UR. JERNEJ WEISS

VLOGA NACIONALNIH
OPERNIH GLEDALIŠČ
V 20. IN 21. STOLETJU

THE ROLE OF NATIONAL
OPERA HOUSES IN THE
20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

Izid monografije so podprli

Mestna občina
Ljubljana

LJUBLJANA
Zmagavica 2016

ZELENA
PRESTOLNICA EVROPE

Organizacija Združenih
narodov za izobraževanje,
znanost in kulturo

LJUBLJANA:
MESTO/CITY
OF/LITERA-
TURE...

• Unescovo
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• od 2015

REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA
MINISTRSTVO ZA KULTURO

vloga nacionalnih opernih
gledališč v 20. in 21. stoletju

*the role of national opera
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2019

Znanstvena monografija z mednarodno udeležbo
Vloga nacionalnih opernih gledališč v 20. in 21. stoletju
– *The Role of National Opera Houses in the 20th and 21st Centuries*
Uredil Jernej Weiss

Studia musicologica Labacensia, 3 (ISSN 2536-2445)
Glavni urednik • Jernej Weiss (Ljubljana/Maribor)
Odgovorni urednik • Jonatan Vinkler (Koper)
Tehnična urednica • Tjaša Ribizel (Ljubljana)
Uredniški odbor • Matjaž Barbo (Ljubljana), Primož Kuret (Ljubljana), Helmut Loos (Leipzig),
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Recenzenti • Lubomír Spurný, Ivan Florjanc, Igor Grdina

Oblikovanje in prelom • Jonatan Vinkler

Prevod • Amidas d. o. o.
Jezikovni pregled (slovensko besedilo) • Jernej Weiss

Izdali in založili
Založba Univerze na Primorskem (zanjo: prof. dr. Dragan Marušič, rektor)
Titov trg 4, SI-6000 Koper
Glavni urednik • Jonatan Vinkler
Vodja založbe • Alen Ježovnik
Festival Ljubljana (zanj: Darko Brlek, direktor)
Trg francoske revolucije 1, SI-1000 Ljubljana

Koper, Ljubljana 2019

ISBN 978-961-7055-50-4 (spletna izdaja: pdf)
<http://www.hippocampus.si/ISBN/978-961-7055-50-4.pdf>
ISBN 978-961-7055-51-1 (spletna izdaja: html)
<http://www.hippocampus.si/ISBN/978-961-7055-51-1/index.html>
ISBN 978-961-7055-52-8 (tiskana izdaja)
Naklada tiskane izdaje: 200 izvodov (tiskovina ni namenjena prodaji)
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26493/978-961-7055-50-4>

© 2019 Festival Ljubljana

Katalogni zapis o publikaciji (CIP) pripravili v Narodni in univerzitetni knjižnici v Ljubljani
COBISS.SI-ID=298791680
ISBN 978-961-7055-50-4 (pdf)
ISBN 978-961-7055-51-1 (html)

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The European Musical Context of the Operas of Slavko Osterc

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During the first thirty years of the 20th century, there was considerable development of opera all over Europe. It was natural that people thought that after the deaths of Wagner and Verdi there was no more scope for grand or romantic opera, although some composers did attempt to carry on the tradition, notably Claude Debussy¹ and Richard Strauss². Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* has a number of Wagnerian features, but these are combined with aspects of symbolism which do help to distance his work from that of Wagner.³ Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* of 1910 is a classic romantic opera written in a style totally compatible with the later 19th century.⁴ In many

- 1 Robin Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London: Eulenburg, 1979) explored the Wagnerian connections in Debussy's works, especially the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Parallels with Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* are identified in chapter 4, "Pelléas and Tristan," 60–75 and further connections in chapter 5, "The Interludes," 76–95 and chapter 6, "Wagnerian Minutiae," 96–135.
- 2 See especially Norman Del Mar in *Richard Strauss* vol. 1 (London: Barrie & Rockcliff, 1962) in which he discusses the musical features of Strauss's early works and their romantic character. His linking of the orchestral tone poems with the operas *Salome* and *Elektra* which he calls "The Stage Tone Poems," is entirely appropriate.
- 3 This is explored in depth by Roger Nichols and Richard Langham Smith, eds., *Claude Debussy, Pelléas et Mélisande* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 78–139.
- 4 The romantic character of *Der Rosenkavalier* is made clear by Norman Del Mar in *Richard Strauss* vol.1 (London: Barrie & Rockcliff, 1962), "The Crowning Success," 334–420 and its reprint in Alan Jefferson, *Richard Strauss Der Rosenkavalier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 21–79.

other operas the romantic tradition was modified extensively even if it was remotely recognisable. In many cases there was a reaction against the whole of the romantic movement which took a number of forms, but various lines of activity became apparent. The reduction in size, length and forces used was notable, as was an anti-romantic and often satirical character that derived from popular musical idioms. What is particularly interesting is the fact that operas often used combinations of these different developments, thus falling into a number of contrasting categories and not one particular model.

The use of subjects deriving from the ancient world, especially Greece, became more frequent.⁵ The plays of the most famous Classical Greek playwrights, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes, were a fruitful source for early 20th-century operatic composers. Early examples were *Salome* (1905) and *Elektra* (1909) by Strauss. For the former, Strauss used a German translation of Oscar Wilde's Biblical French-language play *Salomé*⁶ and the latter was derived from and translated by Hugo von Hofmannsthal directly from the original play *Elektra* by Sophocles.⁷ In both cases these had strong romantic overtones despite the fact that they were both cast in one act and each lasted less than two hours. The style of both these works was similar with strong melodic content, the use of Wagnerian-style motifs, and rich scoring using a very large orchestra. The tragic story of Oedipus, as also related by Sophocles, was the subject of the opera-oratorio *Oedipus Rex* of 1927 by Stravinsky. Here the composer departed from Wagner in fundamental respects, featuring the main stages in the tragedy in *separate* numbers rather than making a continuous drama, but keeping the work about 50 minutes long and casting it in only two parts,⁸ rather than the traditional three acts. The text was set in Latin (in a translation by Jean Daniélou from the original French of Jean Cocteau) as a reaction to Wag-

5 The Greek myths as related by the Athenian tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides mostly concerned the life of Oedipus and the Greek heroes of the Trojan war.

