

COLLECTIVE PERFORMANCE: THE ROLE OF THE ENSEMBLE IN THE PERFORMING ARTS EVENTS OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Abstract

The concept of 'collective performance' emerged as a necessity for the unfolding of the opera classes, as it was necessary to include a large number of students for whom this course served as artistic practice. The possibility of working with an ensemble turned into a directorial challenge, which required finding solutions that would delimit the function of the choir, therefore of a collective character, with an important artistic participation within the notion of performance.

The idea is not a new one, it exists since ancient times, and it has come down to us renowned and highly theorized. Its approach as a pedagogical and directorial method can be applied to many types of performing arts events, in a wide sphere, close to or completely foreign to the opera genre. Personally, I have successfully used it in countless projects: in the theatrical-pedagogical performance *I Am the Little Prince as Well* based on the novel by A. de Saint Exupery (2019), in the student repertoire performances - *Suor Angelica* by G. Puccini (2014), *The loneliness of the tragic hero* adapted from *Iphigénie en Tauride*, *Orfeo ed Euridice* by Ch. W. Gluck and *Idomeneo – Re di Creta* by W.A. Mozart (2015), *Hansel and Gretel* by E. Humperdinck (2016, 2022), *Habanera*, based on *Carmen* by G. Bizet (2017), *Orfeo ed Euridice* by Ch. W. Gluck (2017), in the premieres on the stage of the Romanian National Opera in Cluj: *Nabucco* by G. Verdi (2016-2022), *Răspântii – o poveste românească* [*Crossroads – A Romanian Tale*] by Dan Variu and *Tânărul și moartea* [*The Young Man and Death*] by Constantin Rîpă – premieres (2018), etc.

In the present habilitation thesis, the subject is discussed in the second part of the first chapter. However, due to its extremely attractive and contemporary character, and also as it expresses, in itself, one of the defining aspects of my directorial style, my intention is, starting with the beginning of 2024, to publish at the MediaMusica publishing house of the "Gh. Dima" National Academy of Music Cluj-Napoca, a separate work on this topic.

The first chapter of my habilitation thesis, I.A - *RETROSPECTIVE ON THE PERSONAL TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY IN RELATED FIELDS*, is therefore structured in two parts. The first part contains, after a necessary introduction (I.1), detailed but concise references related to: scientific papers, my doctoral thesis (I.2), training courses and other milestones of my professional career (I.3).

Subchapter I.4 - *Professional teaching experience*, plays an important part in the structure of the work, developing along several lines: I.4.1 Course materials, I.4.2 Approaching non-conventional performance spaces: the student micro-season *Casa Artelor [House of Arts]* and *Scena Urbană [Urban Stage]*, I.4.3 Collaborations with other cultural institutions, tours, participation in festivals, I.4.4 Pedagogical activity within the D.E.C.I.D [Distance Learning Department] of the "*Gh. Dima*" Music Academy Cluj. Coordination of undergraduate theses and dissertations, tutoring activities, I.4.5 Artistic education during the COVID-19 pandemic and the *PASS-WORD-OPERA* creation and interpretation student program. A brief account on some of these activities is presented in the following paragraphs.

Workshops, in the sphere of higher artistic education, may take various forms. Personally, I employed several of them, considering the benefits they have in the complete and effective development of students, without, however, omitting the essential aspect of educating and training different segments of the public, who do not attend on a regular basis the traditional theatres. The main purpose of these workshops (regardless of their form), was to enrich the contemporary cultural field and to offer young artists a new platform of expression, thus encouraging their creativity and valorising it in front of the audience. The approach of non-conventional performance spaces aims to overcome the limits imposed by a specific venue intended for productions and discover a new form of personal self-exploration. The practical concretization of these activities materialized in the *Casa Artelor* and the *Urban Scene* student micro-season projects.

The "Casa Artelor" student micro-season was initiated in February 2015 and continued until 2019, ending abruptly with the onset of the global health crisis. The project was conceived as an interdisciplinary singing and performing arts workshop, which aimed at the adaptation of interpretive and directorial techniques to a studio-type playing space (conference hall and art gallery openings), with a small audience of about 50 people, without a curtain or delimitation of the stage, without lighting or the possibility of using props. It was realized in partnership with the "*Carpatica*" Foundation and the "*Oraşul*" Magazine, whose president, the architect Ionel Vitoc, became the host and main promoter of the events.

