

*Ключевые слова*

*С. Прокофьев, «Обручение в монастыре», опера buffa, оперная эстетика, семиотика, оперный тип высказывания.*

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**Петь или не петь: значение оперного типа высказывания в опере Сергея Прокофьева «Обручении в монастыре»**

*Key Words*

*Sergey Prokofiev, Betrothal in a Monastery, opera buffa, operatic aesthetics, semiotics, operatic mode of utterance*

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# To Sing or Not to Sing: the Signification of Operatic Mode of Utterance in Sergey Prokofiev's Betrothal In A Monastery

*Abstract*

From the very beginning of his operatic career Sergey Prokofiev positioned himself as a proponent of through-composed opera, uninterrupted plot development, and blurring of traditional division between aria and recitative. In this sense *Betrothal in a Monastery* (1940) represents an interesting exception in Prokofiev's operatic oeuvre. Along with a typical opera buffa plot, the composer adopted some of the stylistic features of the eighteenth-century opera. By giving a semiotic analysis of the operatic mode of utterance, I aim to uncover the appropriate range of meaning associated with it in the part of each character. Prokofiev's approach to the operatic singing as old-fashioned, unnatural, and conventionalized allows us to view this opera as a sort of musical manifesto of his operatic credo.

*Аннотация*

С самого начала своей оперной карьеры Сергей Прокофьев обозначил себя как сторонника сквозной оперы с непрекращающимся развитием сюжета и гибкими границами между арией и речитативом. В этом смысле опера «Обручение в монастыре» представляет собой интересное исключение. Вместе с традиционным сюжетом оперы буффа, Прокофьев заимствует некоторые стилистические черты оперы XVIII века. Используя семиотический метод для анализа оперного типа высказывания, в данной статье я пытаюсь выявить связанный с ним ряд значений в партии каждого персонажа. Изображение оперного пения и оперных форм как устаревших, искусственных и условных позволяет рассматривать «Обручение» как музыкальное выражение оперного кредо композитора.

*Betrothal in a Monastery* (1940) is a unique opera in Prokofiev's output in many ways. Based on Richard Sheridan's play *The Duenna* (1775), it is the only one of Prokofiev's operas that is based on a work originally intended to be set to music.

The action takes place in Seville, where a nobleman Don Jerome wants his daughter Louisa to marry a rich fish merchant Mendoza. Louisa, in turn, is in love with noble but poor Don Antonio. Together with her Duenna, who wants to marry Mendoza herself, she develops a plan to trick Don Jerome and Mendoza (who has never seen his future bride) by swapping their clothes. While Duenna disguised as Louisa meets Mendoza for the first time and persuades him to elope with her, Louisa reunites with Don Antonio. The third couple is Donna Clara and Don Antonio, Louisa's brother. Clara pretends to be offended by Antonio's inappropriate behavior, as he sneaked into her room without having permission to do so, and their story line develops around him asking for forgiveness. After getting married in a monastery, all three couples – including Mendoza and Duenna disguised as Louisa – reunite at Jerome's house. When the trickery is revealed, the father has no choice except to forgive his children, and the opera ends with joyful celebration.

Along with a typical eighteenth-century opera buffa plot, with a pair of couples in love, an unsuccessful suitor, and a smart nurse, with characteristic play with exchanged and mistaken identities and sprinkled with a local Spanish color, the composer adopted some of the stylistic features of the opera of that time. The heavy reliance on traditional operatic forms and operatic singing in general is striking. Contrary to Prokofiev's operatic ideal, the usage of arias and ensembles does not serve the purpose of propelling the action, making the *Betrothal* a notable exception from his operatic aesthetics in yet another way. Obviously, the structure of Sheridan's play influenced some of the musical decisions, but Prokofiev treats his literary source rather freely and does not

directly follow the play.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, he consciously preserves many opportunities for set numbers and even includes extra ones, like Jerome's minuet in the sixth scene, juxtaposing this anachronistic by Prokofiev's standards technique with more natural for him through-composed style of operatic writing.