6 For Strauss's methods see Roland Tenschert, "Strauss as librettist," in: Derrick Puffett, ed., *Richard Strauss Salome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 36–50.

7 For the process see Karen Forsyth, "Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*: from Sophocles to Strauss," in: Derrick Puffett, ed., *Richard Strauss Elektra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 17–32. It should be noted that Hofmannsthal also took some parts of the *Elektra* plays by Aeschylus and Euripides where it suited his plans.

8 Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky Oedipus Rex* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23–66 gives a clear exposition of the dramaturgy of the work.

ner's literary German, which was intended to give it a universal appeal. As a way of distancing the drama from the audience and illuminating the meaning of the Latin, the separate numbers were spaced out by the insertion of narrative explanations, which were written in French by Jean Cocteau, but to be given in the vernacular of the country in which it was performed, a feature that gives the work a formal and monumental character. In another opera, Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, the myth about the fate of Ariadne after the killing of the Minotaur in the Palace of Minos at Knossos in Crete was assembled by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. In this case, however, the opera's plot was complicated by the overlaid story of Harlequin and his lovers, a good example of a humorous viewpoint on the Greek myth. This story (minus Hofmannsthal's additions) also appears in the opera *Ariane et Barbe-bleu* by Paul Dukas. The story of Theseus who had abandoned Ariadne was again addressed by Milhaud in his minute operas *L'abandon d'Ariane* ('The Abandonment of Ariadne') and *La délivrance de Thésée* ('The Deliverance of Theseus'). The Classical Greek comedy *Birds* by the Athenian playwright Aristophanes shows a very strong anti-romantic subject in its fantasy about the bird kingdom being persuaded by two disgruntled human beings to create their own city completely separated from the kingdom of the Gods and the world of humans. The opera *Die Vögel* ('The Birds') of 1919 by the German Walter Braunfels (1882-1954) is loosely based on the Greek original and is a skilful combination of fantasy and classicism. We can perhaps see this as a reaction to Wagnerian romanticism in its humour, although the musical idiom is clearly that of the 19th century, with its strong tonal focus. The comic element is particularly noticeable in the word setting for the birds which gave the composer an opportunity for bird-like singing, for example, in the melodic lines of the Nightingale in the prologue.⁹ On the other hand the example of Wagner's Siegfried talking with the birds is an obvious precedent that must surely link Braunfels with the previous century. Unlike in the Wagner, however, Braunfels's character Hoffegut understands everything that is being sung by the Nightingale without first having to draw blood with Nothung, the magic sword.

Other operas had exotic, psychological and mysterious dimensions. In the pre-First World War years the operas of Debussy, Zemlinsky, Schreker, Richard Strauss, Arnold Schönberg, Janáček and Bartók were very significant in this direction. The mystery of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* is very much part of the symbolist culture of understatement and subtle implica-

9 Walter Braunfels, *Die Vögel*, klavierauszug (Vienna: Universal, 1920), 6–10.

tion (see below for details). In complete contrast Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra* present the psychological dilemmas of their two heroines, the former with her thwarted advances leading to the execution of Jokanaan and her own demise, the latter with her vengeful killings of her mother and her lover and the consequences of these actions. The mysterious atmosphere is created almost totally by traditional musical means, romantic harmony and programmatic orchestration.¹⁰

One of the main trends can be collectively considered as symbolism, an artistic movement that was at first literary and originated in France, involving such figures as the poet, Stéphane Mallarmé, and the Belgian poet and playwright, Maurice Maeterlinck. Its translation to the medium of music was inevitably inexact. Symbolism was a potent force in music when associated directly with symbolist *words*, whose connections would be unambiguously presented in operas based on symbolist plays or dramatic texts, especially in settings of Maeterlinck by Debussy (*Pelléas et Mélisande*) and Paul Dukas (*Ariane et Barbe-bleu*). The principal symbolist idea in Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* is the conflict between light and dark, almost always one of equating light with good and dark with evil.¹¹ Both Debussy and Dukas respond to this idea with a variety of contrasting keys and modes.

Also deriving ideas from the symbolists, and to some extent the story, is *Bluebeard's Castle* (*A kékszakállu herceg vára*) by the Hungarian Béla Balász, set by Béla Bartók in 1911. Bluebeard shows his new wife Judith his castle with its seven doors. The symbols that are encountered on the way are clear: weapons, riches, blood, tears and water (a very strong symbol) appear, but the most frequent idea is the symbolist dichotomy between light and dark. How Bartók translated these symbols into music is also achieved by equating them with tonalities, in which Bluebeard's symbols are represented by specific key areas. The opening of the doors of the castle gives Bartók the opportunity to make sudden and easily understood key changes to emphasise this symbolism. The darkness referred to in the spoken prologue is represented by the tonality of F sharp. It may be a strange coincidence that Bartók uses the same key as Dukas to represent the darkness, F sharp, both major and minor. Like Dukas he starts from this key and returns to it with a remorseless inevitability. Bartók's rather different cycle

10 Robin Holloway discusses Strauss's orchestration in *Elektra* in: Derrick Puffett, ed., *Richard Strauss Elektra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 128–47.

