

THE 68TH STERIJINO POZORJE FESTIVAL 2023

Selector's Report

HUMANITY – ASCENDING AND DESCENDING

During the past year, the Selector of the 68th Sterijino Pozorje Festival saw fifty-seven plays based on the plays by playwrights who write in Serbian and other languages that are in use in Serbia, and thirty-two of those are original adaptations of domestic plays, dramatizations of prose and poetic pieces, or author's projects, which suggests an intensified interest in a domestic drama that can be seen for some years now.

The scope of individual dramatic approaches, formal and stylistic characteristics, research paths, and changes in dramatic writing is wide, but so are the differences in quality regarding certain new dramaturge strategies and techniques of playwriting. Our stages feature plays with a traditional dialogue structure, but we are witnessing a rise in the number of monologue plays dominated by narration and poetic discourse.

The thematic scope of performances is vast, creatively inventive, and dramatically and theatrically provocative. For the last several seasons, the theatres in Serbia are witnessing a formation of a specific thematic circle consisting of different versions of violence against women, regardless of their age, education, and financial status. The problem regarding the status of a woman in a patriarchal society, the scope and coverage of actual changes in this field, as well as a woman's ability to realize her potential outside traditional roles, offer a wide range of options for playwrights' explorations. The problem of violence against women and the question of their rights in society – unfortunately, this is still a crucial topic in this region and outside it.

Other common topics include an intimate or politically implicated treatment of migrations, dystopian visions, and dramatic reflections of the war and its implications, while we fear that, unfortunately, the echo of war devastations in Ukraine is going to be articulated, both dramatically and theatrically. Some of the plays reimagine or are inspired by intertextual relationships with the motifs of the world and domestic drama, or are centered around the biographic or autobiographic material portraying public or historical figures (Grigorije Božović, Milica Stojadinović Srpkinja, Josip Broz Tito, and Aleksa Šantić). Those dramatic researches are based on well-known biographic facts or are formed as comic and parodic persiflage of national history or contemporary phenomena ("Red Flag" factory). In our theatric life, we can also notice dramatic research of the individual identity against collective identities and social groups, on the level of both the family and the nation. Certain plays capture the attention because of their dialogues and polemic focus on the painful questions of our times (migrations, authoritative regimes, socially engaged plays promoting the "green" initiative, social position of the workforce in the capitalistic world and the dilemma between staying here and moving elsewhere, and the confessions of the so-called Gastarbeiter doctors, among other things), and thus accentuate the theatric potential of these topics.

The selection of plays for the Sterijino Pozorje Festival also represents the status of Serbian drama in the region, Europe, and the world. Plays by our playwrights are currently present mostly in Slovenia: plays by Dimitrije Kokanov (he is, by the way, together with Tijana Grumić, the most productive and busiest playwright and dramaturge we have at the moment) are performed at the Slovene National Theatre Nova Gorica (*Suddenly, a River*, directed by Kokan Mladenović) and the Slovenian National Theatre Drama Ljubljana (*Motion*, directed by Juš

Zidar), while Tijana Grumić's *52 Hertz (The Loneliest Whale in the World)* is performed at the Slovene National Theatre Nova Gorica. Also, Jelena Kajgo's *Rollercoaster* is performed at the Mladinsko Theatre Ljubljana, while Milan Marković Ramšak is awaiting the premiere of his play *A Rainy Day in Gurlitch* at the Prešern Theatre Kranj. The theatre audience in Slovenia can also see Branislav Nušić's *A Suspicious Person* directed by Kokan Mladenović at the Gledališče Koper Teatro Capodistria. Nušić's *Bereaved Family*, the classic of our comedialogy, is playing in Croatia, at the Satirical Theatre Kerempuh in Zagreb. In North Macedonia, at the Teatar Anton Panov Strumica, Dragana Miloševska's *Orange Peel* is performed as well. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are two plays directed by Zlatko Paković, *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich as We Build It Today* at the Bosnian National Theatre Zenica, and *The Pedagogy of Resistance of Branko Ćopić*, co-produced by OMAHA Centre Cazin, Cultural Centre Bihać, the National Theatre Tuzla, and Cultural Centre Novi Pazar.

The main criterion for the selection of play for the 68th Sterijino Pozorje Festival was the overall aesthetic value of the plays. After that, or together with that, the selector considered, as additional criteria, the exclusivity of the plays, their cultural diversity, accentuated modernity, research potential, aesthetical radicalism, artistic distinction or uniqueness, and other factors. The basis for the entire selection process was the paraphrase of Peter Brook's thought: "A spark of life, together with flesh and blood of reality, must be present in every moment of the theatrical act."

