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**CONCEPTS OF STAGE PERFORMANCES  
AT WORLD'S CONTEMPORARY  
OPERA HOUSE**

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The aim of the article is to explore the latest performance trends in the creation of the operatic works by world's leading opera houses particularly in such aspects as the role of stage techniques and elements, light and technical solutions, perception factors of the latest interpretations by the spectators' in the context of musical, dramatic and set design decisions using stage performance of World's Opera Houses in 2012–2019. The methodology of the research is to apply comparative, analytical, source studying and logical methods. This combined methodological approach was used to analyse the role of the latest trends, their influence on the original idea of the composer and natural use of them. Scientific novelty. We have characterized and traced the introduction of the latest techniques and technology into the classical musical and theatrical productions of leading opera houses in the world. It is the first time when the world's contemporary operatic performances of 2012–2019 have been reviewed through the modern technical, set design and directing patterns, which are used in operatic classic repertoire. We have started the subject of viability of its employment and effect on the playgoers. Conclusions. Inventive solutions and decisions of stage directors and scene designers in the European opera houses sometimes lay to the performances completely different subtext and reveal new palettes of original drama. Modern technologies, such as any kind of visual projections, animation, different understages and various platforms raised opera art to a new level. However, the new performance techniques are not always successful in visual, drama or musical dramaturgy; they could lead to the failure of the stage play, which, in turn, does not justify the risk of too brave play interpretation.

*Keywords:* conception; set design; directing method; contemporary opera house.

**Introduction**

Today, opera directors from all over the world are looking for new ways of interpreting classic musical and theatrical performances. However, the problem of set design searches analysis remains almost unexplored, especially in Ukraine. This work is dedicated to the works of Ukrainian theatre theorists as H. Veselovska (research theatrical focus), M. Zahaikevych (analysis of operatic drama and musical performances), S. Pavlyshyn (analysis and research on the theatrical work of the stage and performance groups), A. Stavychenko (interaction of actors, directors and spectators), A. Tereshchenko (directing experiments in the musical theatre), M. Cherkashyna (directing interpretations and their expediency), M. Frenkel (scenographic aspects of the play), and others. The nature of art as a phenomenon was studied by S. Bezklubenko, and the technical solutions of visual art in the stage space were considered by H. Lypkivska (theatrical searches of the musical and drama theatre) and T. Sovhyra (the latest techniques in theatre performances). Since the problem of stage productions remains relevant, it is decided to consider it in the aspect of the world music theatre.

New visual solutions in the form of different kinds of projections, animations and the latest light equipment have considerably expanded the palette of techniques of scenic solutions of contemporary musical performances.

Polish art historian M. Gorecki argues: “video art, as well as performance, involves leaving the cinema and theatre convention, forcing the visual artists of different styles to look for new aesthetics and strategies that can simplify art that is anarchic, free from rules and hierarchy” (2017, p. 152).

According to H. Lypkivska (2018, p. 106), the high use of various kinds of video projections on stage performance started in the 60s of the 20th century, with the advent of Western European and American culture in such a direction of art as performance.

However, D. Honcharenko notes: “The history of syncretic performance art using the latest media and video projection dates back about a century ago to Loie Fuller's experiments with video projections on her

transparent clothing, as well as the first integration of the video into a performance during the Berlin revue in 1911 ... In the 1920s video projection was already used in many cabaret shows, and artists continued to experiment with the illusory effects of interaction ... In the 1950s, the trend of attracting new technologies to the theatre, in particular, in 1958 Joseph Svoboda and Alfred Radok established a multimedia theatre *Laterna Magika* in Czechoslovakia” (Honcharenko, 2014, pp. 58-59).

A performance, and later a happening, as a kind of conceptual art and a certain kind of continuation of the traditions of the ancient folk theatre, actively used screens and projections, which sometimes led to the “domination of visual over verbal things in stage art” (Honcharenko, 2014, p. 60).

In the theatre of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the same tendency is observed: stage experiments in world theatres sometimes reach absurd visual evocations; performances become more courageous in the context of the interpretation of the original drama about the epic characters of the heroes and the unusual action place that differ significantly from the original.

