KULTŪROS, FILOSOFIJOS IR MENO INSTITUTAS

LIETUVIŲ TEATRO ISTORIJA

Trečioji knyga
1970–1980

VILNIUS
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Summary

This book, compiled by scholars of the Culture, Philosophy and Arts Research Institute's theater research department, resumes the investigation of theater development that was discontinued in 1987, when the Lithuania's SSR Academy of Science History Institute's theater history department published the collective work ***Soviet Lithuanian Drama Theater in the Years 1957–1970.***

The book presents an overview of the development of six Lithuanian drama theaters in the same decade, the years 1970 to 1980, as well as the development of the National Opera and Ballet Theater in 1957–1980 (the volume on Lithuanian Soviet theater history, published in 1979, covered the productions of the National Opera and Ballet Theater only up to the year 1957).

Lithuanian Theater History 1970–1980 was written in independent Lithuania, which gives its authors the opportunity to openly and critically evaluate many expressions of stage art that took place in the period of time that is being discussed, but were constrained by the soviet ideology back then.

As the distinguished culture researcher Solomon Volkov writes, "The 20th century could be called the century of propaganda, when culture was used as a political weapon to an extent that was previously unseen."

In the years 1970–1980, the art of theater was slowly freeing itself from the claws of ideology; the confrontation of artistic intelligentsia with the soviet ideology became harsher, and the international relations kept expanding. However, it was difficult to gain complete freedom from the political and ideological constraints. This "liberation", occurring in the late 1950s, seemed to promise greater freedom for creative work, but was suppressed by expressions of stagnation.

A well-known Russian publicist and writer, Viktor Suvorin, wrote, "The red propaganda purportedly announced that liberalization began in the Khrushchev era. Khrushchev awarded about five poets and writers with summerhouses; and they, in their dumb voices, proclaimed, 'We are the children of the 20th party congress! The liberation begins!' yet no one ever received any proof of such liberalization. During the Khrushchev era, horrible events took place: our tanks crushed people in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and the soldiers-liberators shot at public demonstrators in Novocherkask. For a brighter future."

Still, the liberation left its traces – the resistance against the dogmas of the totalitarian soviet system, especially in the cultural areas, strengthened. The relationships with the Western world developed further (already in the 1970s foreign artistic troupes, French theater groups, pantomime artists, Italian

operas and English theater troupes toured the Soviet Union). The artists' critical attitude towards the presence of ideology in culture was becoming more and more open. Theater troupes having a democratic deviation emerged in the Soviet Union; a new generation of playwrights grew up that articulated the problems of an individual's freedom more openly; works of cinema and literature on controversial topics appeared in public. The first steps of freedom were not easy, but these strong critical beginnings were irreversible. This became prominent in different national cultures as well.

Yet, culture and art remained under the supervision of ideologists. Some plays were defaced or entirely forbidden, including Sławomir Mrożek's *Tango* in the National Drama Theater (directed by Jonas Jurašas), Aleksandr Kopkov's *Dramblys* on Klaipėda's stage (directed by Povilas Gaidys), Kazys Saja's *Mamutų medžioklė* as well as Juozas Grušas' *Barbora Radvilaitė* in Kaunas' Drama Theater (both directed by J. Jurašas). Communist party functionaries on different levels interfered with the creative process, specifically with the admission and discussion of plays, as well as with their fate on stage.

Lithuania's theater felt the Soviet censorship in the 1970s as well. The formation of repertoires was especially affected by this. In the 70s in Lithuania, just like in other Soviet states, there was a strict procedure regarding the control of theater repertoires and the admission of plays. The repertoire committee, working along with the soviet ministry of culture, practically played the main role in censorship – confirmed or denied plays that were unacceptable from a political point of view, made adjustments to repertoires, and issued theaters a list of recommended plays (works of Russian Soviet dramatists) that were to be performed. Theaters had to obey the following proportions when constructing their repertoire: 40% of the works had to be Russian Soviet plays, 20% – contemporary Lithuanian works, 15% – Russian classics, 15% – Lithuanian and foreign classics, and 10% – works from other socialist countries. For a long time the Soviet ministry of culture's summary of reports (the data was submitted to Moscow by the repertoire committees of each soviet republic) did not include any plays by contemporary foreign authors. The situation changed in the long term, because every theater looked for ways to bypass this dictate.

Lithuania's theaters were also drawn into a never-ending vortex of Soviet festivals and other mandatory commemorations of political events. That was another way of forcefully adjusting theater repertoires and pointing them into an ideologically correct direction. Perhaps this is why all playbills at that time were incredibly similar. Then again, the situation and creative work in different theaters varied in this decade. While some troupes, their creative managers and directors bravely expressed their critical view, civil courage and worked on a new artistic direction, other theaters were obedient to the political norms.