To understand the uniqueness of such approach, it is necessary to situate the *Betrothal in a Monastery* in the context of the composer's operatic aesthetics. From the very beginning of his career Prokofiev proclaimed himself a proponent of a through-composed type of opera. His first efforts are the most revolutionary in this sense, developing the tradition of Russian operatic radicalism of Dargomizhsky's *The Stone Guest* and Musorgsky's *The Marriage*. The composer's ideal lay in the field of dramatic theatre, and his ultimate goal was to abandon unnecessary operatic conventions in order to achieve dramatic truth. Prokofiev's first mature opera, *The Gambler* (1915–17), rejects the traditional division between aria and recitative in favor of continuous freely flowing dialogue. Even though Prokofiev never denied the importance of melody and catchy tunes, his interest in the following two operas, *The Love for Three Oranges* (1919) and *The Fiery Angel* (1919–23), still remained in achieving a continuous scenic action. After more than a ten-years hiatus the composer returned to the operatic genre under new circumstances. Working in the Soviet Union under the "Socialist realism" doctrine he necessarily had to reconsider his approach. However, as Richard Taruskin points out, instead of radically changing the style of operatic writing, he appealed to the Russian classic in justifying his preference for through-composed opera.<sup>2</sup> In an interview from 1940, just before starting his work on *Duenna*, he talks about two types of arias in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*: Lensky's aria, which stops the action, and Tatyana's Letter Scene, which though melodically rich, manages to move the action forward.<sup>3</sup> This latter type is the one that Prokofiev claims to draw upon. The presence of set pieces in his late operas *Semyon Kotko* (1939), as well as in *War and Piece* (1941–52), and *The Story of a Real Man* (1947–48), is motivated by the scenic action.

Despite occupying such a special place in Prokofiev's operatic output, *Betrothal in a Monastery* for a long time was perceived as seemingly

<sup>1</sup> For the discussion about the libretto of the opera and its relation to the literary source, see Larisa Dan'ko, "Prokof'ev v rabote nad 'Duēn'ey'." In *Cherti stilya S. Prokof'eva: Sbornik teoreticheskikh statey*, edited by L. Berger, 82–115. Moscow: Sovetskiiy kompozitor, 1962; Harlow Robinson, "The Operas of Sergei Prokofiev and their Russian Literary Sources," PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Taruskin, "Prokofiev, Sergei," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. by Stanley Sadie [London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1992], 1137.

<sup>3</sup> *Prokof'ev o Prokof'ev: stat'i i interv'y*, ed. by V.P. Varunts [Moscow: Sovetskiiy kompozitor, 1991], 183.

unproblematic. The composer himself left scarce documentation of his conception. A rare insight is conveyed in this statement from a 1943 interview: "I was attracted by the subtle humor, the charming lyricism, the sharply defined characters, the dynamic action and the fascinating structure of the plot, every turn of which is awaited with breathless interest."<sup>4</sup> This remark has influenced the interpretation of the opera as a joyful retreat between the heroism of *Semyon Kotko* and epic grandeur of *War and Peace*. The work has not received much scholarly attention, and the existing literature is mostly focused on the opera's history and its relation to the literary source.<sup>5</sup> The recent dissertation by Stella Baty Landis is, to the best of my knowledge, the first and the only attempt to problematize the opera's conception.<sup>6</sup> After considering the place of music and the nature of the comic in the Socialist realism aesthetics, the author draws attention to the role of music as an active agent in the opera. According to Landis, the main idea of the work is undermining music's power in response to the demands of the Socialist realism. While the hypothesis of music playing a special role in the conception of the opera seems crucial, I do not necessarily agree with her conclusion. By giving semiotic analysis of the operatic mode of utterance in the opera, I would suggest an interpretation of this work as a manifestation of Prokofiev's opera aesthetic.