According to T. Sovhyra, “modern technologies allow the movement of video surfaces in the entire stage space and even in the auditorium in different planes by means of rotary and expanded mechanisms, as well as dynamic winches, connected in one plane and split into small particles” (Sovhyra, 2018, p. 68).

However, despite predominantly talented performers and their ideal vocal data, experimental rendition in world theatres, which are considered innovative, are not always taken well by the spectators and the critics.

### **The purpose of the article**

The purpose of the research is to investigate the latest performance trends in the creation of the operatic works at the world musical theatres. The context of the scientific challenge is outlined in the range of tasks such as to study the role of staging techniques and elements, light and technical solutions; to analyse the factors of perception of the newest interpretations by a spectator in the context of musical, dramatic and scenic decisions on the example of staging of world opera houses in 2012–2019.

### **Presentation of the main material**

Turning to the world context of operatic directing at the present days, we want to consider the premieres of recent years in the leading European theatres, which dictate world-directing tendencies. In particular, in the performance of “*Bohemia*” by G. Puccini (2017) on the Opera Bastille’s stage in Paris, producers (director Claus Guth, conductor Gustavo Dudamel) decided to resort to a courageous scenic decision – to move the action of the play into open space. The main characters were singing in space suits on a spacecraft.

As the famous in Europe music critic Shirley Apthorp (2018) states that such a scenic decision was rather controversial and unconvincingly taken by the audience who was coughing loudly at the performance and took the director and his team with a flurry of dissenting exclamations. The author of the publication explains this reaction by the fact that the composer of the opera G. Puccini had very clearly defined all the directions for the decision of the scenes, so the operas of this artist are rarely subjected to a better abstract interpretation. That is why, “despite the spacecraft and the alien planet, despite the idea of storytelling through hallucinations of the main characters, Guth’s stage direction of the play is powerlessly returning to the old paths, for what else can be done? Two things should be noted in the work of Guth and his team. First, it looks great – from broad planetary prospects to brilliant black Parisian figures ... Second, Guth knows how to locate people on stage, lead singers, and create their vision” (Apthorp, 2018).

The courageous decision of the producers caused contradictory emotional reactions of the audience. Thinking over the idea of the creators, it can be argued that the main idea “was to imagine characters in a hopeless space mission in the distant future – a sterile world devoid of love, in which their own approach to death provokes a return to the ghost in the past” (Apthorp, 2018).

Thus, the whole effect is transposed into hallucinations, memories of the past, which, according to the memoirs of another famous critic Stephen J. Mudge, sometimes looked organically on the stage, as, for example, in the scene at the cafe “*Momus*” (in the stage play – memories about the cafe “*Momus*”), with set tables and juggling waiters. Muzetta appeared in open space in the space capsule and sang the waltz.

Other ideas, according to the reviewer, were less convincing. Like, for example, the last duet of Rodolfo and Marcello, was performed using microphones, making a scene similar to the “feverish” cabaret, where student’s heads showed themselves under the curtains (Apthorp, 2018).

In quite provocative evocation, only the work of the conductor Dudamel was noted with absolute success. He read the music in the classical interpretation for Puccini, as well as the brilliant vocal work of the performers.

In 2012 there was a German performance of another hieratic opera work “Magic Flute” by W.A. Mozart, in the Komische Opera Berlin the producers reduced to an absurdity the popular idea of the screen and projection (Swed, 2018). The well-known modern producer and director of the Komische Opera Berlin Barrie Kosky has transformed the Mozart’s opera into a lively, spectacular online cartoon. According to the American music critic Mark Swed “the stage has become a cinema. The huge screen on which the animation was projected had a variety of carved doors and platforms to which the characters came and went up. Unlike the projected opera, the idea of Kosky is to display animation as a live theatre. With careful set motion, this idea worked perfectly” (Swed).

