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Riotous Performances

Буремні вистави

Abstract. Theater audiences have been expressing their opinions about what is happening on stage and in the world around them for centuries. In some instances, uproarious behavior bordering on — and including — full-fledged riots, have provided early indications of profound conflicts taking shape within society that eventually can gather to overturn the political and social order. As the cases discussed here — drawn from Naples, London, Brussels, New York, Dublin, Paris, Miami, and Kyiv — suggest, such disturbances can reflect economic discontent, the rise of nationalist identities, and the emergence of new artistic movements. A night at the theater, the concert hall, or the club is always about more than the background noise of our lives. What happens when performers meet their audiences signals how we see our futures; and ourselves; and how we like what we see, or not.

Keywords: opera, ballet, riots, Stravinsky, Synge, Beckett, Nijinsky.

Having been schooled by Victorian-inspired middle-class conceptions of decorum, many Americans think of the performing arts as objects of veneration to be respectfully viewed with little attention to their surrounding social and political context. Such almost-religious reverence limits applause to carefully controlled moments, demands cessation of audience conversation, and frowns on indecorous behavior of all sorts. Norms of propriety require that audience members check the outside world at the door upon entering a temple to the arts, be it a mega-sized opera house or a tiny studio theater.

Such notions of appropriateness have eroded during the past half-century or so nearly everywhere, except perhaps in the symphony concert hall. For most of our history, humans have responded to performance quite differently. The communal connections arising when people gather to witness beauty, passion and creativity more often than not demand less decorum than our Victorian forbearers would have appreciated. Audience behavior at early opera performances was closer to that of a Rolling Stones concert than to Germanic symphony halls; just as many jazz musicians today, Mozart complained bitterly about listeners continuing their conversations while he was playing.

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that eventually can gather to overturn the political and social order. Such disturbances can reflect economic discontent, the rise of nationalist identities, and the emergence of new artistic movements. Students of social and political change would be well served by paying attention to what is happening on the stages around them.

Naples, 1764

Opera originated in the 1590s out of efforts by humanists and classicists in the principalities of northern Italy to recreate the sounds of ancient classical drama by bringing together words and music to replicate the Greek chorus. Their experiments moved from small chamber concerts onto a larger stage following a performance of Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* at the wedding of Maria de' Medici to King of France, Henry IV in 1600. These developments occurred simultaneously with the emergence of a new form of Absolutism during which a generation of rising monarchs sought to extend their supreme autocratic authority beyond restrictions of law, legislature, or custom.

The new art form allegedly reprising ancient Greek performance portrayed tales initially drawn from classical mythology. Looking back to the supposed origins of Western civilization, opera served to legitimate previously unprecedented royal authority. Monarchs integrated opera into court rituals, especially during the carnival celebrations leading

up to the Lenten season prior to Easter. Larger and grander theaters purpose built for opera began to appear, none grander than the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples.

Built in 1737 at the behest of Bourbon King Charles (Carlo) VII of Naples, two years after his ascension to the throne, the San Carlo was by far and away the largest and most munificent theater of its time. Charles left Naples in 1759 to ascend to the Spanish throne as King Charles (Carlos) III. His magnificent Neapolitan opera house connected to the royal palace adjoining the kingdom's major public square (now the Piazza del Plebiscito). Given its central location, the San Carlo became a symbol of Bourbon ambition as well as the growing distance between those lofty few who could join the King at a performance, and those many who could only view the theater from a far.

The deeply embedded contradictions of Neapolitan life were never more apparent than during the horrid famine years of 1763 and 1764, among the worst to hit the Italian Peninsula. The kingdom's government under Carlo's son and successor — the bumbling Ferdinand I (who at times resembled nothing more than the characters of his beloved comic *opera buffa*) — turned to its crafty senior minister Bernardo Tanucci for leadership. Tanucci responded vigorously, dispatching agents to the countryside to hunt down speculators and seize hidden grain reserves. Blinded by Absolutist ideology, officials—no matter how well intentioned—only made matters worse. The Bourbons proved incapable of confronting the myriad structural challenges facing their realm (such as a feudal method of organizing rural land tenure).

As the full effects of starvation ground deeper into the countryside, hundreds of desperate peasants flooded the capital in search of food. They came in waves throughout the autumn and into the winter. In a moment of profound

self-delusion, the king, his ministers, and city leaders proceeded with the pre-Lenten Carnevale celebrations of 1764. By tradition, these events included the ritualistic pillaging at the King's behest of grandiose theatrical floats piled several meters high with mountains of free food — the *cuccagna*.

Predictably, the act of setting up gigantic towers of free food in a city full of desperately starving people did not end well. A couple of hours after sundown, restive citizens broke through barricades without awaiting royal proclamation, looting the food and moving on to stores around the city. A few meters away, upper-class Neapolitans were attending the opera at the San Carlo. Some among the audience, having been warned by their servants, hid as the mob lost control. Others took cover where they could. Generalized disorder continued outside and within until the authorities restored calm.

The Bourbons never quite recovered from this fiasco as Ferdinand failed to repair his shattered authority. The symbolism of starving peasants attacking operatic audiences in search of food underscored a profound division between those inside the opera house and those outside.

London, 1809

English playhouses depended less on Royal sanction and support than elsewhere in Europe. A vibrant commercial theatrical culture remained more diverse both on the stage and in the audience. Seating may have been segregated by ticket price. Nonetheless, something of a middling class audience took shape as professional and commercial as well as artisanal and merchant groups — and not a few women — found their way into eighteenth century London's raucous commercial theaters. The city's two Royal Charter theaters — Covent Garden and Drury Lane — remained more democratic than their counterparts on the European continent.



San Carlo Opera House
from Royal Box

Such propinquity meant that the divisions outside Teatro San Carlo in Naples entered inside London's auditoriums.

