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Michael Nyman's Opera *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs* and Questions of Interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

Ekaterina G. Okuneva[1], Anastasiya A. Nogovitsyna[2]

[1,2]Petrozavodsk State A. K. Glazunov Conservatoire,
Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation
[1]okunevaeg@yandex.ru✉ , https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5253-8863
[2]a.slepcova93@mail.ru, https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2496-9630

Abstract. The article focuses on the interpretation of the themes and images of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in Michael Nyman's opera *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs*. The authors touch upon the issues of the history of the creation of the work, the features of the libretto, which acquired the character of an intermittent narrative as a result of the radical reduction of the original source, and examine the compositional and dramatic patterns of the opera and its musical and stylistic specificities. In his interpretation, Nyman combines the traditional view of Shakespeare's play as a metaphor for artistic creativity with its postcolonial reading. Compositional strategies are based on deconstruction techniques, manifested in depersonalization (the separation of voices from the roles, leading to a subtraction of the theatrical-stage component), the semantic gap between the text and the music, self-reference, and harmonic similarity, which makes it possible to establish a commonality between characters that are essentially opposite (Caliban and Prospero), which contributes to a re-evaluation of the perception of their images.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, Michael Nyman, the play *The Tempest*, the opera *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs*, interpretation, postcolonialism, deconstruction, depersonalization

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Introduction

William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* has attracted the attention of artists,[1] composers and cinematographers for a long time.[2] The semantic versatility of the drama was conducive to the plurality of the interpretation of the issues touched upon in it. Among the most well-known musical interpretations of the play are the operas by Henry Purcell (1695) and Thomas Ades (2004), the final section of Hector Berlioz' monodrama *Lelio ou le retour a la vie* (1831), Pyotr Tchaikovsky's symphonic fantasy (1873), the music for theatrical performances composed by Arthur Sullivan (1861) and Jean Sibelius (1926), and Kaija Saariaho's compilation of songs (1993–2014). The diversity of the musical manifestations of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in Russian musicology is researched in Yaroslava Kabalevskaya's dissertation, [1] and interpretations of separate composers are examined in the articles of Darya Volodyagina, [2] Ekaterina Shapinskaya, [3] Alina Perevalova [4] and many other researchers.

The set of musical-theatrical manifestations of Shakespeare's play has been complemented by Michael Nyman's opera *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs*. However, this composition, famous though it may be, has not yet become a subject of special musicological research, which determines the novelty of the present article.

The works of Michael Nyman encompass various genres. Although the composer acquired the greatest amount of fame in the sphere of the film industry as the creator of the music for Peter Greenaway's pieces, at the present time, a no less significant part of his music is comprised by works for musical theater. Eight operas have been composed by him, and it may be asserted with confidence that the present sphere of genre is considered by Nyman as a field for experimentation. The plotlines for his compositions are unusual; the British master is frequently interested in various types of pathologies. Such is his opera *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1986), based on the story of the illness of Professor P. described by American neurologist Oliver Sacks, or the "opera of ideas" *Facing Goya* (2000), in which the issues of genetics and cloning are connected with research of the personality of genius (for more detail about this see: [5]), or the television opera *Letters, Riddles and Writs* (1991), the plotline of which, on the one hand, is based on Mozart's complex relationship with his father and, on the other hand, touches upon the questions of artistic plagiarism (for more detail about this see: [6]). In this context, Nyman's turning to the classic of English literature seems to be unusual. But this is so only at first glance. The composer's artistic method is defined by the technique of bricolage: when turning to an "alien" text, he deconstructs it, and then reassembles it into a new integrality, seeming to reshape the old meanings and significations (for more detail on this see: [7]). This strategy reveals itself in different ways in the works of the British master. In the opera *Noises*, *Sounds and Sweet Airs*, it characterizes, first of all, the level of work with the libretto, helping reveal the hidden meanings of Shakespeare's text and reevaluate tradition.

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[1] This play by Shakespeare has inspired such well-known artists as William Hogarth, John Everett Millais, and John William Waterhouse.

[2] The first film adaptation of the play appeared in 1905 (created by film producers Herbert Beerbohm Tree and Charles Urban). By the present time, over fifty movies based on this subject have been filmed in Europe and America.

The History of the Creation of the Opera, Interpretation of the Play in Shakespeare Studies

Initially, Nyman's attention to *The Tempest* was instigated by producer Peter Greenaway, with whom in 1990 the composer collaborated in his work on the film *Prospero's Books* (1991)[3]. The film is innovative from the point of view of both the cinematographic techniques and the narrative. It features a combination of many different arts — opera, dance, pantomime, painting, animation, calligraphy, and the use of the newest computer technologies of that time (digital processing of visual depictions).

During the process of work on the soundtrack, Nyman became acquainted with choreographer Karine Saporta,[4] who participated in the production of dances for Greenaway's film. In collaboration, they thought of creating an opera-ballet on the same plotline, having agreed upon absolutely new music. At first, the composition received the title *La Princesse de Milan* (*The Princess of Milan*). Its premiere took place in June 1991 in Hérouville-Saint-Clair (France) in the performance of the chamber orchestra *L'Ensemble de Basse-Normandie*. Later Nyman recalled: "Musically I treated *La Princesse de Milan* as an opera, which is what, in its dance-free existence, it is."[5] In 1993 he renamed his composition into *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs*, and at that time, it was performed without any choreography, as an independently existing opera.

The Tempest presents the crown of Shakespeare's achievement, being his final completed play, written in 1611–1612 and published in the "First Folio," which came out in 1623. In Renaissance literature, this composition was relayed to the genre of comedy, however, starting from the 18th century, it has been customary to consider *The Tempest* as a tragicomedy.

The plotline of the work presents a story of betrayal, retribution and forgiveness, but, in reality, the circle of issues raised in it is more broad: the thirst for power, the power of nature and man, the vices of society, female chastity, the power of love, and the role of art. Following this, it is no wonder that the polyvalent world of the drama has generated a multitude of diverse literary interpretations, in which the play was examined either in light of postcolonial theory, [8] or from the perspective of feminist criticism, or else was interpreted as an allegory of art.

The greatest amount of controversy in Shakespeare studies was aroused by the chief protagonist of *The Tempest* — the sage Prospero, who attempted to immerse himself into the mystery of the universe and to master the laws of nature. He, as a puppeteer, directed all the events of the play, holding in submission both the evil savage Caliban and the noble spirit Ariel. The connections formed in *The Tempest* between Prospero's demiurgic power and theatrical illusion compelled a number of researchers to associate the chief protagonist with Shakespeare himself and to consider his final monologue as the playwright's

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[3] The idea of creating a film based on Shakespeare's play was suggested to Greenaway by British actor and theatrical producer Arthur John Gielgud, who subsequently performed the chief role in the film.

[4] Karine Saporta is a French choreographer, photographer and producer of short films, a representative of the artistic movement "New French Dance." From the second half of the 1990s, she actively collaborated with the Ekaterinburg Ballet Theater, wherein a number of ballets, including *Belle, au bois dormant* and *La Fiancée aux yeux de bois* were produced.

[5] Nyman M. *Noises, Sounds & Sweet Airs*. Argo CD/MC 440 842/2-4. 1994.
URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20080907182001/http://www.michaelnyman.com/disco/34 (accessed: 08.11.2024).

farewell to the theatrical stage. Greenaway relies on this interpretation to a certain point in *Prospero's Books*. In his film, the commentaries of all the actors are uttered by John Gielgud — the performer of Prospero's role. Likewise, the film director makes it clear to the viewer that everything taking place on the screen is carried out in the magician's imagination. In the final scene, Caliban saves from destruction two books, among all those Prospero destroys, — one with Shakespeare's plays and the other with *The Tempest* written by Prospero, which is conducive to the identification of the protagonist with the British playwright.

The interpretation of Prospero's behavior at the end of the play is, likewise, ambivalent in Shakespeare studies. According to the most widespread opinion, his rejection of magic is interpreted as the result of the hero's spiritual enlightenment, as a conscious Christian general pardon. [9, p. 199] According to another angle, virtually all of Prospero's plans (with the exception of the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand) collapse, and he is compelled to forgive his enemies, because he realizes his incapability of struggling against evil. [Ibid., p. 201]

In general, Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, as has been noted before, is frequently regarded by literary scholars as a philosophical allegory, in which the playwright's contemplations about the role of art and science in people's lives and about the means of transformation of the world and society have found their manifestation. It is not by chance that Greenaway, too, accentuates the spiritual component of Shakespeare's play in the title of his film. The crucial place in the movie is taken up by Prospero's library. It is comprised of 24 books, the titles of which remind us of the lost works of the Ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus: the Books of Water, Memory, Architecture, Myths, Death, etc.[6] Undoubtedly, the books are interpreted by the film director as a cultural monument and a symbol of knowledge accumulated by humanity throughout the centuries of its existence. At the end of the film, Prospero destroys his manuscripts, which gave ground for art researchers to interpret his actions as the manifestation of the uselessness and the meaninglessness of art.

However, for Nyman, such a perspective is unacceptable. Starting from his first opera, *The Man who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*[7] the contemplations about the meaning of art in society, as well as the artistic auto-reflection become the meta-themes of the composer's musical-theatrical works (for more detail about this, see: [6]). In this respect, *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs* does not present an exception. Nyman suggests his own rendition of Shakespeare's play.