Already in 1960s the Soviet musicologist Ekaterina Ratser noticed an unusual variety of expressions in the opera.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in *Duenna* Prokofiev employs a whole palette of utterances, from operatic singing to speaking. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogic understanding of a novel could be usefully applied to interpreting this feature.<sup>8</sup> According to Bakhtin, a novel is in constant conversation with other texts, on the one hand, and at the same time it is able to hold and provide a space for conversation for multiple voices within the text. This multiplicity of voices, or heteroglossia, is always colored with traces of previous usage of language, or defined by belonging to "social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of

generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions."<sup>9</sup> In this case, the very act of choice of particular words – or in our case modes of singing – immediately takes us beyond the level of simple referential meaning. Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson define this "dialogized heteroglossia," or "bringing world-views and senses of experience into dialogue with each other and then exaggerating the resulting interactions and imagining ones that have never happened," as the central task of a novel.<sup>10</sup>

With this in mind, the main clue to the text of *Duenna* seems to be this interplay of different voices. I propose to identify at least four modes of utterances through formal characteristics and a manner of singing: operatic, arioso, recitative, and speaking. Each of these "modes of expression" could be defined by just a few of these features. Thus, the operatic mode might be represented in a very short passage not by its formal or structural characteristics, but simply by the style of vocalization.

Operatic mode:

- traditional opera genres (aria, ensemble, serenade, brindisi);
- expresses emotions;
- closed form;
- clearly shaped melodic line, melismatic text setting;
- frequently in regular rhythm, based on dance types.

Arioso mode:

- expresses emotions without slowing down the action;
- the structure usually present as a some sort of periodicity;
- freer melodic structure, usually syllabic with occasional melismas;
- strict time.

Recitative mode:

- moves the action forward;
- text-based form;
- declamatory style of singing; syllabic setting;
- irregular rhythmic structure.

Speech mode:

- drives the action;
- no musical form;
- speaking instead of singing;
- rhythm of natural speech.

<sup>4</sup> S. Prokofiev: *Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, ed. by S.I. Shlifstein (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), 123.

<sup>5</sup> Larisa Dan'ko, "Prokof'ev v rabote nad 'Duēn'ey'." In *Cherti stilya S. Prokof'eva: Sbornik teoreticheskikh statey*, edited by L. Berger, 82-115 (Moscow: Sovetskiiy kompozitor, 1962); Ekaterina Ratser, "'Duēn'ya' Prokof'eva i teatr", in *Muzika i sovremennost': sbornik statey*, ed. T. Lebedeva, 24-61 (Moscow: Gosmuzizdat, 1963); Harlow Loomis Robinson, *The Operas of Sergei Prokofiev and their Russian Literary Sources* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1980); Larisa Dan'ko, *Teatr Prokof'eva v Peterburge* (Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskiiy proekt, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Stella Baty Landis, *The Soviet Operas of Sergei Prokofiev: In Search of Socialist Realism* (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Ratser, "'Duēn'ya' Prokof'eva i teatr", 46.

<sup>8</sup> For more in-depth discussion of Bakhtin's theory, see, among others, Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* / edited by Michael Holquist ; translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 262-263.

<sup>10</sup> Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson, "Bakhtin, Mikhail," in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imre Szeman. ([Baltimore, Md.]: Johns Hopkins University Press, c1997- ), <http://litguide.press.jhu.edu/cgi-bin/view.cgi?eid=22>.

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The distribution of these four modes in the opera is unequal, with arioso and recitative modes occupying the majority of the score and the speech mode as the most rarely employed. If we consider the meaning of these modes in the context of Prokofiev's operatic aesthetics though, the last three categories are not problematic. Arioso and recitative modes are the main ways of expression in the rest of his operas, and speech is also frequently used as a specific color. It is the operatic mode that clearly stands apart as something unusual for the composer.

