
EUROPE THEATRE PRIZE FOR THE FIFTEENTH TIME

MILOŠ MISTRÍK

Institute of Theatre and Film Research, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava

Abstract: The first edition of Europe Theatre Prize took place in 1987. It is among the most reputable events in theatre at which prizes are awarded for a lifetime contribution to theatre. Prizes have been awarded to prominent theatre directors and actors, choreographers and dramatists. The prize is not awarded annually; up until 2016, there have been fifteen prize-giving ceremonies hosted by a number of European cities. Since 1990, in addition to the main prize, the Europe Prize New Theatrical Realities has been awarded to the younger generation (at the most recent 2016 edition, the word “new” has been omitted). To date, the prize has been awarded thirteen times. The study presents a concise overview of the Europe theatre prize winners and the details of individual editions.

Key words: Europe Theatre Prize, Europe Prize New Theatrical Realities, European theatre

The history of the Europe Theatre Prize was started in 1986, under Jacques Delors, the then President of the European Commission, and Carlo Ripa di Meana, European Commissioner responsible for culture. The initiative was launched by Alessandro Martinez, former and current Secretary General of the ETP, and it was endorsed by the acclaimed Greek actress Melina Mercouri and the French culture activist Jack Lang. It was inaugurated as a prize to be awarded to the most acclaimed personalities or theatrical companies that have contributed to the realisation of cultural events that promote understanding and the exchange of knowledge between peoples. An acclaimed Greek film actress and singer Irene Papas was appointed chair of the first international jury. For the first time, the ceremonial prize-giving took place in 1987, in an ancient Greek amphitheatre in Taormina, Sicily, and it was broadcast via Eurovision. The first award was presented to Ariane Mnouchkine and her Théâtre du Soleil.

Up until now, over thirty years that is, the prize has been awarded fifteen times. Sometimes, the prize-giving periodicity was more regular, while on other occasions, there was a gap of several years between editions. The ground for that remained the same: prize-giving requires a lot of funding and it was not always feasible to arrange for its support by the structures of the European Union. Up until 2001, its first nine editions, had been organized in Taormina. After that, prize-giving event turned into a touring ceremony, depending on which country and town were successful in fundraising for the event.¹

The second prize-giving was organized two years on, in 1989, and it was awarded to Peter Brook. This edition was a point of departure for the starting of an excellent tradition: since then, renowned authors have written books dedicated to prize-

¹ Refer to List No. 1 in conclusion of the study.

winning artists, in which their work, personalities, and views are mapped out. Right from the outset, unlike many other events of this kind (let us remind the reader of the American Oscar awards ceremony), it has maintained ceremonious atmosphere and at the same time, it has become a meeting place for experts and for the evaluation of creative personalities. The International Association of Theatre Critics (AICT) became a co-organiser of the event and its reputable critics were approached to sit on the jury, which elevated the analytical and critical spirit of the event. During several days of the prize-giving event, participants may attend productions and also critical workshops, the presentations of productions, rehearsals and round-table discussions with awarded personalities. An unforgettable experience during the second edition was the debate between Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski.

The winner of the third edition (1990) was Giorgio Strehler. That year, another acclaimed co-organiser joined in – The Union of European Theatres (UTE), founded in 1990, which is an alliance of the most reputable European theatres (its members are either entire theatre companies or individuals). Several laureates of the subsequent editions originated from this body. The highlight of the third edition was a new prize added to the Europe Theatre Prize, which was the Europe Prize New Theatrical Realities dedicated to younger theatre makers and ensembles. Typically, it would have several candidates (between two and five) and, when looking at the laureates, it is apparent that the international jury has had a fortunate hand and their good choice has been corroborated by future development.²

There were also reshufflements made to the international jury. Aside from artistic personalities, there has been an increasing number of eminent theatre critics, historians, scientists, festival organisers and theatre directors on the jury. In the early editions of the event, worth mention are critics Bernardo Dort and Renzo Tiano, Russian Shakespeare's connoisseur Alexey Bartoshevich, one of the most acclaimed British critics Michael Billington, Ulf Bribaumer, professor at Vienna University, Italian critic Franco Quadri, George Banu, professor at Sorbonne, director of BITEF festival Jovan Ćirilov, director of festival in Avignon Bernard Faivre D'Arcier, the Spanish theatre organiser in the Mediterranean region José Monleón, the well-known theatre maker and politician Jack Lang, professor Peter Selem, Krystyna Meisner from Poland, and others.

The first nine prizes of the Europe Theatre Prize that had been awarded in Taormina until 2001, ended up in the most competent hands. Among the award winners were Heiner Müller, Robert Wilson (it was the very first European award presented to this American theatre maker), Luca Ronconi, Pina Bausch, Lev Dodin, and Michel Piccoli. In order to give a full picture of prizes, additional awards, be with a slightly political overtone, should be mentioned. They were presented to theatre makers who pursued European ideals by their outlooks on life. The first one to have been awarded this prize at the opening edition was Melina Mercouri (1987), followed by Václav Havel (1998), BITEF Belgrade Festival, and Sarajevo drama theorist and peacekeeping politician Ibrahim Spahić (2000). Yuri Lyubimov (2011) and Silvia Purcărete (2016) have been deservedly awarded the prize for their lifetime creative accomplishments.

² Refer to List No. 2 in conclusion of the study.

With ten editions, the tradition of the event was firmly established. However, the support of Taormina to the event was not longer possible. Therefore, new locations, new ways and ideas in European theatre had to be sought. If up until then prizes had been awarded to the “classics” of modern European theatre, a need to put this principle to a test cropped up and to daringly reach out to names which were not among the favourites and were found provocative at times. At the same time, there was a need to search more boldly for new faces for the Europe Prize New Theatrical Realities, as in its early editions, the focus of attention was largely on well-established names. There was a need to replace centrism with a well-balanced attention to smaller theatre cultures.

After Taormina, the next prize-giving ceremony was organised five years on, in Turin, in 2006. The prize went to Harold Pinter. He, too, was among the classics of European drama, but he was also a courageous provocateur and a politically uncompromising artist who publicly condemned the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the bombing of Yugoslavia. During the ceremony, he did not hesitate to share his views with the distinguished audiences seated in Teatro Stabile (apart from other personalities, present was also Ján Figel, the then member of the European Commission, EU Commissioner responsible for education, training, culture and multilingualism). Since the event held in Turin, the set up of the international jury changed dramatically and in the five years that followed, it worked more or less in the same format with but minor changes. Older and original members (Georges Banu, Renzo Tian, José Monleón) were joined in by British theatre critic Ian Herbert, German stage manager and organiser of New European Drama, biennale in Wiesbaden, Manfred Beilharz, the president of the second most eminent association European Theatre Convention (ETC), Jean-Claude Berutti (the Slovak National Theatre is also its member), Marina Davydova, Russian theatre critic and drama theorist, and Slovak drama theorist Miloš Mistrík.

The eleventh and twelfth editions of the prize-giving ceremony followed one after the other, in 2007 and 2008, each time on the invitation of Thessaloniki in the North of Greece. In the first case, two names were selected ex aequo for the main prize: Robert Lepage, director and magician of the theatre from Quebec and the acclaimed director Peter Zadek. At the prize-giving ceremony, the Canadian was received by critics with some hesitation, although his artistic reputation and the achievements of his theatre in North America and in Frankophone countries were well known. In his case the jury simply took a risk. Peter Zadek was affronted, as he was superior to the Canadian when it comes to age and creation. He did not attend the prize-giving ceremony and gave a rather insulting argument for not coming (he allegedly did not feel like flying an airplane operated by the Greek Olympic Airlines). Instead, there arrived the Berliner Ensemble with Zadek's brilliant direction of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and with unforgettable Annett Renneberg playing Solweig. In informal discussions, Zadek's uncompromising mouthpiece was actress Angela Winkler. One year on, the twelfth edition of the event was again organised in this Macedonian-Greek city. This time, there was again only one laureate, the versatile French theatre, opera and film director, actor and producer Patrice Chéreau.

