

## **The Comic Operas of Józef Elsner and the Circulation of Operatic Genres in the Central Europe at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century**

While Józef Elsner is quite commonly recognized as Fryderyk Chopin's teacher, and – for people with slightly more historical knowledge – as a central figure in the musical life of post-partition Warsaw, his compositions remains much less known, and his operatic output – close to oblivion. For the established musicological opinion it is Elsner's sacred output that have the first place, followed by symphonic, chamber and piano works; if it comes to the operas, they are the two 'national' ones from the end of the second decade of the 19th century – *Król Łokietek* and *Jagiello w Tenczynie*.

However, during the period of Elsner's most fertile work in the theatre of Wojciech Bogusławski, that is in the years 1797-1814, well over ten (not all of them have survived to this day) ambitious, musically extensive operas of comic and essentially entertaining character were created. Their slight presence in the historiography of the Polish music and Polish theatre to date may be associated with certain established research tendencies, looking in the Polish cultural history of this turbulent period rather for specifically Polish motives, reverberations of the national tragedy of the Third Partition of the Commonwealth, or intuitions and anticipations of the coming era – Romanticism.

The peculiar value of Elsner's comic operas however can be better appreciated rather from the opposite viewpoint, by linking them with more buoyant trends of the opera of the second half of the eighteenth century: the Italian opera *buffa*, which constituted the main repertoire of Wojciech Bogusławski's opera before the 1794, or Viennese *Singspiele*, lavishly adapted for the Warsaw stage in the years 1800-1806. The common denominator for these trends is the Vienna of Mozart's time and slightly later: the place from which or through which Italian opera troupes came to Warsaw in the times of Stanisław August Poniatowski (their repertoire was later staged in Polish by Bogusławski), where young Elsner could hear premiere performances of operas by Mozart, Salieri or Paisiello during his stay there in 1789-1791, also the main point of orientation and source of repertoire for the Austrian theatres in Brno and Lviv, where the composer worked before establishing cooperation with Bogusławski's. The 'Viennese' repertoire – if we use this collective term to describe Italian operas created in the Austrian capital (or at least staged there and from there brought to Warsaw) together with Viennese *Singspiele* – dominates in Bogusławski's opera theatre until 1804, since when the Warsaw audiences could more and more often hear adaptations of French operas.

The aim of the project is to capture the specificity of Elsner's comic operas by setting them against a wide background of various European operatic genres that constitute – due to their dominant presence in Bogusławski's operatic repertoire – the immediate context of the composer's creative work. Detailed analyzes will answer the questions about the time-changing influences of Italian, German and French opera, about the traditions of specific operatic sub-genres, about patterns drawn from individual works. The identification of these affinities and influences will justify the application of the methodology of current research on the European operatic genres from around the 1800 to the analysis of the studied works, while at the same time Elsner's operas will be presented in a broad theatrical context, using the existing thorough knowledge of Bogusławski's theatre.

The analyzed opera repertoire will have a chance to appear as a fascinating area of meeting the emerging traditions of Polish national theatre with the opera culture of Viennese classicism: opera *buffa*, *dramma eroicomico*, magic *Singspiele* from the circle of Emanuel Schikaneder; and as a participant in the intense changes and mutual interactions of opera genres at the turn of the Nineteenth century, in which the French *opéra-comique* played the most significant role. On the other hand, the analysis linking the studied repertoire with the historical theatrical context will shed new light on the figure of Wojciech Bogusławski, contributing to the development of one of the key areas of research on the history of Polish theatre.