This micro-season complemented the productions organized within the Music Academy "Gh. Dima," and was a platform through which the students passed the "trial test" of emotions resulting from the direct impact with the audience (major impact in the conditions of a performance space - studio), before a premiere or a bachelor's exam that was to take place on the "home" stage, at the Academy.

At the opposite pole in terms of completing and perfecting interpretative skills lies the *Scena Urbană* project, a project that ran parallel to the *student Micro-season*, and which, in fact, intensified the results of both directions.

Scena Urbană is an initiative of the Romanian Order of Architects, Transylvania Branch, which aims to reactivate urban spaces and return them to the community. *Scena Urbană* accomplishes its purpose by exemplifying the cultural and educational potential of underutilized urban spaces, by bringing them back onto the map of Cluj's culturally active objectives.

For the many generations of students who were active within the *Scena*, the experience was not only new, but brought with it certain precise needs of artistic training, which entailed long rehearsals, demanding requirements, continuous physical and mental training, but which in the end brought about the much-desired results.

Unlike the studio space of the micro-season, the stage set of the *Urban Stage* was vast, always different. The several hundred spectators, who were mostly standing, represented a real force, an unstoppable wave of energy, which you, the artist, had to subdue. The stage availability, the accuracy of the diction, the expressiveness of the facial expressions and gestures, the empathic ability to transmit the emotional message, all had to be used to the maximum.

The adaptability and exuberance of the performance stems from passion, perseverance and training. It is my belief that *Scena Urbană* was and remains an important field of experimentation of technical-interpretive means for all artists at the beginning of their journey, but also for those already established.

Regarding the *artistic education during the COVID-19 pandemic*, it represented an important step in my professional evolution, an oversized field of reflection, which occasioned a beneficial concentration and diversification of my pedagogical and artistic concepts.

For students who were still motivated to develop professionally, we set up an online rehearsal system, through which were able to continue preparing our opera and musical theatre productions, of course in a different, much more demanding form, which required, in addition

to double the work time, patience, dedication and passion. All this, with the precise goal of presenting these projects on stage, as soon as this would have been possible.

We employed a technique borrowed from pop music, using pre-recorded material, to allow the singers to musically repeat the entire score of the performance accompanied by the piano and the voices of the other protagonists as backing track. We used graphic schemes of the stage setting, which we explained, visualized and marked during rehearsals on digital platforms. We carefully studied the text, the meanings, the states and feelings of the characters, the diction, the dynamic and agogics contained in the role. We proposed many "fantastic" themes for individual improvisation to facilitate the understanding of some concepts, the development of some stage situations or relationships. We realized that individual improvement leads to substantial saving of working time on stage and helps to increase the quality and efficiency of teamwork. And we also learned to trust each other, to be able to rely on others, not to refuse the shoulder that is offered to cry on.

The **PASS-WORD-OPERA** student artistic creation and performance programme emerged as an absolute necessity to give my students the satisfaction of performing the productions they had worked so hard on for a whole year, and which could not be performed with an actual audience. Thus, we invented a concept, a programme that could gather under one roof all their achievements during an atypical academic year. I wanted it to be something appealing to the public, but primarily to represent the young artists, to be part of their world.

The first **PASS-WORD-OPERA** edition (June 11-20, 2021), brought together seven productions (theatre, opera, musical), broadcast, as premieres, on the website and YouTube channel of the "Gh. Dima" National Academy of Music in Cluj. The total of over 4000 views of the performances included in the programme, confirmed to us that the effort was not in vain. Although the academic year 2021-2022 was held under a more fortunate sign, of hybrid education in the first semester, and then of *physical presence* in the second semester, it seemed unfair to me to give up on this project. As a result, all the student performances of the Opera Singing and Musical Performing Arts specialties, coordinated and directed by me, presented on the stage of the "Gh. Dima" National Academy of Music, were included in the second edition of the creation and interpretation programme PASS-WORD-OPERA, which took place in the same format, on the YouTube channel of the academy, from June 12-20, 2022. Given my long experience in television, I personally took care of both the conception and graphic creation of the programme logo and all promotional spots, as well as the video editing of the presented materials.

In continuation of the first part of the habilitation thesis, I also focused on my publications (I.5): *studies, articles or lectures published in non-indexed journals, communications held at conferences, symposia, scientific meetings, workshops* (I.5.1) and *publications at CNCS classified publishing houses* (I.5.2), but also on my intense and diversified *artistic professional experience* (I.6), which is presented in full in *Appendix 4* of the present thesis.