The Opera's Structure and Dramaturgy

The Tempest consists of five acts, each divided into two or three scenes (an exception to this is the fourth act, which consists of only one scene). Nyman himself assembled the libretto, having taken Shakespeare's text as a basis. At the same time, he shortened the play significantly, having selected the very essence from the lengthy monologues and dialogues. Despite the abridgements, the order of the events was preserved (see the correlation between the structure of Shakespeare's play and the architectonics of the opera in Table 1), however, the fragmented quality

[6] They precede and indicate the themes of the main episodes of the film.

[7] The artistic conception of the composition proceeds from the harmonizing role of music in the life of an ill person.

Table 1. The Correlation of the Compositional Structure of Nyman's Opera *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs* and Shakespeare's Play *The Tempest*

Shakespeare	Act 1		Act 2		Act 3			Act 4	Act 5			
	Scene 1	Scene 2	Scene 1	Scene 2	Scene 1	Scene 2	Scene 3	Scene 1	Scene 1		Epilogue	
Nyman	–	No. 1–6	No. 7–8	No. 9	No. 10	No. 11		No. 12	No. 13	No. 14	No. 15–18	–
	Act 1							Act 2				

of the utterances stipulated the effect of *interrupted narrative*. On the one hand, the abridgments have increased the semantic capacity of the text, which, even prior to that, was distinguished for its high state of metaphoric qualities, on the other hand, they were conducive to the intensification of theatrical conventionality. The deconstruction of the classical source was reflected in the "lacerated" character of the libretto, which largely presented fragments of dialogues and monologues.

The five-act structure of *The Tempest* was transformed by Nyman into a two-act composition. Each of the two acts contained different quantities of numbers: there were 11 in the first act and 7 in the second act.[8] The outer scenes of Shakespeare's play (the first scene of Act 1 and the Epilogue) were omitted by the composer, and the rest he distributed unevenly: some of the scenes contained a rather large amount of numbers (for example, the second scene of Act 1 and the first scene of Act 5), whereas, on the other hand, other scenes were united together into single numbers (for example, the second and third scenes of Act 3). This distribution is stipulated by the particularities of the dramaturgy.

Act 1 demonstrates an exposition of the chief dramatis personae, predominantly, in their interrelations with Prospero: Nos. 1 and 2 show the images of Prospero and Miranda, No. 3 shows Prospero and the spirit Ariel, No. 4 — Prospero and Caliban. Nos. 5 and 6 demonstrate the lyrical sphere, the love scene of Miranda and Ferdinand. Nos. 7 and 8 bring in the figures of the antagonists — Alonso, Gonzalo and Sebastian.

Simultaneously with the exposition of the main dramatis personae, the protasis of the conflict occurs, the development of which begins with No. 9, when Caliban gets in with Prospero's enemies and incites them to kill the magician (No. 11, with which the first act ends). The development of the love story in the play is carried out in No. 10.

No. 12, which opens up Act 2, as can be seen from *Table 1*, is based on the unification of the scenes of Acts 3 and 4 of Shakespeare's play. This is stipulated by the fact that in this number Nyman combines together the various types of trials that the characters go through: thus, Ariel, who appears in the form of a harpy, sends madness to the antagonists, while Ferdinand is instructed to preserve Miranda's innocence before marriage. No. 13 is an inserted number.

[8] The numbers or scenes were titled by the composer following the first lines of their texts.

It is a "masque," the purpose of which was to express by means of an allegory the essence of the author's intentions, in this particular case — to emphasize the value of chastity. Just as in Shakespeare, the scene presents a "text within a text." Three goddesses appear in it — Ceres, Juno and Iris, who extol purity and virtue, both of which are guarantees of a happy marriage.

No. 14 is based on a dialogue between Ariel and Prospero, where the sage acknowledges his lack of ability to humanize Caliban. The crucial and semantic scene for understanding the conception of the entire opera is concentrated in No. 15, which presents Prospero's monologue, in which the latter rejects magic. The fragments selected by Nyman for this text represent his aesthetic position most vividly. The composer noted that music is an inseparable component of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Indeed, the play is saturated by a large quantity of musical episodes (Ariel's songs, the singing of the Greek goddesses, etc.), it speaks about music quite often. When Prospero repudiates his own power as a magician, first of all, he defers to music and its healing impact:

> But this rough magic
> I here abjure; and, when I have required
> Some heavenly music — which even now I do —
> To work mine end upon their senses that
> This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book.[9]

All of this has allowed researchers to label *The Tempest* as "an encyclopedia of musical images and genres." [10, p. 43]

Nyman's Interpretation of Shakespeare's Plotline

The originality of Nyman's interpretation of Shakespeare's text is stipulated by the latter's broad interests in the sphere of art studies and primarily connected with the images of Prospero and Caliban. In the program notes to the CD of the opera released by the *Argo Records* label, the composer indicated that his conception was greatly influenced by Stephen Greenblatt's essay "Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century" [11] and Terence Hawkes' book *Shakespeare's Talking Animals*, [12] in which the play was interpreted not only as the metaphor of artistic creativity, but also in the angle of post-colonialist renditions.

