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**«Джованна Д'Арко» Дж.Верди и «Орлеанская дева» П.И. Чайковского:  
сравнительный анализ**

**A comparative study of Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco* and Tchaikovsky's *The Maid  
of Orleans***

**Аннотация**

Статья посвящена сравнительному исследованию двух опер, написанных на один сюжет: «Джованна Д'Арко» Дж. Верди и «Орлеанская дева» П.И. Чайковского. Размышляя о ключевых различиях композиторских прочтений истории Жанны Д'Арк, автор исследует культурно-исторический контекст создания опер и определяет его влияние на изучаемые произведения.

**Abstract**

The article presents a comparative study of two operas on the same subject: Tchaikovsky's *The Maid of Orleans* and Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco*. Revealing principal differences in the

composers' treatment of the plot, the author explores historic and cultural background that affects the operatic versions of the story of Joan of Arc.

**Ключевые слова:** Жанна Д'Арк, опера, Чайковский, Верди

**Keywords:** Joan of Arc, opera, Tchaikovsky, Verdi

When faced with two operas that are based on the same stage play, feature the same main characters and are composed in relatively the same time period, one naturally expects them to provide a similar interpretation of the same story. Yet a dramatic surprise awaits a listener who will engage in comparing Giuseppe Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco* and Petr Tchaikovsky's *The Maid of Orleans*: these two operas are very far from being two different musical narrations of the same plot; rather, they present two distinctly different versions of the story of the French national heroine. The purpose of this article is to research the possible reasons of such a drastic difference in the two operatic interpretations of Friedrich Schiller's play. Obviously, we shall attempt to look for explanations that lie beyond the evident individuality of the composers' musical language.

It seems reasonable to begin with a brief outline of the major variations of the storyline in the two works we are taking in consideration here. We may say that the two corner stones of any operatic narration are love and death, and it is in fact the treatment of these two aspects of Joan of Arc's life that arouses most questions in this comparative analysis.

First, let us have a closer look at the treatment of the love line in both operas. Tchaikovsky remained faithful to Schiller's narration of the sudden love that struck Joan on the battlefield. Verdi, or, more precisely, his librettist Temistocle Solera, has eliminated the character of Lionel, the knight Joan fell in love with, and has offered a love story between the heroine and King Charles. Strangely enough, this outrageously unhistorical change has been well received by some critics: "Joan's sudden infatuation on the battlefield for Lionel (which

somebody has called “one of the most idiotic episodes ever invented”, and which even Schiller’s title of *Romantische Tragödie* will scarcely explain away) has been changed by the librettist into an infatuation for Charles. Some have considered this an improvement on the original” [Keys, 1960: 229]. Apparently, the love story as it was presented in the play was too vague to go in line with the traditions of the well-established Italian musical dramaturgy, which implied a love story at the center of any operatic plot in opera seria. However, due to this alteration, the central internal conflict of Joan has shifted from the spiritual dimension to the earthly struggle of a loving heart, which is torn between the father and the beloved.

In Tchaikovsky’s opera the love story remains unaltered and, in comparison with Verdi’s work, underdeveloped. Love strikes the main heroine in the midst of the battle and provokes an internal burden of violating the vow of chastity she had given before. There is no actual violation of the vow, but the feeling that grows in Joan’s heart makes her believe she has committed a terrible sin. Tchaikovsky focuses mostly on the internal conflict that troubles the heroine, Lionel’s love being merely a setting for the internal drama of Joan’s heart. Once again we may trace the roots of this particular treatment of a love story in the lore of the national operatic school: Russian opera, unlike the Italian opera, did not have strictly developed rules and prescriptions concerning musical dramaturgy. It is quite common for Russian opera to adhere to patriotic, spiritual and psychological dimensions, which sometimes tend to overshadow the lyrical element (e.g. Glinka’s *Life for the Tsar*, or Moussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*).

The climax of Tchaikovsky’s opera is definitely the death of Joan. While Verdi remains loyal to Schiller’s termination of Joan’s life in the battle, where she is once again restored to her previous glory, Tchaikovsky does not go along with this idealistic view of Joan’s reinstatement to common adoration and reverence. The Russian composer remains faithful to the historical truth and has Joan die in a bonfire. He was probably too impressed with the actual death of his heroine to accept a happy ending. “Last night I was reading a book on Joan of Arc... when I arrived at the process, *abjuration* and the actual execution (she was screaming all the time, while

they were leading her to the execution, and she was begging them that they would cut her head off instead of burning her), I couldn't stop crying. I felt so sorry for her; I felt an incredible pain for the humanity, an inexplicable anguish took over me" (Tchaikovsky, 2004). The bonfire scene in the opera, however, does not sound desperately tragic. Tchaikovsky makes us understand that although Joan's body may be suffering, her spirit is finally liberated of the internal torment of her sin that she couldn't live with. The operatic maid of Orleans does not scream in terror, when led to the bonfire. She accepts her fate with dignity and finally comes to peace with God and with herself. The peace descends upon her with the beautiful melody of the choir of angels.

It is interesting to investigate the religious dimension of both operas. Tchaikovsky offers a deep exploration of Joan's internal struggle, first between her obedience to God's calling and her love to the homeland she has to leave, then between her love for Lionel and the notion of its sinfulness. In the opera's finale the composer strongly dwells upon the idea of purification through suffering, glorifying the martyr death of his heroine and granting her forgiveness and peace. Although some critics (Taruskin, 1990; Parin, 1999) tend to diminish the significance of religious ideas in *The Maid of Orleans*, I do believe that the central conflict of the opera is clearly of a religious character and any attempt to eliminate it would harm the understanding of Tchaikovsky's interpretation of Joan of Arc.

While Tchaikovsky states clearly that the voices in Joan's head were of divine origin, Verdi puts his heroine in between two alternating choirs: that of the angels and of the demons. It is essential to remember that the opera was composed in 1845, 75 years before the canonization of Joan of Arc, therefore open expressions of her affiliation with the divine might have caused Solera and Verdi problems with religious censorship. In fact, the opera was subjected to a number of changes by the censors. For instance, all the explicit references to God and Virgin Mary on the part of Giovanna had to be eliminated. Francesco Izzo suggests that such measures could be dictated not only by religious reverence, but also by political disapproval of the idea that the "revolutionary" character of Giovanna could be led by God (Izzo, 2007). Thus, the

religious conflict in Giovanna D'Arco is definitely not developed to the fullest and lies not so much between God's will and the heroine's consciousness, but between the two forces that seem to be taking possession of her soul and tearing it apart.

This brief overview of the principal differences in Tchaikovsky's and Verdi's interpretations of the story of Joan of Arc reveals that the reasons for drastic alterations of both the original source of the libretto (Schiller's play) and the historical truth often lie beyond individual expressions of creativity. Both interpretations were strongly affected by the peculiarities of national operatic schools. The focused attention on the spiritual world of the heroine in Tchaikovsky's case takes roots in the first Russian operas and flourishes in the later works of Moussorgsky (*Khovanshina*) and Rimsky-Korsakov (*Kitezh*) and Tchaikovsky himself (*Iolanta*). The essentially elaborate love affair, the focus on external rather than internal conflicts, the opposition of filial and marital love in Verdi's opera originate from the conventions of Italian *opera seria*, which had many distinctive demands for the musical dramaturgy. Besides, its constant subjection to religious censorship has almost eliminated elaborate religious references from the operatic stage, thus leaving open the question of Joan's affiliation with divine or demonic powers. As we can see, cultural background often affects individual interpretations of plots and characters, prompting the authors to create images that may scarcely be recognized as two artistic treatments of the same story.

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