In the mentioned performance, the director turned some characters into pantomime heroes of the film, which is sufficiently organically combined with the general context. The drama composition has been changed – recitatives replaced the silent movie with subtitles, accompanied with the piano “Fantasies” by W. A. Mozart.

One of the key creators of the production was the painter-Animator Paul Barritt, who simulated the complete visual picture of the action, and through it – the atmosphere, mood and spectacular effects.

Another great European premiere with a world resonance was the production of A. Berg’s “Wozzeck” in the Oslo Opera House (Oslo, 2017). Christof Loy, one of the most famous directors of our time, focused on staging in the inside life of the characters and gave them clear characteristics.

As for the visual decision, the director moved the scene to the jail cages with sliding walls. Huge grids and sort of dwarf characters contrast sharply, emphasizing the futility of the struggle, forcing the heroes to exist in the trap of dark grey walls. There is no literal prison on the stage, but there is a certain claustrophobic sense of the closed space. Unexpectedly the wall falls, but only to show a place near the pond, where Wozzeck catches up with Marie, strikes her and unexpectedly sinks. Therefore, the only way to escape the limitations is to die (Tolalli, 2018).

As critic Askel Tolalli points out, Christof Loy went deep into psychiatry: ‘Grids and cages play the role of isolation from the outside world. When there is absurd cruelty and frank sadism of other heroes: a weird doctor, ethically dubious medical experiments over characters and the rude cruelty of the Captain – this stage play is, in essence, a study of the mind of Wozzeck’ (Tolalli, 2018).

The main character is dressed in jeans and a faded orange T-shirt, which makes him look completely usual and normal. The appearance, close to the spectators in the auditorium, makes despair of his mental illness even more pronounced.

Under the guidance of conductor Lothar Koenigs, an orchestra plays as one coherent mechanism. According to Askel Tolalli, they bring “awful beauty and disgusting lyric” (Tolalli, 2018) to the music of A. Berg.

Quite opposite to the genre and atmosphere was the presentation of W. A. Mozart’s opera “Cosi Fan Tutte” (All women do it), it was staged at the Royal Opera House in London (2016, director Jan Philipp Gloger, conductor Simeon Bychkov).

One of the most important aspects of this opera is the harmony of the ensemble, which was completely achieved in the mentioned performance. However, according to a well-known critic David Karlin, despite the youth and the charm of the performers and their perfect vocal data, it wasn’t enough to rescue an evening made tedious by leisurely tempi and a staging by Jan Philipp Gloger that seemed far “too clever” for its own good (Karlin, 2018). The reviewer saw two main problems. The first is that the action is constantly fighting against the libretto rather than working with it. To pull this off needs very skilful acting direction – it has to be communicated visibly to the audience that the singers know perfectly well that what they are singing does not match what they are doing; otherwise, it is just confusing for audience. “The second is that Sabina Puértolas played Despina as a genuinely nasty piece of work rather than an airy good time girl. Johannes Martin Kränzle delivered Don Alfonso’s self-congratulations as targeted point-scoring rather than harmless fun. With all this added to the plethora of serious points and Bychkov’s extremely slow tempi, it felt like a very long evening” (Karlin, 2018).

An unsuccessful interpretation of musical dramaturgy was confirmed by a famous music critic Mark Valencia: “the maestro’s laboured tempos in most of the arias are so extreme that he adds 15 minutes to the opera’s standard running time” (2017). The critic noted the brilliant work of the performers, the extravagant attractive costumes by designer Ben Bauer, the refined lighting of Bernd Purkrabek, however, and almost

complete isolation from the psychological interaction of characters, which is tragic to the opera. The blame for this the author laid on the director, suggesting the conductor to share it.

Consequently, we can conclude that the interpretative vision of the actors of the play for the original genre is incompatible with the work of W.A. Mozart, which suggests comedy, lightness, and in some ways naivety, which made the opera's plot interesting and sharpens storylines in one integral line.

A completely different reading of W.A. Mozart's comic opera "Cosi Fan Tutte" was created at the famous American Metropolitan Opera (director Phelim McDermott, conductor David Robertson, costumes by Laura Hopkins, 2017).