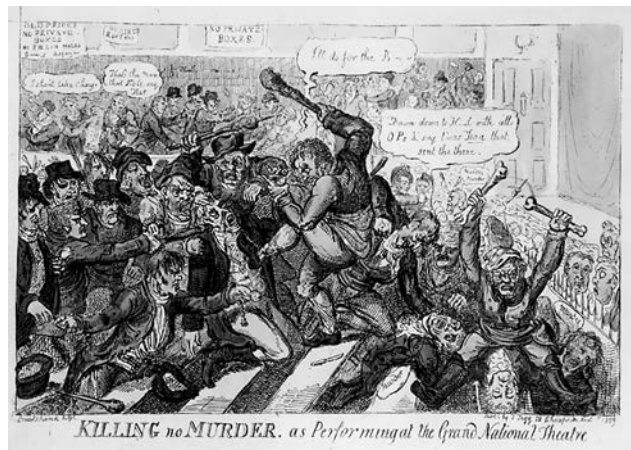
Canadian theater historian Richard Gorrie argues that riots represented an integral part of London's boisterous theatrical experience; so much so, that managers requested that military detachments be posted inside theaters beginning in 1721. Gorrie identified three-dozen major disturbances during which violence interrupted shows between 1730 and 1780.

London's commercial theaters at the time brought together heterogeneous cross-sections of an English society divided by class, income, gender, political beliefs, and taste. Unlike in Paris, London theaters permitted servants to attend together with their masters. Seating patterns confined lower classes to the upper gallery, while classes that were more ordinary piled into the pit, and the elite sat in mid-tier boxes. Abuse and refuse hurled at the stage from the heights effortlessly fell onto those in the pit; disagreements over seating assignments quickly escalated; and drunken patrons accelerated any argument. Fisticuffs easily broke out among contending groups as they passed each other in shared corridors and lobbies; often spilling into nearby streets, coffeehouses, and pubs. Numerous accounts tell of duelists having it out in the audience. Reports of such goings on in the era's sensationalist press spread the word of mayhem well beyond the theater and its immediate surroundings.

Management's dependence on ticket sales amplified the power of audience discontent. Battles broke out over various issues, including changes in program, disagreements over politics and content, and animosity among fans of various actors. Such disturbances could last several nights as audience members challenged standards of behavior expected by management. At their core, such disruptions highlighted cavernous discrepancies between traditional expectations and ever-changing theatrical practices at a time of profound social and economic transformation. The informal boundary between stage and audience, and among audience members, dissolved throughout the eighteenth century. The construction of larger theaters with more clearly differentiated spaces calmed the waters by the late eighteenth century.

Conflagrations at the outset of the 1808–1809 season destroyed London's two Royal Charter theaters. The loss of both prestigious houses to fire that autumn spurred artistic, financial, and social changes that had been pressing London theatres to adjust to new economic and social realities for some time.

The September 20, 1808 Covent Garden fire overtook the old house at four in the morning when the season was only twelve days old. A delayed response and insufficient firefighting equipment combined to doom the theatre, nearby houses, pubs and other commercial establishments before smoldering out. Sets, costumes — including a lace veil once worn by Marie Antoinette — dramatic scripts, musical scores — including several by George Frederic Handel — disappeared in the flames together with a valued organ that Handel had played. Not long thereafter, on February 24, 1809, the nearby Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, burned to the ground,



Old Price Riot. Cartoon by Isaac Robert Cruikshank

quickly consumed by flames within a little over half-an-hour. By 11 pm that evening, London had lost the city's only theaters licensed to perform spoken-word drama during the regular season.

The two Royal companies shifted their seasons to the King's and Lyceum theaters while construction of replacement houses started in short order. Untangling the companies' intricate financial arrangements would take longer.

The new Covent Gardens opened in September 1809 with much pomp and circumstance. The opening night audience was in a less than celebratory mood, however, greeting manager John Philip Kemble's grandiloquent and jingoistic welcoming remarks with coughs and sneers, then shouts and general disorder. Kimble summoned the police, who declared a riot by reading the 1714 Riot Act from the stage to warn of the police action to follow. The audience began to disperse as a couple of dozen members rose to their feet to sing "God Save the King." The story was not over, as protests and violence erupted throughout the fall season. The infamous O.P. (Old Price) Riots lasting 67 days had begun, exposing deep social divisions within London.

Initially, the disturbances appear to have been a consumer protest over increases in ticket prices (an additional shilling for the boxes, and an additional sixpence the pit). Kimble replaced a once open third tier with elite boxes — private anterooms often associated with gambling and prostitution — and crammed in additional seating in the plebian upper tier (much as US sports venues at the turn-of-the-twenty-first century replaced open seating with ever more expensive and luxurious "skyboxes"). Covent Gardens reopened as a watering hole for a newly self-satisfied elite masked by Kemble's overgenerous embrace of a new British nationalism that was on the rise in the face of ongoing wars with an assertive Napoleonic France.

As dramatic as the 1809 O.P. Riots appear, they were a reversion to the previous century's consumer remonstrations and unrest. The professional and artisanal classes that had supported much of London's theatrical life revolted against what they saw as an unjust assertion of aristocratic privilege. The tumult subsided only after Kimble met with protest leaders, fired the extravagantly paid Italian opera singer Angelica Catalini — whose exorbitant fees were

used to justify the price hikes — and restored previous prices. The affair wound down once Kimble had stepped onto the Covent Gardens' stage on December 15, 1809 to offer a formal apology for his unseemly pursuit of lucre. The Royal Theatre, Drury Lane — the same building, though renovated, in use today — opened in October 1812, after having smartly eschewed the sorts of price hikes that had touched off Kemble's misfortune a few years before.

If eighteenth century Neapolitan and London theatrical disturbances revolved around divisions of class and wealth, the rise of popular nationalism throughout the nineteenth century triggered larger-scale disturbances which often merged with rebellions on city streets. One such disturbance helped bring about a nation's independence.

Brussels, 1830

The lands now constituting Belgium remained under foreign — Burgundian, Spanish Hapsburg, Austrian Hapsburg — rule for centuries. Separated in 1648 from the northern United Provinces following the Eighty Years' War, Catholic Flanders and Wallonia stood at odds as with their new Protestant neighbor to the north, The Netherlands. Napoleon annexed the region to France in 1795, ending Hapsburg rule. The post-Napoleonic settlement created a new United Kingdom of the Netherlands combining Protestant northern (Dutch) and Catholic southern (Belgian) provinces under a monarchy headed by self-proclaimed King William I, Prince of Orange. There was too much history for this arrangement to work.

King William decided to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of his reign with a three-day festival in August 1830 capped off on the 25th with a luxurious opera performance in Brussels' Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie. Political tensions had been running high with a vibrant Belgian independence movement gaining steam.

