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Aspects of Theatre Directing in the Maria Zankovetska National Academic Ukrainian Drama Theater during the 1990s–2010s

Аспекти режисерської діяльності Національного академічного українського драматичного театру ім. Марії Заньковецької 1990–2010-х років

Abstract. The paper examines the key features of the creative work of three stage directors of the Maria Zankovetska Theater during the 1990s–2010s: Fedir Stryhun, Alla Babenko, and Vadym Sikorskyi. The analysis of their landmark productions enables distinguishing the method of working on the theatrical production by each of them and outlines the thematic and conceptual range of both the artists' works and the theater as a whole. The variety of artistic methods of stage direction during the period was studied, including the elements of psychological, poetic, and conditional theater in the terms of aesthetics, as well as the political, philosophical, and intellectual theater in relation to the concept, and the nature of the conservative and experimental theater in respect to the novelty of the implementation of stage solutions. It was identified that the creative image of the theater had been established by F. Stryhun and his artistic guidelines were dominant during the period, with his creative work oriented towards the social and cultural educational demands of Ukraine. Modern stage design and directing, presented by his colleagues A. Babenko and V. Sikorskyi, were less significant in the overall course of the theatre.

Keywords: Maria Zankovetska Theater, stage direction, repertoire, psychologism, theatrics, conditional theater.

Introduction

The period of the 1990s–2010s became an integrated stage of development for the Maria Zankovetska National Theater and is linked to the creative management of the company by its manager and actor Fedir Stryhun (1987–2019). In addition, two more active directors worked at the Zankovetska Theater on a permanent basis during this period: Alla Babenko and Vadym Sikorskyi. The fundamentals of creativity of each of the three artists differed: while in certain aspects they were opposing, in others they were related, influencing the development of artistic trends in the theater, which were implemented mainly through the directors' activities. The dominant features of the artistic endeavors of each of the directors are yet to be identified comprehensively through teatrology analysis of their landmark theatrical productions, as well as interpretation thereof in the scope of the historical period of development of Ukrainian art.

O. Klekovkin explored the origins and history of the evolution of “director’s theater” in different countries and emphasized the commonality of visions of the beginning of the modern era of stage direction “as the art of creating an artistically integrated stage artwork” during the second half of the 19th century. The scholar aptly ironizes: “The simultaneous coexistence of theaters of various periods can be found on the map of any city: here is the boulevard theater (certainly, bearing a different and a rather prestigious name); here you see the salon theater and the theater producing government concerts; and here is an experimental theater all the time imitating the stormy search initiated by its predecessors over a century ago” (Klekovkin, 2015, p. 16). While pursuing this idea further, the directors of the 1990s–2010s should be considered (F. Stryhun, A. Babenko, and V. Sikorskyi) within the framework of the prominent history of the development of this profession without emphasizing the very capability of artists of the late 20th century to introduce something

fundamentally new into the methods of production (given the history of postdramatic, according to H.-T. Lehmann's definition, "post-Brechtian", theater (Lehmann, 2013)). This paper illustrates the relationship between the stage directors at the Maria Zankovetska Theater and the specific historical era, with certain distinguishable and stable methods of directing acquiring aspects relevant to Ukrainian culture during this specific historically significant period.

Aim of the paper

The subject matter of the study is the heterogeneous production methods of the Maria Zankovetska National Academic Ukrainian Drama Theater company. It is important to highlight the manifestations of political and current theater when the time reference is minimized and other directorial ideas come to the fore, as well as the aesthetic and stylistic principles of such theater (in the present case, the theaters).

Literature Review

The inconsistency in assessments of the performance of the Maria Zankovetska Theater during the 1990s–2010s results from the lack of historical distance and the impossibility of looking at this period with the benefit of hindsight. The artists whose creative work is being considered are still alive and working in the theater industry. Therefore, the research papers on this period are scarce. Acting and stage direction, as well as the public position of Fedir Stryhun were analyzed by T. Osadchuk in her Candidate thesis (Osadchuk, 2017), the oeuvre of Vadym Sikorskyi was studied by S. Rosa-Lavrentii (Rosa, 2005). A large body of studies of critical and journalistic nature on the work of all the listed directors may be found in the publications by the leading theater researchers S. Veselka, Yu. Bohdashevskiy, V. Zabolotna, H. Lypkivska, V. Haidabura, A. Drak, and others.

Results and Discussion

A theater company with a hundred-year-old history (founded in 1917 in Kyiv) has been based in Lviv since 1944. During the 1990s–2010s it consisted of about 120 artists (of which approximately 65 were actors), producing an average of 8–12 new performances per season. The performances were staged daily on two different stages, with the company also touring and participating in festivals. The theater entered the 1990s with a well-established body of actors of the middle-age and older generation, as well as young artists who had already made a name for themselves in the 1980s.

Historically, for the Ukrainian nation this period was the time of establishment of a new independent statehood. The large territory united during in the Soviet period—the newly established modern state of Ukraine—started a complex process of, as Yaroslav Hrytsak defines it, "overcoming the past" (Hrytsak, 2021), which still continues.

