

Cultural Heritage in Historical Perspective

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Vladimir Georgievich Ehrenberg: A Mocker's Fate*

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Abstract. The article presents for the first time in Russian music scholarship an artistic portrait of one of the theater-related musicians of the Silver Age — Vladimir G. Ehrenberg. The composer contributed almost fifteen years of his artistic life serving in cameo theaters, the most significant of which was *Krivoie zerkalo* [*Distorted Mirror*]. Together with Alexander Kugel and Zinaida Kholmanskaya, Ehrenberg stood at the origins of this St. Petersburg cabaret, and subsequently (with a few interruptions) he carried out the duties not only of a composer, but also a conductor and the head of the music department. The aesthetic platform of *Distorted Mirror* was determined with Ehrenberg's participation. It was particularly after the production of his opera parody *Vampuka, the African Bride* that the theater set a course for dethroning the clichés of various theatrical genres.

The composer took an active part in the so-called anti-opera campaign launched by the leaders of the *Distorted Mirror*, and created a number of plays that were very successful among his contemporaries. Among them were *Rychalov's Tour*, *The Cruel Baron*, *The Action on the Protested Promissory Note* and others. Operetta and pantomime, cantatas and romances, and symphonic music also came in his view (*The Modern Symphony*, *Schumette of Digestion*). An ironic view of musical and theatrical clichés has made it possible Ehrenberg to become virtually the chief musical parodist of his time. In his experiments, Ehrenberg, possibly unwittingly, forestalled certain techniques intrinsic to music of later times, including elements of instrumental theater (in his “memo-melodrama” *When knights were Valiant*) and the use of non-artistic texts for artistic purposes (*The Action on the Protested Promissory Note*).

Keywords: Vladimir Ehrenberg, theater of miniatures *Krivoie zerkalo* [*Distorted Mirror*], opera parody, operetta-parody, pantomime, Alexander Kugel, Nikolai Evreinov

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Культурное наследие в исторической оценке

Научная статья

Владимир Георгиевич Эренберг: судьба пересмешника

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Аннотация. В настоящей статье впервые в отечественной музыкальной науке представлен творческий портрет одного из театральных музыкантов Серебряного века — Владимира Георгиевича Эренберга. Почти пятнадцать лет своей творческой жизни композитор отдал службе в театрах малых форм, из которых главным был «Кривое зеркало». Наряду с Александром Кугелем и Зинаидой Холмской Эренберг стоял у истоков этого петербургского кабаре, а впоследствии (с некоторыми перерывами) исполнял в нём обязанности не только композитора, но также дирижёра и заведующего музыкальной частью. Эстетическая платформа «Зеркала» определилась не без участия Эренберга: именно после постановки его оперной пародии «Вампука, невеста африканская» театр взял курс на развенчание штампов различных театральных жанров.

Композитор принял активное участие в так называемой антиоперной кампании, развёрнутой руководителями «Зеркала», и создал ряд пьес, имевших большой успех у современников. Среди них: «Гастроль Рычалова», «Жестокий барон», «Действо об опротестованном векселе» и другие. В поле его зрения попали также оперетта и пантомима, кантаты и романсы, симфоническая музыка («Современная симфония», «Шуметта пищеварения»). Иронический взгляд на музыкально-театральные штампы позволил Эренбергу стать едва ли не главным музыкальным пародистом своего времени. В процессе экспериментов Эренберг предвосхитил некоторые приёмы, свойственные музыке более позднего времени, в том числе элементы инструментального театра (в «мемо-мело-траги-драме» «Когда рыцари были отважны») и использование нехудожественных текстов в художественных целях («Действо об опротестованном векселе»).

Ключевые слова: Владимир Эренберг, театр миниатюр «Кривое зеркало», опера-пародия, оперетта-пародия, пантомима, Александр Кугель, Николай Евреинов

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*He was a parodist <...> “Dei gratia,”
a mocker permeated with the spirit of irony and sarcasm.¹*

The history of European cabarets and cameo theaters involves many celebrated names. The composers who had some exposure to the cabaret, to one degree or another, include Arnold Schoenberg, Erik Satie, Alexander Zemlinsky, Isaac Albeniz, Oscar Straus and other extremely authoritative figures. Russian small-scale theaters and cameo theaters² cannot boast of such participants.

However, we have also had our “heroes.” Their names, unlike the names of their contemporaries, are presently known only to specialists. Among the Russian composers, most of whom were dilettantes, mention must be made of the following musicians who wrote music for the cabaret: Aleksei Alekseevich Arkhangel'skii (1881–1941, the critics called him nothing less than “the juror composer of ‘Der Fledermaus’”); Nikolai Aleksandrovich Manykin-Nevstruev (1869 – after 1917), and Ilya Aleksandrovich Sats

(1875–1912) — the latter two are known primarily for their activities at the legendary Moscow Art Theater. As his contemporaries had acknowledged, the “darling” of the St. Petersburg-based cabaret *Brodyachaya sobaka* [*Stray Dog*] was Nikolai Karlovich Tsybul'skii (1879–1919; pseudonym: Count Aucontrere). Other people who were connected with the cameo theater *Krivoie zerkalo* [*Distorted Mirror*] was Vasilii Avgustovich Shpis von Eshenbrukh (1872–1919) and Nikolai Nikolaevich Evreinov (1878–1953), as well as one of the co-founders of the *Distorted Mirror* Vladimir Georgievich Ehrenburg (1875–1923). The destinies and the legacy of these composers have been studied extremely unevenly. Thus, the music of Ilya Sats, including that connected with the Russian cameo theaters, has been the object of Zhanna Panova’s dissertation.³ Ilya Sats’s musical output is examined in the third chapter of Ilya Shamov’s dissertation

¹ Kugel' A. [Homo Novus]. V. G. Erenberg [Vladimir Ehrenberg]. *Zhizn' iskusstva* [*The Life of Art*]. 1923. No. 38. P. 7.

² In recent times the interest towards the phenomenon of the cabaret, both in Russia and in other countries, has been noticeable activated. Researchers from the most various fields of humanitarian knowledge have turned to this problem range. Among the articles from recent years, mention must be made of Vladimir Shekalov’s work (Prima-balerina spuskaetsya v podval: “Vecher tantsev XVIII veka” Tamary Karsavinoi v “Brodyachei sobake” [The Prima-Ballerina Descends to the Basement: “18th Century Dance Evening” an Evening of 18th Century Dances of Tamara Karsavina at “The Stray Dog”]. *Vestnik Akademii russkogo baleta im. A. Ya. Vaganovoi* [*Gazette of the A. Ya. Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet*]. 2019. No. 1 (60), pp. 79–110), as well as Rimma Arkhangel'skaya’s research works [1; 2].

³ Panova Zh. V. *Il'ya Sats — kompozitor na teatre (Khudozhnik v zerkale «Serebryanogo veka»): avtoref. dis. ... kand. iskusstvovedeniya: 17.00.02* [*The Composer Connected with Theater (The Artist in the Reflection of the “Silver Age”): Thesis for Dissertation for the Degree of Cand. Sci. (Arts): 17.00.02*]. Moscow, 1994. 24 p.

in the context of the stage direction style of the MKhAT (the Moscow Art Academic Theater).⁴ Nikolai Manykin-Nevstruev was discussed in Alexander Naumov's article, although the latter examines primarily the composer's role "in the formation of the musical aesthetics of the productions of the Moscow Art Theater,"⁵ rather than his music written for cabaret. Brief biographical information and an overview of the works of Aleksei Arkhangel'skii were published for the first time in the journal *Problemy muzykal'noi nauki / Music Scholarship* for 2019; up to now, this has remained the sole published work about the composer [3]. Up to the present time, Vasilii Shpis-Eshenbrukh and Nikolai Tsybul'skii have not found themselves at the center of attention of the musicological community, unlike Nikolai Evreinov. Lately, the theme "Evreinov i russkaya kul'tura" ["Evreinov and Russian Culture"] has been developed rather actively by Nina Sviridovskaya [4; 5; 6].