Unruly crowds already forced the cancellation of a parade and fireworks displays in Brussels as local high society gathered at their most opulent theater for an evening of opera, ballet, and mime. The evening featured the Brussels premier of French composer Daniel Auber and librettist Germain Delavigne's spectacular *La muette de Portici* (*The Mute Girl of Portici*), also known as *Masaniello* in Italian. Considered among the earliest of French Grand Opera, the lavish *Portici* premiered in Paris in 1828 to rapturous reviews.

The choice of Auber and Delavigne's latest may have made sense for a different time and place given their growing fame and popularity. Its selection for Brussels in August 1830 proved disastrous. The libretto had been drawn from the story of the fisherman Masaniello who led a popular 1647 uprising against Spanish Hapsburg rule in Naples. Pro-independent factions spotted an opportunity to promote their agenda.

The local French language press urged patrons to abandon the opera at the beginning of the fifth act as a sign of protest. The performance never lasted that long. The second act duet "Amour Sacré de la Patrie" ("Sacred Love of Country") brought the audience to its feet with cheers so loud that the performers had to cease and restart. At the line "Aux



Opera riot. (Gustaaf Wappers «Episode of the Belgian Revolution of 1830», 1834)

Armes” (“Call to Arms”) some audience members ran into the streets where they were greeted by a spreading feverish crowd. Pandemonium within the theater brought down the curtain before the Fifth Act could begin. Meanwhile, the crowd gathered outside the theater stormed government buildings and nearby factories.

Calm did not return to Brussels — or to Belgium. The States-General in Brussels voted in favor of secession, with a newly convened National Congress passing a Declaration of Independence on October 4. Five major European powers — Austria, Great Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia — convened in London, initially declaring support for William. Seeing the futility and expense of their efforts, the London Conference accepted Belgian independence in December (it would take the Dutch until 1839 to do the same). Leopold, the youngest son of Duke Francis of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, became the new country’s first monarch in 1831.

Aubier and Delavigne’s sumptuous work of soaring music combined mime, ballet, and song performed by a formidable ensemble remained popular for years. For a young Richard Wagner, their opera’s significance lies less in its art as in its political force. Opera combined with nationalism elicits powerful passions which can alter the course of history.

New York, 1849

Librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte lived much of his life on the run. Exiled from his native Venice following a conviction for “public concubinage,” he eventually made his way to Vienna where, to all our good fortunes, he connected with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to create three of the greatest operas ever written: *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), *Don Giovanni* (1787) and *Così fan tutte* (1790). Eventually, debtors, victorious gambling partners, jilted lovers and their families pushed him on to London. Da Ponte settled down for a bit, having four children with companion Nancy Grahl. Pursuing creditors forced Da Ponte, Grahl, and their children to take to the road once again. After a period running a grocery store in Philadelphia, he settled in New York.

Da Ponte cased out the expanding monied classes of the largest and wealthiest American city, opened a small Italian bookshop, wrote what became a series of well-received picaresque memoirs, and started giving private lessons to the offspring of the rich and notable. These connections eventually enabled him to land a position as Columbia College’s first Professor of Italian, as well as the first Jew, and Roman Catholic priest on its faculty (Da Ponte’s life was never straight forward).

For all of New York’s dynamic economic and population growth, the city’s Italian population at the time remained in the handful of hundreds. Da Ponte took it upon himself to promote his native culture. Upon hearing that the highly regarded Spanish tenor Manuel Garcia was bringing an opera company of equally famed family members to New York, Da Ponte sprang into action. Linking Garcia up with top New York impresarios, Da Ponte helped Garcia and local promoters to stage Rossini’s *Barber of Seville* in November 1825.



Astor Place Opera House Riot, 1849

This first ever New York performance of Italian opera took place at the recently renovated Park Theatre with local notables in attendance such as the poet James Fennimore Cooper, and international star power such as Da Ponte and Joseph Bonaparte (Napoleon’s brother who had once been King of Spain and was now living in New Jersey). Garcia mounted a production of Da Ponte’s *Don Juan* in May 1826. The incorrigible Da Ponte opened New York’s first theater purpose built for opera in 1833, only to have it burn to the ground in 1837.

Garcia’s visit did not find fertile soil for opera, which would not take root in New York until the 1854 opening of the 4,000 seat Academy of Music. Rather, his tour cemented opera’s reputation among New York’s expanding working class as a resented symbol of elitism.

By the late 1840s, Isaiah Rogers designed the luxurious Astor Opera House, which opened to the bitter taste of some of the city’s poorest living nearby in the notorious Five Points neighborhood. Following a financially unsuccessful opera season its first year, Billy Niblo took over as manager and bet on well-known conventional dramas to fill the house. Irish immigrant Niblo had gained fame and fortune running his extraordinarily fashionable pleasure gardens modeled after London’s popular Vauxhall Gardens. With his gardens closed for renovations, he looked to repeat his crowd-pleasing attractions at the Astor Opera House.

Niblo booked famed London actor William Charles Macready for a run playing *Macbeth* in May 1849. The downscale Bowery Theater scheduled a production of *Macbeth* at the same time with the popular Thomas Hamblin in the lead role. Not to be outdone, the management of Mitchell’s Olympic, a popular workingman’s theater a few blocks away, turned to American actor Edwin Forrest to play the same role simultaneously.

Macready and Forrest — as well as their fans — had a long-running feud that had disrupted theaters on both sides of the Atlantic for years. Artistic differences, personal animosities and nationalist fervor fueled their conflict since the 1830s. In one notorious instance, Forrest showed up for Macready’s performance of *Hamlet* at Edinburgh’s Theatre Royal in 1846 and loudly heckled his rival. Macready remained a favorite of the polite classes for his subtle and nuanced stage presence; Forrest’s overblown physical build and outsized American patriotism won favor among nativist and toiling audiences.

As their May rendezvous approached, the colorful New York press stirred the waters with tribalist glee.

A barrage of eggs, potatoes, and a stink bomb greeted Macready when he stepped onto the Astor Opera House stage on May 7, 1849; with much worse to follow. The plebs in the upper gallery started throwing chairs down on the stage by the third act. Astor management imposed a formal dress code for the May 10th performance, turning away many trying to take their seats in the upper galleries. Tempers flared and, by 7:15 pm an angry mob encircled the theater looking for white-gloved patrons to harass. As shouts overtook his opening lines, Macready brandishing a truncheon pointed out offenders to police officers stationed around the hall.