Still others openly conformed. The "ideological purity" of theater directors was vigilantly overseen by a local political organization that essentially traumatized them and prevented them from doing their work. This is evident in the protocols of meetings of theater's communist party organizations, cited in this book and pointing out the tense work and creative atmosphere.

Apart from doing creative work, theaters had to administer various social functions – provide support to factories, military divisions, and communes. They had to take part in the so-called political education program, i.e. they enhanced the political consciousness of their troupe. In addition to that, theater troupes had extensive tour plans – during the summer break they performed on technologically primitive club stages. They also had to prepare detailed reports for the Soviet ministry of culture on theater attendance, the number of spectators and plays both in the actual theater and on tours. The communist party, the trade union, and communist youth organizations had the steering wheel not only for ideological work in theaters, but also for the creative process. This caused tension in troupes and hindered creative work.

In this period, an important role was played by Lithuanian theater researchers, who evaluated the most prominent expressions of directing, acting, and stage design, supported significant plays that were important to the current public, and defended and held on to progressive theatrical ideas and the right positions.

In the 1970s the confrontation of aesthetic positions did not weaken either. The variety of paths taken by theater directors consolidated themselves; new methods for directing expression and theatric experimentation became available. The point of view towards the narrowly understood theatric realism changed, the limitations of the psychological method were unfolded as well. This gave way to new spaces for looser interpretations of dramaturgy. Not all creators of theater were ready to accept these changes and novelties on stage.

Along with the oldest and the older generation of directors such as Juozas Miltinis, Vaclovas Blėdis, Henrikas Vancevičius, young Lithuanian directors, known for their brave and productive creative explorations, began to emerge. It was then that the drama theater put on stage plays by Jonas Jurašas, Povilas Gaidys, Jonas Vaitkus, Vytautas Čibiras, Dalia Tamulevičiūtė, Eimuntas Nekrošius, Irena Bučienė, Rimas Tuminas, Aurelija Ragauskaitė, Saulius Varnas, Gytis Padegimas; from an artist's point of view, these productions were mature and important to the public. Most of them were categorized as resistential cultural expressions, demonstrating resistance to total lies and double-dealing that hovered in the real world.

Each director was creating their own theater, at times stained with bitter satire, at times with creative scenic metaphors, and still at other times with playful improvisation or subtle psychological analysis. The most talented

plays glowed in all colors of the scenic spectrum and gave hope because they spoke in the great language of Truth about the present time.

The beginnings of the radical and experimental theater of that time are associated with the Lithuania SSR Art Institute students' underground "Corridor Theater", which was founded by young artists Arvydas Ambrasas and Regimantas Midvikis. Plays of absurd poetics were performed on this stage, including *Duobė, Maratonas,* and S. Beckett's *Act Without Words*.

The generation of young stage artists encouraged a national breakthrough in dramaturgy. The plays of Juozas Grušas, Justinas Marcinkevičius, Juozas Glinskis, Kazys Saja, Saulius Šaltenis, and Grigorijus Kanovičius destroyed familiar patterns and investigated strong and painful social, as well as historical, topics and problems. At the same time our theater was enriched with the roughly regained plays by contemporary Western artists.

In these difficult years the theater made an impression with its most expressive productions, and convincing and appealing artistic expressions. The theater of the seventies acquired a well-deserved prevailing position amongst other arts and prophesied the beginning of a rebirth.

In this book the emphasis is on issues dealing with theater repertoires, directing, and acting, vocals, choreography and stage design. The most significant productions of each troupe are distinguished, examining signs and repercussions of their social importance. Sources used for this purpose include the press at that time, articles and reviews, memoirs, theater, literature and dramaturgical research, documents from archives and museums. The aim is to present each expression of stage art from multiple perspectives.

The appendixes contain theater documents (protocols of art councils, directorate orders, etc.), repertoires, information about the authors of the book, and an index of last names.

The chapters of this collective monograph were written by scholars working in the theater research department of the Culture, Philosophy and Arts Research Institute: executive editor prof. habil. dr. Irena Aleksaitė, dr. assoc. prof. Audronė Girdzijauskaitė, dr. Rasa Vasinauskaitė, m. d. Gražina Mareckaitė, dr. assoc. prof. Helmutas Šabasevičius, as well as freelance authors dr. assoc. prof. Dovydas Judelevičius, dr. assoc. prof. Jonas Bruveris, and theater researcher Ramunė Balevičiūtė.

The archives of Lithuania's Theater, Cinema, and Music Museum, Lithuania's Literature and Arts archive, theaters' and personal archives were used while compiling this book.

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