

VICTORY OVER THE SUN

The World's First Futurist Opera

edited by

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A. Koptiaev, 'At the Futurists' "Opera" ('Na "opere" futuristov'),
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How mature we are! How civilised! Should we not imitate the shouts of Paris, the last word of its Futurist cabaret? We didn't even show off too much for Paris, for example. On 3 December, I entered the jolly operetta theatre (Luna-Park), looking like someone who has made his peace with his Futurist fate: why not suffer in the name of art, for art? Why not get to know the subtlest revelations of new art? But then I remembered the word 'lunatics', which had been applied to the Futurists, and so handed my coat to the caretaker with particular trepidation. 'Is there a hook?' I asked him, pointing to the rail, and then, receiving an answer in the affirmative calmed down: not everyone in this world of the 'society of the future' has gone mad. A Futurist would have answered differently, of course, and would have called the coat-hook a horse.

Such was the impression from yesterday's performance. Everything was upside down: Pogu³ would have had tremendous success here. Before us were people who (so they said in their manifesto) had decided to mix up all commonly used concepts, conduct a re-evaluation of them and produce new combinations to fit in with the new understanding of the world. The sun, for example. Is it not in fact something obsolete, superannuated and tiresome? So, let this fiery ball perish! Attempted murder of the sun (with unsuitable means) was what occupied the author of the text of yesterday's opera *Victory over the Sun*. I will not mention his name.

Its style? Oh, that's something completely unprecedented: the reduction to absurdity of every thought, every comparison and every expression, the feeble attempt to create scandal and some kind of childish culinary touch. Thus the Futurist will say, 'The eyes of lunatics are overgrown with tea' (I'm quoting yesterday's text from memory), 'The camels of factories already threaten with fried fat', 'Walk street of millions, the ravioli will be Russian-style', etc.⁴ The Futurist is without doubt a hungry being, first and foremost, and fills his imagination with images of edible things. At least it is clear what he wants here, and what he is after, but for us his search is generally a question mark. What is it you want with all this rubbish, my dear fellow?

I almost forgot to say that the Futurists are very aggressive: thus, in the first scene we saw the muzzles of some strange kinds of cannon and then two Futurist warriors (strong men) engaged in an incomprehensible conversation.

There were people shooting from rifles in the work, and soldiers marched past, but all that we found out at the end was that the Futurists, thanks to aggressive manoeuvres, had stolen the sun and put it in their talentless hands. Probably the 'martial song', consisting almost entirely of vowels, is linked to this.

The Futurists' war with the sun, with light, is very characteristic: here are those who really do not like clarity, warmth and brightness!

Despite the whole muddle of the performance, I nevertheless found its ideal source – Oswald's phrase in Ibsen's *Ghost*: 'Mama, give me the sun!' The Futurists have taken the mad Oswald as their leader!

In the music there is the same muddle (the opera was performed to the accompaniment of a piano). At the beginning there was a Borodin-like indulgence of seconds, then whole-tone scales, later still muddle and more muddle. Surprisingly, in the middle of the latter flashed hints of the melodies of Puccini's *Bohème*. Most original was the fact that this was music not recognised by innovators even from our most radical avant-garde community. In a word, it was music which was not music, but simply a challenge to the musical ear.

The artists who created this work were shown at the beginning, on the curtain, in portraits (Goodness, what portraits!), but they did not appear at the end, despite being called. We do not know the names of the performers: they were not listed on the posters.

The audience raved, but not of course because they were enthusiastic. A few individuals were brought out, but the shouting prevented us from hearing the nonsense they spouted. There was not one phrase which was not interrupted by one or another remark from the audience (and these remarks were rather more successful than those being performed!). The audience laughed, squealed, whistled, talked to the stage, got angry, indignant, and . . . all the same sat through to the end. The performers and the authors were packed off to the lunatic asylum.

But the lunatics made the most of their madness, and if they did not get a full house, they nevertheless had a large audience.