After the twelfth edition, organisers focused on cities which were designated as European Capitals of Culture. In 2009, it was Wrocław in Poland and the international jury awarded a prize to Krystian Lupa; in 2011, the event was hosted by St. Petersburg and the prize went to Peter Stein. As mentioned above, an extraordinary

award was presented to the outstanding director Yuri Lyubimov, connected with the fate of the legendary Taganka Theatre. Unfortunately, the problem with a location that could host the prize-giving ceremony on a regular basis, continued. Five more years had to pass before a rather improvised prize-giving ceremony was organised in Craiova, Romania. For many years, Craiova has been hosting one of the most acclaimed Shakespeare festivals in Europe, and the city has ample experience with organising similar events. The main prize was awarded to the Swedish choreographer Mats Ek.

This may also be attributed to the fact that the list of acclaimed living personalities of European theatre may have been exhausted and the jury began to look for outstanding theatre makers in other countries too. The assumption is that should the event continue, there would be other artistically important points indicated on the theatrical map of Europe. However, the question is, whether the prize-awarding ceremony is viable. The lack of funding is an essential barrier and the next edition is out of sight. The probable end of the prize-giving event is also indicated by the discontinuation of a well-established practice of the jury while it holds its sessions. To date, the practice has been such that once the prizes were awarded, i.e. the day after all participants had departed, the jury had a meeting and took a decision on prizes to be awarded next time. This time, no such meeting of the jury took place in Craiova. However, judging by the most recent action taken by Jack Lang, the organizers have not given up. On the occasion of Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU their intent is to write a letter to the culture minister of Slovakia Marek Maďarič, calling upon him to make a proposal to his colleagues during European negotiations, to jointly endorse the idea of this high-level event of European theatre.

Until now, young laureates have not been given much attention. It should be noted that the Europe Prize New Theatrical Realities has been seldom awarded to really young theatre makers under thirty years of age. It is understandable that some time must pass before an artist matures and his/her works become acclaimed nationally and internationally and the audiences take note of him/her, let alone critique, professionals and the jury that decides on Europe theatre prizes. When the first Europe Prize New Theatrical Realities was awarded, there was only one award winner, Anatoly Vasiliev from Russia. However, in 1994, the prize was awarded to three young theatre professionals and theatrical bodies. Of them, the Spanish ensemble *Els Comediants* and the Lithuanian theatre director Eimuntas Nekrošius ascertained, through their production, that it was a wise decision to give the prizes to them. In 1998, the jury awarded Swiss Christoph Marthaler, who afterwards (but also before that) excelled on European theatre scenes. The decision to award a prize to the London Royal Court Theatre in 1999 was quite out of the ordinary, this time, not so much for its scenic art, but rather for its systematic production of new European in-*yer-face* drama (in Slovakia, the established term is *controversial drama*), i.e. dramatists like Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Jez Butterworth, Conor McPherson, and Martin McDonagh. Other names followed suit in the years to come. They became an integral part of the very best of European theatre: Thomas Ostermaier, Oskaras Koršunovas, Josef Nadj, Alvis Hermanis, ensemble Rimini Protokoll, Sasha Waltz, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Guy Casiers, Árpád Schilling. Alongside West European artists, the artists from other countries, especially from the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia) and from Central Europe (Poland, Serbia, Hungary) came to the forefront.

Slovakia saw its big day come in St. Petersburg, when the Europe Prize New Theatrical Realities was awarded to the Slovak theatre director Viliam Dočolomanský and his theatre studio *Farma v jaskyni* [Farm in the Cave]. Official documents about him mentioned his Slovak descent and that he worked in the Czech Republic. A less positive fact ought to be mentioned here: during fifteen editions of the event, Slovakia has been awarded a prize just once and had it not been for the politically motivated prize awarded to Václav Havel, the Czech Republic would not have appeared on the list of laureates at all, only via a Slovak director.

But let us not forget about other important prize winners; the international jury decided to give prizes to Katie Mitchel, Kristian Smeds, the Icelandic theatre group Vesturport Theatre, and to National Theatre Scotland. As regards these two theatres, they operate in small marginal countries, but are noted for their outstanding artistic quality.

Over thirty years of its existence, The Europe Theatre Prize, facing a questionable future, has accomplished an exceptionally beneficial mission. Most of the time, it has given prominence to the best outcomes of Slovak theatre culture, to its quality and creativity. Likewise, the Europe Prize New Theatrical Realities (whose jury dropped the word “new” from its name at its most recent 2016 edition, as it did not correspond with reality – among the laureates were also creative professionals in their fifties) has veritably reflected and highlighted the most creative trends in European theatre and the prize has been awarded as a token of the recognition of quality across geographically diverse locations of Europe, starting from Iceland, through Serbia, down to Russia and Portugal.

