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**REVIEW OF IVANA ILIĆ'S BOOK *THE FATAL WOMAN***

*Fatalna žena – Repräsentacije roda na operskoj sceni*

(Fatal Woman – the Representation of Gender on the Opera Scene)

Belgrade, Fakultet muzičke umetnosti, 2007, 168 pages

The gender determination of music, i.e., the gender structure of opera, has received only sporadic and unsystematic attention from local musicologists. Ivana Ilić's study marks a departure from this trend. The book, which is a reshaping of the author's Master's Thesis, is the first attempt to deal with this field, establishing it within institutionalized discourse. In other words, Ilić's book brings gender studies from the margins into the core of contemporary musicological thought in Serbia, in line with the world trend of the last two decades. *Fatal Woman – the Representation of Gender on the Opera Scene* (168 pages), published by the Faculty of Music in Belgrade in 2007, has five chapters, a preface and a closing word. The chapter titles are *Opera and the Gender Identity of the Female Character*; *Gender, Racial and Class Tensions in the Operas: Koštana and Carmen*; *the Two Codes of Femininity*; *the Voiceness of the Female Characters*; and *the Function of Female Characters in the dramaturgy of the Opera*. The study also contains a Name Index, an extensive bibliographical register, as well as a summary in English. The design of the book cover is thematically representative, and the refined drawing by Siniša Ilić catches the eye of the future reader.

In every introduction of a 'new' discourse, or rather, extension of the existing musicological space, the author of such intervention in the domestic surrounding sets about summing up the reason to do so. The issue of gender identity and its representation is a constituent, sometimes decisive, part of the post-structuralist and post-modern theoretic directions of the last thirty years from which we draw out contemporary academic discourse. Therefore, in the case of Ivana Ilić, on the one hand, something is gained - the foundation is laid for future gender considerations of music - and something is lost - the existing state of gender music perception, which this type of study inherently and potentially changes. The author perceives the importance of maintaining an analytical approach to the musical material observed, in order to build around it an interpretative network. Her thoroughness is commendable, both due to her indisputable quality, and the way in which she presents the musical layers of opera.

The author says that her analysis 'rests on the consideration of music structures through which, in the operas *Koštana* and *Carmen*, the female gender identity is constituted and performed given the cultural and ideological conditions of its existence' [p.27]. The author confirms and extends this view in the conclusion, which reads: 'Different interpretations of music, which the gender theory can spawn, have effect only if they are based on the [very] work: can not be imposed, but rather they derive from it'. And such different interpretations should contribute to a change of understanding, from the 'innocent, trans-historic and trans-sexual subject of performing and listening to the music' to the acknowledgement that gender identity influences our understanding of the experience of music [p.149].

The author raises the problem of female voiceness. Ilić successfully and deftly introduces the theoretical area of opera and voice, which primarily stems from French deconstruction theory based on Lacanian Psychoanalysis. In that view, the voice, particularly female, is either in surplus, providing pleasure, or in shortage, indicating that pleasure is impossible. As the book *Fatal Woman* was written before the release of the brilliant study by Mladen Dolar *Voice and Nothing Else*, which went one step ahead of all prior perceptions of the issue of voice from this aspect, this dialogue with the Lacanian theory of voiceness might be deeper and more troublesome than Ilić acknowledges.

The author first raised the issue of voiceness theoretically in the chapter *Female Voiceness - The effects of performativeness*, in which she provides three sub-chapters: *Female Voice as the Voice-Object*, *Female Authorial Voice* and *Subject of listening/watching* [pp. 25-34]. She then conducts an analysis of the operas *Koštana* and *Carmen* in the chapter *the Voiceness of Female Characters* [pp. 85-101]. In it, the author spins a developed analytical web in which she tries to 'catch' all manifestations of voice and voiceness in opera. She distinguishes the 'rationalised' voice that keeps its relation to the text, from the 'objectified' one, which transcends the linguistic frame by going deep into space with more or less immediate voiceness. I would also mention here that Ilić by the term voiceness includes 'all vocal manifestations of the character: laughter, crying, shriek, sigh, keeping quiet' [p.29]. Voiceness, in other words, could be taken as the scene of the opera voice. Such a view of the place, function and space of the female voice in the opera, of the multiplicities of voice within the opera form, and the attempt to introduce the performer's functions in the music discourse is highly laudable. But when the web of appearance is applied to the analysis, the reader can be puzzled by the revealing possibilities. Apart from the apparent desire to introduce performance into consideration, it is perfectly clear that in most studies on opera it gets irretrievably lost in the text. This leads us to a crucial question in gender-oriented discussion of opera and female voice: Does analysis from this aspect necessarily have to be 'negatively' established? Does the story about 'patriarchal' annulment of female vocal transgression have to be perpetuated?

I think that Ivana Ilić's study provides an alternative solution – female voice in opera is, in fact, a

'mighty weapon', which not only destabilizes the patriarchal order, but completely suspends the logocentric world. Analysing the manifestations of Koštana's 'song', or showing the constructed image of 'ideal femininity' in a character like Micaëlla, the author shows that the voice and the role of the opera heroine are, in fact, the only touchstones of musical experience. Opera is fundamentally misogynistic, as is any other drama – i.e., any 'narrative' structure *par excellence*, - says Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero in her book *For More Than One Voice – Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. But at the same time, she suggests that one should think further than one's own frame of mind. The triumph of female voice and opera expression that destabilizes the intelligibility of language is not just survival of the 'subject of pleasure', but also something else – an indication of the original musicality of language, which is buried beneath its rational function. To paraphrase Mladen Dolar – voice is always between body and language, between biology and culture, between subject and the Other. In that sense, voice - that is the female voice manifested on the pages of Ivana Ilić's study - has the transforming function of meditation which reveals the unusual position of 'power' in the opera singer's voice. This, as well as the novelty of her theoretic-analytical view, places the book *the Fatal Woman – the Representation of Gender on the Opera Scene* in a prominent position in the gamut of recently published domestic and regional research.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović