

Dear readers,

This year, the English issue of *Slovak Theatre* reflects on the overlaps between Slovak performing arts and the international context and it presents studies that map out the current themes resonating in the European theatre community.

The issue opens with a portrait of Tomáš Berka (1947), an important Slovak scenographer, graphic designer, author of stage and film music, rocker, and film architect collaborating on numerous international productions. The author of the study, Dagmar Podmaková, analyses Berka's work in Slovak theatre since the 1970s with an emphasis on his scenographic signature and poster work. Her text is also a contribution to the theoretical reflection on scenographic art, which is particularly challenging with respect to analysis also due to the connection of this artistic discipline to other theatre elements. A selection of Berka's posters reflects the artist's perception of society from the beginning of normalisation, when Soviet troops were present in Czechoslovakia (1968–1991), to the search for a path to democracy in the first half of the 1990s.

Michaela Mojžišová's text is dedicated to the work of the German director Peter Konwitschny, who, through his collaboration with the Slovak National Theatre, has profoundly influenced the poetics of and reflection on Slovak opera theatre. His productions are also characterised by the appearance of distinctive, constantly reappearing signs. In her study, the authoress focuses on those signs that are directly derived from the musical matter of the staged scores: the theatre visualisation of musical points, the ironisation of musical clichés, the director's critical attitude towards the illustrative use of music, his peculiar approach to ballet in operas, or the onstage representation of musical instruments as symbols. Using selected productions as examples, she demonstrates that although Konwitschny's interpretation of opera pieces in the context of their staging tradition is often almost provocative, it is his musical knowledge that enhances both the ideological and aesthetic values of his directorial argumentation.

Martin Hodoň's study is dedicated to an even more radical representative of politically engaged European theatre, the Swiss director Milo Rau. The text focuses on an analysis of the preenactment *The Congo Tribunal*, in which Rau reflected on three cases of jeopardising the human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, concerning the mining of precious minerals, massacres, and displacement of the population. Hodoň highlights the phenomena of reenactment and preenactment, examining their starting points, points of contact, and compositional practices. He concludes that what Milo Rau exposes through reenactments and preenactments can be seen as a relationship between trauma and memory, the past and the future. In Rau's understanding of art, the political becomes personal and vice versa. As Martin Hodoň notes: "The verdict announced by the court in the theatre hall is not so much an anticipation of the actual trial, but rather a demonstration of the possibility of justice and the possibility of strengthening democracy."

Culturologist Zuzana Timčíková focused on the current topic of audience development. In her study, she presents several definitions of audience development, which come from theorists and cultural managers, mostly from the Anglophone environment or participants of national and European cultural policies. At the same time, she deliberates the direction in which issues related to audience development in the field of theatre culture in Slovakia are moving and who is initiating them. She

concludes that while in Western and Northern European countries actors from many areas of cultural and artistic life, representatives of cultural policies, government departments, etc., are actively involved in a relatively animated discussion about working with audiences, in Slovakia, these debates are initiated more by the creators and organisers of the performing arts themselves than by cultural policy actors, i.e., more by those at the "bottom," without strategic frameworks established by those on the "top."

Festivals are an important place for the creation of the audience's theatre taste and for the development of theatre discourse. Especially international ones, which, in addition to presenting and promoting works of art and creators, offer the experience of a shared cultural experience. A reflection on one of the oldest and most important European events of this kind – the Festival d'Avignon – is offered by Elena Knopová's text. After a brief introduction to the issue of festivalisation in France and the current research carried out in relation to theatre audiences, her text presents a reflection on the productions of international theatre makers presented at this year's festival. The authoress analyses the context in which the productions in the festival's programme were presented to the public, the dramaturgical and thematic lines, while noting the return of theatre makers to the basic expressive means of theatre instead of complex effects and technologies. In her opinion, The Festival d'Avignon 2022 has complied with the concept of storytelling that has initiatory potential and thus engages theatrically for a better real world.

Michaela Mojžišová