Europe Theatre Prize

- 1st edition, 1987, Taormina:** Ariane Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil (France)
Special prize to: Melina Mercouri (Greece)
- 2nd edition, 1989, Taormina:** Peter Brook (United Kingdom /France)
- 3rd edition, 1990, Taormina:** Giorgio Strehler (Italy)
- 4th edition, 1994, Taormina:** Heiner Müller (Germany)
- 5th edition, 1997, Taormina:** Robert Wilson (USA)
- 6th edition, 1998, Taormina:** Luca Ronconi (Italy)
Special prize to Václav Havel (Czech Republic)
- 7th edition, 1999, Taormina:** Pina Bausch (Germany)
- 8th edition, 2000, Taormina:** Lev Dodin (Russia)
Special prizes to: BITEF Festival (Serbia); Ibrahim Spahić (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- 9th edition, 2001, Taormina:** Michel Piccoli (France)
- 10th edition, 2006, Turin:** Harold Pinter (United Kingdom)
- 11th edition, 2007, Thessaloniki:** Robert Lepage (Canada); Peter Zadek (Germany)
- 12th edition, 2008, Thessaloniki:** Patrice Chéreau (France)
- 13th edition, 2009, Wrocław:** Krystian Lupa (Poland)
- 14th edition, 2011, St. Petersburg:** Peter Stein (Germany)
Special prize to: Yuri Lyubimov (Russia)
- 15th edition, 2016, Craiova:** Mats Ek (Sweden)
Special prize to: Silviu Purcărete (Romania)

Europe Prize Theatrical Realities

1st edition, 1990, Taormina: Anatoly Vassiliev (Russia)

2nd edition, 1994, Taormina: Giorgio Barberio Corsetti (Italy); Els Comediants (Spain); Eimuntas Nekrošius (Lithuania)

3rd edition, 1997, Taormina: Théâtre de Complicité; Simon McBurney (United Kingdom); Carte Blanche – Compagnia della Fortezza – Armando Punzo (Italy)

4th edition, 1998, Taormina: Christoph Marthaler (Switzerland)

5th edition, 1999, Taormina: Royal Court Theatre (United Kingdom) for its work in promoting and discovering young British and Irish playwrights: Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Jez Butterworth, Conor McPherson and Martin McDonagh

6th edition, 2000, Taormina: Theatergroep Hollandia – Jan Simon, Paul Koek (The Netherlands); Thomas Ostermeier (Germany); Societas Raffaello Sanzio – Romeo Castellucci, Chiara Guidi (Italy)

7th edition, 2001, Taormina: Heiner Goebbels (Germany); Alain Platel (Belgium)

8th edition, 2006, Turin: Oskaras Korsunovas (Lithuania); Josef Nadj (Serbia/Hungary)

9th edition, 2007, Thessaloniki: Alvis Hermanis (Latvia); Biljana Srbljanović (Serbia)

10th edition, 2008, Thessaloniki: Rimini Protokoll – Helgard Haug, Stefan Kaegi, Daniel Wetzel (Germany/Switzerland); Sasha Waltz (Germany); Krzysztof Warlikowski (Poland); Special Mention awarded to Belarus Free Theatre (Belarus) by the Jury

11th edition, 2009, Wroclaw: Guy Cassiers (Belgium); Pippo Delbono (Italy); Rodrigo García (Spain/Argentina); Árpád Schilling (Hungary); François Tanguy et le Théâtre du Radeau (France)

12th edition, 2011, St. Petersburg: Viliam Dočolomanský (Slovakia/Czech Republic); Katie Mitchell (United Kingdom); Andrey Moguchiy (Russia); Kristian Smeds (Finland); Teatro Meridional (Portugal); Vesturport Theatre (Iceland)

13th edition, 2016, Craiova: Viktor Bodó (Hungary); Andreas Kriegenburg (Germany); Juan Mayorga (Spain); National Theatre Scotland (United Kingdom); Joël Pomerat (France)

The study was developed within APVV project No. 15-0764 Slovak Theatre and Contemporary European Theatre Culture, Continuity and Discontinuity.

Translated by Mária Švecová