

Many people are involved in amateur theatre all around the globe. The International Amateur Theatre Association (AITA/IATA), which “unites and links amateur theatre groups, community theatres and organisations actively working for theatre amateurs and individuals throughout the world”, lists organisations from 74 countries and all continents. In Slovenia, more than 7,000 people were actively involved in amateur theatre in 2019. Despite these numbers, this field of theatre is rarely subject to academic research and analysis. Even more so, if we are aware of the fact that some of the theatre revolutions of the 20th century happened precisely in semi-professional or amateur theatre groups (e.g., The Performance Group of Richard Schechner; the Teatr-Laboratorium of Jerzy Grotowski). This issue of *Amfiteater* is thus dedicated to the amateur theatre of the 21st century in Slovenia and Europe. This image is complemented by papers that investigate the key moments in the theatre history of the 20th century, when amateur theatre facilitated the search for new performance practices.

Already, Bertolt Brecht wrote about proletarian acting and suggested a distinction between amateurs and dilettantes. Amateurs are the ones who take advantage of their non-professional position in order to seek new ways of performance; dilettantes on the other hand strive to imitate professional theatres but can never reach the ideal. Aldo Milohnič applies this thesis to his research of the Workers’ Stage in Slovenia under directors Bratko Kreft and Ferdo Delak.

After World War II, the amateur culture became one of the priorities of the cultural policy in former Yugoslavia as it gathered a large number of the population and enabled a strong ideological indoctrination. The state strongly supported the restoration of cultural halls and built a large number of new ones all over the country. It employed renowned architects and stage designers to do it. One of those was Valo Bratina, who planned a number of restorations and new projects for halls that became domiciles of amateur theatre groups. Ana Kocjančič presents his work between 1946 and 1954.

Young theatre professionals, often students of the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television and the Faculty of Arts who gathered in theatre groups of amateur nature, carried out the performative turn of the 1960s to the 1970s. Tomaž Toporišič describes the relationships between the institutions and student or experimental theatres, that later influenced theatre development of the 1980s. He also investigates foreign influences that marked this development. Barbara Orel deals with the specific

¹ The editorial work on this issue and the writing of the introduction took place at the AGRFT, University of Ljubljana in the framework of the research programme Theatre and Interart Studies P6-0376, which is financially supported by the Slovenian Research Agency.

question of not-acting (Michael Kirby) that was introduced to the Slovenian theatre scene by amateur groups in the 1970s.

The image of contemporary amateur theatre in Europe is presented by three papers based on empirical studies in Slovenia, Estonia and Malta. Gašper Troha, Anneli Saro and Hedi-Liis Toome, Vicki Ann Cremona and Marco Galea analyse surveys between theatre groups as well as statistical data in order to describe the challenges of amateur theatre in their countries. The comparison shows the many similarities as well as specificities of amateur theatre in certain countries; for example, the blurred demarcation between professional and amateur theatre in Malta, which is a consequence of its specific historical development.

These articles are complemented by a series of papers which deal with specific theatres, productions or theatre genres. Tomaž Krpič analyses the community of the *Škofja Loka Passion Play*. Ana Vrtovec Beno deals with the representation of cultural heritage and comes to the conclusion that this is one of the formative features of amateur theatre, as it is crucially bound to a certain place and local community that is familiar with such heritage.

Louise Ejgod Hansen presents the children's programme at the Aarhus 2017 European Capital of Culture. The basic idea of it was to introduce participative theatre, so that the programme was done by children for children. Barbara Polajnar presents the Theatre of the Oppressed, which is also based on practices of community and devised theatre.

This issue of *Amfiteater* is round up by three case studies of Slovenian amateur theatre. Kaja Novosel presents the development of the gathering/festival Čufar Days (Čufarjevi dnevi) in Jesenice. Tara Milčinski analyses different types of amateur theatre groups, challenging the division between rural and urban ones. Ajda Sokler looks into the history of Studenec Theatre, an example of a successful theatre group that has managed to gain a broader resonance of its work.

Amfiteater thus aims to present amateur theatre from a scientific point of view. It shows its complexity and diversity in the 20th and 21st centuries. It opens up new questions that will, hopefully, stimulate future research and analysis of this theatre field.

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