The events of the play were transferred to the 1950s to the Coney Island District of New York. According to critic David Salazar (2018), the production puts the spotlight on Don Alfonso. He is the protagonist on a mission and every other character is either his ally or an antagonist to his ultimate motivation – to express that the world of love is a sham. Nothing is stable. Nothing is truly real. According to the critic, the space of the scene is perfectly designed, the motel (the main place of action) is mobile and the viewer can see the rooms of the main heroes from different angles, adding the dynamics of action and intimacy to the love scenes. Having Fiordiligi and Dorabella stay in a motel completely underlines the point that they have no "true home," and further supports Alfonso's philosophical perspective on them. In the interpretation of the producers of "Cosi Fan Tutte" is a caution fairy tale in which love is a true fable. It was noted that the work of conductor David Robertson "was some of the finest Mozart conducting we have heard in some time" (Salazar, 2018).

In La Scala, Italy's opera house in the production of G. Puccini's "Girl from the West" (2016), directed by Robert Carsen, reminded spectators how the opera came from what it originally dealt with: myth (Mellace, 2018).

According to the plan of the directors (conductor Riccardo Chelli, set design – Robert Carsen and Louis Carvalho, video – Jan Williams Galloway), "cinema and its memory encompass the entire show: the miners are watching a western movie when the curtain raises in the breathtaking, abrupt (both visually and musically) start of the opera" (Mellace, 2018).

According to critic Raffaele Mellace, the performers were in the cinema, where they are both spectators and actors (2018); the musical level of performance was perfect, the orchestra followed the maestro perfectly, which covered the innovative aspects of music by G. Puccini. Robert Carsen's production highlighted the progressive nature of the composer's opera, which could not ignore the actual trends in performing arts, as well as the Western as a popular genre.

All performers of secondary roles were great actors, including members of the choir, who performed many acting tasks in the first and third steps. Judging by the turbulent ovations, the audience positively perceived the staging, and especially the work of Maestro Chelli (2018).

One of the brightest premieres of the 2017–2018 season at the Vienna State Opera was the production of "Samson et Dalila" by C. Saint-Saens (director Alexandra Liedtke, set designer – Raimund Orfeo Voigt, conductor Marco Armiliato).

The interpretation was taken as ambiguously, the audience was dissatisfied with the production group, namely the director and the set designer. As for the stars of the performers and the conductor – they were welcomed positively.

According to the critics, the director allowed himself a great deal of freedom in reading the libretto, but still had some interesting ideas. The scenes in which the artists removed the biblical accents and exaltation were confused. For example, the love scene of the protagonists took place in the bathroom, which translated it to the domestic level, thus diverting from the original source. With the removal of the basis of the work of secrecy and faith, the very idea of the work went "down to earth". However, the musical component of the performance was much less controversial (Sutherland, 2018).

The scientific novelty of the research is that for the first time in the world the latest opera performances of 2012–2019 were considered in the context of the latest modern technical, set design and directing techniques used during the implementation of the opera of the classical repertoire, as well as the question of its employment and influence on the audience.

### Conclusions

After reviewing the modern operatic productions of recent years, we conclude that it is important to make a compromise between a bold, sometimes controversial interpretation of the opera classics and the search for new subtext of drama.

In modern interpretations of plays, the role of video means, since their use the further, the more captivates the theatrical stages, is important. However, one should agree with the point of the theatre theorist H. Lypkivska: in the modern theatre “the forms and methods of using multimedia technologies, as well as the technical solutions of the theatre as a whole, are in constant development ... Only in the future, when the theatre would “have a disease” of the video art as it have “had a disease” of all innovations during 2500-year history, it will be possible to make exhaustive and final conclusions about our subject” (2018, p. 113).

Consequently, despite the predominantly perfect performance of plays from the musical point of view, not all premieres of recent years in the world’s leading opera houses, courageous in interpretation, were welcomed by the public. This confirms the need for the full harmony of all components of such a complex synthetic genre as the opera. The director, as the key figure in creating a production, should combine all the components of the performance – actors, artistic decisions, plastic elements of play, makeup, costumes, musical interpretation (together with the conductor), which in the end have to merge into one organic work of art.

