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## **“Let there be Love in the world!”. Meeting on the border of two eras in Vitaly Gubarenko’s opera *Remember Me***

This article is dedicated to history of creation of author’s versions of the opera by the Ukrainian composer Vitaly Gubarenko (Vitaly Hubarenko, [ISO 9: ukr. Vitalij Gubarenko], 1934–2000). Its literary basis was the play *Nightingale Night* by the Soviet screenwriter and playwright Valentin Yezhov ([ISO 9: rus. Valentin Ežov], 1921–2004). The opera was written in the first half of the 1970s and exists in three author’s versions. The first of them was completed only in the piano score and was not orchestrated. It was named *The First Commandment*, a lyric drama in three acts, six scenes with a choral Epigraph (1972). The second, entitled *The Returned May*, is a lyrical drama in two parts and seven scenes (1973–74). The third is a lyrical short story in four scenes *Remember Me* (1977).

The figure of the author of the literary source deserves a more detailed consideration. The name of Valentin Yezhov became popular thanks to the film *The Ballad about a Soldier*, which in 1959 was shot according to his script by the talented director and co-author Grigory Chukhraj ([ISO 9: rus. Grigorij Čuhraj], 1921–2001). The film received many awards, including the highest award that existed in the USSR – the Lenin Prize. This film became a new word in the interpretation of the military theme that was popular in Soviet art. Instead of the pathos of heroic battles and the victorious conclusion of the four-year military confrontation between the Soviet Union and Germany on the fronts of World War II, this film was about a small and purely personal episode from the life of an ordinary nineteen-year-old soldier Alyosha Skvortsov. In a bloody battle in which all his comrades were killed, Alyosha managed to knock out two tanks. For this, instead of the reward he asked to let him go home for a few days to see his mother and help her fix the roof of the house. The main plot of the film uncovers during the journey of a young soldier from the front line to the rear. During this short time, he experienced a whole life full of various events and meetings. He saw the other side of the war, which invades the destinies of people and destroys them. He learned how civilians endure the misfortunes that have fallen to their lot, what consequences the war leaves in human souls. He had a chance to meet both human dignity, loyalty, goodness, and baseness, opportunism.

The main adventure on his way was the appearance in a closed freight car, which he barely managed to get on, of an unfamiliar girl. When she saw that she was alone with an unexpected companion, she experienced severe stress and in panic fear tried to jump off the train at full speed. The acute dramatic situation that arose at the beginning of their acquaintance, in the process of the trials that they experienced together, was replaced by trust, mutual sympathy, the birth of the first timid feeling. They had to part ways before the final goal of the soldier’s

protracted journey home approached. War is a time of parting, despair, expectation and hope. The desired meeting of the hero of the film with his mother turned out to be so short that it immediately became both a meeting and a separation. From the text framing the film, as well as from the first frames, we learn that the soldier died, that he was no longer destined to return to his native village.<sup>1</sup>

The hero of the next work by Valentin Yezhov, the play *Nightingale Night*, which became the literary basis of three opera projects by Vitaly Gubarenko, soldier Pyotr Borodin can be called Alyosha Skvortsov from *The Ballad about a Soldier*, who has matured by two years. Pyotr was lucky to reach the end of the war and find himself in the victorious days of May 1945 in a small German town of the Soviet occupation zone. From the text of the play, we learn that the city was badly damaged as a result of American bombing. Peaceful life in it is just beginning to improve. But the young soldiers, together with Pyotr, already feel its breath and rejoice at the silence that has come, the opportunity to return from the words of wartime to forgotten words and concepts. The choral epigraph of the first version of the opera was sustained in the spirit of unhurried meditation and began with the words “How difficult it is for us to get used to silence ...”. The second and third versions also opened with a choral epigraph, but of a different, victorious hymn character “The war is over!” The chorus “How difficult it is for us to get used to the silence” sounded here before the second picture. In all three versions, choral episodes and the inclusion of choral lines in the course of action were interpreted as commentaries in the spirit of choirs in ancient tragedy (Example 1 and 2).