Greenblatt established the close tie of Renaissance literature with perceptions of the surrounding world predominating in the society of that time and, first of all, about the ways of life of the wild tribes discovered during the times of the great geographic discoveries. When presenting numerous testimonies of how the "savages" were described by the conquerors, he became more firmly convinced that their image was perceived primarily through the prism of language. The researcher invoked the conception of Terence Hawkes' book, in which the positions of the playwright and the colonizer were compared. The comparison of their activities was based on the fact that both of them impose both on the enslaved and upon the readers the forms of their own culture, which is manifested in the act of speaking.

According to the authors, the dramatist and the colonizer become merged together in the person of Shakespeare's Prospero, because, on the one hand, behind the guise of the protagonist

[9] Here and onwards, the fragments from Shakespeare's play are cited from the edition: Shakespeare W. *The Tempest*. London: Penguin, 2015. 240 p.

Shakespeare himself is concealed, who guides the fates of his characters, and, on the other hand, the magician takes on the role of an unvarnished colonizer, since by means of his magic he takes over the island and subjugates Caliban. It is indicative that the attempts of domesticating the savage are connected with the attempt of teaching him the language for communication. "I pitied thee, / Took pains to make thee speak," — Prospero says to Caliban, to what the latter replies: "You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse."

Terence Hawkes presumes that the playwright is a colonist in the metaphorical sense: his art permeates into our cultural experience and begins to form the territories of an "alien" culture domesticated in its own image and likeness. However, there are more positive sides in this process than in real colonization, since the playwright's language is conducive to the extension of the boundaries of our culture. Nyman poses the question: "And (again) what is the role of the composer?"[10] the question is, of course, rhetorical, since the behavior of the composer is analogous to the role of the playwright-colonizer.

The specificity of interpretation of Shakespeare's play has led to an ambiguity of genre in the case of Nyman's oeuvre, which essentially acquired the image of a concert composition with voices (as if Shakespeare's play were not staged according to roles, but merely read from the stage). The elimination of the theatrical-stage component, its visual constituent, although was, indeed, stipulated by the transformation of ballet into opera, but, nonetheless, began to be perceived as a principle of a significant absence. As a result of it, the composer concentrated the listener's attention exclusively on the music, not merely by immersing him into "noises, sounds and sweet airs," but also causing him, similar to the playwright-colonizer, to recreate the stage events in his imagination.

Depersonalization

The "minus technique" found a peculiar manifestation in the sphere of performance in terms of vocal depersonalization. The opera is written for three singers (soprano, contralto and tenor) and an ensemble of wind and string instruments. The composer, most likely, was attracted to Greenaway's idea about the timbral-vocal unification of the protagonists, conditioned by the demiurgic interpretation of Prospero's role and his identification with Shakespeare's image. However, Nyman's approach is different. In his opera, the singers' parts are not personalized, all of them, alternatively or simultaneously, may present one and the same protagonist. For example, Prospero's role is sounded out, at alternate times, by the soprano, the alto, the tenor, or by several voices together. The same situation is also intrinsic to the other characters. Thereby, the intentions of the film director and the composer are identical at their basis — both of them rid their heroes of the individual characteristic features of the voices. However, while in Greenaway's film, all the spoken lines in the roles of all the protagonists are pronounced by one actor, in Nyman's music, on the contrary, each one of them is presented by different voices.

According to the composer's conception, the performers primarily bear the function of "carriers of the text," which is especially emphasized in the score: "The three singers are voices rather than roles, carriers of the text rather

[10] Nyman M. *Noises, Sounds & Sweet Airs*. Argo CD/MC 440 842/2-4. 1994.
URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20080907182001/http://www.michaelnyman.com/disco/34 (accessed: 08.11.2024).

than characters."[11] This solution, on the one hand, is conducive to the creation of a special sound landscape, possessing peculiar magic traits, which is inspired by Shakespeare's text itself. It must be reminded that one of Caliban's utterances contain any characterization of the sound magic of the island:

> Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
> Sounds, and sweet airs,
> that give delight, and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears;
> and sometimes voices,
> That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again…

The phrase "noises, sounds, and sweet airs" provided the title for the entire opera.

On the other hand, the vocal depersonalization allows the composer, as paradoxical as it may be, to reveal the plurality of the semantic function of the human voice on stage, as a counterbalance to the connection with theatrical role specialization existent in traditional opera.