The gathering crowd outside discovered a pile of heavy paving stones being used to build a sewer and began to through them at the opera hall's large glass windows. The audience, fearing for their lives, barricaded themselves inside as rioters attempted unsuccessfully to start a fire in the basement. At 10:00 pm, with an estimated crowd of 10,000–15,000 surrounding the building, the National Guard arrived and opened fire. Macready, who had tried to continue his performance throughout, quietly sneaked away in a dress. Morning would arrive before peace returned to Astor Place with 25 lives having been lost and more than 120 injured.

Xenophobic appetites and class bitterness combined to turn a night at the theater into one of New York City's most deadly rampages. The Astor Opera House — now known as the “Massacre Opera House” — could not restore its well-heeled reputation. The New York Mercantile Library purchased the building a few years later and used it until demolishing it in the 1890s.

Dublin, 1907

Theater has been a vital forum for Irish politics and an important outlet for contending Irish identities since the restoration of Charles II, if not before. Charles brought back theatrical entertainment to Ireland in 1662 — as he had in England — by establishing the office of Master of Revels in Ireland. In doing so, he connected theater to the Crown's Royal representatives in Dublin Castle.

Few legitimate outlets existed in Ireland for the expression of the intense and bitter rivalries created by the island's profoundly factional confessional, linguistic, national, class, and patronage landscape. Dublin's long-time royal stage in Smock Alley (1662–1759) — together with various successor Royal theatres — became associated with nearby Dublin Castle and the rambunctious students at Trinity College next door.

On November 4, 1712, local Tory colonial administrators forbade the reading of a proclamation in honor of Queen Anne on the birthday of her predecessor William III of Orange. Ireland had become a social powder keg as “New English” regime clients laid claim to lands previously held by Catholic and old Protestant gentry. Bitter conflicts among Protestants and Catholics, landholders and their tenants, Newbies and Old Timers were set to detonate.



Playboy of the Western World, 1907

Royal representatives in Dublin Castle could not deter Williamite Whigs from celebrating the deceased monarch. Whig partisan Dudley Moore jumped from the pit onto the stage just before a performance at Smock Alley declaring his fealty to the House of Orange. Pandemonium ensued as the house broke down with shouts, swords, and fists flying back and forth among various factions throughout the house. A Whig-dominated Grand Jury later dropped riot charges against Moore.

A few commercial theaters joined the royal chartered theaters at Smock Alley and, later, elsewhere. Trinity's students and Castle officialdom insured something of a stable audience base, which nonetheless never proved sufficient to sustain more than a handful of theaters. Touring companies ranged far and wide over the island, expanding the Irish theater audience. Leading writers, actors, and backstage artists frequently found their ways to the larger London theater scene in order to survive. New York stages joined the mix in the nineteenth century to form a Dublin, London, New York triad supporting Irish theater.

Dublin remained Irish drama's fulcrum; a theater scene dominated by political friction and intrigue which periodically surfaced. In 1754, a seemingly innocuous performance of Voltaire's *Mahomet* erupted into a riot as the production substituted for a debate that authorities never allowed over the previous year's “Money Bill.” That legislation permitted Westminster to raid the Irish budgetary surplus to cover England's national debt. Another outburst of Protestant Orange Order jingoism nearly destroyed Theatre Royal, Hawkins Street during a December 1822 performance of Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*.

Irish theater continued to expand and to become more professional throughout the nineteenth century as Irish, English, and sometime American companies added theaters around the island to their tours; and, as commercial houses featuring musical fare opened in Dublin. The latest Gilbert and Sullivan operetta followed Irish American Dion Boucicault's latest work and contemporary Scandinavian dramas by Ibsen. English promoter J.W. Whitbread joined with Irish brothers Michael and John Gunn to open Dublin's luxuriously grand Queen's Royal Theatre in 1884.

Violence bubbled just below the surface — boiling over at some performances — as Ireland's culture wars intensified. Shipyard workers in Belfast famously threw rivets at actors

performing characters with whom they disagreed; inebriated Trinity students amused themselves by interrupting Dublin performances. A chasm opened between popular nationalism and internationalist curiosity — or, more simply, between theater as propaganda and theater as art.

Against this background, a band of parlor room intellectuals gathered one rainy afternoon in September 1897 at the Comte de Basterot's summer estate — Duras House, County Galway—to transform Irish theater. These hearty theatrical insurrectionists — initially including W.B. Yeats; Augusta, Lady Gregory; and Edward Martyn — formulated a plan for advancing non-commercial Irish theater written by Irish playwrights performed by Irish actors for Irish audiences.

Poet and writer Yeats had achieved the status of celebrity, having been a driving force in Ireland's late nineteenth century literary revival. Folklorist Gregory grew up in Anglo-Irish high society and, during various Grand Tours of the continent, had become a follower of John Ruskin's aesthetic ideals. The Jesuit-trained Martyn joined playwriting with political and cultural activism (he would serve as the first president of Sinn Féin founded by republican journalist Arthur Griffith). Martyn left the group, turning his attention to Irish-language theatre. Martyn's cousin George Moore — a naturalistic novelist and artist — signed on to launch the Irish Literary Theatre.

Gregory drew on her connections with top colonial administrators to secure an otherwise unobtainable operating license from the Lord Lieutenant. The theatre's strong connections to Dublin Castle made the company suspect in the eyes of some Irish republicans.

Beyond the pragmatic challenges of standing up operations, the group was riven by artistic disagreements beyond their shared dislike of commercialism. Yeats preferred the mythological over realism; Martyn, the naturalist, inclined towards realism; Gregory similarly was drawn to more naturalistic folk drama. Frank and Willie Fay, brothers who became leading Irish actors, signed on to provide much-needed theatrical experience.

Following initial seasons at the diminutive St. Teresa's Hall and the slightly larger Molesworth Hall, the Society changed its name to the Irish National Theatre Society and secured the Mechanic's Institute on Abbey Street next to the city morgue. The 562 seat Abbey Theatre created within the Mechanic's Institute building opened on December 27, 1904.

Constructed around a pit, stalls, and a single curved balcony, the Abbey left little room for working class patrons who sought out cheap seats in an upper balcony. Sinn Féin founder Griffith began purchasing the last row of seats for party members to ensure a working-class presence, instructing them to monitor insults to Roman Catholics.