THE 68TH STERIJINO POZORJE FESTIVAL COMPETITION SELECTION

1. CHILDREN, opera in seventeen songs, music by Irena Popović, based on the novel by Milena Marković; composed and directed by Irena Popović; National Theatre in Belgrade

In this play, the on-scene reading of the drama turns into the on-scene singing of the eponymous novel and thus transforms into a concrete musical and dramatic form that follows a chronological sequence of stories, intimate moments, and childhood moments. The scene roars with revolt and individuality, protests against the generation of parents and teachers, both in a realistic and symbolic sense, as well as the despise of the fake moral and petite bourgeoisie. Actors and opera singers form a monolithic collective entity or an identity that, all across an almost empty scene, dance through their expression of human pain and joy, all of its ascending and descending. The play *Children* is not dramatic, but a musical performance that uses the music by Irena Popović Dragović as an internal dynamic motif that grows bigger and bigger only to ecstatically articulate Milena Marković's idea that "we are not people, but some frightening children".

2. MISS, written by Ivo Andrić, dramatized by Vanja Ejdus, directed by Đurđa Tešić; National Theater of the Republika Srpska Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina, The Republika Srpska)

Vanja Ejdus achieved a skillful combination of the epic and the drama in her dramatization of *The Woman from Sarajevo*. The spiritual fall of Rajka, the protagonist, is started by a traumatically experienced and interpreted behest by her father about the importance of saving money. The directorial process of Đurđa Tešić portrays a poetically emphasized stylization and visualizes two opposed views of the world: the rationality of the "common" people, on the one hand, and the twistedness of a person inflicted by stinginess, on the other. The dynamic of the performance is focused around a less-than-innocent metaphorical omen that Money is a superior

ruler of a person's life, comes both from comic situations of the protagonist and musical rhythms and harmonic songs that follow the plot and successfully portrays the atmosphere in Sarajevo and Belgrade in the 1930s.

3. NIGHT – SCENTED STOCK, written by Aleksandar Popović, directed by Branislav Mićunović; National Theatre Niš

The highest achievement of Branislav Mićunović's direction of *Night – Scented Stock* is a sonorous and clear positioning of the genre and plot. That is now the picture of our mentality, an ultrasound image of our character, with a tendency to bring all the broken pieces of the plot together and to use the language to encompass all the complexities of humanity, all the histories of regular mortals and their spinning wheels and flounders in the social and political liar, without denying its poetic and philosophical sense for once. There is a touch of a scenic ritual in *Night – Scented Stock*, subtle and highly estheticized, seducing the viewers' senses.

4. THE DECEASED, written by Branislav Nušić, directed by Egon Savin; Montenegrin National Theatre and Cultural Center Tivat (Montenegro)

This is a concise, harsh, wicked black comedy, a dark grotesque with obvious traces of the crime genre (you can make as many variations of this genre as you want!), but it is all so precisely directed that it does not disrupt the richness and complexity of Nušić's drama, and it is all also linguistically adapted for the Montenegrin area. Whether it is displaced or not, this play fits our age perfectly. *The Deceased* is, without a doubt, a pure social satire that tells us all about criminals using huge capital to cover their tracks and enslaving honest citizens, together with the legal system, the media, the police, and the politics. Egon Savin's version of *The Deceased* is a harsh confrontation with fake social moral, hypocrisy, corruption, thievery, and other forms of evil in the milieu of the so-called high society.

5. A LULLABY FOR ALEKSIJA RAJČIĆ, written by Đorđe Kosić, directed by Jug Đorđević; National Theatre in Belgrade, Foundation "Novi Sad - European Capital of Culture", Sterijino Pozorje Novi Sad

This play is a fragmentary verse drama about a sad, failed status of a woman in the chains of the patriarchal society, about the clash between an imagined and harsh reality. Kosić's drama has incredible poetic potential and starts with a crime committed by a woman who is unable to resist her husband's abuse. Inspired by a book by Milutin A. Popović, *Female Convicts – An Album of the Požarevac Penitentiary Female Ward*, the author starts to write a drama that extraordinarily imitates the form of epic poetry (lullabies, laments, Dodola songs, etc.) and is combined with a harsh linguistic register of our times and this contrast results in a remarkable dramatic pattern for the creation of a play that is beautifully directed by Jug Đorđević who interlaces the elements of traditional and Brechtian theatre.