The aim of this article is to present at a first approximation the destiny and the artistic legacy of Vladimir Georgievich Ehrenberg, one of the musical cabaret activists of Russia of the first decades of the 20th century. It cannot be said that in

the history of Russian culture Ehrenberg is entirely unknown. A sparse amount of biographical information about him may be found in such reputable editions as the Soviet-era *Teatral'naya entsiklopediya* [*Theater Encyclopedia*],⁶ the encyclopedia *Estrada v Rossii. XX vek* [*Popular Music in Russia. The 20th Century*],⁷ as well as on the more trustworthy internet portals (the encyclopedia *Krugosvet* [*The Whole World*]). Nonetheless, he is primarily known in connection with two circumstances. First of all, Ehrenberg was one of the creators of the famous opera parody *Vampuka, nevesta afrikanskaya* [*Vampuka, African Bride*]. Second, he is famous (primarily in theatrical circles) as the father of Vladimir Vladimirovich Ehrenberg, the Soviet theatrical activist and movie actor.

Biographical information about the composer is rather scarce, especially in regard to his childhood and youthful years. Ehrenberg was born into a large family. His parents, Egor (Georg, Georgy) Karlovich (a member of the guild of merchants) and Sofia Gustavovna (née Schortmann, the daughter of a titular counsellor) had 19 children. Most likely, the musician received a legal education. This, at least, is what

⁴ Shamov S. B. *Vyrazitel'nye i formoobrazuyushchie funktsii udarnykh instrumentov v muzyke russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra rubezha XIX–XX vekov na primere spektaklei MKhAT 1900–1910-kh godov: avtoref. dis. ... kand. iskusstvovedeniya: 17.00.02* [*The Expressive and Form-Generating Functions of Percussion Instruments in the Music of Russian Dramatic Theater of the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries on the Example of Performances of the Moscow Art Academic Theater: Thesis for Dissertation for the Degree of Cand. Sci. (Arts): 17.00.02*]. Moscow, 2010. 24 p.

⁵ Naumov A. V. «V preddverii Satsa»: N. A. Manykin-Nevstruev — kompozitor i dirizher Moskovskogo Khudozhestvennogo teatra 1900-kh godov ["On the Threshold of Satz": N. A. Manykin-Nevstruev — Composer and Conductor of the Moscow Art Theater in the 1900s]. *Manuskript*. 2021. Vol. 14, Issue 1, pp. 195–201.

⁶ A. Iv. Erenberg, Vladimir Georgievich [Ehrenberg, Vladimir Georgievich]. *Teatral'naya entsiklopediya* [*Theater Encyclopedia*]. In 5 Vol. Moscow: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, 1967. Vol. 5. Col. 998.

⁷ Lopatin A. A. Erenberg Vladimir Georgievich [Ehrenberg, Vladimir Georgievich]. *Estrada v Rossii. XX vek. Entsiklopediya* [*Popular Music in Russia. The 20th Century. Encyclopedia*]. Moscow: Olma-Press, 2004, pp. 763–764.

was asserted by theater critic and one of the founders of the St. Petersburg theater *Distorted Mirror* Alexander Kugel, a friend and close associate of Ehrenberg. Kugel wrote: «upon a strange play of circumstances he [Ehrenberg. — N. E.] was a proved juror, but it is not possible to imagine a person less equipped for the career of a lawyer. <...> [He was] an artist to the marrow of his bones, a typical representative of the bohemians and of inconstancy of character.”⁸

In all probability, the young man did not receive any professional musical education either. According to the words of the selfsame Kugel quoted in Nikolai Evreinov's memoirs, he “never studied the theory of composition in any systematic way, relying primarily on his own talent, intuition, his musicality and the participation in a student orchestra, beyond the stand of the cornet-a-pistons.”⁹

Ehrenberg devoted the best years of his life to theater. At the end of 1908, along with Kugel and Kholm'skaya, he became the initiator of the founding of the cabaret *Distorted Mirror*. The composer was a real godsend for the *Distorted Mirror*, since he “possessed the rarest gift — humor in music. His music provided not only a good mood <...> — it <...> was wicked, witty and derisive. He was a parodist, as they say, ‘with the grace of God’...”¹⁰

Ehrenberg served as the head of the musical section of *Distorted Mirror* until

1916, also carrying out the duties of a composer and a conductor. That same year, 1916, at the Liteyny Cameo Theater the *Musical Drama at the Third Pargolovo. Near the Railway Station* (based on a text by Boris Geier); the comic opera *The Wedding* (based on Chekhov) saw the limelight first at the Liteyny Cameo Theater, then in the Zimin Opera in Moscow (December 1916), then at the Musical Drama Theater (1917).