The Abbey Theatre drew rising literary whiz kid John Millington Synge into its circle. Synge, who would die of Hodgkin's disease at the age of 37 in 1909, had grown up in a well-off Anglo-Irish family. He was drawn to working class Irish rural life, which he found fascinating for its

mixture of Roman Catholicism and ancestral nature worship. His at times harsh portrayals of village life proved too realistic for some nationalists, who preferred more idealized presentations of Irish Catholic society. The nationalists were primed to be critical when his *The Playboy of the Western World* opened at the Abbey Theater in January 1907.

Word spread beforehand that Synge's play about young Christy Mahon killing his father was anti-Catholic. Set in a County Mayo pub, Synge populated the cast with stereotypical local characters who greet Mahon's confession that he had murdered his dad with various degrees of praise and dismay. When it turned out that Old Mahon had only been wounded, the townsfolk turned on young Christy. Old Mahon saved his son from a crowd bent on vengeance only after a second attempt at murder had failed. In the end, the Mahons father and son reconcile and leave town after having exposed the dismal, brutish, dead-end life of the Irish village. Defenders of Irish national honor were not amused.

The hall was packed opening night, Saturday, January 26. Unease and discomfort grew throughout the first act as the audience realized what had begun as a comedy parodying rural life was turning increasingly dark. The story takes a nasty turn following Christy's second failed attempt at murder when a girl pulls off her petticoat for the young man to use as a disguise. Insult was added to injury when actor Willie Fay flubbed his lines and ended up insulting Irish womanhood. The hisses began. The actors attempted to continue until the noise had become too great.

Fay stopped the performance and declared that he himself was from County Mayo and took no offense. Lord Walter Fitzgerald arose in the stalls and tried to calm the crowd, which only further agitated the nationalists in the audience. The police arrived and the performance stumbled to its conclusion with insults and brawls breaking out as the house lights came up and continued into the street.

The actors and Yeats had expected worse and supposed that all was well. Yeats mobilized a press blitz to curry favor for the play. Gregory, evidently unaware of the longstanding tumult bought by Trinity student audiences, asked her nephew to rally some of his university classmates to the cause.

An enraged crowd from both sides of the nationalist divide gathered at the doors by 7 pm on Tuesday, January 29 for the play's second showing. The Trinity students and local toughs rushed the doors when they opened fifty minutes later, setting off a scrum for the best seats. Yeats only made the situation worse when he announced a debate over freedom of the theater scheduled for the following Monday.

The play continued for a while until Willie Fray made his first appearance as Christy Mahon, resulting in anarchy. More and more police arrived to calm the crowd as open warfare broke out every time the house lights dimmed to restart the performance. Both sides picked up supporters outside as havoc spilled onto the Trinity campus and across the Liffey River, only to be calmed at dawn. Protests and arrests continued for the remainder of the play's week-long run, subsiding in intensity with each passing performance.



Igor Stravinsky. Rite of Spring. 1913

Synge's *Playboy* became ever more appreciated for its luxuriously lyrical Irish speech. The Abbey company took advantage of notoriety and toured the play across Ireland, England and into Europe. They added the production to their 1911 American tour when, on opening night in New York (with Gregory seated next to former US President Teddy Roosevelt), scuffles broke out with heckles, boos, hisses, tossed vegetables, and a stink bomb. The tour was interrupted in Philadelphia when the entire cast was arrested for putting on an immoral performance. While the charges were dismissed, the continuing conflict among Irish nationalists of various beliefs continued to disrupt Dublin's theaters into the future.

As the stories from Naples, London, Brussels, New York, and Dublin illustrate, theaters are integrated into larger worlds teeming with contestation over class, economics, politics, and identity. More fundamentally, they are places of creative expression.

Many disturbances have been about artistic quarrels over what is transpiring on stage. The Rome Carnevale of 1800, for example, limped ahead immediately following the collapse of Napoleon's short-lived Roman Republic and the city's occupation by Neapolitan armed forces. Impresarios struggled to stage the season's productions in the face of the depleted ranks of musicians, actors, and dancers. Artistic battles were sure to follow. The soprano lead in Luigi Caruso's new musical at the Teatro Valle, for example, was a partisan of rival composer Pietro Allessandro Guglielmi. Caruso, who was conducting, and the soprano prima donna started a shouting match between the stage and the orchestra pit. The audience soon joined in with all sense of decorum evaporating. The performance ended in madness as the songstress marched off stage and out of the theater.

Paris, 1913

Sergei Diaghilev came to Paris on the eve of World War I, just as fin-de-siècle decadence and lavish entertainment were reaching new heights. The city's heady mix of bourgeois and downscale nightlife had an edge not seen elsewhere. Glamor and slumming mixed as every kind of social encounter found new outlets in a society that loved the shock of being shocked. The titillation of scandal was stage-managed. Ever more scandalous exotic dances and music swept through the Parisian scene—the waltz, polka, can-can, apache,

cakewalk, *maxixe*, samba, tango, belly dancing, jazz—simultaneously becoming tamed for proper society. Performers sought tension between virtuosity, gracefulness, and sensuality; and the bourgeoisie was ready to follow suit in more muted form. This scene was tailor made for resourceful Russians.

Diaghilev grew up in a home known for hosting musical and other artistic gatherings. His family — well-off vodka distillers in the Urals city of Perm — fell on hard times during his late teens and Diaghilev headed to study law at St. Petersburg University in 1890. He soon fell in with the vibrant culture circle around the journal *Mir iskusstva* (*World of Art*). His efforts to promote cutting-edge art exhibits in the capital collided with the conservatism of mainstream Russian artistic taste.

In 1906, he organized an extraordinarily successful exhibition of new Russian art at the *Petit Palais* in Paris, which he followed a year later with a week of performances at the Paris Opera House of Modest Mussorsky's *Boris Gudinov* featuring basso Fyodor Chaliapin. By 1909, in an early example of the exercise of “soft power,” he had convinced Russian officials to support his efforts at promoting Russian culture in Paris.

Financial constraints forced him to turn from opera to less expensive dance. Initially, he drew on the Imperial Ballet of Saint Petersburg for talent, planning the season of his new Ballets Russe company around seasonal hiatuses back in Russia.

Diaghilev collected some of the most remarkable performance and visual artists of the era around him — including Léon Bakst, George Balanchine, Alexandre Benois, Ivan Bilibin, Braque, Jean Cocteau, Coco Chanel, Claude Debussy, Mikhail Fokine, Natalia Goncharova, Juan Gris, Vasily Kandinsky, Tamara Karsavina, Léonid Massine, Henri Matisse, Juan Miró, Bronislava Nijinska and her brother Vaslav Nijinsky, Pablo Picasso, Sergei Prokofiev, Maurice Ravel, Nicholas Roerich, Erik Satie, and Sergei Sudeykin — in what would become one of the most influential dance companies of the twentieth century both in its original incarnation and in various subsequent troupes following Diaghilev's death in 1929.