6. YANKEE ROSE, written by Slobodan Obradović, directed by Miloš Lolić; Belgrade Drama Theatre

This is a comic, grotesque, and bitter story that uses dark humor to "deconstruct" almost all paradigms about the USA. Starting with a pseudo-autobiography of Anna Nicole Smith, an American model, actress, television star, *Playboy* Playmate, and television personality, Slobodan Obradović creates a universal drama about a tragic faith of a woman. Miloš Lolić composes this story about the ascending and descending of one of the countless copies of Marilyn Monroe as a

spectacular genre blend of a musical, puppetry, and vaudeville. Questioning the phenomenon of “the American dream”, this play develops in a comically rich (due to a significant amount of metatheatrical parts) and soft manner, only to blend all genres into the center tone of the play: the tragedy and uneasiness. *Yankee Rose* memorably portrays the plague of our time: possessiveness, insensitivity, family fallout, commercialization, media manipulation, consumerism, etc.

7. WHY ARE YOU SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR, written by Darko Cvijetić, dramatized by Kokan Mladenović, Mina Petrić, Darko Cvijetić, Dubravko Mihanović, and the ensemble; directed by Kokan Mladenović; Serbian National Theatre Novi Sad, Gavella Drama Theatre Zagreb, National Theater Sarajevo, and Scene MESS Sarajevo

Fiction and reality are constantly clashing in this play that thematizes the breakup of SFRY and the war that followed it. “A post-Yugoslavian writer” Darko Cvijetić reimagines a harsh truth about war trauma, both within a family and in general, staring death right in the face. The personal and autobiographical compete and are embodied in the acting process, giving the play a note of something truly undeniable, i.e. the power of a realistic testimony. The directorial solution – the writer in the role of a Writer plays the actual writer that organizes the text and changes his memories in front of the audience, thus integrating his own life into a stronger directorial concept – becomes an eminence of a previously rarely seen connection of reality and theatre, and with a meaning highly above anything that can be achieved in a “theatre-within-a-theatre”. The directing and dramaturge solutions in *Why Are You Sleeping on the Floor* are yet to be defined.

8. 52 HERTZ, written by Tijana Grumić, directed by Mojca Madon; Slovene National Theatre Nova Gorica (Slovenia)

A combination of a naïve children’s view of the world, the experience of middle-aged people, and the language of science form a magical and poetic beauty of Tijana Grumić’s drama. That combination is the basis of a powerful and visually elegant play that takes place everywhere – from the bottom of the sea to outer space. Mojca Madon’s subtle and poetic direction is characterized by a framing, metatheatrical story with a narrator who ties everything together, constantly building and deconstructing the illusion on the scene.

NON-COMPETITIVE INTERNATIONAL SELECTION “THE CIRCLES”

1. BEAUTIFUL VIDA, written by Staša Prah, directed by Marjan Nećak; Gledališče Koper Teatro Capodistria (Slovenia), Slovene Civic Theatre in Trieste (Italy)

The latest theatrical variation by Staša Prah on the motif of Beautiful Vida, an old myth in Slovene literature, is a dramaturge basis for the scenic and musical spectacle directed by Marjan Nećak that is a grand, visually and musically rich metaphorical play about a Woman, lust, love, and passion.

2. A NIGHT WITH ALEKSA, written by Marko Tomaš, directed by Ivica Buljan; Croatian National Theatre in Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Buljan’s deconstructing play surpasses the stereotypical mythic character of Aleksa Šantić as a symbol of Mostar. The audience is given an incredibly suggestively performed soliloquy that resembles Krleža and talks about the curse of a small, patriarchal milieu that can serve as a paradigm of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the past, but today as well.

3. TENA – Chronicle of a Beauty Ruined, written by Josip Kozarac, dramatized by Borislav Vujčić, directed and adapted by Dražen Ferenčina; Gavella Drama Theatre Zagreb, Civic Theatre “Joza Ivakić” in Vinkovci, Ludens Theatre, Center for Lifelong Education and Culture Bjelovar, Požega City Theater (Croatia)

Based on a Josip Kozarac novel, the director Dražen Ferenčina extracts a primordially eternal play, while leaving the financial reality behind. The source material is used as a basis for a new authorial reconstruction of the legacy it uses. Elements of choreodrama, choir singing, and expressionist particles combined in the directorial approach result in a strong impression of this modern theatric accomplishment.

PERFORMANCE IN HONOR OF THE AWARD WINNERS

A PAINTING BY AN UNKNOWN ARTIST, based on a novel *The Exhibition* by Miodrag Kajtez, dramatized by Đorđe Milosavljević, directed and adapted by Nikola Zavišić; National Theatre “Toša Jovanović” Zrenjanin, Sterijino Pozorje Novi Sad

Milivoje Mladenović, PhD
Selector of the 68th Sterijino Pozorje Festival
Novi Sad, March 2023