The "fresh" legacy of public administration inherited from the Soviet Union, the geographically diverse historical background of ethnic Ukrainians living in different empires, Russia's consistent intervention in the political life of Ukraine, and its invasion of sovereign territory—these and other factors significantly hampered the development of the cultural field. The theater, however, being the art of subtext and dialogue with a wide audience, was experimenting with its own ways of "conversation" with time and audience, which manifested itself exactly through the work of the mentioned directors. In modern theatrical art, it is the director who is considered to be the author of a piece, thus, in theatrical production, it is the director who ultimately determines what the piece should be and what ideas should it convey to the audience.

The key figure who established the creative image of the Maria Zankovetska Theater during the 1990s–2010s was its manager *Fedir Stryhun*. By the time he began directing, he was already a famous stage and film actor in Ukraine; the main roles in his repertoire were heroic, patriotic, and romanticized characters, which resulted from his heroic appearance and natural endowment. This factor alone has become the impetus for the Maria Zankovetska Theater to be associated with the Ukrainian patriotic repertoire since the early 1990s. Subsequently, it was colloquially referred to as the Hetman Fedir Stryhun Theater.

Each of F. Stryhun's theatrical productions was an extensive canvas involving the theater's entire creative staff, including extras and students. Large-scale scenes with songs and dances, skillfully and effectively constructed crowd scenes, with intense attention to plausible detailed mise-en-scènes often interspersed with symbolic images in the structure of the theatrical production. For example, in *The Visit of the Old Lady* by F. Dürrenmatt (2006), the love story between Ill and Claire was rendered by a dancing couple that appeared between parts of the act and plastically represented the development of their relationship.

F. Stryhun's entire creative career was devoted to the only ideological direction—development of the Ukrainian "educating" theater, the Lviv Theater University, where the audience would gain knowledge from various spheres. His primary aim was to teach students their own history, "half-forgotten" during the years of Soviet rule, and discover globally famous stage pieces. The beauty and originality of Ukrainian culture was revealed to the audience of the 1990s in a number of programmatic theatrical productions, which included the heritage of Ukrainian folklore and ethnic motives in the costume decoration and stage design, with the content being central and conveying information about the past of the nation. An important aspect of such productions by F. Stryhun was their high aesthetic quality. They have become the pinnacle of his creative work and demonstrate his director's style as a producer. These include such theatrical productions as the *Ill-Fated One* (Beztalanna) by I. Karpenko-Karyi (1987), which

for the first time omits the class motive in the interpretation, while the focus is switched to the complex psychological structure of the action; *Haidamaki* (Haidamaky) by T. Shevchenko (1988), which served as a reminder of the history of theatrical productions of this work throughout the century, including the theatrical productions by Les Kurbas; *Marusia Churai* (1989), an up-to-date first interpretation of Lina Kostenko's verse novel; *The People's Malakhiiy* (Narodnyi Malakhii) by M. Kulish (1990), staged for the first time after a half-a-century ban, where the author "focused his attention on the non-class solidarity of the evil, which he convincingly speaks about via Malakhiiy" (Haidabura, 1991, p. 20); *Jesus the Son of the Living God* (Isus, syna Boha zhyvoho) by V. Bosovych (1994), a work unique in theological, ontological, and social aspects, a second-to-none theatre mystery that was in the repertoire of the company until 2021.

This cohort of Fedir Stryhun's theatrical productions is justly considered the most distant from the concept of so-called "actor's directing", as in these productions the director operates a more complex theatrical language. An actor continues to be an essential part of a theatrical production, however, its system of imagery is created by a harmonious combination of metaphorical scenographic solutions, text and sound, music scores, and not the popular construction of crowd scenes. The designer Myron Kypriian comes to assist the director, for his scenography "over the years had been actively crystallizing out the concept of purity of style" (Y. Pihel, 2008, p. 56). With his stage design of the theatrical production *Marusia Churai*, he helps the director to create the image of the principal character as a people's doleful deity, its voice and conscience never ceasing even centuries after Marusia's physical death. The scene is positioned in an undated space, and the story of Marusia and Hryts is played through the conditional illustrative nature of the events. The first act conveys the plot, attributing to the Cossacks and Marusia positive heroic traits and contrasting them with the "opportunists"—the local rich. The principal character (D. Zelizna) is in the spotlight; a pair of vocalists and guitarists (Iliuk, 1994) perform Brechtian songs, thus commenting on and poeticizing the events unfolding before the audience. In terms of genre, the production balances between intellectual and heroic-historical drama; it bears earmarks of literary theater, for it is the poetic interpretation of Lina Kostenko's novel and not its literal rendition. The performance included the constant presence of the principal character and a large part of the author's supporting characters on the stage at all times.