Paris — and later London, and every other major dance city — fell in love with the ensemble's unique combination of Russian power and French sophistication. The Paris cultural scene was divided between a fashionable *haut bourgeoisie* drawn to the arts for entertainment and traditional notions of beauty, and the “Bohemians” in search of the shocking and new. The Ballets Russe appealed to both groups. Diaghilev, the ultimate showman whose nickname was “Chinchilla,” could show off his fine manners in his top hat and tails to the first, and his avant-garde Russian spirit to the second.

Diaghilev recruited an unknown Igor Stravinsky to compose three ballets: *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911), and *The Rite of Spring* (*La Sacre du printemps*) (1913). Audiences and critics agreed that *The Firebird* was a remarkably accomplished first ballet. The opening dissonance of *Petrushka* shocked and confused many traditional

ballet fans while producing excitement among the outsiders. Stravinsky pushed the limits of his audience even further with *The Rite of Spring*. Now considered among the most influential ballets and orchestral scores of the twentieth century, few in the Paris of 1913 were prepared for Stravinsky's pounding cadences and aggressive theatrics telling a story beginning with a Eurasian pagan rite and ending with the ceremonial execution of a sacrificial virgin.

Diaghilev booked the just-opened Théâtre des Champs-Élysées for four performances and assembled a large orchestra of 82 freelance musicians. Located on fashionable Avenue Montagne, the theater was — and remains — among Paris's most chic addresses.

Troubles began during rehearsals. Composer Stravinsky bickered constantly with choreographer and lead dancer Nijinsky. Nijinsky, for his part, developed an exceedingly difficult program full of unballetic movements. He invented a counting system for the dancers which largely ignored the musical score. The dancers later credited Nijinsky with having created the work during rehearsals.

Conductor Pierre Monteux faced his own problems. Many of the musicians pulled together for the performance did not believe that the score could be played. Eventually, Monteux had to plead with orchestra members not to write "corrections" into the score. Somehow, the production came together, and the dress rehearsal went reasonably well.

On May 29, 1913, a star-studded audience — including such luminaries as Jean Cocteau, Maurice Delage, Maurice Ravel, Camille Saint-Saëns, Misia Sert, and Carl Van Vecten — gathered in excited anticipation for what promised to be a memorable — if infamous — night. The program began with a crowd-pleasing traditional work different from what was to follow: *Les Sylphides*, performed to music by Frédéric Chopin with a purposefully beautiful set by Alexandre Benois, choreography by Mikhail Fokine, and danced by Nijinsky and Tamara Karsavina. Diaghilev would have been hard pressed to find a work that would contrast more abruptly with what was to follow the intermission.

That gap was announced as soon as the curtain went up on Roerich's allegorical set, which was as modern as Benois's had been traditional. Diaghilev had asked Monteux and the dancers to plough through until the end no matter what happened. The catcalls began halfway through the Prelude, with traditionalist and avant-garde camps in the audience exchanging insults and taunts with one another and with the performers. Nijinsky, offstage, started shouting out the count for the dancers who could not hear the music for the din. At one point, dancer Marie Piltz starts to tremble uncontrollably as she is selected as the maiden to be sacrificed in the spring rite. Audience members called for a doctor. As the moment revealed her spasms to have been choreographed, the shouts demanded a dentist, then two.

Somehow, everyone made it through the 34-minute dance. Despite the uproar, the orchestra and dancers were called back for four, or five, curtain calls. Subsequent reviews ranged from the outraged to the laudatory reflecting the deep aesthetic divisions on the Paris art world of the time.

The remaining performances of the Paris run — and all the subsequent performances in London — were relatively tame in comparison to opening night. The raucous rejection of what was to become one of the twentieth century's most influential works became legendary, highlighting how what was once indecently new can become conventional with time.

Stravinsky would have to wait to celebrate. He evidently ate a tainted oyster sometime during the run of performances. By week's end, had checked into a nursing home in suburban Neuilly-sur-Seine for acute enteritis which, in fact, turned out to be typhoid.

Coconut Grove, 1956

If many consider *The Rite of Spring* to be among the most influential ballets and orchestral composition of the twentieth century, numerous theater mavens have declared Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* to be among the century's most notable plays. Like *The Rite of Spring*, *Waiting for Godot* initially disturbed, confused, and angered countless theater-goers before entering into the canon of major works.

Samuel Beckett wrote the original French language play — *En attendant Godot* — during the winter 1948–1949. Roger Blin directed the premier production at Paris's Théâtre de Babylone in January 1953. The English language premier in London followed two years later under the direction of a 24-year-old Peter Hall.

Beckett was already a well-regarded member of postwar French intellectual circles, having moved to the city during the 1930s; and, having fought in the French Resistance during World War II. His interest in writing and in theater developed while a student at Dublin's Trinity College during the 1920s, and as a member of its faculty in the early 1930s before he moved to London, and then Paris.

Beckett would have witnessed the turmoil surrounding the Abbey Theater — and theater and literature more generally — as nationalism sought to reshape Irish culture. *Waiting for Godot* mirrored the absurdism reshaping the arts in response to the reality of possible annihilation in an unstable Cold War nuclear world.

The initial American production opened at the Coconut Grove Playhouse in an upmarket Miami suburb on January 3, 1956 under the direction of Alan Schneider, with veteran comedians Bert Lahr playing Estragon and Tom Ewell cast as Vladimir. Ewell was enjoying success on Broadway and in Hollywood as a leading star in romantic comedies. His performance in *The Seven Year Itch* (both on Broadway in 1953–1954, and in Hollywood in 1955) earned him a Tony Award and a Golden Globe Award just as he was to head to Florida to play in *Waiting for Godot*. Lahr was beloved for his appearance as the cowardly lion in the film *The Wizard of Oz* as well as for his long career in vaudeville and comedy. Many ticketholders that evening were expecting to see their favorite comedians in the light fare typical of their careers.