In the first scenes, it becomes clear that Pyotr knows German, so he is used as a translator when communicating with local residents. Soldiers are released into town on their first leave of absence. Lieutenant Fedorovsky remains on duty in the military unit. As it turns out later, this is the main antagonist of the protagonist, a cynical and vindictive man. It is in his hands that the fate of Pyotr unexpectedly turns out to be. And he takes the opportunity to describe in the most unfavorable light the offense of Pyotr, who did not return from his dismissal at the appointed time. The reason for the delay, deliberately made by Pyotr, was his meeting in the park with a German girl Inga. At first, she accepted the Soviet soldier, who wandered alone around the ruined old tower, as a mortal enemy, guilty of all the troubles that befell her. On the eastern front, her father was killed, her home was destroyed in the bombing, and her mother and sister were killed. Germany lies in

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<sup>1</sup> The plot of this film and the image of the hero can evoke associations with the famous novel by the French writer Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt *Oscar and the Pink Lady* (2002). It is not about war, but about a boy who has cancer and is doomed to a short life, and at the same time knows that his life will soon end. But thanks to the Pink Lady (grandmother Rose), the woman who helped fill this short term with great meaning, he managed to live it richly and fully. A similar situation is recreated in the movie *The Ballad about a Soldier*. We can say that the experience gained by the hero during his short vacation in the midst of the merciless wartime was enough for a whole rich life, which was cut short on the battlefields.

## Интерлюдия

Sostenuto assai *p* 89

Хор Б.

Как труд - но

при - вы - жать нам к ти - ши - не, че - ты - ре го - да

Example 1. A choral epigraph of the first version.

ruins. And she is ready to die at the hands of this barbarian when she cries out to him with hatred right in his face: “Kill as you killed my Germany, my homeland”.

The first meeting of young people, as we see, turns out to be as dramatically tense as the meeting between Alyosha Skvortsov and Shura in the film *The Ballad of a Soldier*. Only in the play is the situation significantly *exacerbated*. Inga and Peter belong to two opposing camps, to two forces whose deadly battle has just ended. We can turn to literary traditions and find parallels of the plot construction of the play with known sources. In the interpretation of the theme of love, which grows out of the enmity that preceded it, the plot model of *Romeo and Juliet* is recognized. In particular, the arrangement of the characters coincides. Lieutenant Fedorovsky plays the role of an aggressive-minded Tybalt. When, in search of the missing soldier, he saw him in the park, sleeping next to an unfamiliar German girl, he did not want to listen to Pyotr’s explanations, but immediately interpreted

*Марше Черкашинеї*  
**ПОМНИ МЕНЯ**  
Op. 19  
Эпиграф В. Губаренко

**Allegretto** (♩ = 112)

Example 2. A choral epigraph of the second and third version.

this scene in his own way. A clash between them was inevitable. But at the same time, the junior in rank raised his hand against the elder who had offended his companion. Pyotr's guilt was thereby aggravated. Let us recall the scene in George Bizet's *Carmen*. José's clash with Zuniga made it impossible for him to return to the army, as a result of which he, unwillingly, found himself among the smugglers.

In the play by V. Yezhov there is not only his own version of Tybalt, but also a character whose function coincides with the role of Father Lorenzo in *Romeo and Juliet*. This is Colonel Lukyanov. Wise with years and life experience, he is well versed in people, understands the motives of the act of Pyotr Borodin, a soldier guilty of violating military discipline. Lukyanov realized that Peter was able to overcome the stereotypes of wartime and defend the German girl. Lukyanov also recognized the base nature of the vengeful Fedorovsky. Like the hero of Shakespeare, Father Lorenzo, Colonel takes the liberty of saving a hopeless situation with an unexpected decision. Despite the fact that at the suggestion of Fedorovsky, the order of the high commander has already been given to declare Pyotr's act an emergency, that is, a war crime, Lukyanov decides to take a non-standard step. Instead of putting the culprit under arrest, he sends him with a group of demobilized Soviet soldiers to his homeland. At the same time, we understand that he is risking his own career and head.

Inga and Peter, like the heroes of the film *The Ballad about a Soldier*, are forced to be separated. But the first feeling they experienced has a special meaning. These are those new relationships that mean the victory of the highest humanity and universal human values. Such relationships were born in the crucible of confrontation and enmity, on the ruins of lives destroyed by the war. These are the sprouts of a new world outlook, which has yet to establish itself in post-war Europe.