In order to understand the role of operatic mode of utterance I propose to apply a concept of markedness developed by Robert Hatten in his book *Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation and Interpretation*.<sup>11</sup> Hatten defines markedness as "the valuation given to difference."<sup>12</sup> It requires the presence of a binary opposition with an unequal value in terms of signification placed on each side, where an unmarked term generally has a wider range of references and occurs more frequently, while a marked term is applied for more specific purposes and in a specific context. Therefore, marked elements yield to the process of ascribing to them a specific meaning more easily.

Applying this concept to the *Betrothal*, we can consider operatic mode as marked in the context of Prokofiev's operatic aesthetics. This is an example of what Hatten calls "markedness growth" in music, when a particular musical element changes its meaning over time from unmarked to marked or vice versa,<sup>13</sup> since from the eighteenth-century perspective operatic mode of singing should be viewed as unmarked, as it was the main if not the only mode of operatic expression. Only from the twentieth-century perspective references to the eighteenth-century style of writing acquire additional significance. Moreover, an adequate interpretation of this opposition requires a creative approach on the part of the listeners, as they should be familiar with both eighteenth century conventions and Prokofiev's operatic style.

Even though one can name other examples of the revival of the eighteenth-century operatic aesthetics in the first half of the twentieth century, such as Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* or Igor Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, Prokofiev's approach is different. These composers are playing with conventions of the opera buffa as well, but their styles are consistent throughout the operas, whereas Prokofiev intentionally juxtaposes the style of the eighteenth-century number opera with his

own operatic style in through-composed structure, making this interplay of two different operatic aesthetics more readily apparent.

In what follows I will try to establish the range of meaning connected with operatic type of expression and demonstrate how it could possibly shed some light on the idea of the opera. In doing so I begin by formulating the signification of the operatic mode of utterance in the part of each character.

The main romantic couple, Louisa and Antonio, usually express themselves in arioso or recitative mode of utterance. Louisa's part with its characteristic profile, which is both melodically rich and rhythmically flexible, is similar to other Prokofiev female heroines and anticipates Natasha Rostova from *War and Peace*. At the same time one of the main musical characteristics of the couple is their love theme that originates from Antonio's serenade in the first act and appears in the course of the opera as a lyrical characteristic of Louisa and Antonio's love. Besides the choice of a genre that has a long operatic tradition (for example, the serenade from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*), such features as clear and simple melodic and rhythmic structure, strophic form, guitar accompaniment, suggest its belonging to the operatic mode.

**MP3**

Antonio's serenade, act I, tableau 1, scene 4  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vM0v6Tg9jW8>  
Yevgeniy Akhmedov

**MP3**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axHWdH-t9mM>  
Konstantin Pluzhnikov

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Hatten, *Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 39.

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## Пример 1

АНТОНИО

40 *p dolce*  
Кте.бев.ок.но гля.дит лу.на, и ве.

А.н.  
-лит о - на со - рвать по - ско-рей тво.их дрем.лю.щих о -

Another instance of operatic singing in Louisa's part is a scene where she meets Mendoza. Disguised as Clara, she asks him to help her in finding Antonio. Both Mendoza and Louisa turn to the operatic singing as a ritual of courtship. Mendoza, thinking that the young lady is flirting with him, takes on a role of a well-mannered gentleman. The unnaturalness of Mendoza's words is revealed through the contrast of melismatic operatic singing when he addresses Clara/Louisa with recitative replicas addressed to Don Carlos or aside. Louisa, in turn, adopts operatic singing to please Mendoza and persuade him to help her. Moreover, Louisa borrows not only Clara's dress, but also her way of singing, which is most of the time operatic. Louisa's part in this scene is based on an elaboration of D major triad, with wide intervals and melismas, that sounds almost meaningless in its purity; this singing without a theme is similar to a speech without content. Only when Louisa asks Mendoza to help her in finding Antonio, that is, telling the truth, she returns to her natural manner of singing with the reappearance of Antonio and Louisa's love theme.

