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WAGNER'S BOOK *OPERA AND DRAMA* TODAY

The representative Collection of Papers from the scholarly conference 'Wagner's Book *Opera and Drama* Today', held at Matica srpska on December 4 and 5, 2004, was published in Novi Sad in 2006 by Matica srpska, the conference organizers. The editors for this invaluable and deluxe edition were Professor Sonja Marinković, PhD, Zoran T. Jovanović, PhD and Docent Vesna Mikić, PhD. According to editor-in-chief Sonja Marinković, the publication of a translation of Wagner's book *Opera and Drama* provided the incentive for a scholarly dialogue about Wagner's world of art, his oeuvre and the reception of his work in our (former and present) cultural region.

The collection features 16 selected papers that were presented at the symposium within four key topics: *Wagner and Society*; *Musicological and Theatrical Perceptions of Wagner*; *Wagner and the Slavs*; and *Productions of Wagner's Operas*. Each of these thematic circles is represented by one chapter in the collection.

The chapter *Wagner and Society* includes the papers 'So What If the Holy Roman Empire Should Dissolve into Dust, For Us There Would Still Remain Holy German Art'; 'The Political Implications of Sachs's Final Monologue in Wagner's *Mastersingers* from Nuremberg in Germany from 1867 to 1945' by Aleksandar Molnar, PhD; 'Mediations of Reality Within the Bayreuth Festival' by Dragana Jeremić-Molnar, PhD; and 'Richard Wagner's Anti-Semitism' by Ivana Medić, MA.

The paper by Aleksandar Molnar, PhD, examines the political implications of Sachs's final monologue, tracing them through four important periods of German history, from 1867 to 1945: the period of the North German Confederation (1867-1870), the period of the Second Reich, (1871-1918), the period of the Weimar Republic (1919-1932), and the period of the Third Reich.

The paper by Ivana Medić, MA, also examines the political connotations of Wagner's work. The author identifies elements of anti-Semitism in Wagner's writings *Opera and Drama*, *Judaism in Music*, *What is German?*, *German Art and German Politics* and demonstrates

through several clear examples from Wagner's operas that 'Wagner's art was by no means ideologically benign, but, on the contrary, supported and coded anti-Semitic stereotypes'.

The text by Dragana Jeremić-Molnar, PhD, examines Wagner's institution of the Bayreuth Festival as a testing ground for constructing a (new and totalizing) reality removed from the everyday social and political life of Germany, particularly analyzing the subtle ways in which Wagner would introduce his listener/viewer into the world of the other reality, expose him to that 'Bayreuth reality' and then bring him back to the world of everyday life.

The problem areas addressed by papers from the group entitled *Musicological and Theatrical Perceptions of Wagner* are very diverse. In her essay *I saw the world end* [...enden sah ich die Welt], Nadežda Mosusova, PhD, elaborates in great detail on existing views and presents her own equally musicological and compositional view of Wagner's theatology and particularly the enigmatic 'female ending' of *The Twilight of the Gods*.

Analytical interpretations by Professor Vlastimir Peričić and Professor Berislav Popović, the amateur 'impressions of listening to (Wagner's) music' of a former high school student, and the paper *Recitative, Introduction and Three Fragments of Fantasy on the Margins of Examining the Problem of Music Syntax in the Overture to Richard Wagner's Opera Tristan and Isolde* by Miloje Milojević, MA, interweave three diverse views on the overture to the opera *Tristan and Isolde*. They point to certain methodological problems of music syntax analysis originating from the absence of a suitable analytical methodology that would include the aspect of the listener and reliably reveal syntactic music segmentation at the level of deep structures.

In the text 'Wagner's Research Endeavours in the Work *Opera and Drama*' (dedicated to the memory of Branko Dragutinović), the author Milenko Misailović examines the most significant points of this work, which he perceives as a theoretical synthesis of the Wagner's operatic aesthetics. The author comments on the composer's attitude towards the domination of melody in the history of opera; his interpretation of the myth, strength and role of the language of words and the human voice; as well as Wagner's very theory of (music) drama – *Gesamtkunstwerk* – particularly emphasizing the composer's view on the importance of libretto structure for a real revival of the opera. The author concludes his extensive study by presenting certain critical reviews of Wagner's book, but nonetheless concludes that 'Wagner long ago became the Shakespeare of music drama and dramaturgy in operatic art'.

Dragana Martinović's text 'Appia's Theatrical Vision of Wagner's Music Drama' focuses on the approach to the staging of Wagner's operas and the theoretical interpretation of his ideas by the Swiss stage designer and director Adolphe Appia. Under the influence of Wagner's ideas on the reform of opera, Appia carried out his own reform of theatrical staging in

the first half of the 20th century, embodied in the ‘theory of rhythmic spaces’, with lighting orchestration.

The chapter entitled *Wagner and the Slavs* is dominated by a musicological approach to problems concerning Wagner’s oeuvre. Proceeding from the specific reception of Wagner’s work in 19th-century Russia, in her text ‘Wagner and the Russian Opera: *Parsifal* and *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya*’ Sonja Marinković, PhD, examines the similarities and differences between the often compared operas *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya* by Rimsky-Korsakov and *Parsifal* by Wagner concluding that ‘despite the existence of common ground with Wagner’s *Parsifal*, one cannot speak of influences and similarity of views – the ‘Russian Parsifal’ belongs to a different ideological and musical world’.

In the text by Katarina Tomašević, PhD, entitled ‘Petar Konjović *pro et contra* Wagner. Contribution to the Study of the History of National Music Drama’, the author examines the numerous layers of Konjović’s ‘imaginary creative dialogue with Wagner’, as well as his campaigning for the performing of Wagner’s works on Yugoslav music stages. Pointing to the fact that it was from Wagner that Konjović adopted and ‘fully understood the importance of direction and staging as equal elements of Gesamtkunstwerk’, and that the Serbian composer also indirectly adopted some other elements from Wagner’s music drama, which he embraced ‘via his Slavic and French allies’, the author concludes that the results of Konjović’s imaginary creative dialogue with Wagner are ‘built into the very foundations of domestic national music drama in the 20th century’.

The influence of Wagner’s concept of music drama on Serbian national music drama of the first half of the 20th century is also the focus of the text ‘Milenko Paunović’s Art from his Identification with Wagner’s Achievements to his Own Creative Expression’ by Biljana Milanović, MA. Characterizing Paunović’s operatic work as a symbiosis of the German ‘Wagnerian and post-Wagnerian stylistic technique and the specificity of Serbian folklore music’, that is, as a variant of the combination of Germanic and Slavic operatic traditions, the author argues that Paunović’s work is ‘atypical of the Serbian context, but can be compared to similar endeavours in the wider European region of the time’.

The text by Branka Radović, PhD, entitled ‘Nikola Hercigonja’s Wagner’, whose musicological synopsis also discreetly incorporates a personal note, analyzes Nikola Hercigonja’s published and unpublished works, which the author believes played an important role, together with Hercigonja’s public activity, in the reception of Wagner’s work in the Belgrade musical milieu at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century.

The final group of papers in this extensive collection is entitled *Productions of Wagner's Operas*. In his paper entitled 'Richard Wagner on the Stage of the Belgrade Opera', Raško Jovanović, PhD, discusses the 'fate' of Wagner's operas *The Flying Dutchman*, *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* on the stage of the Belgrade Opera in the interwar period and after the Second World War. Pointing to the small number of performances of these music dramas, Jovanović underlines the fact that, despite the almost always positive reviews,¹ the response of the Belgrade audience was 'below expectations', so that Wagner's operas could not even be included into the standard repertoire that the Belgrade Opera systematically cultivated.

The paper by Igor Cvetko, PhD, 'Richard Wagner in Slovenia', written in English, examines and traces the presence of Wagner's operas on the opera stages in Slovenia, from the premiere of *Tannhäuser* in 1874 at the then German Theatre in Ljubljana to the performances of *The Flying Dutchman*, *Lohengrin* and *Siegfried* at the Ljubljana Opera in postwar Yugoslavia. A premiere that Cvetko singles out as particularly successful is Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, which was staged and conducted by the later famous Fritz Reiner at the Slovenian section of the theatre in Ljubljana in the 1910/11 season.

In the text 'Richard Wagner: Staging Problems', the author Gordan Dragović, MA, argues that Wagner the music author and theoretician of music drama transcended his epoch and 'prevailed' over Wagner the stage manager, who remained 'deeply rooted in the epoch of romanticism', and that it was precisely *the total work of art* (Gesamtkunstwerk) that was the victim in this 'struggle'. Examining Wagner's dramatic-musical creations from a directorial point of view, Dragović believes that the revolutionary innovations Wagner introduced 'masked the dramatic-musical disunity between the director-stage manager and the poet-musician'.

Unlike Dragović, who retains an analytical discourse in his text, the director Dejan Miladinović, MA, chooses the essay as a specific autopoetic piece of writing in his text 'The Sail – A Gate of Time (My Directorial-Scenographic Technique in Staging Wagner's Opera *The Flying Dutchman*)'. The author stresses that his goal in staging this opera of Wagner's was to 'achieve a unity of two metaphors, the musical and the visual, aimed at an integral meaning', pointing to the particular importance of the final visual metaphor in the performance, which brings a sublimation of his idea of the work and, as such, according to maestro Miladinović, 'regardless of its visual effectiveness, must be simple, sufficiently clear and understandable to every viewer'.

¹ The author exhaustively cites excerpts from reviews from contemporary press.

The final paper in this collection is the text entitled ‘Wagner’s Opera as a Musical: *The Flying Dutchman* in Bayreuth 2003’ by Ira Prodanov, PhD. Written in the form of a review, this paper points to the specificities of Claus Guth’s directorial production which went beyond the conventions of traditional Bayreuth productions of Wagner’s operas and incorporated elements of the American musical from the 1960s and 1970s, effects of black and white movies, and light effects of contemporary disco clubs. The author believes that this ‘extremely interesting postmodernist mixture of genres’ opened up new opportunities for a discussion on the current topicality of Wagner’s idea of Gesamtkunstwerk. Finally, the collection was enriched by a detailed and informative appendix entitled ‘The Performances of Richard Wagner’s Operas in Belgrade’ by Anđela Mikić, MA.

The overall impression is that this extensive and heterogeneous collection of valuable papers truly makes stimulating reading for new analyses and interpretations of Wagner’s compositional and theoretical work. The only remaining dilemma is whether its title ‘Wagner’s Book *Opera and Drama* Today’ is justified. It is clear that in this case the editors were guided by the idea that the name of the collection should be the same as that of the scholarly conference at which the papers had been presented, but this did not prove to be the best solution. The only paper of all the works published in this valuable book that actually deals with Wagner’s work *Opera and Drama* is the text by Milenko Misailović, PhD. In the other texts (but not all of them) this work of Wagner’s is present only sporadically as a comparative theoretical plane that is not really discussed.

Translated by Jelena Nikezić