Although each character in Nyman's opera possesses different timbral representations, frequently negating his or her gender identity, the composer, nonetheless, did not fully repudiate the traditional assignment of voices. Thus, the analysis of the timbres shows that Miranda's utterances[12] are entrusted predominantly to the female voices — the soprano and the contralto. Only one (in the second scene of the first act), the magician's daughter is sounded out by the tenor voice.[13]

However, in the overwhelmingly large proportions, the timbral discrepancy provides the composer with broad possibilities for demonstrating the semantic polyvalence of the voices formed on the basis of their close connection with the text. For example, Ferdinand's voice during the course of the unfolding of the opera modulates from a low timbre to a high one. For the first time, the king of Naples appears in Scenes 5 and 6, in a duet with Miranda. The voices of both protagonists harmonize with the traditional roles of young lovers: Miranda's role is sung by a soprano (occasionally, by a contralto), while Ferdinand's role is sung by a tenor. Beginning with the tenth scene, and in all of the subsequent scenes (Nos. 12, 17), the prince's utterances are assigned only to female voices (even in the duet with Miranda). Apparently, the change of the protagonist's timbral characteristic feature, acquires a simbolic meaning. Ferdinand's words are permeated with love for the girl and a fascination with her youth and innocence. The female voices, being higher in the pitch continuum, appear as a literal personification of the sublimity of his feelings and the purity of his intentions.

The part of Caliban, whose image is associated with barbarism and boorishness, is always entrusted to a male voice. In Scenes 4, 9, 11 and 18, it is performed by a tenor. An exception is provided by only two phrases. In Scene 4, Prospero accuses Sycorax's son of bearing the intentions of dishonoring Miranda, to which Caliban replies: "Would 't had been done! / Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans." In Scene 11, he instigates Stefano to kill Prospero. When describing the island's magical qualities, Caliban remembers his dreams in which the heavens grant him riches: "I cried to dream

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[11] Nyman M. *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs*: Vocal Score. London: Chester Music Ltd, 2009. P. II.

[12] The heroine appears only in the first act of the opera (in Scenes 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 10).

[13] At Miranda's words "still'tis beating in my mind," the soprano and the tenor sing in octave doubling. Her utterance presents an answer to Prospero, who reminds her that he was her mentor.

again," — Caliban sighs. In both cases, the indicated utterances are entrusted to the soprano. The use of the high-registered voice here acquires a special meaning. Caliban aspires to gain control of the island, he dreams of *elevating himself* and becoming, similar to Prospero, a demiurge-ruler. It is indicative that the utterance from Scene 11 in the soprano part is doubled by the tenor, which signifies the groundlessness and baseness of these desires.

The ethereal spirit of Ariel is expressed by female voices virtually in all of the scenes (Nos. 3, 12, 14 and 16). The choice of the high or middle registers in this case is appropriate, since it associates itself with incorporeity and immateriality. An exception is formed by only a short fragment from Scene 12, wherein Ariel appears in the guise of a harpy and sends curses to Alonso, Sebastian and Gonzalo, prophesying retribution that would descend on their heads. It must be noted that Ariel here is virtually identified with Prospero, which explains the composer's preference for the sound of the tenor voice.

Prospero's voice is the most mobile from the perspective of timbre. The sage participates in almost all the scenes and interacts with all the characters of the play.[14] The timbre of his voice, as shown by analysis, frequently depends on his vis-à-vis. For example, in the dialogues with Miranda, the part of Prospero is almost always sung by the low-registered voices (the contralto or the tenor). At the same time, in some cases, for example, at the beginning of Scene 2), there is a gender-based allotment of the roles, while in other cases (for example, in Scene 1), the combination of the female voices creates the atmosphere of the spiritual unity present between the magician and his daughter. When Prospero exchanges utterances with Caliban, his text is always sounded by a higher-registered voice. It would seem that in providing such an allotment Nyman is guided by the principle of the opposition between the "base" and the "sublime," reflecting it in the corresponding confrontation of the voices.

Thereby, notwithstanding the partial preservations of the traditional timbral role and the gender-based assignment of the roles, this depersonalization in Nyman's role leads to a spreading of the semantic space of the voices, which acquire different semantic interpretations, depending on the context and the situation. For example, the soprano simultaneously personifies incorporeity, supernaturalism, immateriality (Ariel), innocence and beauty (Miranda), sincerity and the poetical quality of feelings (Ferdinand), but also the aspiration towards power, acquiring a parodic tinge, stemming from the base desire to elevate oneself (Caliban). The same way, the tenor also in some cases personifies earthliness and rudeness (in the case of Caliban), and in other cases, serves as the reflection of the role of the hero-lover (Ferdinand) or the magician made wise by experience (Prospero).

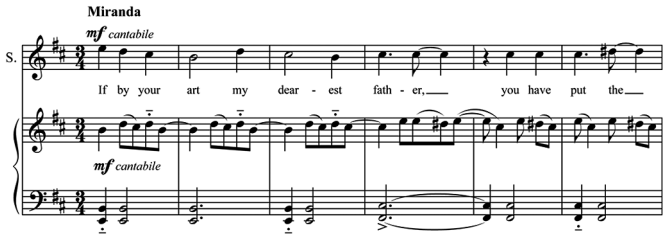
At the same time, in the conditions of the theatrical-stage space, the vocal transformation of the characters, undoubtedly, disorients the listener, generating the effect of an altered state of consciousness. On the one hand, in a like manner, Nyman is able to convey the combination of the real and the fantastic, intrinsic to Shakespeare's play, which generates a surrealist atmosphere. On the other hand, the resultant depersonalization becomes yet another technique that makes it possible to deconstruct not only Shakespeare's source, but also the opera itself as a specific genre, from the times of the birth of which the singing voice has been inseparable from the stage image.