Alan Schneider had been born weeks after the 1917 Russian Revolution in Khar'kiv (in today's Ukraine). His parents, both physicians, took their family to the United States in 1923. Alan finished high school in Baltimore,

before studying at Johns Hopkins University, the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and Cornell University. One summer evening in 1941, as a young graduate student home visiting his parents, Schneider attended a performance at Catholic University directed by then-faculty member Walter Kerr.

Schneider was so taken with Kerr's work that he went backstage and told him that he had never seen anything of such high quality. When Kerr discovered that Schneider was finishing his master's degree, he arranged to have him join the Catholic University faculty. By December, Schneider was directing the world premiere of recent Pulitzer Prize winner William Saroyan's *Jim Dandy* at the university.

Zelda Fichandler later recruited Schneider to join her fledgling company at Washington's Arena Stage. He remained close to Fichandler and Arena until his untimely death in 1984. Schneider was killed by a motorcycle in London while crossing the street to drop a letter in the mail to Samuel Beckett.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Schneider kept winning kudos for his productions of works by Beckett, Bertold Brecht, Edward Albee, Harold Pinter, and William Saroyan. He gained wide recognition with his direction of the original Broadway production of Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* In 1963, Schneider became the first director to win both the Tony Award for Broadway and the Obie Award for Off Broadway in the same year for Albee's play and the Off-Broadway production of Pinter's *The Collection*.

The production had experienced difficulties before arriving in Florida. Previous runs in Washington and Philadelphia were cancelled due to low box office sales. Schneider, Ewell, and Lahr were quite different artists who were struggling with an unprecedented text. Schneider's rigorous attention to technical matters, while remaining as close as possible to the words written in the script, earned the appreciation

of the playwrights. He became a particularly favored director for Beckett, with whom he remained a close collaborator. Schneider's demanding style was not always as appreciated by actors. Lahr's son — theater critic John — reports that his father banned Schneider's name from his household.

Waiting for Godot had been booked for the Coconut Grove Playhouse's grand opening. Originally launched in 1927 as a cinema, the playhouse was known for its high style and the largest Wurlitzer organ in the United States. In the 1950s, oil magnate George Engle purchased the movie theater and, with the help of architect Alfred Browning Parker, renovated it as a playhouse. The theater and its company have remained a major regional theater ever since.

Monied Floridians were looking forward to the opening gala as an opportunity to show off, and to see cherished old school comedians Ewell and Lahr on stage. Though described at times as a "riot," the well-heeled crowd did not shout and throw objects at the stage. Instead, they walked out. A call had gone to Miami cab drivers to head over and pick up the unexpectedly early fares. The hall had virtually emptied by intermission.

Critics joined in the censure, describing the play as one in which nothing happens. The catastrophe of their Florida experience would lead to the cancellation of an additional stop in New York. The Broadway premier eventually took place in April 1956 under Herbert Berghof's direction with Lahr appearing as Estragon and E. G. Marshall as Vladimir. The shock of the new was not quite as much of a jolt in New York.

The fiasco haunted Schneider for the rest of his career and left its mark on Lahr as well. Lahr, despite claiming to not having understood the role, benefited the most. His subsequent performance as Estragon in New York defined the role for American audiences. Schneider's reaction was more



The Coconut Grove Playhouse



Kyiv Opera House

mistrustful, complaining, from time to time, of a Lahr family vendetta against him. The Coconut Grove Playhouse would find its feet and move on to become a beloved piece of the Miami cultural scene. As it did, it fully embraced its historic role as the home of the American premier of one of the twentieth century's most iconic plays. What was new and shocking had become ordinary and revered.

Kyiv, 2013

The rhythmic hip-hop-like chants of protest exploded just as the final curtain came down on the flower-laden ballet dancers and the musicians who had performed with them. Within seconds, the bright lights of TV crews who had forced their way into the orchestra seats overwhelmed as-yet dim house lights when suddenly — as if on a cue from a cameraman — four white banners poured out of the fourth balcony enveloping the hall below.

To ever louder chants of “*Hanba! Hanba! Hanba!*” (“Shame! Shame! Shame!”), the streamers demanded that the National Ballet of Ukraine retain their artistic director Denys Matvienko. The sumptuous Kyiv Opera House exploded in chaos after a stunning performance on April 13, 2013.

The Kyiv theater has seen more than its fair share of music history, and politics-inspired disruptions since opening in 1901. These links connected the city to the turn-of-the-century avant-garde throughout the Russian Empire and Europe. Stravinsky's father, for example, enjoyed a successful career as a bass with the Kyiv Opera as well as the Mariinsky Opera in St. Petersburg. Vaslav Nijinsky and his sister Bronislava were natives of the city.

More notoriously, on September 12 (September 1 Old Style), 1911, Nicholas II's unforgivingly conservative Interior and Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin stood up after the second act of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, turning his back to the stage next to a ramp between the parterre and orchestra seats. Perhaps the Prime Minister had decided to use the intermission to check out the Royal Box, where Nicholas and his two oldest daughters, the Grand Duchesses Olga and Tatiana had been watching the production.

His personal bodyguard evidently viewed the break as an opportunity to sneak off for a surreptitious smoke. More than

two score security guards posted around the hall similarly disappeared just as Dmitry Bogrov — the son of a local merchant family, secret police informer, and self-proclaimed anarchist revolutionary — determinedly approached Stolypin. Bogrov raised his gun and fired; two shots hit Stolypin in the arm and chest. The Prime Minister died a few days later with the assassin's execution coming shortly thereafter, leaving behind a tangle of conspiracy theories which continue a century later.

Nothing so lethal occurred after the ballet performance in April 2013; yet an act of intrigue once again presaged regime collapse. In this instance, a weak, incompetent, and corrupt Ukrainian government would be run out of the country a scant ten months later.

The National Ballet of Ukraine has managed to remain a national treasure despite all of the political, financial, and artistic upheavals of the past three decades. Like many other Soviet companies, the Kyiv ballet needed a dusting off once the country fell apart and cultural institutions long dependent on state munificence were tossed into the international arts marketplace.

The company's ballet school continued to produce a steady stream of world-class performers — especially male dancers — who headed out across the globe. Oftentimes they signed with international companies. New York's American Ballet Theater hired numerous Kyiv-trained soloists and Corps members of note. Kyiv dancers nonetheless returned home whenever their schedules permit them to take time away from leading companies in Moscow, St. Petersburg, London, and New York. The company became, as former US Ambassador to Ukraine William Green Miller once quipped, “the best company money can't buy.”