## Пример 2

ЛУИЗА

205 *p*  
(К Луизе)  
- стив.чуть.н.уть.гла.за. Хе - хе - хем! Сень.

М.  
- ор, толь.ко вы спо - соб - ны о - ка - зать мне

Л.з.  
206  
ми МЕНДОЗА - лость.  
Ну, так и есть, го -

The second couple, Clara and Ferdinand, is more melodramatic in expressing their feelings. Clara, who plays an offended lover, is the character whose part is written in the operatic mode almost throughout. Her two solo arias draw upon conventions of the opera seria, significantly enough being the only closed numbers in the opera that go uninterrupted. However, when she forgets about her role and expresses her true self, Clara turns to arioso or recitative mode, thus revealing a mere desire to punish her lover as the real motive of her behavior.

In the first aria Clara expresses how upset she is about Ferdinand and his misbehavior. This aria is even preceded by a recitative secco with

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characteristic strings tremolo, the only one in the opera. A spinning motion in the melodic line in a moderate tempo together with the accompaniment in a triple meter suggest strong associations with waltz with its traditional romantic and sensual connotations in general and Glinka's Spanish romances in particular. The sensual character is even more emphasized by chromatic inflections in the melodic line and piquant harmonic flavor as a result of substitution of regular dominant of B-flat major with B minor, two chords that are related by a common third, adding a fresh twist to a conventional harmonic progression.

Пример 3

189 Andantino J: 72

Кл. би.дол. Фер.ди.нанд один на свете

Кл. всех до.ро.же, Фер.ди.нанд о.дин то.с.ку рас.св.ять мо.жет. Но не.

Кл. ждан.но серд.це он встре.во.жил в пред.рас.свет.ный час вче.ра. Ночь ба.

тр

In the second aria Clara laments her destiny, as she is abandoned by Ferdinand and is about to spend the rest of her life in the convent. In Sheridan's play Clara is forced to enter the convent, while in the opera she goes there herself. Moreover, as we know from her joyful exchange of replicas in the previous scene with Louisa, who gladly comments on how the new attire fits her, Clara is going to stay there just for one day. Therefore, we are not supposed to take her lament seriously. Nevertheless, the style of the aria tries to convince us otherwise by employing opera seria style. The allusion to the opera seria style in opera buffa is something that Mozart used in his operas. For example, it brings to mind the Countess aria *Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro* from *Le Nozze di Figaro*, where the Countess laments her husband's infidelity, or Donna Elvira's first appearance in the trio *Ah! Chi mi dice mai* from *Don Giovanni*, where she sings about being betrayed by her lover. All three arias have a highly expressive melody, full-scale orchestral introduction and rich orchestral accompaniment, they are written in a duple meter in a slow tempo, and Clara's and Donna Elvira's arias are even written in the same key of E-flat major. In her interpretation on Mozart's operas Wendy Allanbrook argues that Mozart introduced features of opera seria to create overornate and exaggerated portrait of Elvira.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Prokofiev uses the same technique to ridicule exaggeration and artificiality of Clara's feelings.

## MP3

Clara's aria, act III, tableau 7, scene 2  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBjFa1mVbyM>  
 Yulia Matochkina

Clara's beloved Ferdinand is also in a sense a one-dimensional character. His main feature is his pathological jealousy of Clara. Ferdinand is even ready to let Antonio flirt with his sister Louisa being afraid that he could turn to Clara. Apart from a few replicas in recitative style, his main leitmotif is a distinctive short minuet-like theme. Its belonging to the category of operatic mode of utterance is precisely because of its explicit reliance on a dance genre. Being one of the two minuets that Prokofiev introduced in the opera, it is characterized by gloomy and passionate character, with its heavily chromatic vocal line and bare accompaniment in the low register.