[14] Prospero is absent in Scenes 7, 8, 9, 11 and 13.

The Specificity of the Musical Material

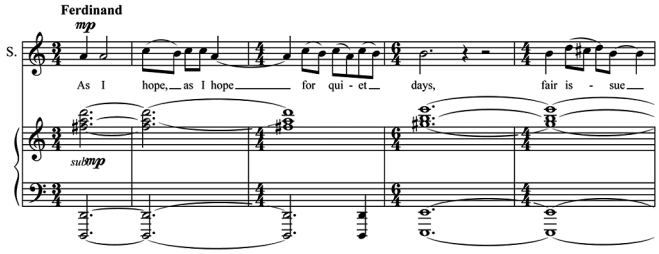
In Nyman's composition there is an absence of an unfolded system of leitmotifs, with the exception of the leit-harmonic progressions, which shall be discussed later. The musical material obtains a through development. However, the composer resorts to repetitions of separate themes creating semantic arches. The opera opens with Miranda's words: "If by your art, my dearest father, you have / Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them," at the same time, in the melodic contours of the accompaniment it is possible to divine the intonations of the intonations of the famous motive "Dies irae" (Example No. 1). Because of the reliance on the perfect fifth in the bass, the motive sounds archaic in its character. The absence of the tertial tone leaves the modal slant as indefinite (the mode may be determined as the pitch E in the Dorian mode or E in the Mixolydian mode). Of course, the "Dies irae" motive, subsequently dissolved in figurations, is interpreted by Nyman not as an image of death, but rather as a symbol of fate. Not only the entire first number, in which Prospero discloses to Miranda the truth of his parentage, is aligned on this material, but also the end of the end of the second number, where the sage thanks generous Fortune for the opportunity to punish his enemies.

Example No. 1 Michael Nyman. *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs.* No. 1, mm. 1–6



Subsequently, the "Dies irae" motive would appear in Scenes 10 and 12, in Ferdinand's part. At the same time, it would already be the modal tint of the Mixolydian major mode that would predominate (Example No. 2). The Prince falls in love with Miranda and swears to guard her innocence.

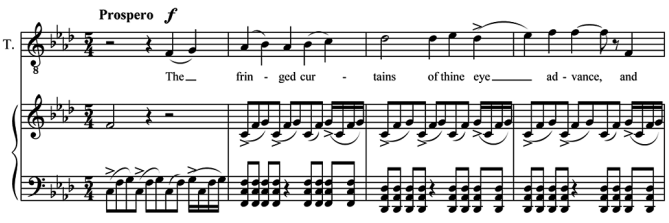
Example No. 2 Michael Nyman. *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs.* No. 12, mm. 110–114



This also provides the material with which the opera concludes. The musical arch formed with the beginning not only endows the composition a compositional eurhythmy, but also indicates at the realization of Prospero's chief intention, connected with his daughter's happiness.

The correlation of the text and the music in the opera is ambivalent. In some cases, it becomes possible to speak of their direct interaction. For example, No. 5 opens with a stepwise ascending melodic line, which then is passed into the part of the tenor, illustrating Prospero's words "The fringed curtains of thine eye advance" (Example No. 3).

Example No. 3 Michael Nyman. *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs.* No. 5, mm. 19–22



In other cases, the music does not correlate emotionally with the text; moreover, there may be a semantic rupture appearing between them. In this regard, No. 7 is very indicative. The aforementioned scene brings in, for the first