11 Stefan Jarocinski, *Impressionism and Symbolism* (London: Eulenburg, 1976); Roger Nichols and Richard Langham Smith, eds., *Claude Debussy, Pelléas et Mélisande* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

of keys has a Mahlerian feel to it: F sharp, E flat, C, A, F sharp, broadly descending by minor thirds, although there is a great deal of flexibility in this plan. In the opening F sharp section, the grim atmosphere is emphasised by the motif of the falling and rising minor second played shrilly, usually in parallel thirds, by trumpets and oboes. Pentatonic patterns reinforce the static and claustrophobic atmosphere.¹²

Some ideas of light and dark were also shared by the Russian, Leonid Andreyev, especially in his play *Chornyi maski*. These symbols are found extensively in Kogoj's setting of this play in his *Črne maske* of 1924–27. Duke Lorenzo is constantly asking for the darkness within his castle to be illuminated, becoming obsessed with this at various points in the drama. It becomes inextricably entwined with the murder of his own double and the need to purge his castle of all forms of guilt. Kogoj's method of representing this dichotomy is by contrasting tonality with atonality, smooth vocal lines with *Sprechstimme* and homogeneous romantic orchestration with sharp-edged sounds using unusual instruments.¹³

Osterc was familiar with Kogoj's opera, having reviewed it in 1929, considering it a great work with many Wagnerian features: "The advantages of the Wagner principle are mainly: the greatest likeness to spoken drama, the correct length of the scenes, a great unity in architecture, and the most intimate relationship between the word and the music."¹⁴ However he did note the music of the time was beginning to avoid romantic tendencies and with his list of new developments is almost presenting a crisis:

That is why today's compositional generation is seeking archaic comics, and is not over dramatic in the imagination of an external tragedy. Thus Křenek¹⁵ wrote his Jonny spielt auf with jazz rhythms and forms, and Kurt Weill's Dreigroschenoper is now all over Europe. And Stravinsky's operatic oratorio [Oedipus Rex] even ignores the action. Honegger wrote the oratorio King David in the sense of separate numbers, Hindemith writes sketches and Milhaud so

12 Béla Bartók, *Herzog Blaubarts Burg - A kékszakállu herceg vára*, vocal score (Vienna: Universal, 1921), 9–16.

13 Niall O'Loughlin, "Dramatic and Musical Conflicts in Kogoj's *Črne maske*," Primož Kuret, ed., *Glasba in/za Oder - Music and/for the Stage* (Ljubljana: Festival, 2014), 127–133.

14 Slavko Osterc, "Marij Kogoj: *Črne maske* (Opera v dveh dejanjih.)," [Kronika] *Ljubljanski zvon* vol. 49, no.6 (1929): 380–82.

15 The composer's original Czech spelling (Křenek) is retained except in quotations which use the form (Krenek) that he adopted after moving to the United States.

*called "Minutenenopere". Apart from Hindemith and Berg (Germans!). They all write more or less homophonically and as simply as possible. Chromatics are abandoned and diatonic features, such as major and minor modes, ecclesiastical and pentatonic scales, are favoured.*¹⁶

During the First World War new works that confirmed this trend were *Der Ring des Polykrates* and *Violanta* by Korngold and *Die Gezeichneten* and *Der Schatzgräber* by Franz Schreker. After the war operas and other dramatic works by Paul Hindemith, Ernst Křenek,¹⁷ Kurt Weill, Ernst Toch, Alban Berg, Darius Milhaud, Janáček, Schönberg, Stravinsky and other composers brought a further line of development, particularly in two respects: the reduction in size and scale of operas and the use of pastiche and parody.¹⁸ Financial pressures after the First World War meant that expenditure was often, but not always, on a reduced scale with fewer singers, smaller orchestras or ensembles and shorter duration, with one-act works being very common. Even three-act operas sometimes lasted less than an hour.

How would all of this affect the development of the operas of Slavko Osterc?

Osterc composed all his operas between 1921 and 1930. We can mention briefly three works from the early 1920s before his studies in Prague (Table 1), a romantic opera on a traditional Slovene legend, *Krst pri Savici* ('Baptism at the Savica') in 1921, *Kralj Edip* ('King Oedipus') composed 1922-25, but now lost, and in 1923 the one-act opera *Osveta* ('Revenge'), based on *Die*

16 Osterc, "Marij Kogoj: Črne maske (Opera v dveh dejanjih.)," 381.

17 Lothar Knessl, *Ernst Křenek* (Vienna: Elisabeth Lafite and Österreichischer Bundesverlag für Unterricht, Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1967), 18, makes clear the position of Křenek: „Jonny spielt auf“ (op.45, Text: Křenek), in Křeneks tonalen Stil fallend, ist ein romantisches Wunschbild von jenem Amerika, das es vermeintlich besser hat, da dort die Menschen lebensbejahend und belastet sind (verkörpert durch die Tiltelpartie). Die Idee der Freiheit ist auf die „Außenwelt“ projiziert, aber nicht ungeboren, da dem Wunschbild in der Person des virtuosen Daniello eine es verzerrende Karikatur entgegengestellt wird. Der Komponist Max, eine autobiografisch gesehene Figur, durch die der „Sprung über den Schatten“ einer Vorstufe des „Jonny“ gleicht, findet in einem nicht sehr überzeugenden Kraftakt in die Welt der Freiheit. Durch das zeitgebundene Milieu, die puccinesquen Melodien und die Einschaltung von – zum Schlager abgeschwächten – Jazzelementen avancierte „Jonny“ im Handumdrehen zur Modeoper und ist Křenek's finanziell gewinnbringendstes Bühnenwerk geworden.

18 Constant Lambert, *Music Ho!* (London: Faber, 1934; Hogarth Press, 1985), 66–78.

Sühne by Theodor Körner.¹⁹ In Prague it is certain that Osterc encountered many different operas and plays in a very lively cultural environment, undoubtedly stimulating his imagination in numerous ways.²⁰

Table 1: Osterc's early operas.²¹

1921	<i>Krst pri Savici</i> ('Baptism at the Savica')	Prešeren/Osterc/Gustav Šilih
1922-25	<i>Kralj Edip</i> ('King Oedipus') - lost	Sophocles
1923	<i>Osveta</i> ('Revenge')	Theodor Körner

After his return from studies with Alois Hába and others in Prague, his mature contribution to the genre consists of five operas composed in the years 1927 to 1930 (Table 2) broadly speaking in three categories: the extended one-act opera, the full-length opera and the minute-opera. In the first category is *Iz komične opere* of 1928; in the second: *Krog s kredo* of 1928-29; and in the third are three one-act very short (10-15 minutes) operas: *Saloma*, *Medea* and *Dandin v vicah* (all of 1930). We shall examine each in turn, first on their own accounts and secondly, noting possible influences from other composers working within Europe.