<sup>14</sup> Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze di Figaro & Don Giovanni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 233-235

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Пример 4

КЛАРА *p*  
Не га - да - ла я, что здесь, в ти - хой о -

Кл. *poco cresc.* *mf* *dim.*  
- би - те - ли, сре - ди мо - на - хинь мол - ча - ли - вых за - кон - чить

Кл. *p*  
дни судь - ба мне ве - ле - ла.

The second minuet is written for Don Carlos, who is not the main character of the opera, but his role as a confidant is important for the development of the intrigue. His part, which is almost entirely in the operatic mode, is based on the minuet theme that accompanies him almost throughout the opera. Frits Noske in his book about signification in the opera talks about two different types of minuets in Mozart's operas: the aristocratic and the bourgeois.<sup>15</sup> Noske describes the former as somewhat archaic, in

<sup>15</sup> Frits Noske, *The Signifier and the Signified: Studies in the Operas of Mozart and Verdi* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 33.

a slow tempo, without melodic movement in the first measure. This is the type that Prokofiev uses as a characteristic of Don Carlos. Initially Prokofiev composed this minuet theme for a different work, an unrealized production of *Eugene Onegin* for Alexander Tairov in 1936, where it serves a similar purpose. In the play this tune is sung by Onegin with the French text and conveys the same connotation of pastness.

Пример 5

221 Andante J.52  
К. КАРЛОС *p*  
Нет боль - ше - го сча - сть - я, чем слу - жить вам, сень.

К. *poco cresc.*  
о - ра. Я ста - рый меч - та - тель, меч - та - тель с дав -

К. *pp*  
но раз - би - тым серд - цем. Мо - гу ли об - ма - нуть вас, сень о - ра?

Although being polite and well-mannered is not necessarily a bad thing, Prokofiev portrays Don Carlos's old-fashionedness as oftentimes inappropriate and ridiculous. This is especially evident in his dialogue with Jerome in the sixth scene of the opera, where Don Carlos brings him a letter from Louisa, but gets to the matter only after performing all his greeting rituals. At first Jerome tries to follow Carlos's ritual and repeats his minuet theme, but he is impatient to hear the news and the delay

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makes him feel nervous, which is conveyed through him shifting to the recitative mode in his comments aside.

Clara, Ferdinand, and Don Carlos are representative of a noble class, and for them operatic singing in a high style could be natural, but even in their parts Prokofiev treats it as false and artificial. Mendoza, Jerome, and Duenna clearly represent comic characters, and for them the very fact of their singing in high operatic style creates a comic effect.

Thus, one of the purest examples of operatic mode is Jerome's fatherhood aria, where he complains about how difficult it is to be a father of a grown-up daughter. The aria parodies opera seria devices from the very beginning: clearly marked opening with a furious passage of strings, onomatopoeic melismas on the words 'groans', 'sobs', pompous orchestration, and dramatic key of g minor create a sense of exaggeration and aggrandizement.

**MP3** Don Jerome's aria, act I, tableau 1, scene 5  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2ge\\_MnW3hY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2ge_MnW3hY)  
Nikolay Korshunov

Пример 6

Another example is Mendoza's aria about fish and the following duet with Jerome. Here Prokofiev uses another common operatic device. He illustrates the text of the aria with arpeggio passages in the orchestra mimetically imitating fish splashing in water. A comic effect is created by the sense of redundancy, as if music and text are saying the same thing.

Пример 7

One more instance of operatic mode of utterance in Mendoza and Duenna's parts is their first meeting. This scene consists of several episodes, providing an interesting example of operatic mode in a process of interaction with arioso and recitative modes.

In the first part of the scene Mendoza and Duenna are trying to begin a courteous conversation, but both are not sure about how to start. Feeling uncomfortable, from the onset both characters turn to the unnatural for them operatic mode, similarly to the discussed above scene of Mendoza and Louisa, where once again Mendoza is trying to make a good impression and the female character pretends to be somebody else. Both heroes abandon the operatic mode quite abruptly when Duenna takes off the veil and Mendoza sees her face for the first time and it turns out to be far less pretty than Jerome has described. At this point they take off their masks and turn to recitative and speech modes.

