

From "jarring" Jarry to "pendent" Penderecki: Opera in a state of shock - A presentation of Krzysztof Penderecki's opera *Ubu Rex*, after Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*

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Abstract

An unprecedented theatrical scandal broke out in Paris, in 1896, on the opening night of *Ubu roi* by Alfred Jarry: Ubu, the grotesque protagonist, kills the King of an imaginary Poland and usurps the throne. The audience is shocked by the uttering of the opening line, "merdre" ("shite") and by the author's will to provoke. Since then, *Ubu roi* has been considered the first avant-garde, uncompromising, revolutionary play, which later proved prophetic. During the 20th century, Ubu was incarnated by such terrifying personalities as Franco, Stalin, Hitler and other political leaders from the East European block. Hence, audiences and creators discovered in *Ubu roi* a subversive political allegory. After nearly a century, in 1972, Krzysztof Penderecki and his librettist, Jerzy Jarocki, create *Ubu Rex*, an opera based on Jarry's play, the latter being censored by the Polish communist regime for being an "anti-Polish satire". Penderecki's project causes a violent political campaign and, for this reason, the opera's creators have to wait for almost twenty years to see it staged. This *opera buffa* is finally produced for the first time in Munich in 1991. It is only after the fall of the regime that a staging takes place on Polish soil (Lodz, 1993). In this paper we will examine the notion of shock - a characteristic of the avant-garde movement - and in what means Penderecki uses it in order to denounce the social and political conditions of his time. We will focus firstly on the libretto and the changes added by Jarocki in order to underline a commentary on communist and post-communist Poland. Secondly, we will present the experimental style in the music: a mixture of references to older musical styles and to his own compositions, a sort of mockery of both the classical forms, and those of the avant-garde.

CVs

Georgia Kondyli (Musicologist). She graduated from the Faculty of Musical Studies of the Ionian University (1999). As a scholarship holder by the Michelis Foundation, she obtained a Master's Degree in "Aesthetics, Technology and Artistic Creation", specialising in "Music-Musicology" at the Paris VIII University in France (2000). In 2005 she obtained a PhD from the University of Tours (France). She has given lectures and has published articles in research reviews. She has taught in primary education (2005-2006), in public Institutes of Professional Training (2008-2009), and lectured at the Faculty of Theatre Studies of the University of Peloponnese (2005-2007). She is currently Adjunct Lecturer at the Faculty of Theatre Studies of the University of Patras and at the Technological Institute of Education of Music Technology and Acoustics in Rethymnon.

Athena Stourna (theatre designer and theatre researcher). Born in Flemington NJ, USA. She received a BA (Hons) in Theatre Design from Rose Bruford College and a BA (Hons) and an MA in Theatre Studies from the Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle University, where she is currently completing her PhD thesis entitled « Kitchen, cooking, and the stage: performances and convivialities in the 20th century theatre until today ». She has collaborated with theatre reviews and editions and has taught Scenography at the Universities of Peloponnese and Patras. She has worked as a theatre designer and assistant in London, Paris, New York and Athens. Since 2007 she is founder and artistic director of Okypus Theatre Company.