Table 2: Osterc's later operas.

1928	<i>Iz komične opere</i> ('From the Comic Opera')	Louis-Henri Murger/Osterc
1928-29	<i>Krog s kredo</i> ('The Chalk Circle')	Klabund/Skrbinšek
1930	<i>Saloma</i> ('Salome')	The Bible
1930	<i>Medea</i>	Euripides
1930	<i>Dandin v vicah</i> ('Dandin in Purgatory')	Molière

19 Danilo Pokorn, "Bibliografski pregled kompozicij Slavka Osterca," *Muzikološki zbornik* 6 (1970): 76; Jože Sivec, *Dvesto let Slovenske opere – Two Hundred Years of the Slovene Opera (1780–1980)* (Ljubljana: Opera in balet SNG Ljubljana, 1981), 36, 89.

20 Leon Stefanija, "Osterc in Hába," *Muzikološki zbornik* 31 (1995): 33–41; Jernej Weiss, "Alois Hába and Slovene Students of Composition at the State Conservatory in Prague," Jernej Weiss, ed., *Nova glasba v »Novi« Evropi med obema svetonima vojnama – New Music in the "New" Europe between the Two World Wars* (Koper: Univerze za Primorskem; Ljubljana: Festival, 2018), 201–15.

21 In this and all the following tables of operas the last column gives the author of the original (play, story or book) and/or the name of the librettist, if known.

Iz komične opere of 1928

Osterc's *Iz komične opere* ('From the Comic Opera') of 1928 is a one-act opera (which he called a 'sketch') taking its topic from a novel by the French poet Louis-Henri Murger (1822-61) about the Bohemian life in Paris,²² and first performed at the Ljubljana Opera House on 9 May 1928. Murger's most famous work is called *Scènes de la vie bohème*, dating from the years 1847-49 and published in 1851. This source was used by Puccini and Leoncavallo, whose operas, both called *La Bohème* of 1896 and 1897 respectively, were based on *Scènes de la vie bohème*.

Osterc's plot does not involve the characters made famous in Puccini's setting, notably Rodolfo and Mimi, but rather a Brazilian Creole named Dubreuil, a forgetful Charval and the beautiful Juliette, Dubreuil's niece.²³ Osterc laid out the opera with a short introduction and seven loosely connected scenes, and a rather inconsequential plot.²⁴ Dragotin Cvetko gave some musical details: "it was orchestrated in chamber music fashion, for four first and four second violins, two violas, cellos and double basses. The instrumentation is transparent. In the musical sections, normal singing alternates with melodrama and recitation. There are no duets, trios or ensembles; at the end everyone laughs in a short epilogue."²⁵ Sivec gives further details: "... it consists of a prelude and seven musical numbers between which come dramatic scenes with spoken text. In musical numbers the singing alternates with melodrama and recitatives." and "Iz komične opere is a mature and technically perfect work, testifying to the composer's sense of the theatrical as well as to his ability to understand different dramatic situations."²⁶ Anton Lajovic was also very complimentary about Osterc's dramatic skill, particularly in his sense of pacing and timing.²⁷

The idiom of the work is conveyed in an early review by Stanko Vurnik of the first performance,²⁸ He noted with musical examples the following:

1. bitonality (G major and A flat major simultaneously) (Example 1).

22 Andrej Rijavec, *Slovenska glasbena dela* (Ljubljana: Državna založbe Slovenije, 1979), 210.

23 Stanko Vurnik, "Nova slovenska opera," *Dom in svet* vol. 42, no. 7 (1929): 246-50.

24 Rijavec, *Slovenska glasbena dela*, 210.

25 Dragotin Cvetko, *Osebnost skladatelja Slavka Osterca* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1993), 74-76.

26 Sivec, *Dvesto let slovene opere*, 36, 90.

27 Anton Lajovic, "Opera – Slavko Osterc: Iz komične opera," [Kronika] *Ljubljanski zvon* vol 49, no.1 (1929): 60-61.

28 Vurnik, "Nova slovenska opera," 247-48.

Example 1: Bitonality.

Example 2: Parallel sevenths and fourths.

Example 3: Note-clusters built up one note at a time.

Example 4: Unusual canonic melodies.

Julietta: Gerardu: ³

Po - zdrav - ljen stri - ček! Vi ste še tu?
Greet - ings Un - cle! Are you still here?

6 Dubreuil: Julietta: Dubreuil (zarjove):
(in a rage)

Kdo ste? Moj snu - bec! Ta?!
Who are you? My suit - or!

Example 5: Flexible arioso.

2. parallel sevenths and fourths (Example 2).
3. note-clusters built up one note at a time (Example 3).
4. unusual canons, often with prominent chromaticisms (Example 4).
5. flexible arioso (Example 5).

Although the operas of Puccini and Leoncavallo were both in four acts, Osterc used a one-act format. In the first three decades of the 20th century, the one-act opera became very common, partly because composers were reacting against the idea of a romantic opera of long duration, particularly those of Richard Wagner. Osterc wanted to produce a satirical anti-romantic work which by implication mocked the idea of an extended plot. After the First World War there was also the problem of funding expensive productions for which there was little money, a problem that was alleviated by reducing the number of acts and the total length.