Then Duenna takes the initiative and starts to charm Mendoza by flattering him. Her singing becomes more melodic, and Mendoza little by little joins her in repeating the same tune, proving that her charms are indeed working. Finally, Mendoza asks Duenna to sing a song. At first she refuses, saying that she does not sing well, but Mendoza insists. Following the rules of the comedy and the way the scene has been unfolding, we could probably expect another disappointment on

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his part, thus giving the plot one more comical turn. Prokofiev went this path in the opera *The Love for Three Oranges*, in a scene where the Prince tries to please the Cook in order to get the oranges. While in the earlier opera Prokofiev capitalizes on the discrepancy between the Prince's flattering portrayal of the Cook and her real appearance and timbre – the part is written for a bass – in the *Betrothal* he lets Duenna sing an absolutely beautiful and sincere song, thus making her character somewhat charming. This moment is clearly special in her part since it is the only time when she turns from recitative or arioso mode of utterance to the operatic.

The two strophes of Duenna's song portray two periods in women's life: in the first strophe a young girl is shy with her first suitor, but in the second strophe the same girl less than a year later freely flirts with her lover and anticipates the pleasures of the wedding night. The text thus allegorically hints at Duenna's experience in love matters. The musical language of the song is defined by the combination of naivety and sophistication, suggesting that Duenna is not as simple as she seems to be as well. On the one hand, it is in a simple 2/4 meter with a clear rhythmical structure, accompanied by a folk-like orchestral imitation of a plucked string instrument. At the same time an initial impression of simplicity is combined with a hint of modal (Phrygian E minor), rhythmical (triple sixteenth-note melismas in the vocal part) and textural (the addition of the second chromatic voice in the accompaniment in the second strophe) complexity.

**MP3**

Act 1, tableau 4, scene 2  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hi0ei2dAWuI9>

Пример 8

253 *Larghetto*  $\text{♩} = 104$

А. Ког-да вок-руг зе-ле-ной де-воч-ки, сов-

-сем е-ще дев-чон-ки, пер-вый раз в жи-зни ве-се-лый ще-голь ста-не-ту-ви.

А. -вать-ся, го-ворить ей неж-ный вздор и шеп-тать ей: „Ах, как я лю-

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А. -блю вас,“ – на-до ви-деть, как о-на кра-сне-ет, как гла-

255

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This song appears to be a turning point in Duenna's successful seduction of Mendoza, since after hearing it he becomes impatient to take her to Jerome and ask him to bless their marriage. Significantly enough, Duenna has achieved her goal entirely through the aural channel. Understanding that she is not pretty and thus will not be able to conquer Mendoza with

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her appearance, she first lures him by flattering (i. e., by word), and then finishes the process by singing a song, providing the first example of the music's power in the opera.

Finally, the scene concludes with Duenna asking Mendoza to kidnap her. Mendoza at first finds this request unusual, but she manages to persuade him by drawing a picture full of sentimental clichés. Duenna throws together all the stock phrases usually associated with lovers' romantic escape: it should happen necessarily at midnight, in a carriage with a couple of thoroughbred trotters that will take them through the silent moonlit Sevillian streets, and Mendoza's beard will be waving victoriously. Therefore, this comical couple tries on the role that is traditionally associated with noble characters. The scene is set to music from the chorus of masks "Friends, go away, friends, do not make a noise" (rehearsal number 99 of the score). Its steady pacing in short melodic phrases reminds of the chorus of noblemen "Zitti, zitti" from the first act of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, which creates an interesting interplay of meaning. The kidnapping of Gilda in Verdi's opera leads to the terrible outcome, while in *Duenna* the kidnapping happens with an eager participation of the victim herself. Therefore, overabundance of textual clichés together with allusion to the famous Verdi chorus creates an effect of comic traversing of the romantic conventions.