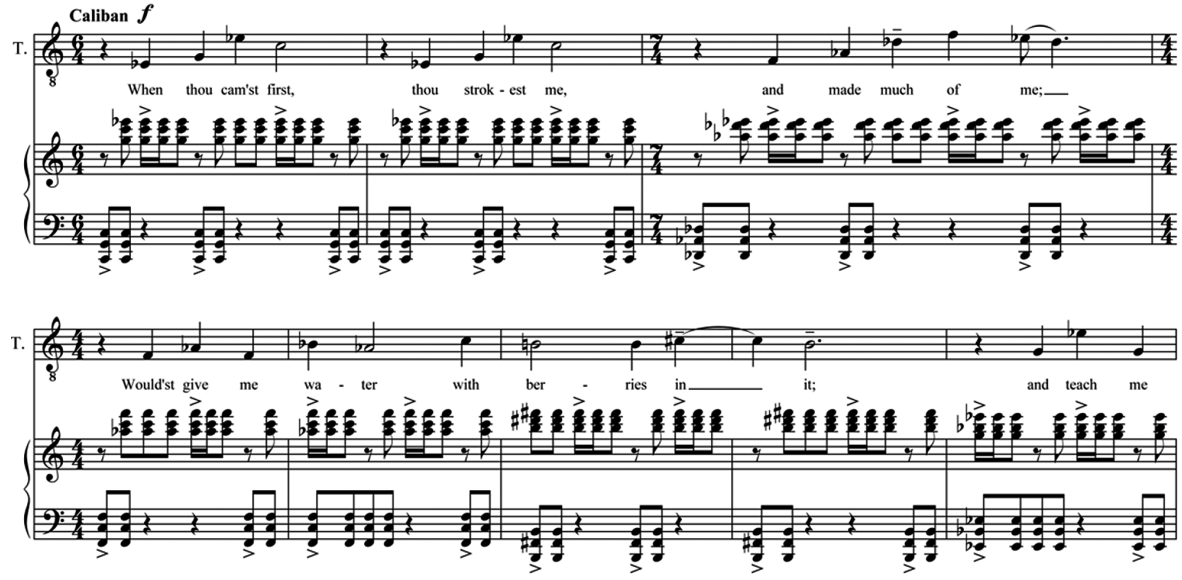
time, the images of the antagonists — Alonso, Gonzalo and Sebastian. While the Neapolitan king is grieving about the presumed death of his son, his companions are amazed at the wonders of the island and start dreaming about how it would be possible to gain possession of it. The music, generally, does not accord with the text. Its basis is comprised by a diatonic golden sequence, associated with Handel's Passacaglia in *G Minor*. The number proper begins as a chain of variations on a ground bass. However, Nyman's music, unlike Handel's, is bereft of any heroic or pathetic qualities, being characterized by a melancholy character. The predominance of female voices only enhances this attribute. It would seem that the semantic rupture between the text and the music here is stipulated by the peculiarities of the dramaturgical conception: the entire course of events is directed by Prospero, "The Tempest" is built up by the powers of his imagination, as the result of which the music rather reflects the secret sorrow of the protagonist who invisibly observes the occurring events.

The musical language of the opera is based on the contrast between diatonic and chromatic harmonies, the simplest functional turns and major-minor. This juxtaposition may be considered to be the reflection of the antagonistic forces personifying order and chaos, hate and love, revenge and forgiveness, and, simultaneously, a peculiar substitution of the opposition between sound and noise present in the title of the composition.

Thus, diatonic harmonies predominate in Prospero's dialogues with Miranda and Ferdinand (for example, the basis on the Dorian and Mixolydian modes in No. 1, on the Phrygian mode in Nos. 2 and 4, etc.). the accompaniment of their parts is based rather frequently on simple functional progressions of correlations of perfect fourths and fifths, or otherwise it emphasizes the melodic connection between the tones, which is intrinsic to modality. All of this induces us to interpret diatonic harmony as a symbol of purity of the protagonists' feelings and intentions, their simplicity and sincerity, the strictness of their upbringing.

The chromatic harmony characterizes, first of all, the musical language of Caliban. His utterances are rather frequently accompanied by progressions of chords of major thirds and tritones of the major and minor keys: C, D-flat, F, B, E-flat, A (Example No. 4).

Example No. 4 Michael Nyman. *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs*. No. 4, mm. 48–55



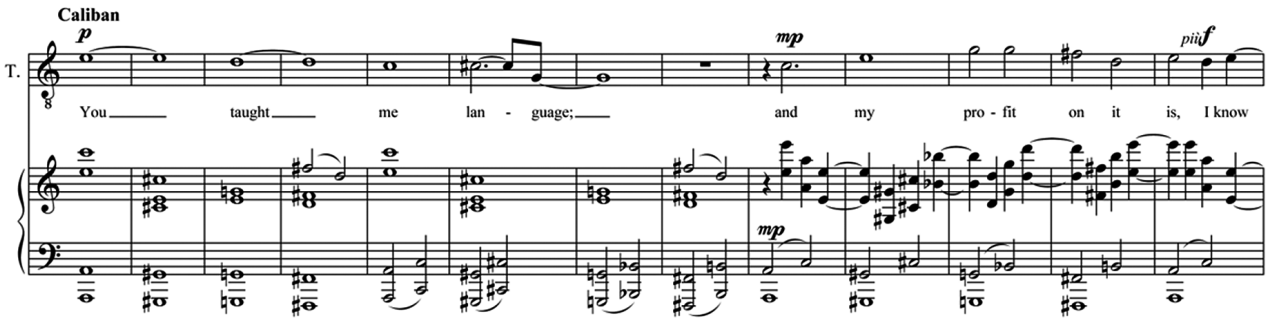
It must be noted that here Nyman used musical material from his previous composition: the present chain of chords (in the same duration and in the same sequence, only with minor nuances having to do with the change of mode in certain chords) comprise the foundation of the opera *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. On its basis, the idea of "harmonic identity" was incorporated: the appearance of the progression signalized the recognition of customary things on the part of Professor P., while its deconstruction and destruction signified the incapability of their identification. In a similar manner, Nyman manifested the peculiarities of the visual perception of the protagonist, who due to his illness viewed the world not the same way as it was perceived in the eyes of other people.