The early one-act operas of Richard Strauss, *Salome* of 1905 and *Elektra* of 1909 had set a precedent, but in practice they were extended romantic works, even if they were performed without a break and each lasting under two hours. These operas were followed in the next twenty years by numerous single-act operas of varying lengths, but mostly of approximately one-hour's duration (see Table 3). One can note in this connection such works as Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* of 1911, Schönberg's *Erwartung* of 1909 and *Die glückliche Hand* of 1913, Korngold's *Der Ring von Polykrates* of 1914 and *Violanta* of 1916. The operas by Bartók and Korngold were about an hour in length, although Schönberg's fiercely expressionistic essays were only half that length or less. Busoni's *Arlecchino* of 1916, his *Turandot* of 1916 and Puccini's *Trittico* of 1918 (*Il tabarro*, *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi*) fit the mould very well, all lasting roughly an hour each. These three operas by Puccini were actually performed in Ljubljana in 1923.²⁹ Yet all of them, with the exception of Busoni's *Arlecchino*, were still serious works of some power.

Even the one-act operas of Paul Hindemith which dated from 1919 to 1921, *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen*, *Das Nusch-Nuschi* and *Sancta Susanna* (see Table 3) were equally tragic and somewhat forbidding. The trend of composers not writing anything even vaguely comic was continued in three-act operas with Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* of 1922 and Janáček's *Kát'a Kabanová* of 1921. The latter's *The Makropulos Case* of 1925 has of course a fantastic element and his *The Cunning Little Vixen* of 1923 provides a little light

29 Sivec, *Dvesto let slovene opere*, 24, 80.

Table 3: Extended one-act operas.

1902	Schreker	<i>Flammen</i>	Dora Pollak
1905	Strauss	<i>Salome</i>	Oscar Wilde/Strauss
1908	Strauss	<i>Elektra</i>	Sophocles/Hofmannsthal
1909	Schönberg	<i>Erwartung</i>	Marie Pappenheim
1911	Bartók	<i>Bluebeard's Castle</i>	Béla Balász
1914	Korngold	<i>Der Ring des Polykrates</i>	Leo Feld
1916	Korngold	<i>Violanta</i>	Hans Müller-Einigen
1916	Zemlinsky	<i>Eine florentinische Tragödie</i>	Oscar Wilde/Meyerfeld
1916	Busoni	<i>Arlecchino</i>	Busoni
1916	Busoni	<i>Turandot</i>	Gozzi
1918	Puccini	<i>Il tabarro</i>	Giuseppe Adami
1918	Puccini	<i>Suor Angelica</i>	Giovacchino Forzano
1918	Puccini	<i>Gianni Schicchi</i>	Giovacchino Forzano
1919	Hindemith	<i>Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen</i>	Oskar Kokoschka
1920	Hindemith	<i>Das Nusch-Nuschi</i>	Franz Blei
1921	Hindemith	<i>Sancta Susanna</i>	August Stramm
1921	Zemlinsky	<i>Der Zwerg</i>	Oscar Wilde/Georg Klaren
1928	Schönberg	<i>Von Heute auf Morgen</i>	Gertrud Schönberg
1928	Osterc	<i>Iz komične opere</i>	Louis-Henri Murger/Osterc

relief even though its underlying message of the life of animals acts as a serious comment on human frailty.

The character of Osterc's opera is quite different from all the serious works, taking more of the spirit of two of the one-act operas of Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), *Arlecchino* and *Turandot*. Busoni took a very strong anti-romantic view of opera and was very sympathetic to the ideas of the *commedia dell'arte*, notably the use of masks and puppet-like characters.³⁰ In addition, in *Arlecchino*, there is a strong parodistic element with quotations from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and a march that sounds very similar to the one that appears in the first act of Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Osterc went a lot further, however, with quick-action knockabout humour and a musical style which draws on a wide range of elements from many composers, notably Kurt Weill, Ernst Křenek, Darius Milhaud and Igor Stravinsky.

30 The *commedia dell'arte* in Busoni's works is explained concisely by Antony Beaumont in his *Busoni the Composer* (London: Faber, 1985), 222–25.

The appearance of Křenek's *Jonny spielt auf* and works by Kurt Weill, Ernst Toch and Darius Milhaud, set a new trend of critical and satirical drama and it was this that fundamentally influenced Osterc. It is clear from Osterc's writings on opera that were published in the late 1920s that he was well acquainted with these developments.³¹ For example, the jazz-like idiom of Křenek's opera, which was performed in Ljubljana in 1928, was as suitable for the subject of *Iz komične opere* as was the popular style of works like Kurt Weill's *Mahagonny-Songspiel* of 1927 and *Die Dreigroschenoper* of 1928.

The one-act opera *Von Heute auf Morgen* by Arnold Schönberg also of 1928 may have had some bearing on the tone of Osterc's opera, even if its twelve-note technique was not used.³² At just under 40 minutes in length, *Iz komične opere* has an anti-romantic compression of events, after the examples of the short operas of Toch and Hindemith. The model of the minute operas of Toch, Hindemith and Milhaud was only later followed by Osterc.

The full-length five-act opera: *Krog s kredo* of 1929-30

Moving on to consider Osterc's major opera of this period, *Krog s kredo* ('The Chalk Circle'), composed in the years 1928-29, one can imagine that the composer was taking a somewhat cynical view of the subject and using all his musical resources to reinforce this idea in a full-length opera of imposing character. It showed a remarkable assurance in handling the operatic medium, but, like the instrumental works of the same period, also gave a clear indication of the techniques of some of the works to follow in the next decade. The Chalk Circle play was originally Chinese,³³ a story of rampant corruption, but also involving a magic method of deciding the truth between two disputants, something akin to the Judgement of Solomon as related in the Bible.³⁴ In the early 1920s, the German poet and dramatist Klabund (the *nom de plume* of Alfred Henschke) translated into German a French version of the play as *Der Kreidekreis* with new characters and addi-

31 See for example Osterc, "Marij Kogoj: Črne maske (Opera v dveh dejanjih.)," 380-82.

32 Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea* (London: Faber, 1975), 244-45.