The play by V. Yezhov appeared in the USSR at the very end of the era, which came after the then main figure of the country Nikita Khrushchev exposed the personality cult of Stalin and was called the '*Khrushchev thaw*'. It was associated with the weakening of ideological pressure on the art of party ideology.

On the stages of most drama theaters in the country, *Nightingale Night* was actively staged in the next decade, although the political atmosphere at that time has changed a lot. A protest movement emerged, and the response was political arrests. In Ukraine, protests against violent Russification in defense of national independence have become more frequent.

In other republics and in theaters in Russia, *Nightingale Night* was actively performed in the 1970s. In Ukraine, it was included in the list of ideologically not entirely reliable works and was not recommended for performances. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian composer Vitaly Gubarenko received an order to create an opera on its basis from the USSR Ministry of Culture and its repertoire and editorial board. The composer himself and the poet Roman Levin began to work on the libretto. From the very beginning, the decision arose to combine in the libretto

a prose text taken from the play and poetic episodes, which should be used mainly in choral scenes.

The creation of the libretto turned out to be a complex and lengthy process. In the personal archive of the composer, several preliminary versions of it have been preserved, which show what was the main problem. It consisted in the need to organically combine contrasting stylistic layers. The lyrical line was presented in the play, surrounded by everyday life and genre scenes. They conveyed the atmosphere of a special time of transition from war to peace, when the old and new sense of life coexist and come into conflict. Colonel Lukyanov is trying to comprehend this global conflict in his own way and foresee the ways of its resolution, and his image becomes important in the ideological concept of the composition.

The composer Vitaly Gubarenko was attracted primarily by the lyrical plot of the play and its chamber character. Opera preconditions were manifested in the literary source through an obvious connection with the genre traditions of French lyric opera, the basis of which was the development of love feelings and a reflection of the dynamics of the states of mind of the protagonists. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the parallels with which were discussed above, the long-standing enmity between the two Veronese families acquired an irrational character and is supported only by inertia. Here the guilt is distributed equally, there is no preponderance of one of the parties and there is no difference in the moral assessment of their actions. Therefore, the atmosphere of such enmity, devoid of any logical reasoning, did not have time to touch the attitude towards the world and the hearts of the main characters. It is different in *Nightingale Night*, where there are winners and losers, an aggressor and a victim of aggression. At the same time, analogies arise not with the lyrical opera genre, but with historical plots and with military conflicts, in which representatives of one of the parties defend their land from enemy invasion and gain not only a military, but also a moral victory. From the very beginning, the soldier of the victorious army, Pyotr Borodin, is in a different moral and psychological state than the German girl Inga, who lost not only her family and her home, but lost all life support, including Germany as a shield and support.

We can say that the meeting of lyrical heroes takes place at a moment that will come for Juliet only when she learns that Romeo killed her cousin Tybalt, that is, he became a real enemy of her family. However, at this time, she not only loves Romeo, but she connected her life with him forever. In Shakespeare's tragedy among two lovers, Juliet plays a more active role from beginning to end. In the plot chosen for the opera by Vitaly Gubarenko, at the beginning of their acquaintance, it is Pyotr who makes a decisive act, which comes as a surprise to Inga and makes it possible to look differently at the one whom she initially perceived as a mortal enemy. It is interesting that Peter's unexpected decision to give Inga an automatic weapon as a weapon of murder and reprisal against the enemy has an analogue in the first act of Richard Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. Tristan did the same when he offered Isolde his sword, with which he had killed her fiancé Morolt. In both cases, in this way, it was supposed to check the validity of an

unambiguous attitude towards the partner as a mortal enemy and start a dialogue with him.

For the sake of Inga, the mistrust and fear of which Pyotr managed to overcome, he did not return on time to the military unit from the leave. Such violation of the charter could be regarded as a crime and lead to capital punishment. Colonel Lukyanov took over the protection of the soldier, as it was already mentioned. However, his image turned out to be too schematic both in the play and in the two multi-act versions of the opera. The episodes in which the figures of an independently-minded Colonel and the cynical, vengeful lieutenant Fedorovsky were in direct opposition were artistically unequal in comparison with the lyrical scenes. The soldier Borodin rebuffed the latter, guided not by the military regulations, but by the universal laws of honor. The act of Colonel Lukyanov, who helped Pyotr to avoid punishment, was perceived by the party ideologists of that time in two ways. During the writing of the opera, the authors had to overcome the obvious shortcomings of the selected dramatic material, as well as the pressure of harsh party censorship.