Therefore, the range of meaning associated with operatic singing in *Betrothal in a Monastery* is far from being positive. It is old-fashioned, false, pretentious, ritualistic, comic, and unnatural. Antonio's serenade and Duenna's song are the only 'operatic' numbers that are free from negative connotations. Probably, the fact that they are motivated by the stage action and serve the development of the intrigue excludes them from being casted as remnants of the tradition that should be abandoned.

By surrounding the operatic mode with this range of meanings Prokofiev also indirectly states the basics of his own view on the opera as a genre and thus participates in the ongoing argument about the primacy of music over words, music over action, operatic versus theatrical. He clearly resolves this debate in favor of through-composed type of opera and uninterrupted stage development. Besides casting operatic singing and numbers that stop the action in a negative light, one of the scenes of the opera almost literally illustrates what could happen if the music takes over the action.

The scene of Jerome rehearsing a minuet on stage with his two friends is another instance of diegetic usage of the music in the opera, but here Prokofiev shows how music could potentially disrupt the action. The trio serves as a background to the whole scene, even though the performance fails to meet high standards. Once again referring to the minuet genre, Prokofiev here uses the second type of the dance, bourgeois minuet, fully

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in accordance with Jerome's social status, which according to Noske is characterized by a faster tempo and more developed and lively melody.<sup>16</sup> The composer achieves a comical effect by slight distortion of the generic characteristics. First, the combination of instruments is strange: clarinet, cornet, and a bass drum form a quite unique ensemble. Then, the awkward leaps in the melodic line are combined with quasi-imitative texture, creating an impression of an amateurism pretending to look professional. Moreover, the conflation and misplacement of rhythmic accents between the parts goes contrary to the minuet as a dance genre and creates a sense of discordance. If this is not enough, the performers once and for all show their dilettantism by failing to listen to each other and playing out of tune, missing the beats, so Jerome has to stop the playing and start over again with no better result.

Пример 9



Despite all the difficulties, the friends are persistent in their practice, even though several times their rehearsal is interrupted by the stage action. First, Jerome stops playing and reflects on the past events; then Don Carlos enters and delivers Mendoza's letter; another messenger arrives with Louisa's note; and finally Jerome stops music in order to announce the preparation for a party that evening. However, it turns out that the music does not want to give way to the action: at first the cornetist and later on the drummer refuse to stop playing and Jerome has to raise his voice to silence them and let the action unfold. It looks like the music does not want to cede its primacy to the dramatic action, trying to revolt against the drama and get an agency of its own. This scene serves almost

<sup>16</sup> Noske, *The Signifier and the Signified*, 33.

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as Prokofiev's illustration of what could happen if the composer gives prevalence to the music over the stage action: it gets too much power and does not allow the story to move forward.

Therefore, semiotic analysis of the opera revealed that *Betrothal in a Monastery* is not just a comic opera. The signification of the operatic mode of utterance uncovered a deeper layer of meaning connected to the Prokofiev's operatic aesthetics. His approach to the operatic singing as old-fashioned, unnatural, and conventionalized allows us to view this opera as a sort of musical manifesto of his operatic credo. Even though at the first sight *Betrothal in a Monastery* seems to obey the rules of a number opera, by casting its conventions in a negative light the composer once again states his faithfulness to the ideal of through-composed opera, uninterrupted plot development, and blurring of traditional division between aria and recitative. At the same time numerous allusions to Mozart, Rossini, Verdi, Musorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov (this question is beyond the scope of this paper) add another dimension to the meaning of the opera, making it a meta-commentary on the history of the opera genre, in which Prokofiev does not deny the significance and cultural value of his predecessors. Their status is more like noble and elegant Don Carlos, for whom there is no place in the modern world.

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