33 *Hui-lan-chi* or *History of the Circle of Chalk*, translated by Stanislas Julien as *Le Cercle de Craie* (London: John Murray, 1832).

34 *The Old Testament of the Bible*, I Kings, 3, verses 16-28.

tional dramatic features, and published it in Berlin in 1925.³⁵ Klabund's play soon became very popular all over Central Europe, with two operatic settings appearing in quick succession, the first by Osterc in a Slovene translation and the second by Alexander Zemlinsky completed in 1931 (*Der Kreidekreis*).³⁶ Antony Beaumont reports that Klabund's play, *Der Kreidekreis*, was performed in Prague some thirty times in 1925,³⁷ surely an opportunity for both Osterc, who had recently arrived in Prague, and Zemlinsky, who was resident there at the same time, to become acquainted with the play before embarking on their musical realisations. The translation of Klabund's text into Slovene was undertaken by Oton Župančič, with the operatic libretto being written by Milan Skrbinšek.

Criticism of the work does seem to stem from the original review by Slavko Vurnik who thought that the work was too romantic. Thus it can be seen to be part of a group of romantically inclined operas from this period (see Table 4). Cvetko suggested that pressure may have been put on Osterc by the Ljubljana opera to make it an extended romantic work.³⁸

In fact, it is carefully laid out, with arias, arioso and what is in effect recitative, even if it is not composed as a 'number' opera. The composer made each act continuous by composing skilful transitions and bridges between the different styles. Cvetko's comments involved a certain amount of speculation, because at the time of writing, the score had disappeared. In fact the opera was not performed in the composer's lifetime. The score went missing, although the orchestral parts were kept in the archives of Ljubljana Opera House. The reappearance of the score in the late 1980s made possible the first performance (in Maribor) in 1995.³⁹

35 Klabund [Alfred Henschke], *Der Kreidekreis* (Berlin: J.M. Spaeth, 1925); Klabund, *The Circle of Chalk*, translated by James Laver (London: William Heinemann, 1929).

36 Antony Beaumont, *Zemlinsky* (London: Faber, 2000), 368–78 discusses Zemlinsky's *Der Kreidekreis* in some detail.

37 Beaumont, *Zemlinsky*, 368.

38 Cvetko, *Osebnost skladatelja Slavka Osterca*, 76–77.

39 By the Slovene National Opera conducted by Simon Robinson in Maribor Opera House on 7 April 1995. The composer was born in Veržej in the Ljutomer region of Slovenia on 17 June, 1895. For more details of the opera see Niall O'Loughlin, "The Chalk Circle Operas of Osterc and Zemlinsky: a comparative Analysis," in: Primož Kuret, ed., *Glasba med obema vojnama in Slavko Osterc – Musik zwischen beiden Weltkriegen und Slavko Osterc* (Ljubljana: Festival Ljubljana, 1996), 64–76 and Niall O'Loughlin, "Slavko Osterc's Compositional Journey and his assimilation of New Techniques," Jernej Weiss, ed., *Nova glasba v »novi« Evropi med obema svetovima vojnama – New Music in the "New" Europe Between the two World Wars* (Koper: Univerza na Primorskem; Ljubljana: Festival Ljubljana, 2018), 175–85.

Table 4: Romantic Operas.

1896	Puccini	<i>La Bohème</i>	Louis-Henri Murger/ Illica and Giacosa
1897	Leoncavallo	<i>La Bohème</i>	Louis-Henri Murger/ Leoncavallo
1904-06	Zemlinsky	<i>Der Traumgörge</i>	Leo Feld
1909/1922	Zemlinsky	<i>Kleide machen Leute</i>	Leo Feld/Keller
1910	Strauss	<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	Hofmannsthal
1929-30	Osterc	<i>Krog s kredo</i>	Klabund/Skrbinšek
1931	Zemlinsky	<i>Der Kreidekreis</i>	Klabund/Zemlinsky

Krog s kredo is an opera that draws in many threads from the European operatic environment. It has elements of mystery, possibly inspired by *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Debussy, *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* by Paul Dukas and *Bluebeard's Castle* by Bartók (see Table 5). Three operas of Korngold may also have had some influence here: Korngold's *Die tote Stadt* of 1910, *Der Ring von Polykrates* of 1914 and *Violanta* of 1916 all work in a historical context with elements of mystery and magic, as does Franz Schreker's *Der ferne Klang* of 1910. One can also take into account the influence of Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* of 1912 with its hallucinatory images and the atonal idiom of Berg's *Wozzeck* of 1922. We also know of Osterc's knowledge of the fantasy and symbolism, together with its musical implications of Kogoj's Črne maske because of his enthusiastic review of the opera after its first performance in 1929.⁴⁰

Table 5: Exotic and mysterious operas.

1902	Debussy	<i>Pelléas et Mélisande</i>	Maeterlinck
1907	Paul Dukas	<i>Ariane et Barbe-bleu</i>	Maeterlinck
1909	Schönberg	<i>Erwartung</i>	Marie Pappenheim
1910	Korngold	<i>Die tote Stadt</i>	Paul Schott [Erich and Julius Korngold]

40 Slavko Osterc, "Marij Kogoj: Črne maske (Opera v dveh dejanjih.)," [Kronika] *Ljubljanski zvon* vol. 49, no.6 (1929): 380–82.

