Baroque Music: Importance of Reconstructing Early Opera

Critical Analysis Paper for Completing the Picture: the Importance of Reconstructing Early Opera

Frans and Julie Muller identified the primary challenges associated with the reconstruction of early opera performances. The importance of these reconstructions could hardly be questioned as they may shed light on the complexity, meaning, perception, and impact of the early opera performances. Taking these aspects into consideration will demonstrate how the original operas were performed, and that would attract audiences who are interested in experiencing an original recreated opera performances. That would encourage investors to recreate such work and would interest people like the stage and opera historians, theater practitioners, opera admirers, musicians, art critics, and artists who are fascinated by reconstructing those operas. Nevertheless, the opera historians and artists are those for whom the topic implies the most notable importance as these people define the way opera art is represented, perceived, and developed in the modern world.

Analyzing the article, I realized that many early opera reconstructions performed worldwide might actually turn out to be critically inaccurate. As a result, the large audiences could obtain a wrong perception of the way opera was performed, for example, in the 17th-century England. Before reading the article, I have never considered the fact that the task of reproducing these operas “is notoriously troublesome because of the lack of pictorial evidence.” As Muller explains that the opera librettos which means ‘little books’ and scores, “lack the visual component, dance, costume, scenery and lighting.” The lack of academic and public interest towards the early opera and Baroque music, in particular, represent the major reason contributing to the difference between the widely dominated conventions and the real facts about early opera.

One of the main assumptions made by the authors implies that “the tension between academic stage history and productions based on reconstructions (few and far between, alas) is caused by the need for proof.” In Muller’s article, they write about how education and the study of academic historical resources may help in reconstructing some operas from stage decor to costumes. The authors explain how the reconstruction of Purcell’s The Fairy Queen, based on A Midsummer Night’s Dream by Shakespeare. “Queen Mary had a collection of Chinese porcelain and Delftware …. predominantly blue and white.” The historical information majorly contributed into recreating stage decor of the anniversary of the royal wedding in the late 17th century.

This notion forced me to reconsider the dilemmas that the opera directors and artists have to face nowadays. The major dilemma implies the choice between making performance more conservative and in-comprehensive, yet historically accurate or filling the evidence gap with one's personal vision and artistic ideas. In this regard, I totally share the author's appeal to the need for modern artists, directors, and musicians to pay more time and effort for researching the available opera-related primary sources. Relying on some few surviving painting of the English theatre showing actors costumes “influenced by contemporary dress at the French court.”

The inferences I can make after reading the article stem primarily from the changed perception of the role initial research plays in the classical music and opera studies. What I found is that each opera reconstruction and Baroque music performance should be evaluated critically to find out whether the artists are relying mainly on the primary sources or filling in the gaps with their own perceptions and interpretations because “a production based on research … can never be more than historically ‘informed’, rather than absolutely accurate.” The reliability of inferences made based on the article is reinforced by the firm scholarship and academic renown of the authors. Frans and Julie Muller are fairly referred to the world's leading experts in the European Baroque music and early opera art.

Speaking of the research that could be elaborated based on the text, I would primarily emphasize the importance to continue the study of the secondary sources like the artists' correspondence as it may also shed light on the understudied aspects of the early opera. Looking towards my future studies, I would also like to concentrate on researching the primary and secondary sources that uncover the way Baroque music was performed in the time it was created. It would be a unique experience to be able to witness an authentic opera performance with the costumes, scenery and stage settings that are original as much as the music itself. For those who would question the need for such research, I would argue that the role of scenery and costume in early Baroque musical performances was not less important than in the opera art.

Bibliography

1. Muller, Frans, and Julie Muller. 'Completing the Picture: The Importance of Reconstructing Early Opera.' Early Music 33, no. 4 (2005): 667-82.