In the opera *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs*, Nyman works with the aforementioned harmonic progression in a different manner. Very frequently he transposes it, changes the modes of the chords, makes use of different inversions of triads, enhancing the chromatic entity of the harmony. Especially exhibitory in this regard is the moment when Caliban accuses Prospero of what Stephen Greenblatt called "linguistic colonialism" (Example No. 5).

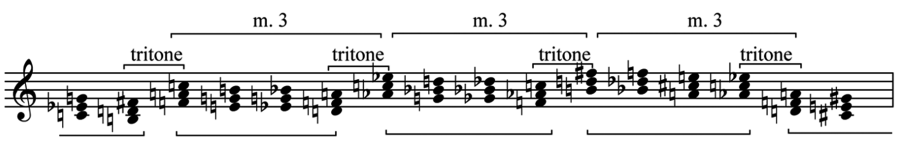
Upon first glance, the connection of such dissimilar characters a Professor P. and Caliban with the aid of a common harmonic progression seems unusual. At the same time, this sheds light on the composer's interpretation of the image of Caliban. For Nyman, the savage man does not present a univocally negative character. Just as Professor P., he is endowed with *his own* perspective of life on the island, albeit, a distorted one — a life, in which, it must be noticed, he drags a slavish existence, because of Prospero.

At the end of Shakespeare's play, the sage admits: "this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine," which returns us, once again, to the conception that likens the playwright to a colonizer. It must be noted that the image of Prospero in the musical relation turns out to be ambivalent. Unlike the dialogues with Miranda and Ferdinand, where diatonic harmonies predominate, the magician's crucial monologue in No. 15, in which he renounces magic, is saturated with chromaticism. The scene presents variations on a harmonic progression of chords presenting correlations of minor seconds aligned together as links of sequences with minor-third steps (Example No. 6).

Example No. 5 Michael Nyman. *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs*. No. 4, mm. 125–137



Example No. 6 Michael Nyman. *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs*. No. 15. Scheme of the Harmonic Progressions



The relationship of this progression with the chain of chords associated with Caliban is all too apparent. It is provided by the tritone-based connections between the tones, the tertial step of the links of the sequence, and the chromatic motion. It is true, however, that in Caliban's harmonic progression there were major-third relationships incorporated, whereas the chromatic progression was created not by all the voices, but only by the bass (see: Example No. 5). Nonetheless, this does not prevent us from seeing the connection between the characters emerged on a harmonic level.

Conclusion

To sum up, it must be noted that the opera based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* turned out to be, in all likelihood, the most radical musical-theatrical composition in Nyman's entire output. The libretto's "ruptured" quality, the lack of scenography, the "separateness" of the voices from the roles, which reflected the composer's deconstructivist approach, have instated its genre-related peculiarity and inimitability. The elimination of the components that are most important for opera as a synthetic whole has made it possible to reveal the implications and hidden meanings in Shakespeare's play, its surrealistic atmosphere and theatrical conditionality and, at the same time, to destroy the formed stereotypes of perception of classical works. The exclusion of the kinetic and visual modalities, the periodically occurring semantic rupture between the text and the music were conducive to the concentration of attention on the musical component of the opera text, while the appearance of the self-referencing material broadened the composition's semantic space.

Reflections on the nature of creativity and the social role of art, as has been noted before, present a meta-theme for all of Nyman's works for the musical theater. *The Tempest*, which has accumulated in itself Shakespeare's entire artistic experience, provided the composer with a new impulse for such reflections. When comparing the playwright (composer) with the colonizer, the British author, as it would seem, comprehends the problem of the artist's responsibility towards society that is hardly a new one. The originality of his deconstructivist approach is connected with the denunciation not only of theatrical conventionalities, but also of the illusory quality of the faith in the self-supportability of our cultural experience. By proclaiming the priority of hearing over the other senses, by destroying the stereotypes of perception, Nyman provides the listener with the key to a new and, perhaps, more genuine understanding of the conception of Shakespeare's play.

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Information about the authors:

Ekaterina G. Okuneva — Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor at the Department of Music Theory and Composition, Petrozavodsk State A. K. Glazunov Conservatoire, Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation.

Anastasiya A. Nogovitsyna — Undergraduate Student at the Department of Music Theory and Composition, Petrozavodsk State A. K. Glazunov Conservatoire, Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation.

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