

Some Reflections on Musical Theatre

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After various adventures, successful or not, during which it seemed to be pulled in different directions by composers, interpreters and critics, musical theatre today seems at last to be able to circumscribe itself.

There has been a kind of renaissance in a genre which recently has been rediscovering its own identity and particular character.

In fact "performance music", "chamber opera", "melodrama", "staged concerts", "lyric renewal" are termed Musical Theatre, no doubt for convenience, but this leads to a confusion which this new genre could well do without.

The artists themselves are often to blame because they have failed to take account of the teething troubles of the new form.

Besides, a form which is capable of accommodating "musical production" outside of opera is in great demand.

In opera the musical dramaturgy is fixed in the libretto, whose text conveys the dramatic situations.

Each aspect (design, production, choreography) converges in order to illustrate the potential of these "musical-theatrical" situations conveying the meaning in the basic text.

However, in recent decades we have seen the break-up of narrative, with a multiplicity of signals being sent to the audience/spectators and with the regular counterpointing of different, inter-weaving stories.

This need to "tell in a different way" has led to the gradual evolution of the various forms of musical production, which have been greatly enriched by non-European influences.

The components of musical entertainment (painting, light, costume etc.) have gradually become dissociated and are now in the process of rediscovering their autonomy within a wider, differently structured context.

The corps of interpreters (musicians, actors, singers, etc.) are becoming liberated, in expressive and narrative ways, in addition to their own specific skills.

Vocal expression is now extremely diversified and is no longer the exclusive reserve of singers.

In the course of all this dynamic pulverising we encounter a potential polyphony, consisting of many micro-languages, capable of creating a physical or emotive energy resulting in violent confrontations between the meaning of an image or a sound, and a significance which is purely formal.

How should this be structured?

In my opinion, we don't need to know everything immediately. We must accept delays, risks, the uncertainties of arranging sounds in relation to images, texts, gestures.

As if living organisms were involved, we must observe them, support them and also protect them. Because if their internal respiration is impeded either by an unfortunate proximity or by formal misunderstanding, they will be in danger.

The first necessity seems to me to be the elucidation of those rules which facilitate a social relationship between objects and concepts however contradictory.

To create to some degree the "phrasing" of musical theatre.

Then comes the most affecting moment, when an anecdote, a fragment of recitative, flows into an arbitrary form.

If this works, these two elements cancel each other out and in turn produce a third element, vital and unexpected.

It is useless to point out that these organisms, either juxtaposed or superimposed, do not abide in a linear narrative.

They are the particles of a polyphonic story.

Therefore no libretto, rather a Score.

The Score arranges everything. It directs the principal and secondary events (their intensity and development), texts which are abstract or have some meaning, lighting and gestures.

The Score arranges not only the "sound" but also each of the production components including comportment, narrative, objects etc. Thus it ensures drama in something which is unutterable.

For me, therefore, musical theatre is equivalent to the occupation of the theatrical temple by the abstract power of musical organisation, and not the reverse.