From 1917 to 1919 Ehrenberg served at the Mikhailovsky Theater (in Petrograd) in the position of the producer; there jointly with Sofia Maslovskaya he produced a performance based on Jacques Offenbach's operetta *Les oiseaux dans la charmille*.¹¹ In 1918 he became a member of the Council of State Opera (CSO) — the “supreme authority of the self-administration of the state-directed opera, bearing all the responsibility for artistic work of the opera repertory company.”¹² According to the information in the press, the Presidium of the Council was headed by Feodor Chaliapin in the position of honorary emeritus, while Ehrenberg was included into the administration of the Council of the State Opera (CSO), “by the soloist artists,” albeit, in the position of the producer.¹³

Information about the composer's life after 1918 is even more fragmentary. In 1923 *Distorted Mirror*, which was closed down in the post-revolutionary period, was revived. In Zinaida Kholm'skaya's memoirs

⁸ Kugel' A. Op. cit. P. 7.

⁹ Evreinov N. N. *V shkole ostroumiya: Vospominaniya o teatre «Krivoe zerkalo»* [In the School of Wit: Memoirs of the Theater “Distorted Mirror”]. Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1998. P. 142.

¹⁰ Kugel' A. Op. cit. P. 7.

¹¹ *Biryuch Petrogradskikh Gosudarstvennykh teatrov* [Herald of the Petrograd State Theaters]. 1918. No. 1. P. 24.

¹² Iz zhizni Gosudarstvennoi opery. Khronika [From the Life of State-Directed Opera. Herald]. *Biryuch*. 1918. No. 6. P. 55.

¹³ Ibid.

we find the mention that “Ehrenberg is alive and well”, and his works appear again in the theater programs — for the most part, in plays from the old repertoire. Having completed the first theatrical season in the Soviet period, the troupe *Distorted Mirror* went on tours as part of their activities. Ehrenberg accompanied the theater in the role of the head of the musical section and the conductor. But he never returned to Moscow. On September 14, 1923 the composer died in Kharkov from complications resulting from typhoid fever.¹⁴

The greater part of Ehrenberg’s musical legacy is connected with his work at the *Distorted Mirror*, while his fame in the theatrical circles of the Russian capitals and the provinces came to him from *Vampuka*, *African Bride*, created in co-authorship with Mikhail Nikolaevich Volkonskii (Anchar Mantsenilov). It was particularly this composition from which the anti-opera campaign began. The theory of anti-opera was formulated in his notes by Kugel¹⁵, while the task of realizing it fell for the most part on Ehrenberg. During the period from 1909 to 1915 a number of compositions was

written by him which are either real opera parodies or come very close to them.

After discrediting the stereotypes of the so-called grand opera of the Meyerbeer and Verdi variety in *Vampuka*, Ehrenberg passed towards the Wagner model, having created in 1910 the opera *Zhestokii baron* [*The Cruel Baron*] set to Vladimir Giatsintov’s text. Unfortunately, the location of the score materials of the *Baron* has not been established, however, the concise description given by Mariya Yarotskaya in *Letopis' “Krivogo zerkala”* [*The Chronicles of the “Distorted Mirror”*] and the response in the *Russkoe slovo* [*Russian Word*] make it possible for us to judge about the object of the parody: “The pilgrims’ choir, each protagonist has his own leitmotif. A minimum of singing and words. The predominant role of the orchestra”¹⁶; “*The Cruel Baron* presents an attempt of a comic opera in new forms, a combination of characteristic comic and tragic leitmotifs which illustrate *a la* Wagner the tragicomedy of the stage positions and providing a comic stylization of the Middle Ages.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Kugel' A. Op. cit. P. 7.

