

## ABSTRACT

We can speak about the birth of Slovenian scenography only after World War I. Before then, fragments in written sources testify of theatre activities related to the formation of theatre across Europe, particularly in the German and Italian milieu, the area to which we also belonged. The earliest mention of a theatre play in Slovenian language is *Paradise* (Raj) from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, yet little has been preserved about this Jesuit school-play except for the title and an anecdote. Accounts follow about numerous passion plays and processions as well as religious festivals such as the procession »Božji grob« (an imitation of the grave of Christ), in which both local inhabitants and artists participated, »actors« as well as companions, for example, in Škofja Loka, Ljubljana, Ruše ... In the intellectual circle surrounding Žiga Zois in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the initiative arose to found a theatre group which staged the first Slovenian drama text in Slovenian language (Anton Tomaž Linhart's *Micka, the Mayor's Daughter* (*Županova Micka*), 1789) on the stage of the Estates Theatre in Ljubljana. After World War I, with the birth of the new nation – the Kingdom of Yugoslavia –, the new, professional Slovenian theatre was also born.

An important turning point in the development of Slovenian stage design is the staging of Ivo Vojnovič's poem »The Death of Jugovič's Mother« (premiere 18 January 1911 in the National Theatre (Narodno gledališče v Ljubljani, today's home of the Slovenian National Ballet and Opera) in Ljubljana, directed by Hinko Nučič. This production is the first to mention a Slovenian scenographer, Impressionist painter Matej Sternen. Thus, with this naturalistic, set backdrop representing a cornfield in the sunlight, began the development of Slovenian stage design, which already after 1922 had caught up to the new European expressionistic and avant-garde fine arts and theatre movements. The first example of a performance with Bauhaus elements was the staging of Čapek's *R.U.R* (1922), directed by Osip Šest with stage design by Václav Skrušný. The true avant-garde movement was born on the people's stage of St Jacob in Trieste, where the Bauhaus-educated set designer and painter Avgust Černigoj worked. Just before World War II, director Fran Žižek designed his version of a contemporary avant-garde theatre space on the bases of the first phase of avant-garde art on the stage of the Drama Society (Dramatično društvo) in Ptuj. He coined it »aillusionism« and presented it also in Prague in front of the circle of Emil František Burian.

The development of scenography unfolded on the Slovenian professional stages more slowly. The first set installations for performances in Ljubljana and Maribor during the inter-war period were still mostly equipped with realistic, naturalist or

symbolic set backdrops, installed into a box-shaped space. Nevertheless, a series of stage designs important for the development of Slovenian scenography emerged leaning on the contemporaneous scenography seen on foreign stages. Alongside the already mentioned avant-garde tendencies, until the 1930s, expressionism reigned stylistically in scenography. The peak of expressionistic scenography was the staging of František Langer's *Periphery* (*Periferije*) (1925). In individual stage designs they began to mix with the expressionist style or even entirely replace it with new fine arts styles: surrealism, new materialism and characteristic of the architecture of the time functionalism. After 1930, realism began to prevail in the younger generation of scenographers, particularly in the works of Bojan Stupica, in which the stage elements were substituted with elements from the real world (for example, plants and trees).

Along with the stylistic trends that touring theatre groups brought to Slovenia, the educational background of stage designers also greatly influenced the evolution of Slovenian stage design between the two wars. In the 1930s, stage designer-architects replaced the till-then prevailing stage designer-painters, giving a new impetus to the shaping of the stage space.

World War II also marked a dividing line in stage design. The Partisan theatre groups and the Slovenian national theatre on the liberated territory found innovative ways to use every bit of material that they could get their hands on for their sets, even the parachutes of the allies. With this heritage and the memory of the golden theatre times of the 1930s, the Slovenian theatre entered a new post-war era; stage design followed the state-delineated fine arts and theatre movements of the (social-)realist style. In the 1950s, with the activities of the stage designers Ernest Franz, Viktor Molka, Bojan Stupica, Maks Kavčič and Vladimir Rijavec, colourful, dynamic stage design which already by its three-dimensionality intervened into the stage space. In the mid-1950s, a younger generation of stage designers began to create on the non-institutional experimental stages, striving towards a complete minimisation of the scenography. The text gained weight. After the entrance of this generation of stage designers, represented by Niko Matul, Mile Korun and Sveta Jovanović, the appearance of the scenography on the professional stages changed here also. The stage design strove towards minimisation and the dematerialisation of scenic elements throughout the entire stage space.

In the 1970s, under the influence of performances from the guest director Ljubiša Ristić and other contemporary European theatre and fine arts movements, Slovenian scenography focused on contemporary researches ranging from the ambiental theatre to performances that were staged on several stages or even several locations, with an important emphasis on the latest visual media, sound and lighting effects and with the use of modern materials. The period gave birth to scenographic personalities (Matjaž

Vipotnik, Mirko Lipužič, Melita Vovk, Avgust Lavrenčič, Sveta Jovanović, Niko Matul, Vlasta Hegedušič, Meta Hočevar ...) who were guests at various Slovenian and Yugoslav stages and marked them with their individual style.

Among the important theatrical movements that co-created the path of Slovenian theatre and stage design in the 1980s and 1990s were the retro-garde movement of Dragan Živadinov with the renowned Baptism at Triglav (1986) and the »theatre of dreams« of Tomaž Pandur.

From its first steps after 1918 until 1991, Slovenian scenography experienced a fast and qualitative stylistic evolution and with its contemporary theatrical-stage design projects after World War II entered itself onto the map of European theatre creation.