1910	Schreker	<i>Der ferne Klang</i>	Schreker
1911	Bartók	<i>Bluebeard's Castle</i>	Béla Balász
1913	Schönberg	<i>Die glückliche Hand</i>	Schönberg
1914	Korngold	<i>Der Ring von Polykrates</i>	Leo Feld
1916	Korngold	<i>Violanta</i>	Hans Müller-Einigen
1916	Busoni	<i>Turandot</i>	Gozzi
1924	Puccini	<i>Turandot</i>	Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni
1927	Kogoj	<i>Črne maske</i>	Andreyev/Župančič
1928	Osterc	<i>Krog s kredo</i>	Klabund/Skrbinšek

One important aspect of the style that he used in *Krog s kredo* is the appearance of oriental-sounding pentatonic or near-pentatonic melodies and the use of Chinese-sounding instruments, especially the flute and gong. Chinese melodies had in fact already been used by Busoni and Puccini in their operatic versions of the *Turandot* story. In 1905 Busoni had composed incidental music for the Chinese fable *Turandot*, but later on, probably in 1913, he used some of this music to create an opera, which was completed in 1917, to be a suitable companion piece for his own hour-long *Arlecchino*.⁴¹ Busoni extracted the melodies for his *Turandot* from the *Geschichte der Musik* by August Wilhelm Ambros, while Puccini's version of *Turandot* (incomplete at his death in 1924) used certain Chinese melodies to create a suitable atmosphere. There does not appear to have been a performance in Ljubljana of Puccini's *Turandot*,⁴² but it may well have been performed in Prague while Osterc was there.

Three 'minute' operas: *Saloma*, *Medea*, *Dandin v vica*

Osterc's three miniature operas (see Table 6) which date from 1929-30 caused great interest. With a duration of 10-15 minutes each they have to make their points without delay and with no romantic overtones. Cvetko summed up the purpose of the minute-opera very concisely: "the min-

41 "The Music for *Turandot*" in Beaumont (1985), 76-86.

42 Sivec, *Dvesto let slovene opera*, does not mention a performance in his lists of operas in Ljubljana.

ute opera is not about the characterization of the performers” but more “the quickest possible course of events”⁴³. The musical style naturally uses a fairly simple idiom, with short melodies or melodic fragments and precise word-setting with very few repeated phrases. Osterc notes in his article⁴⁴ on the minute-opera that the idea arose in 1927, in the works of Hindemith, Toch and Milhaud, of which he is clearly familiar. He stressed that in the minute opera the dramatic nature of the action should be limited and the pathos removed.

Table 6: Osterc's Minute Operas.

1930	Osterc	<i>Saloma</i>	The Bible
1930	Osterc	<i>Medea</i>	Euripides
1930	Osterc	<i>Dandin v vicah</i>	Molière and Hans Sachs

The parody opera *Saloma* ('Salome') of 1929-30 was the first, followed by *Medea* and *Dandin v vicah* ('Dandin in Purgatory'), both of 1930. *Dandin v vicah* is described as “operna groteska”, while *Saloma* is called “minutna opera-parodija”. As was frequently the case at the time, some topics, those for *Saloma* and *Medea*, were taken from classical antiquity (see Table 8), while *Dandin* was derived from Molière. *Medea* and *Dandin v vicah* were first performed on 27 February 1932, both at the Ljubljana Opera House.⁴⁵ There is no evidence for a performance of *Saloma* in the composer's lifetime.

Saloma in fact lasts a mere 11 minutes, using many of the features of the instrumental music to dramatic effect.⁴⁶ Particularly notable is the wry and sardonic tone of the instrumental writing which supports the parodistic character of the story. Osterc is clearly mocking Strauss's *Salome*, the libretto for which was a German translation of Oscar Wilde's powerful original French-text play. In this opera, the dramatic events were carefully planned: from the refusal of Jokanaan to Salome's advances all the way

43 Cvetko, *Osebnost skladatelja Slavka Osterca*, 78.

44 Slavko Osterc, “Minutna opera,” *Nove muzike*, II. letnik, nr. 6, December 1929, 21.

45 Cvetko, *Osebnost skladatelja Slavka Osterca*, 79; Sivec, *Dvesto let slovene opere*, 37, 91.

46 Peter Andraschke, “Minutna opera »Saloma« Slavka Osterca – Die Minutenoper »Salome« von Slavko Osterc,” Primož Kuret, ed., *Slovenska glasba v preteklosti in sedanjosti – Slowenische Musik in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Ljubljana: Kres, 1992), 204–215.

to the extended and impressive *Dance of the Seven Veils* and to Salome's demand for the head of Jokanaan. Unlike in the story of Salome as related by Oscar Wilde and Richard Strauss, Osterc's Herod is bored with Salome's dancing and calls for her to stop. Strauss's famous *Dance of the Seven Veils* is replaced, almost in cabaret fashion, by a rather tired waltz. The original climax is replaced by a very negative anti-climax. The influence of numerous popular operas of the period is very clear (see Table 7).

Table 7: Parody and popular-style operas.

1926	Křenek	<i>Jonny spielt auf</i>	Křenek
1927	Weill	<i>Mahagonny-Songspiel</i>	Bertolt Brecht
1927	Weill	<i>Royal Palace</i>	Iwan Goll [Yvan Goll]
1928	Weill	<i>Die Dreigroschenoper</i>	Bertolt Brecht
1929	Weill	<i>Happy End</i>	Bertolt Brecht/Elisabeth Hauptmann
1929	Osterc	<i>Krog s kredo</i>	Klabund/Skrbinšek
1930	Osterc	<i>Saloma</i>	The Bible
1931	Zemlinsky	<i>Der Kreidekreis</i>	Klabund/Zemlinsky

Medea was based on the gruesome play by the ancient Greek playwright, Euripides. In this story Medea punishes her husband, Jason, for his infidelity and desertion by killing her two children, his intended new bride and her father King Creon. In a brief span of time Osterc sets out the essence of the plot and the trickery by which it was achieved. By compressing the story so drastically it makes the events more horrendous.

Table 8: Operas using Classical Legends.