¹⁵ As Liudmila Tikhvinskaya writes, “in his numerous memorandum Kugel developed an entire theory of anti-opera. Opera, which in his opinion was a “conventional” and “artificial-theoretical” art, limited in its possibilities, was juxtaposed by him with the limitless artistic options of primitive songs, French chansons, as well as Russian and gypsy songs, considering that only in this “elementary,” pre-aesthetic, spontaneous singing are the natural and organic features of life preserved.” See: Tikhvinskaya L. I. *Povsednevnyaya zhizn' teatral'noi bogemy Serebryanogo veka: Kabare i teatr miniatyur v Rossii: 1908–1917* [*The Everyday Life of the Theatrical Bohemians of the Silver Age: Cabaret and Cameo Theater in Russia: 1908–1917*]. Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 2005. (Zhivaya istoriya: Povsednevnyaya zhizn' chelovechestva [Live History: The Everyday Life of Humanity]). P. 71.

¹⁶ Yarotskaya M. K. *Letopis' teatra «Krivoe zerkalo»*. Sbornik vyskazyvaniy pressy, teatral'nykh deyatelei o teatre, programmy spektaklei teatra, sostav truppy za period s 1908 po 1918 gg. [Chronicles of the “Distorted Mirror” Theater. Compilation of Utterances by the Press and by Theatrical Activists about Theater, Programs of Performances of the Theater, and the Makeup of the Repertory Company during the Period Between 1908 and 1918]. *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva* [*Russian State Archive of Literature and Art*]. Fund 2352, list 1, unit of storage 62. P. 74.

¹⁷ *Russkoe slovo* [*The Russian Word*]. April 4, 1910. Cit. ex: Yarotskaya M. K. Op. cit. P. 74.

The anti-opera campaign continued in the 1911-1912 season with a performance of *Gastrol' Rychalova* [*Rychalov's Tour*].¹⁸ The second act of Anchar Manchenilov's rehearsal play presented a parody of a botched opera performance in a Russian province; the musical object of the parody was still Western European Romantic opera — Meyerbeer, Verdi, Gounod, etc. According to the testimony of Nikolai Evreinov, *Rychalov's Tour* became a second “thriller” of the *Distorted Mirror* after *Vampuka* and enjoyed continuous success with the public, including the emperor and the imperial family.

A considerable amount of success fell on the lot of the “mystical-realistic performances” *The Action about the Protested Promissory Note and Its Law Writ of Execution* (set to the text by Vladimir Azov, 1914).¹⁹ A reviewer of the Moscow-based *Teatral'naya gazeta* [*Theater Gazette*], when describing the *Action*, placed it unto a remarkably high context, “After Sergei Rachmaninoff, who ventured with a boldness of talent to set to music Stanislavsky's prosaic greeting on the jubilee of the Art Theater, and then the monologue from Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* — Mr. Ehrenberg gives us an entire aria set to an official text of a bill of credit — ‘Following this bill of mine I am obligated,

I am obligated, obligated to pay Ivan Ivanovich Sibiryakov or whosoever else he will order (basses: ‘or whosoever else he will order’) a hundred rubles, etc.”²⁰ Thereby, the *Action* may be evaluated as one of the first opera experiments of setting to music an unartistic text in some way forestalling the future experiments of young Dmitrii Shostakovich in his opera *The Nose*.

As for the objects of this parody, the reviewer “heard distinctly” in Ehrenberg's musical setting “humorous imitations of Mussorgsky, <...> in that section which brings out ‘the good and evil spirits’ of the judicial delivery boys and real estate brokers and especially the ‘neutral spirit’ of the civic statute <...>, as well as their characterization in the spirit of Meyerbeer with his inclinations towards spectacular ensembles and vivid choruses.”²¹

The anti-opera campaign unfurled by Alexander Kugel and his associates implicated other musical-theatrical genres, including ballet and opera into its orbit. Ehrenberg did not write parodies of ballets, but he turned to operetta. Both of the parody operettas created by him were very received very favorably both by the public and by the critics. The premiere of “*Vostorgi lyubvi* [*The Delights of Love*] in 2 Acts with Singing, Dancing, a Procession and

¹⁸ For more detail about this: E nukidze N. I. Russkie vampuki do i posle «Vampuki»: nekotorye nablyudeniya nad istorieci opernoi parodii [Russian Vampukas Before and After “Vampuka”: Certain Observations of the History of Opera Parody]. *Uchenye zapiski RAM im. Gnesinykh* [*Scholarly Articles of the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music*]. 2012. No. 1, pp. 50–53.

