

The article discusses different approaches and case studies of amateur theatrical activity from the Slovenian ethnic space which draw on the past and, by employ various theatrical techniques (such as the use of text and costumes), "revive it" on special occasions for the audience. The important segment of such theatrical events is the content the actors represent, as the emphasis is on presenting different (local) heritage, e.g., customs and traditions, crafts, important historical figures and past events.

As these traditions are well-known and recognised by the local community, it is something shared between the actors and the audience. Thus, such performances are usually very popular. We will investigate how these traditions influence the selection of theatrical space, the time of the performance, costumes, props, articulation, gesticulation, etc.

Keywords: heritage, amateur theatre, identity, performance

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The Preservation, Presentation and Use of Cultural Heritage in Amateur Theatre

The author's research on amateur theatre focuses on the role and the function it can have for a particular community and the question: "Why perform one's own heritage?"

The article refers to the research the author carried out between 2012 and 2017 for her doctoral thesis *The Examples of Contemporary Folk Theatre in Slovenia*. Her research found examples of amateur productions based on staging heritage, which she discusses in detail in this article. The main features of the presented cases are amateur theatre creativity and the orientation towards a particular activity, that is, preserving and presenting (local) heritage. In the fieldwork that supports this research, the author has used the ethnographic method: observation with participation and interviews.

The productions studied in the article were all original creations, and their authors are creative individuals who find their themes in local traditions or cultural heritage. The primary performers are groups which the author classifies as amateur thespians, as they are "permanent or occasional groups of theatre lovers, who prepare and perform theatre production out of love, and do not have theatre as a profession, that is, a gainful activity" (Logar 18). These amateur ensembles unite volunteer members of both genders, different age groups, statuses and professions, who work as amateurs under the auspices of volunteer cultural, artistic or tourist associations. They mostly use texts by Slovenian and international authors for their repertoire; but once or several times a year, these same ensembles accompany such theatre creativity (that is, producing existing plays) by performing a production or preparing an event linked to the local heritage.

Amateurs are in charge of the organisation of the event or production from the beginning to the end: from the director, actors, text, to the concept and realisation of the costumes and the stage set. The production itself is public, in front of an audience, and includes all the necessary theatre elements, that is, dialogue, costumes, props; often it is presented as an accompanying programme or as a part of a day-long local event. The production is conceived as a completed unit, in the form of a theatre performance with one or more acts.

Based on her research, the author emphasises that the theatre staging of a past event takes place on several levels: from the selection of the place and time of the performance; the appropriate image of the attire; the use of props; to the spoken

word, in this case, a dialect. Through performing heritage and with its great emphasis on the local heritage, such amateur theatre production passes the information about the local specifics and at the same time allows for local identification. One's own heritage, known to the entire community, can thus become an inspiration for amateur theatre artists.

The main vehicle for the amateur theatre productions is content, which in production, is accompanied by visual elements. In staging heritage, the content has a particular role, as the theme based on the community's heritage is what separates this type of theatre from the mainstream amateur theatre activity. The author pays special attention to the use of the local language; according to her research, dialect is the segment of the community heritage that the performers wish to present, as they are the proudest of it and – as they often emphasise – it helps them to express themselves.

A particular characteristic of staging heritage are performances on original locations; that is, the content of the play links to the space in which the production is performed. The staged content is often linked to a particular place, so it must be performed precisely there. Interlocutors believe that performing it in the original place provides an “authentic” backdrop for the contents and scenes. The performances are thus most often in the open air, and not, as customary, in a classical theatre – in a (dedicated) hall. The performing space can be a street, a square, a meadow, a courtyard, or something else, for example, a cave or a river.

The author finds that performing heritage often entails a comprehensive intertwining of the cultural and natural environment which the individual community understands as its heritage. The performers thus reach into different fields of heritage, from material (props, costumes) to immaterial (texts, skills, customs) and even natural (selection of settings).

Presenting heritage through performance depends on the place, time and purpose; likewise, a large part of passing on the heritage depends on the individual or community interpretations. Thus, the common denominator among all the case studies of amateur theatre creativity in the article is heritage; as such, it is often taken out of a particular context and left to the interpretations of the authors.

As is characteristic of the use of heritage in different fields, we can notice two different kinds of usage in its staging. On the one hand, it is about the elements a particular community aims to preserve for future generations to serve the needs of the people for a sense of identity and belonging; on the other, the use of the past is typical for purposes of tourism. In any case, the heritage that provides content for the productions places the studied cases as a specific form of expression

within the (amateur) theatre, creates the uniqueness of cases (no two are alike) and with the performance in the local environment evokes feelings of belonging and identity in the participants.

Translated by Barbara Skubic