1905	Strauss	<i>Salome</i>	Oscar Wilde/Strauss
1908	Strauss	<i>Elektra</i>	Sophocles/ Hofmannsthal
1912	Strauss	<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i>	Hofmannsthal
1913/1923	Milhaud	<i>L'Orestie d'Eschyle</i>	Henri Hoppenot

1919	Braunfels	<i>Die Vögel</i>	Aristophanes/Braunfels
1918	Stravinsky	<i>The Soldier's Tale</i> – <i>L'histoire du soldat</i>	C. F. Ramuz
1924	Szymanowski	<i>King Roger</i>	Euripides/Szymanowski / Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz
1927	Stravinsky	<i>Oedipus Rex</i>	Sophocles/Cocteau/Daniélou
1928	Milhaud	<i>L'abandon d'Ariane</i>	Henri Hoppenot
1928	Milhaud	<i>La délivrance de Thésée</i>	Henri Hoppenot
1930	Osterc	<i>Saloma</i>	The Bible
1930	Osterc	<i>Medea</i>	Euripides
1932	Wellesz	<i>Die Bakchantinnen</i>	Euripides/Wellesz

The third of Osterc's minute operas, *Dandin v vicah* ('Dandin in Purgatory'), is a fantasy, based on the play by Molière called *Georges Dandin ou le Mari confondu* ('Georges Dandin or the Confounded Husband') in which, by marrying a woman of higher station than himself, a man causes problems for himself. Some of the character of the plot of Schönberg's *Von Heute auf Morgen* of 1928 was carried over into Dandin's situation, but we have no evidence that Osterc was aware of this work.

The idea of the "minute opera" was one of a number of fashions in the 1920s (see Table 9). While discussing the whole French musical scene in the 1920s, James Harding relates a discussion between Hindemith and Milhaud.⁴⁷ Because Milhaud had been very active and successful in the composition of a number of operas, he was thought to be a suitable person to invite to write a new opera. Hindemith's instructions were something like: "Write an opera and make it as short as possible." Harding continues: "The reaction against Wagner and his long, excessively long epics was in full swing". "Hindemith's own *Hin und Zurück* took precisely fourteen minutes to perform."⁴⁸ Milhaud [...] broke all records with an opera called *L'enlèvement d'Europe* ('The Abduction of Europa'). It was nine minutes long." Encouraged by his publisher to make a programme of suitable length, he added two more operas derived from Greek myths, a favourite source for opera

47 James Harding, *The Ox on the Roof* (London: Macdonald, 1972), 185–86.

48 Ian Kemp points to some interesting features of *Hin und Zurück* in *Hindemith* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 21

Table 9: Minute Operas.

1927	Hindemith	Hin und Zurück	Marcellus Schiffer
1928	Toch	Egon und Emilie	Christian Morgenstern
1928	Milhaud	L'enlèvement d'Europe	Henri Hoppenot
1928	Milhaud	L'abandon d'Ariane	Henri Hoppenot
1928	Milhaud	La délivrance de Thésée	Henri Hoppenot
1930	Osterc	Saloma	The Bible
1930	Osterc	Medea	Euripides
1930	Osterc	Dandin v vicař	Euripides

plots during this period. These were *L'abandon d'Ariane* ('The Abandonment of Ariadne') and *La délivrance de Thésée* ('The Deliverance of Theseus') lasting eleven and eight minutes respectively, making a grand total for the three operas of 27 minutes. Compared to Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which is not a long opera at just under two hours, *L'abandon d'Ariane* seems positively tiny. Another short opera that appears to have interested Osterc was that by Ernst Toch, the 1927 work *Die Prinzessin auf der Erbse* ('The Princess on the Pea'), which lasts about 35 minutes and is based on a rather incredible story by Hans Christian Andersen.

Conclusion

First it is clear that Osterc was very much influenced by operatic activities all over Europe, partly from his experiences in Prague and partly from his encounters with works performed in the Ljubljana Opera House. He was well aware of new trends as seen in his reporting on performances in Ljubljana in which he noted these features in his writings. Secondly, he also followed some of the modern ideas found in many of these works in the operas that he himself composed. We can note the remote influence of Puccini in *Iz komične opere*, but more the stylistic hints that he derived from Stravinsky, Kurt Weill and Ernst Křenek. It was first performed in Ljubljana soon after its composition. With *Krog s kredo* he reverted to the full-scale opera that was still being composed in Europe. It is a work which

shows some stylistic influence of composers such Hindemith and Honegger, but it draws into its orbit a great many of the features of his own instrumental works of this period.⁴⁹ These instrumental works did receive performances in Osterc's lifetime, but the opera did not, presumably because of the demands of mounting such an elaborate work in the difficult financial times of the 1930s. In any case it is well paced dramatically with skilful blending of the recitative, strophic and instrumental styles. This was not the case with the minute operas, which show the obvious influence of Darius Milhaud in their brevity and concise dramaturgy, and in two of them Milhaud's preference for well-known plots from the ancient world. But they also show some direct and indirect influence of Paul Hindemith. Two of Osterc's minute operas (*Medea* and *Dandin v vicah*) were performed in Ljubljana in 1932, helping to establish his reputation, but *Saloma* was not performed in the composer's lifetime.

What then is the importance of Osterc's operatic compositions? It is clear that they were not copies of the standard European examples, but ones which extended the ideas with some imagination, drawing ideas together in a different mixture of operatic forms. *Iz komične opere*, for example, was not a pale imitation of operas by Puccini or Leoncavallo, but an opera with a totally different plot and perspective and a completely anti-romantic style, taking its cue from works by Křenek, Stravinsky, Weill and Milhaud. As *Krog s kredo* predated Zemlinsky's *Der Kreidekreis* there can be no question of copying; it is clear that they were composed independently. In any case the two works differ in many basic respects. Osterc made very distinct ways of treating Klabund's text and paced the opera accordingly. With the minute operas Osterc's style did not imitate that of Milhaud, but rather he adopted some stylistic features from Weill, Hindemith and Ernst Křenek. Overall then, in all these works Osterc made distinctive contributions to the development of opera in Slovenia, with his operas taking their natural place in the European operatic scene in the first half of the 20th century.

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ISBN 978-961-7055-50-4