¹⁹ For more details about this see: E nukidze N. I. Opernaya parodiya v Rossii v pervoi treti XX veka i kabare: tochka skhoda [Opera Parody in Russia in the First Third of the 20th Century and Cabaret: Point of Assembly]. *Sovremennyye problemy muzykoznaniiya* [*Contemporary Issues of Musicology*]. 2018. No. 1, pp. 39–45.

²⁰ S. R-skii. Ostryi talant [A Sharp Talent]. *Teatral'naya gazeta* [*Theatrical Gazette*]. 1915. No. 11. Cit. ex: Yarotskaya M. K. Op. cit. P. 229.

²¹ Cit. ex: Yarotskaya M. K. Op. cit. P. 229.

an Apotheosis” set to a libretto by Nikolai Urvantsov (Urvantsev) — took place in the 1909–1910 season. Both the libretto and the music presented “a concentration of the banality and the primitive qualities of the German-Russian operetta tradition.”²² Another parody work — *Syn dvukh materei* [*The Son of Two Mothers*] (set to a libretto by an unspecified writer, 1914) — presented in itself, as the program stated, “the first real Russian operetta in which, according to its creators, the plotline, text and music — everything was ‘derived.’” Ehrenburg’s musical setting, “written with great humor,” consisted of “a mixture of popular quasi-Gypsy romances, kewpies and tangoes to the most awful, dramatic positions.”²³

The pantomime became the most high-demand genre in the theatrical culture of the Silver Age. The heightened interest in it inspired the performance of Vsevolod Meyerhold’s *Scarf of Columbine* based on Arthur Schnitzler’s play with Ernst Dohnanyi’s music (*House of Intermezzi*, 1910). As Vadim Shcherbakov writes, “The triumph of Meyerhold’s cabaret pantomime could not have passed unnoticed at the *Distorted Mirror*. Kholm’skaya, as well as Kugel and Evreinov wished to have their own soundless hit song.”²⁴ Thus, the theater’s repertoire was supplemented by the pantomime *Chetyre mertvetsa F’yametty* [*Fiametta’s Four Dead People*] (1911), which was staged, just as Meyerhold’s performance was, with the participation of the Italian comedy of masks.

Ehrenberg did not support the “mask” theme, but still he responded to the genre itself. During the time of his work at the theater he wrote three pantomimes. In *Sumurun* (1912) *Scheherazade’s Fairy Tales* were used as a literary source. *Krug zhizni odnogo zavoevatelya* [*The Circle of Life of one Conqueror*] appeared in the repertoire during the 1914 season as a pantomime-caricature of Kaiser Wilhelm II, the German emperor and king of Prussia, and became a part of the “anti-German program” of *Distorted Mirror* during World War I. The critics acknowledged the music of the pantomime to be successful: “Mr. Ehrenburg presented a new example of his undoubtedly original and talented humorous music, this time illustrating a pantomime-caricature — *The Circle of Life of one Conqueror*. The first two acts — ‘Birth’ and ‘Activities’ — are amusing and at times aroused outbursts of laughter and applause.”²⁵

In the pantomime of the previous year — *Kogda rytsari byli otvazhny* [*When Knights were Valorous*], a “mimo-melo-tragi-drama” in one scene (a pantomime) by Boris Geier (1913) — the composer invented a special technique of depiction. All the protagonists of the play were demonstrated by means the sounds of particular musical instruments: the king — by a trombone, the queen — by an oboe, the knights — by a cello and a horn, the courtier knights — by a viola and a bassoon, the ladies-in-waiting — by a violin and a clarinet, and the indispensable conspirators — by a double-bass and a

²² Cit. ex: Yarotskaya M. K. Op. cit. P. 65.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Shcherbakov V. A. *Pantomimy Serebryanogo veka* [*Pantomimes of the Silver Age*]. St. Petersburg: Peterburgskii teatral'nyi zhurnal [St. Petersburg Theater Journal], 2014. P. 82.