Denys Matvienko was among those who chose to return. A native of Dnepropetrovsk, Matvienko spent his career dancing in Kyiv, while serving as a leading soloist in Moscow, St. Petersburg, New York, Tokyo, and Milan. Approaching his mid-thirties, he was lured back to Kyiv in November 2011 to serve as the company's Artistic Director and to perform whenever possible.

Matvienko set about introducing contemporary ballets to the company's repertoire. He added verve to the company's standard repertoire. For example, he replaced the Marius

Pitipa's well-worn choreography for Ludwig Minkus' *La Bayadère* with a more modern and energetic 1980s version choreographed by the Natalia Makarova for London and New York audiences. Simultaneously, Matvienko invited innovative contemporary artists to bring their works to Kyiv, including Edward Clug, a Romanian dancer whose striking choreography has made the Slovene National Theater one of the most exciting companies of its size anywhere.

The April 13 program combined two of Clug's most successful and beloved works: *Radio and Juliet*, a retelling of the Shakespeare love story to the music of Radiohead; and *Quarto*, a striking abstract chamber piece featuring two pairs of male and female dancers on stage with a pianist and cellist. Matvienko and his wife Anastasia, who was born in Crimea, made *Radio and Juliet* their signature piece, while Kyiv's astonishing young dancers performed *Quarto* (a piece which has won praise from around the world including a prestigious Russian Golden Mask Award) as handsomely as any company to be found. Kyiv audiences embraced Matvienko's vision, making the ballet a magnet for the expanding younger post-independence generation of professionals and entrepreneurs.

Matvienko's leadership symbolized everything that post-independence Kyiv youth wanted for their country: something that was fresh, high energy, edgy, and internationally appreciated, especially in the West. They welcomed his regime as a symbol of a new Ukraine that would be within their grasp if only their country's boorish, traditional in a Soviet sort of way, and corrupt leaders would just get out of their way.

A couple of days before the April 13 eruption inside the Kyiv Opera House, the leadership of the theater and their masters at the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture — run by particularly distasteful cronies of the country's convicted criminal-turned president Viktor Yanukovich — “fired” Matvienko as the company's artistic director. Citing artistic and personal differences, the Opera Theater's management revealed in a bizarre announcement that Matvienko had never been “hired.” Evidently, once Matvienko signed his contract in November 2011, management sent his employment documents to superiors who never bothered to countersign.

The Matvienkos decamped for St. Petersburg, where they continued to dance among the renowned Mariinsky's most popular Principal Dancers. But they did not

do so before Denys Matvienko appeared in the mutinous audience assembled on April 13 to watch substitutes Aniko Rekhviashvili and Anastisia Shevchenko (the latest in a long line of Kyiv-produced rising global ballet stars) perform in the Matvienkos' signature roles in *Radio and Juliet*.

The raucous upper balcony protestors in Kyiv and their sympathetic supporters in lower tiers of the Kyiv Opera House were going far beyond showing support for their dismissed idol, Denys Matvienko. They were proclaiming their collective disgust with the incompetent and corrupt state officials who forced him to leave. That evening's audience warmly embraced the evening's performances of both *Radio and Juliet*, and *Quarto*. Instead, they saved their ire for, to their minds, the illegitimate decision-makers who were stealing their world from them. A demonstration among fans of individual artists assumed far larger meaning. The boundary between artistic vision and politics had blurred in ways reminiscent of the riotous performances of the past.

Uproarious Arts

Nearly three decades ago, in 1993, the Harvard government professor Robert Putnam published his now-classic study *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Trying to answer the question of why Northern Italian cities developed vibrant civic traditions, which came to support the growth of democratic institutions, but Southern Italian cities did not, Putnam was surprised to find a strong correlation between civic health and choral societies. Putnam masterfully argued that choral societies emerged from the same broad reservoir of social capital that is required to support civic vitality.

Perhaps hard-nosed democracy advocates pursuing measurable advances toward institutionally bounded representative institutions consider the music little more than white noise. If so, they miss the much larger story of social and political change. The performing arts, as communal and social activities, bring humans together in all their agreements and disagreements. They express some of the deepest human emotions and, in response, intensify our innermost passions. A night at the theater, the concert hall, or the club is always about more than the white noise of our lives. What happens when performers meet their audiences signals how we see ourselves and our futures; and how we like what we see, or not.

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Рубл Б. А.

Буремні вистави

Анотація. Сторіччями театральна аудиторія виражала своє ставлення до подій на сцені і в широкому світі. В деяких випадках така колотнеча, що межувала (і включала) з повномасштабними заворушеннями, була сигналом про глибокі конфлікти, що оформлювалися в суспільстві, які згущувалися до такої міри, що загрожували політичним і соціальним переворотом. Випадки, описаних у статті — обмежених Неаполем, Лондоном, Брюсселем, Дубліном, Маямі та Києвом — дозволяють зробити припущення, що такі хвилювання можуть відображати незадоволення економічною ситуацією, посилення націоналістичних настроїв, появу нових художніх течій. Вечір у театрі, концертній залі чи клубі — це завжди що більше, ніж просто фоновий шум нашого життя. Те, що відбувається, коли виконавці зустрічаються з аудиторією, вказує на те, яким ми бачимо наше майбутнє, нас самих, і чи подобається нам це чи ні.

Ключові слова: опера, балет, заворушення, Стравінський, Сінг, Бекет, Ніжинський.

Рубл Б. А.

Бурные спектакли

Аннотация. Веками театральная аудитория выражала свое отношение к происходящему на сцене и в мире вокруг. В некоторых случаях такие перепалки, граничащие (и включающие) полномасштабные беспорядки служили ранним индикатором глубоких конфликтов, оформляющихся в обществе, которые впоследствии угрожали политическому и социальному порядку. В случаях, описанных в статье — Неаполь, Лондон, Брюссель, Нью-Йорк, Дублин, Париж, Майами, Киев — позволяют сделать вывод, что такие беспорядки отражают неудовлетворенность экономической ситуацией, нарастание националистических тенденций, появление новых художественных течений. Вечер в театре, концертном зале, клубе — это всегда нечто большее, чем фоновый шум наших жизней. То, что происходит когда исполнители встречаются с аудиторией, указывает на то, каким мы видим наше будущее, нас самих, нравится нам это или нет.

Ключевые слова: опера, балет, беспорядки, Стравинский, Синг, Бекет, Нижинский.

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