

University of Theater and Film Arts, Budapest

Doctoral School

The Multidisciplinarity of Instrumental Theater

Dissertation abstract

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The genre of instrumental theater has been present on western concert-stages since 1958. The creators of the genre are primarily composers who were working mainly with instrumental performers, but implementing both theatrical and musical elements in their compositions. Instrumental theater by its definition differs from the traditional genres of music theater i.e. opera, operetta or musicals, therefore these later genres are not included in my doctorate research area.

Instrumental theater was born from the collaboration and interaction of two independent and traditional artistic disciplines: music and theater. Therefore, the autonomous and original form of these still can be recognized and separated in the works of this multidisciplinary genre. My further statement is, that this multidisciplinary character can be equilibrated by thoughtful artistic work. This means, that within the framework of a given piece it is possible to create non-hierarchic relations of the two disciplines instead of melting them together in some sort of new interdisciplinary genre.

Based on the explanation in chapter 2.2. pieces of instrumental theater can be differentiated from the two important tendencies of the same period, called the musicalization of theater and the theatricalization of music. These tendencies are extending the tools of one discipline with characters or instruments of the other, but the created work can be still categorized within the framework of one or the other artistic discipline. In pieces created this way we can find the tools of another artistic discipline, but not the discipline itself in its autonomous form.

Based on these above-mentioned statements my research examines primarily the possibilities of the autonomy of theater and music within the multidisciplinary of instrumental theater.

I aim to find answers to the following two questions throughout my research: I intend to know how the two autonomous territories of music and theater can be separated in instrumental theater compositions and what guarantees the autonomy of these territories within one piece? Besides, I aim to examine the relationship between these two autonomous

territories in order to determine to what degree it is necessary for them to be in a hierarchic relationship.

Since there is no significant translation of the important literature about the genre in Hungarian, my dissertation includes an overview of the history of the genre, at least as much as it is relevant in order to find and underline answers to my questions.

I use four methods throughout the research:

1., Comparing my statements and questions to the important international studies.

From these I found extremely useful larger scale works focusing on certain issues of instrumental theater, like *The New Music Theater*¹ by Eric Salzman and Thomas Desi, a very diverse study on the history and tendencies of the genre's practice, or the *Komposition zwischen Musik und Theater*² by Matthias Rebstock, a focused study on the first creative period of Mauricio Kagel, the "founder" of the genre. Beside these, Falk Hübner's book, examining the performative praxis of our ages, the *Shifting identities: the musician as theatrical performer*³ was an important source in the research.

2., Detailed analyses of the most important works of the genre.

Since instrumental theater came out primarily of the practice of creating musical compositions, many creators of the genre were often materialized their ideas in form of notated scores. Analyzing written material, and if possible compare this to any available live performances or recordings of the work was the main activity in using this method. Beside this, I knew, that taking part in the creation of new performances of these works can give a more detailed and practice oriented knowledge about the pieces. Therefore since the first year of my doctorate studies I work as a curator, sometimes performer and creator of new stagings of many historic works of the genre within the framework of the Transparent Sound New

¹ Thomas Desi - Eric Salzman, *The New Music Theater*, Oxford University Press, 2008

² Matthias Rebstock: *Komposition zwischen Musik und Theater. Das instrumentale Theater von Mauricio Kagel zwischen 1959 und 1965* Hofheim, Wolke Verlag, 2007.

³ Falk Hübner: *Shifting Identities - Musician as theatric performer*, Universiteit Leiden 2013

Music Festival⁴.

3., Interviews

I conducted several private and public interviews, and conversations with artists working both with music and theater. I attached some transcriptions of these conversations to the dissertation. I chose highly different artists for the interviews in order to get a more diverse overview on the most important issues of the genre.

4., Autonomous compositional work

I underline my statements and the given answers to my questions through creative compositional processes. As a result of this work I ended up with two instrumental theater works. One of them is a three part chamber-musical cycle for solo instrumental performers (Clarinet, Flute and Viola) called the *Monument* series. The pieces of the cycle are primarily designed for instrumental performances in concert-environment. Pieces are intended to show the two disciplines – and the two kinds of recipient behavior of the audience – in a sort of a balanced autonomy. The other work is a 70 minutes long theater-performance for three instrumental players / actors called *Trió*, based on the drama of the Hungarian author, Attila Csikós. In this composition I present catalogical series of several possible state of temporal hierarchic relations between theater and music.

As a result of working with these four methods I had access to the historic and contemporary theory and practice of the genre, as well as its surrounding territories, including some layers of my own artistic practice. The doctoral dissertation summarizing this diversified artistic research, including conclusions and answers to the above given questions.

Dissertation includes four chapters, six commented transcriptions of interviews and the scores of my own compositions.

In the first chapter I give a definition and a categorization of the genre including the dissemination of the historic categories of new music theater, contemporary or experimental

⁴ s. www.atlatszohang.hu

music theater, as well as related contemporary fields a.o. composed theater, new discipline, or the extended field.

In the second one I summarize informations on the history of the genre as far as it is relevant to the present research. This chapter includes a more detailed review on a much earlier concept regarding the collaboration between different artistic disciplines of the avant-garde period, called *Monumentalkunst*, and its critical relationship to the *Gesamtkunst*.

In the third chapter I examine the performance-praxis of the genre throughout a detailed analysis of four works of Otto M. Zykan, an Austrian composer. I am reviewing throughout this four analysis the creative craftsmanship of the genre, focusing exclusively on the methods of collaboration between music and theater on a concert-stage. My choice on Zykan is highly and purely personal. I did not feel any necessity to choose representative works of his oeuvre nor of the repertoire of the genre. I simply point out through the selected works certain mechanisms of instrumental theater. I made my choice to present the – for me very valuable – work of Otto M. Zykan because there is a lack of information on his oeuvre not just in Hungarian, but in the international context as well. With my work I wanted to contribute to the discovery of this rarely known heritage of the genre.

Throughout the fourth chapter of the dissertation I analyze two of my own works created during the research. The analysis represents the pieces based on their degree of autonomy within the multidisciplinary collaboration as well as within the context of their own discipline.

The practical analysis of the works shows, that it is a highly natural need to have a temporal hierarchy in the presence of the two disciplines, in case we talk about a multi- and not an interdisciplinary piece. The regulation of these hierarchic relations and securing the necessary autonomy of the disciplines, is an artistic goal. The multidisciplinary framework of the instrumental theater offers a great opportunity to achieving this.