²⁵ Tamarin N. Krivoe zerkalo [*Distorted Mirror*]. *Teatr i iskusstvo* [*Theater and Art*]. 1914. No. 40. P. 778.

drum.²⁶ Such a “technique” presented a considerable amount of difficulty for the artists: “...The originality [of the pantomime. — *N. E.*] is in that it is not only played out with the support of the music, but that each protagonist possesses his or her own instrument in the orchestra which speaks for him or her. The orchestra is done in a very humorous fashion and merges very well with what takes place on stage. The artists <...> have not yet achieved a sufficiently good ensemble, but this will take place in due time; the task which befell them was very difficult, here one needs a great musical sense and an exclusive plastic suppleness in order to amalgamate each motion absolutely precisely, endowing it with exhaustive expressivity with the corresponding musical chord.”²⁷

In the programs of *Distorted Mirror* Ehrenberg also demonstrated himself as an orchestral composer, having composed in 1912 the symphonic poem (parody) *Napoleon*, in 1914 — *Shumette of Digestion*, and in 1917 — the *Contemporary Symphony*. The symphonic poem became one of the numbers of a thematic evening under the title of *Napoleon in the ‘Distorted Mirror.’* The symphonic poem was a caricature of tendentious interpretations historical events of and consisted of five movements: *I. The Condition of Russia prior to Napoleon’s Invasion; II. The Incursion of the Twelve Languages; III. The Battle of Borodino; IV. The Fire of Moscow;*

V. The Gloomy Locality on St. Helena Island. In Maria Yarotskaya’s *Chronicles...* it is marked that the symphonic poem was performed “with great humor <...> by an orchestra under the direction of the talented and versatile composer; especially funny was the “incursion of the twelve languages.”²⁸ The fourth movement — *The Fire of Moscow* — was written by Ehrenberg on motives of popular songs.

Shumette of Digestion was a sideshow into the parody on the futurist dramaturgy “a show with an inter-theosis *Sausage from Butterflies, or Zappendya.*” It is possible that the symphony, thereby, parodied the music of Mikhail Matyushin to the first futurist opera *Victory over the Sun*, the world premiere of which took place in December 1913. According to the reviewer of *Teatr i iskusstvo [Theater and Art]* Ars. B., the composition aroused “outbursts of laughter” because of its “remarkable ability to evoke humorous effects of harmonization out of the orchestra.”²⁹

Ehrenberg’s final oeuvre for the *Distorted Mirror* was the *Contemporary Symphony*, renamed after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 into the *Symphony of the Old Regime*. “It [the symphony. — *N. E.*] was conceived in the form of a real three-movement parody on the solemn music found in symphonies. The movements are as follows: 1. the small loaf, 2. sugar and 3. spiritus vini. The most interesting movement is the last, reminding of the

²⁶ Cit. ex: Yarotskaya M. K. Op. cit. P. 202. The technique invented by the composer arouses particular associations with instrumental theater, the basic principles of which would be formulated much later. I express my sincere gratitude to Svetlana Savenko for this observation.

²⁷ Zigfrid [Stark E. A.]. «Krivoe zerkalo» [“Distorted Mirror”]. *Teatr i iskusstvo [Theater and Art]*. 1913. October 27. No. 43. P. 856.

²⁸ Yarotskaya M. K. Op. cit. P. 144.

²⁹ Ars. B. Krivoe zerkalo [Distorted Mirror]. *Teatr i iskusstvo [Theater and Art]*. 1914. No. 4. p. 78.

Dies irae movement of the well-known Requiems...”³⁰ In October 1917 *Distorted Mirror* went out on a tour to Moscow, where the composition was performed with a new title and also received favorable reviews from the press: “A genuine humorist in music, this time Ehrenberg has performed a jest with an entire orchestra. Against the background of superficial techniques of the symphony, he used the motives of the ‘old regime,’ such as the music on *spiritus vini*, <...> etc.”³¹

The musical-theatrical legacy of Vladimir Ehrenberg is not limited to the genres of opera, operetta, pantomime and symphony. The audiences were especially fond of the *Solemn Cantata* to the second anniversary of *Distorted Mirror* and the concert program of the *Solemn Public Proceedings in Memory of Koz'ma Prutkov Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of his Decease* (1913). The program of the latter included three vocal miniatures set to Koz'ma Prutkov's poems: the duo *Na vzmor'e* [*On the Seaside*], the trio *Konduktor i tarantul* [*The Conductor and the Tarantula*] and the quartet *Vy lyubite li syr?* [*Do you Like Cheese?*].