As I mentioned at the beginning, in the second half of the first part of the work, I developed the concept of *Collective performance: the role of the ensemble in the performing arts events of the 21st century* (I.B). The chapter contains original and innovative case studies and practical applications, both from an artistic and pedagogical point of view: The expressive potential of the scenographic character in collective performance - *Orfeo ed Euridice* by Ch. W Gluck (I.8), The emotional dynamics of the group - *I am the Little Prince as Well* adapted from A. de Saint Exupery (I.9) and Video-scenography as an amplifying element of the collective performance – *Nabucco* by G. Verdi (I.9).

Comprehensively analysing the research, educational and artistic activities that I have undertaken so far, summarizing the multitude of projects that I foresee in the near future, I have arrived at a logical and possible forecast of the directions in which I will be able to develop my professional career - *Part II, Career Plan*.

Thus, on the didactic-academic level (II.1) I will continue the *design and writing of course materials* (II.1.1), *the realization of performances within the Opera Class, but also of extra-university projects, in order to participate in the seasons of the "Gh. Dima" National Academy of Music, the collaboration with other cultural institutions, organization of tours, participation in festivals, contests, charitable and inclusive events, etc.* (II.1.2) *coordination of undergraduate theses, dissertations, development of the tutoring concept* (II.1.3) and *application for programmes and grants for funding and development of student activities within the academic disciplines, as well as my own artistic projects* (II.1.4).

On the managerial-organizational level (II.2) I have proposed the realization of the 3rd (live) edition of the *PASS-WORD-OPERA 2023 Student Festival of interpretation and artistic creation*, which will contain, in addition to performances, exhibitions, workshop-classes and master-classes, lectures and workshops held by prestigious specialists in the relevant fields, but also the organization of the *Alexandru Fărcaș National Vocal Interpretation Competition*, 1st edition, March-April 2024. This competition comes as a natural consequence of a first pilot edition that took place between January 14-21, 2023, and aims to stimulate and develop technical and interpretive vocal skills, educate young people in the spirit of knowledge,

repertoire choice, interpretation and promotion of authentic and real values both from the world of classical music and from the Romanian one. Its purpose is also to increase the visibility of young artists, the effective and productive knowledge of the competition on the lyric performance market, exchange of experiences and best practices for higher education institutions in Romania and worldwide.

From a scientific perspective (II.3), the career plan anticipates various activities (co-organization of the third edition of the *SCENA National Conference with international participation*, the re-editing of the Symposium *Arta vocală în toate ipostazele [Vocal Art in All Aspects]* affiliated with the *Alexandru Fărcaș National Interpretation Competition*, third edition 2026), but also the design of studies, articles, lectures and publications.

On the artistic level, my intention is to continue the *Urban Stage* project and the collaborations with professional performance institutions: Hungarian Opera Cluj (*Young artists on the opera stage, Here and Now* by Adrian Borza) Opera Craiova (*Suor Angelica* by G. Puccini), Opera Braşov (*L'heure espagnole* by M. Ravel), Opera Timisoara (*Dido and Aeneas* by H. Purcell), etc. Moreover, I will endeavour to develop my portfolio of filmed and graphically processed projects (the productions and activities of the *PASS-WORD-OPERA* Festival, 3rd edition, *The Addams Family*, *Mary Poppins* and the *Aristocrat Cats*, stage adaptations of Disney musical and animated films, video essays, video installations – in collaboration with the students and teaching staff of the University of Art and Design Cluj, *Dido and Aeneas* by H. Purcell, etc.). Regarding short- and medium-term projects, there will also be world premieres - *Rugă veche, Rugă nouă*, a performance of song-texts with orchestral accompaniment, on music by Constantin Rîpă; *Requiem pro ignotis*, for soloists, choir and orchestra, on music by Adrian Borza, the operetta *Frau Luna* by P. Linke, whose original script was adapted to Romanian by me.

Contemporary society, indulgently characterized by *hyper-consumerism*, arrogates to itself a new definition of value – as a measure of an optimal lifestyle, perfectly fitting into social templates. Modern technique allows all consumers to come into contact with art, which is perfectly reproducible today. Our audience suffers from an acute need to quickly assimilate novel stimuli and sensations, instead of information. It has no time for empathy and reflection. I believe with conviction that the mission of education definitely has a say in this respect. An arduous, toiling but also miraculous change can start from here. The pedagogue must be a skilled "retailer." The small but constant long-term "profit" will be able to seed generations, which will carry forward, in turn, traditions and values that will not perish in time or space.