Customers of the composition from the collegium of the USSR Ministry of Culture sharply criticized the first version of the opera presented in the clavier. In a letter to Vitaly Gubarenko and Roman Levin dated January 17, 1973, they wrote:

In the opera, unfortunately, you made an undesirable deviation towards some kind of abstract humanism..... It is only one step from abstract humanism to the Christian preaching of forgiveness, the call to ‘love your neighbor’, again an abstract ‘neighbor’, since the Christian religion teaches that ‘all people are brothers’. An element of this religious morality, which is alien to us, is felt in Inga’s final prayer against the background of the choir, in the text of the chorus in the fourth scene, and finally, in the title of the opera, as you know, the first church commandment reads ‘Thou shalt not kill’), with which we also cannot agree.<sup>2</sup>

After a significant revision of the libretto and the creation of the second edition of the musical text, the opera was named *The Revived May*. Its premiere took place on the stage of the Lviv Opera and Ballet Theater on July 11, 1974. However, after three screenings, the play was removed from the repertoire by order of the Lviv Department of Culture, the head of which regarded the composition as ideologically harmful. However, the negative assessment did not affect the stage fate of the opera *The Revived May* after the Lviv failure was staged three more times. First time – at the opera studio of the Ivan Kotlyarevsky Kharkiv Institute of Arts (premiered on May 14, 1975), then at the Tchaikovsky Opera and Ballet Theater in the Russian city of Perm (on February 26, 1976) and, finally, at the Dnepropetrovsk Opera House (on April 19, 1985).

At the same time, the composer continued to work on this material and tried to take into account the artistic inequality of the two storylines interacting in the opera. Gubarenko decided to completely abandon the second of them, connected

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<sup>2</sup> The letter is kept in the personal archive of the composer V. Gubarenko.

with the confrontation between the purely positive Colonel Lukyanov and the negative Fedorovsky. Thus, the conflict was softened, which went beyond the personal relationships of lyrical heroes and touched upon the global contradictions of post-war history. The created more compact version of the same plot was designated as a lyrical novel in four parts and was named *Remember Me*. Its clavier was published by the publishing house 'Musical Ukraine' in 1984. On stage, the opera in this version was performed in 1980 simultaneously in Kharkov and in Lviv, where it was given a name 'Unforgettable' and they combined it with a one-act ballet to the music of Gubarenko's Third Symphony, dedicated to the partisans of Ukraine.

In the lyric novella *Remember Me*, only two characters act: these are Peter and Inga. An epic storyline is presented by choral sideshows. Each of the paintings of the lyric novella is built as a phase form of a see-through structure. The organizing principle of this form consists in action at the level of the whole regularity *i-m-t*, that is, *initio* (beginning), *movere* (middle) and *terminus* (completion). At the same time, the internal organization of each phase at the syntax level corresponds to the chain form. The chain form acts within the phase and consists of fragments that do not exceed the period in scale. This can be shown by the example of the structure of the first picture. It consists of six phases of different scale.

The *initio* section includes the first two phases. It all starts with an exposition of the image of Pyotr and his arioso. The orchestral introduction, which precedes it, contains a motive-thematic basis for further development and consists of two contrasting constructions. The first of them, which is sounded by a group of brass instruments, includes the initial motive of singing as an intonation grain and a stage of polyphonic unfolding. The second is a melody of a declamatory nature with an iambic descending leap of a seventh and an octave and a fifth ascending move. It is entrusted first with a cello solo, and then with a group of violins and violas in counterpoint to a cello solo and is accompanied by the entire group of cellos. Linear texture dominates, while on the background of the extended tonality the quint tone is established as a reference (Example 3).

