfiguration. Mimicry and music are other typical and fundamental forms of the same process, based on the desire to transpose through ritual repetition or parody, in any other special personality.

Recitation and singing are not similar in their expression only through a different gradation in the relationships and dialectic between the concrete and the abstract, between the actor and the spectator, which serves as the foundation of the show. The psychological stimulus arises from the tendency towards exteriorization, towards exhibition itself, since they spring from desire and are discharged into otherness; it is no coincidence that it is related to entertainment, in the initial sense of this term, that is, that of detachment from one's own nature and one's own consciousness, in order to diversify”⁸.

In relation to the spectator, however, music and theater cover the same emotional spectrum. „This form of manifestation unites the actor with the spectator, thus urging a participation in which a sense of community is created. In other words, it becomes the typical expression of a coexistence. Indeed, the show follows the rite and represents, in relation to it, a dialectical exigency towards the religious ideology whose natural historical expression is the rite: in the sense that, although it is initially in its sphere, it ends up creating an alternative (thus so as to provoke adverse reactions, expressed through anathemas and censorship). At the beginning the show is combined with the rite, and the recitation with the song and there is only one kind of show”⁹.

Specifically, in all ancient civilizations, the ritual took the form of a spectacle. In the ancient Assyro-Babylonian civilization, when the New Year was celebrated, called Akitu, the epic poem of Creation was represented, with a mythical and cosmogonic character. „Other ceremonies, in which the ritual was manifested through performances, were practiced by the Hittites (a population that had its own civilization in Asia Minor, in the third and second millennium BC - n.a.). Egyptian civilization offers rich material on the spectacular evocations that took place in a ritual, as magical formulas have been deciphered in tombs, on tombstones or papyri, which reproduce part of the text of these ceremonies, either for the spoken or sung part, either for the mime part”¹⁰.

All the holy texts, whether we are talking about the Egyptians, the Assyro-Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, etc. they are, in fact, scripted to give dynamics to the ritual. Many of them contain breaks (*intermezzo*), in which sounds were played or played that prepared the spectators for the next events. All the ancient narratives that contain mythical events of the deities are, in fact, dialogues with several characters in action. And, in one form or another, these dialogues include sung parts and instrumental parts, because the dramatic action could not have led the spectators to catharsis without the help of music. For example, in *Sarcophagus Texts*¹¹ a poetic “song of the four winds” was identified, which, being dialogued and indicating scenic movements, „is supposed to have given rise to a choreographic representation on the rhythm of the song”¹². „The original title is *How to Master the Four Winds of Heaven* and the lyrics develop the theme through the songs of four virgins, each mastering one of the winds and

⁸ Vito Pandolfi. 1971. *Istoria teatrului universal*. București: Ed. Meridiane, pp. 16-17.

⁹ *Idem*.

¹⁰ *Idem*, pp. 18-19.

¹¹ Funerary inscriptions from the years 2250 and 1780 BC.

¹² The hypothesis is supported by a funerary painting from 1900 BC. which illustrates it.

the emergence of a fifth character trying to abduct them. As usual, this is a magic formula designed to allow the deceased to control the winds”¹³.

4. Conclusion

When we analyze the balance between the spectacular elements in dynamics and music, in order to correctly understand their consonance, we must return to the origins of humanity and to the oldest spectacular manifestations. Only in this way can we correctly deconstruct the deep meanings of these manifestations in order to be able to grasp and adapt their meanings. And such documentary evidence is extremely numerous, as we show below.

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¹³ Vito Pandolfi, *op.cit.*, p. 21.