

YUGOSLAV

SET AND COSTUME DESIGNERS AT PQ99



YUGOSLAV THEATRE DESIGN

Yugoslavia has not participated in the Prague Quadrennial since 1991. In the twentieth century, full of challenges, the last decade happens to be one of the most difficult. Still, theatres of all descriptions - drama, opera, ballet and puppet theatres - have performed in Yugoslavia throughout this period of time. Theatres are performing their plays and staging new ones even now, when potential theatregoers run the risk of being bombed and certain theatres experience serious collateral destruction.

The basic idea of Yugoslav theatre artists in this tragic decade is to be dedicated to the theatre as a battlefield of their art, not to give commentaries on history and politics. It does not mean that theatre art has avoided reality it is surrounded by. It has tried to achieve it by its own language, and not the language of ideology and journalism. Our set and costume designers have also kept to this approach.



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In my opinion, this is illustrated at PQ'99 in the works of six costume designers (Angelina Atlagić, Milanka Berberović, Miroslav-Bata Blagojević-Cincar, Milena Jeftić Ničeva Kostić, Anamarija Mihajlović, Ljiljana Petrović), and six set designers (Miroslav Benka, Jasna Dragović, Darko Nedeljković, Igor Vasiljev, Geroslav Zarić, Aleksandar Zlatović) as well as the individual participant Miodrag Tabački, a set designer.

The concept of a whole, which is called "Our togetherness (world, nation, individual)", is not just a worn-out phrase for the Yugoslav artists. These are the very notions which brought about battles and bloodshed in the Balkans between the PQ'91 and this year's PQ.

That national is not the same as chauvinistic, that it is possible to be a patriot and not a chauvinist - this thesis was not comprehended by all the social forces in the Balkans. And that has had tragic consequences. However, it may be openly said that the thesis was much clearer to the theatre artists of our country.

It was clear that artists, particularly with their individuality, had to take part in the great contemporary theatre adventure of the world. It seems to me that, by creating set and costume designs for performances, both these

on display and many others, the Yugoslav artists did not have a consciously chosen national specificity as a starting point. It is as if they had in mind that the specific national quality would be expressed in a work of art by the subconscious in its being and its talent. An exaggerated emphasis on the national specificity so frequently leads to trash. It has also been the experience elsewhere in the world. It is even more dangerous in the periods of heated national concerns in a country, which come about as a hardship of history.

This does not mean that a posteriori art historians are not able to discern the specific national feature in the artists of a country. It could also be one of their tasks. Although it is difficult to find that national specificity from a closer time distance, I will go as far as to make a comment on this. I would say that the exhibited works 6 + 6 + 1 show a sort of mutual surrealist experience of the world. It is not a coincidence, since Belgrade had, apart from Romanians in the Balkans, the closest connections with the surrealists in Paris of the 20s and 30s of this century. That tendency towards surrealism has its roots in Serbian folk tales and narrative prose of the whole Balkans. Therefore, a certain surrealist feature,

the magic realism of the exhibitors, is based on deeper roots which could be national. I consider it fortunate that all these exhibits, no matter what they are like, are national to a spontaneous and essential degree, but they perfectly fit in with the set and costume design trends and tendencies, thus becoming a part of the luxurious and diverse "world garden of theatre design", to use the PQ'99 syntagm.

We hope that the flowers still growing in our devastated theatre gardens will not be destroyed completely by God Mars, the sworn enemy of art.

Jovan Ćirilov

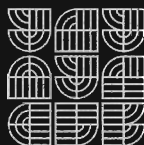
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