The prosaic text voiced in a vocal melody generates a free, non-symmetrical syntax, on the basis of which a flexible arioso melody is built with interspersed recitative elements. The first arioso of Pyotr includes four links of a continuous chain form. At the same time, the laconic orchestral conclusion creates an arch with the beginning and is built on an iambic motive with a descending jump, which sounds at the solo trumpet, and then at the fagott.

The second phase is connected with the exposition of the image of Inga and with the tense initial stage of the dialogue of disagreements between the two heroes. Here a new key motif of an expressive character emerges, expressed by dissonant chords on strings and woodwind instruments. It captures the desperate panic that Inga experiences. Together with a short motif of sixteenth durations, which conveys Pyotr's reaction of surprise, it forms the basis of the intonational development of this phase.



### Картина первая

Парк на окраине города, переходящий в небольшой лес. Среди деревьев — утренняя средневековая битва, пробитая снарядом. Появляется Петр Бородин. Остатки битвы, разваливаются оборонительные стены битвы, задуваются.

15 *Sostenuto assai* (♩ = 66)

15

16

16

Example 3.

Phase three begins the second section, *movere*. It comes after Pyotr gives Inga a machine gun and invites her to shoot him, his enemy. The remark “Inga puts down the machine gun and covers her face with her hands” is accompanied by the familiar motif of panic despair and fear in the orchestral tutti. The density of its sound gradually decreases, at first the line of movement of the horns remains, which then turns into a chanting melody of two clarinets. This is how the transparent sound and calm restraint of Pyotr’s *microarioso*, addressed to Inga, is prepared: “Now you understand what it means to kill a person?”

Despite Pyotr’s desire to calm the girl, she does not trust him and continues to insist on her hatred for him. He wants to let her go home and asks if she has anyone at home? In response, Inga begins to choke back tears. Peter is trying to remind him of the main thing, that the war has already ended. This causes a new outburst of emotions in the girl. The motif of agonizing despair and fear resounds in the orchestral tutti again. They open Inga’s aria-story, the fourth phase of the first picture (Example 4).

The aria consists of two contrasting chain-shaped links and has an open character. In the second of the links, the motif of excruciating fear will again appear in the orchestra. And again, the dense tutti texture is replaced by a transparent one. At the end, the voice sounds accompanied by solo replicas of the French horn, then the English horn. The texture becomes denser along with the growth of dynamics, but immediately becomes rarefied again. This is how the transition to the fifth phase of the end-to-end form of the picture is carried out, which is associated with the inclusion of remarks of the commenting chorus.

The chorus repeats the words about the time when all those close to Inga and Pyotr died (in 1943.... In 1941...). This reminds of the tragic consequences of the military conflict and prevents Inga from believing in the sincerity of a soldier of the hostile side. Therefore, *terminus*, the completion of the picture and its sixth phase, as it were, returns the situation to the initial confrontation, despite all the efforts of Pyotr to establish a new level of mutual understanding. The motive of despair and fear sounds again. The final phase opens and ends with them.

Following the first scene, the choral interlude “How difficult it’s for us to get used to silence” begins with a four-bar orchestral opening, which creates an even flowing background and prepares the bass solo intro. With the connection of tenors, the theme of unhurried concentrated reflection develops in an imitative presentation, which is joined by individual orchestral voices. Female voices begin the contrasting section of *Meno mosso*. It has a bright hymn character and is given in chord presentation without orchestral accompaniment. In a short conclusion, the bass repeats the initial melody.

The main degree of tension and conflict confrontation was concentrated in the first picture. In the further development of the relations between the heroes, it is felt that the mistrust has already been broken, there is an opportunity to get to know each other better. The second scene begins as a continuation of the conversation between Inga and Pyotr during a walk. In the orchestral introduction, the

57 *Piu mosso agitato*

Та ин - че - го не см - ела!

Раз не те бе... все по нить!

*poco a poco dim. e ritard.*

Example 4. Inga's aria.

undulating development of the melodic line is based on the alternation of descending and ascending leaps with a gradual rise to a higher register. With the appearance of a monotonous ostinato figure of accompaniment, a vocal melody appears against its background, imitating speech intonation. Pyotr's remarks are sustained in the spirit of a confidential, friendly conversation. Inga's speech is more abrupt and agitated. Inga reminds Pyotr that it is time for him to return to his unit.