The question of set design concepts and point of introducing the latest directing techniques is still relevant and requires further research.

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## КОНЦЕПЦІЇ СЦЕНІЧНИХ ПОСТАНОВОК У СУЧАСНОМУ СВІТОВОМУ ОПЕРНОМУ ТЕАТРИ

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Мета статті – розглянути новітні постановочні тенденції у втіленні оперних творів провідними театрами світу, зокрема в таких аспектах, як роль постановочних прийомів і технологій, світлових і технічних можливостей,

чинники сприйняття новітніх інтерпретацій глядачем у контексті музичного, драматургічного та сценографічного рішень на прикладі постановок світових оперних театрів 2012–2019 рр. Методологія дослідження полягає в комплексному застосуванні компаративного, аналітичного, джерелознавчого та логічного методів для з'ясування ролі новітніх тенденцій у сучасному оперному театрі, їхнього впливу на оригінальний задум композитора та органічність використання. Наукова новизна. Охарактеризовано впровадження новітніх прийомів і технологій у класичні музично-театральні постановки провідних театрів світу. Уперше світові новітні оперні постановки 2012–2019 рр. розглянуто в розрізі найновіших сучасних технічних, сценографічних та режисерських прийомів, що застосовуються під час реалізації опер класичного репертуару, а також порушено питання доцільності їхнього використання та впливу на публіку. Висновки. Винахідливі ходи та рішення режисерів-постановників та сценографів у європейському театрі подекуди надають виставам зовсім інших підтекстів і розкривають нові палітри драматургії. Сучасні технології, такі як будь-якого роду візуальні проєкції, анімації, плунжерні системи театральних сцен та різноманітні платформи, піднімають оперне мистецтво на новий рівень. Проте новітні постановочні тенденції, котрі не завжди доцільні з погляду візуального, драматургічного та музичного прочитання, можуть призвести до провалу вистави, що не виправдовує занадто сміливої інтерпретації твору.

*Ключові слова:* концепція, сценографічне рішення, режисерський прийом, сучасний оперний театр.

**КОНЦЕПЦИИ  
СЦЕНИЧЕСКИХ ПОСТАНОВОК  
В СОВРЕМЕННОМ МИРОВОМ  
ОПЕРНОМ ТЕАТРЕ**

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Цель статьи – рассмотреть новейшие постановочные тенденции в воплощении оперных произведений ведущими оперными театрами мира, в частности в таких аспектах, как роль постановочных приемов и технологий, световых и технических возможностей, факторы восприятия новейших интерпретаций зрителем в контексті музыкального, драматургического и сценографического решений на примере постановок мировых оперных театров 2012–2019 гг. Методология исследования заключается в комплексном применении компаративного, аналитического, источниковедческого и логического методов для выяснения роли новейших тенденций в современном оперном театре, их влияния на оригинальный замысел композитора и органичность использования. Научная новизна. Охарактеризовано внедрение новейших приемов и технологий в классические музыкально-театральные постановки ведущих театров мира. Впервые мировые новейшие оперные постановки 2012–2019 гг. рассмотрены в разрезе новейших современных технических, сценографических и режиссерских приемов, что используются во время реализации опер классического репертуара, а также поднят вопрос целесообразности их использования и влияния на публику. Выводы. Изобретательные ходы и решения режиссеров-постановщиков и сценографов в европейском театре иногда придают спектаклю совсем другие подтексты и раскрывают новые палитры драматургии. Современные технологии, такие как любого рода визуальные проєкции, анімації, плунжерные системы театральных сцен и разнообразные платформы, поднимают оперное искусство на новый уровень. Однако новейшие постановочные тенденции, не всегда удачные с точки зрения визуального, драматургического или музыкального прочтения, могут привести к провалу спектакля, не оправдывая слишком смелой интерпретации произведения.

*Ключевые слова:* концепция, сценографическое решение, режиссерский прием, современный оперный театр.