Ehrenberg also either wrote or compiled music to the other miniatures of the *Distorted Mirror*, however, due to the lack of authentic information it has not always been possible to define their genre. Theatrical plays with Ehrenberg's music included Pyotr Potemkin's *Svyashchennyi lebed' Kapitoliya* [*The Sacred Swan of the Capitol*] (text by Boris Geier), *Barometr Koppeliusa* [*The*

Barometer of Coppelius], and *Muzykal'naya stsenka* [*Musical Scene*] (1911), Leo Nikulin's humorous fairy tale *V Versale* [*In Versailles*] (1912), *Mudryi Charudatta* [*The Wise Ciarudatta*] (a musical tragicomedy, 1910), *Takova zhenshchina* [*Such is the Woman*], a musical satire with Vladimir Podgorny's text, and *Prekrasnye sabinyanki* [*The Beautiful Sabines*] (a political satire, a historical performance in 2 acts and 3 scenes, a work of Leonid Andreev, 1911). Of all the aforementioned numbers only the description of the last one has been preserved.

Prekrasnye sabinyanki presented a plotline from Roman history (produced by Nikolai Evreinov, according to Leonid Andreev) interpreted in a political context. The Sabines, as Evreinov remarked, “are constitutional democrats, whose wives are nothing else than the freedoms which, as it appears to the Sabines, were obtained by them in 1905.”³² The Sabines' state of indecision was especially vividly highlighted by the musical accompaniment Ehrenberg thought of. “The most remarkable in our production,” — as Zinaida Kholm'skaya remembers, — was the music composed by Vladimir Ehrenberg,³³ to the sound of which the Sabine cadets moved, making two steps forward and one stop backward. Two steps forward — and the vigorous, strong and belligerent sounds of the *Marseillaise* are heard. One step backwards — and the *Marseillaise* transforms into some kind of heinous, drawling-mournful, base-spirited whimper of a beaten dog. This is the

³⁰ *Vechernee vremya* [*Evening Time*]. February 4, 1917. Cit. ex: Yarotskaya M. K. Op. cit. P. 293.

³¹ *Teatral'naya gazeta* [*Theater Gazette*]. 1917. No. 16. Cit. ex: Yarotskaya M. K. Op. cit. P. 297.

³² Evreinov N. N. Op. cit. P. 318.

³³ In his memoirs Nikolai Evreinov asserts that the invention of this musical technique should be credited to him (see: Evreinov N. N. Op. cit., pp. 318–319).

cadets' *Marseillaise*,³⁴ which has always aroused concurrent peals of laughter and unceasing applause of the public, marked out more vividly than any spoken text and demonstrated the political physiognomy and cowardly evasive tactics of the so-called "party of people's freedom."³⁵

Vladimir Ehrenberg's musical discoveries frequently drew the attention of the press, but only one critic in 1915 published in the *Teatral'naya gazeta* a full-fledged article devoted to the composer titled *Ostryi talant*

[*A Sharp Talent*]. There, similar to many of his contemporaries, gave due credit to Ehrenberg's musical gift, noting the variety of genres of his work, "his exuberant talent," his "refined musical taste and solid technical skill."³⁶ It may be that not everybody would agree with such a characterization. And yet we shall agree with Kugel's opinion: in the history of Russian vaudeville theaters Ehrenberg remains as an unsurpassed musical satirist and parodist. And as an eternal "mockers of fate"...

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³⁴ According to Nikolai Evreinov, this cadets' *Marseillaise* was nothing else than the first measures of the Russian national anthem *God, Save the Tsar!*

³⁵ Kholm'skaya Z. V. *Teatr «Krivoe zerkalo»* [Theater "Distorted Mirror"]. URL: <https://ptj.spb.ru/archive/5/in-oppositeperspective-5/teatr-krivoe-zerkalo> (accessed: 07.03.2023).

³⁶ S. R-skii. *Ostryi talant* [Sharp Talent]. *Teatral'naya gazeta* [Theater Gazette]. 1915. No. 11. Cit. ex: Yarotskaya M. K. Op. cit. P. 229.

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