After the initial link of the chain form, the second more detailed structure is a duet with an arioso light melody interrupted by pauses. If Pyotr gradually takes

possession of himself and his speech becomes smoother, then Inga cannot cope with the new experiences that flooded her. Pyotr comes to help her and quickly turns his attention to a detail that is out of sight. As it turned out, the young people had not yet had time to introduce themselves to each other. In the third link of the continuous chain, the tone and character of the music changes. The tension goes away, communication becomes more relaxed and easier. At the mention of the old tower in which Inga lives, the polyphonic theme and linear composition of the presentation from the introduction to the initial arioso of Pyotr returns. When Inga is hiding in the tower, and Pyotr is waiting for her return, his micro-arioso sounds, in which he confesses to the new feelings that gripped him: “And something unfamiliar excites, nagging, like this strange evening, like this May returned to people.”

Pyotr’s reaction to the return of Inga, who has transformed from Cinderella into a princess, constitutes the emotional climax and the final link of the second scene. Here, as in the first picture, the intrusion of the chorus, which repeats many times, like an echo, Inga’s words about the terrible shadows of war, again recalls the atmosphere of the transitional time in which the heroes find themselves. To save Inga from the ghosts of the past, Pyotr decides to stay with her, hoping that he can explain the reason for his delay, and the military unit will understand him, because the war is over.

The interlude between the second and third scenes was solved only by orchestral means. It can be called a nocturne, which sounds at the pace of *Adagio* and is accompanied by a constant background in the form of a continuous repetition of an ostinato figure, imitating the rustle of foliage in a night park. Against this background, the duet of the first violins and cellos develops, to which all strings and woodwind instruments join in the culmination. The interlude ends with the powerful sound of the entire orchestra and goes into the third scene (Example 5).

A new stage in the development of relations between the heroes looks like a bright dialogue of consent, the joy of mutual understanding and the first love date in the life of both. Now, what separates them is not decisive. Their hearts merge with the sound of May nature, with the voices of the trees of the old park. In a joyful hymn, they readily declare their love to the whole world. And just as Tristan and Isolde repeat their names in Wagner’s opera, they like to pronounce their names: Pyotr, this is the name that sounds in a German movie that they both watched before the war; Inga, a name that reminded Pyotr of the name of the oriole bird.

The third scene ends with a choral interlude, the sublime hymn “Let there be love in the world”. It alternates between chord presentation and a tenor soloist melody in the spirit of free recitation. The choir texture and the singing *a cappella* evoke analogies with church hymns (Example 6).

In the fourth picture, the heroes are forced to say goodbye. Their farewell is not nearly as dramatic as *Romeo and Juliet*’s last date. After all, they believe that their first and such an unusual love will remain for life. They believe in their future and in the future of the entire planet. After all, such a terrible war that they

## Интерлюдия

Adagio

131

*p*

*ppp*

*espressivo*

*mf*

Example 5. Interlude between two and third scenes.

Adagio

148

И. *pp* Пе - - - тер...

П.

Adagio (За сценой.) *pp*

С. Пусть бу - дет в ми - ре лю - бовь, \_\_\_\_\_ пусть бу - дет

А. *pp* \_\_\_\_\_ *p*

Т. \_\_\_\_\_ *p* Пусть - бу - дет

Б. \_\_\_\_\_ *p*

Example 6. Interlude “Let there be love in the world”.

survived should be the last. The war is over, and very soon a meeting with their homes awaits soldiers.

Taking into account the criticism that was voiced in the letter cited above from the customers of the composition, the authors reworked the finale. Instead of Inga’s Prayer with the choir, a song quote was introduced. In the new choral arrangement by Vitaly Gubarenko sounded the popular song of the war years by Vasily Solovyov-Sedoy [ISO 9: rus. Vasilij Solov’ëv-Sedoj, 1907–1979] “*We haven’t been home for a long time*”. With this song, the demobilized soldiers, including Pyotr Borodin, went home. The sound of the song by Vasily Solovyov-Sedoy in a colorful instrumental and choral texture, with the colorful use of a group of percussion instruments, creates an atmosphere of catharsis in the final pages of the opera.