Similar techniques were used by Fedir Stryhun in other stage directions from this cycle. In *Haidamaki*, he adopted the technique of the Greek chorus—the poet's thoughts—from the chronicle play by Les Kurbas (which Kurbas also staged at the Maria Zankovetska Theater in 1922 (Veselovska, 2016, p. 114)). However, he complemented it with the presence on stage of the actor playing Shevchenko,

a portrait of the author mounted above the stage, and his "voiceover", which seemed to his contemporaries to be powerful means of expression; even the issue of redundancy of directing techniques arose. "The external kinetics (the revolving stage), the play of light, the smoke, the "slow motion", and the sculpturesque physique in the manner of antique 'tableaux vivants'" (Drak, 1991, p. 17). F. Stryhun unfolded the action also in a conditional space, trying to shift away from the realism of the relationships between the characters in his stage setting. The list of "director's" stage directions by Stryhun includes *Natalka Poltavka* (Natalka Poltavka) by I. Kotliarevskyi, which, at the time of its new production in 1991, could have been attributed to an unconventional interpretation of this piece because the characters, as if "dabbling at" the theater on the stage, were trying on the roles of Voznyi and Vybornyi and engaging an area of the auditorium into the active performance.

However, F. Stryhun's search and (relative) experimenting in the domain of stylistics and aesthetics of theatrical productions is limited to the mentioned pieces, which were staged during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Thereafter, it is the conceptual component and patriotic content that comes to the fore, which, obviously, sought-after by the mass audience of the 1990s. The list of pieces that fit into this artistic system includes: *Pavlo Polubotok* (Pavlo Polubotok) by K. Burevii (1990), the *Mazeppa* (Mazepa) trilogy by B. Lepkyi (1992–1993), *Andrei* (Andrei) by V. Herasymchuk (2000), *The Treason* (Derzhavna zrada) by R. Lapica (2003), *The Orgy* (Orgiya) by Lesya Ukrainka (2004), *The Slave* (Nevolnyk) (2011), and some others. The main reason for their production was the artist's desire to fill the cultural gaps developed as a result of the ideological repressions by the Soviet Union, to retribute the key and pivotal names and events of Ukrainian history and culture, forming new ideological connections. What prevented the director from drifting away from realism were, sometimes, visual scenography in theatrical productions and, sometimes, the mundane mise-en-scene solutions and sound accompaniment. In his pursuit of conveying the atmosphere of the era and specific historical circumstances as accurately as possible, countless characters and extras wearing historical costumes were playing through scenes of the productions to make them as realistic as possible.

However, there were also some exceptions. *The Treason* by an American writer of Ukrainian descent, Ray Lapica, about the personality of Taras Shevchenko, became a symbolic figurative theatrical production, where "the figure of the poet was presented multi-faceted as an evolution of the ideas embedded in his works" (Lypova, 2015, p. 76). A panorama of life of a Ukrainian artist in Tsarist Russia during that historical period was depicted, where the people became ghosts as compared with the wealthy and powerful elite. The poets were assigned the role of the conscience of the nation and were forced

to stay silent. The scene of the presence of the other world in Shevchenko's life is illustrative when a bright light breaks through from under the bars of the proscenium and illuminates the poet lying on it crashed from the blows of fate. As Valerii Bortiakov's scenography suggests, the eternity had haunted him even during his lifetime.

Another set of theatrical productions by F. Stryhun, which also fit into his concept of the development of the theater university but which are less dramatic, were his ethnographic-folk productions and school educational repertoire based on world literature, namely *Sharika* (Sharika) (1995) and *Hutsulka Ksenya* (Hutsulka Ksenya) (1997) by Ya. Barnych, *Early Sunday Potion Digging* (U nedil'no zillia kopala) by O. Kobylanska (1998), *The Beloved Unloved One* (Kokhanyi neliub) by Ya. Stelmakh (1999), *Before the Sun Rises, Dew Will Eat Out the Eyes* (Doky sontse ziide, rosa ochi vyyst) by M. Kropyvnytskyi (2001), *The Visit of the Old Lady* by F. Dürrenmatt (2005), *Silva* by E. Kálmán (2007), *The Lady of the Camellias* by Alexandre Dumas fils, *Matchmaking at Honcharivka* (Svatannia na Honcharivtsi) by H. Kvitka-Osnovianenko (2009), *Lady Windermere's Fan* by O. Wilde (2012), *Christmas Eve* (Rizdviana nich) by M. Gogol (2015), *Maria Zankovetska* (Maria Zankovetska) by I. Riabokliach 2017, etc. These plays gained a foothold in the repertoire and became the favorite theatrical productions of the Lviv audience.

F. Stryhun strived to reveal the author as deeply as possible. However, a certain idealization of collisions of the above-mentioned pieces and sometimes artistic "navete" in terms of the conceptual interpretation thereof is perceptible. In the operettas *Sharika*, *Hutsulka Ksenya*, and *Silva* the director presents the characters as the embodiment of all possible positive traits, such a view is justified by the genre itself. However, such a simplified interpretation can also be seen in *The Lady of the Camellias* or *Lady Windermere's Fan*. The female protagonists in these productions appeared before the audience not as women "with a past", as they were in the plays but as innocent, chaste virgins, which pleased the sentimental Lviv audience.

The theatrical productions by Alla Babenko used a fundamentally different method of stage direction and contrasted with the theatrical productions by F. Stryhun. Babenko, paradoxically, was a disciple of the local Zankovetska Theater Acting Studio (unlike F. Stryhun, who graduated from the Kyiv Theater Institute¹), and started her career in Lviv as an actress. However, education in directing at the Shchukin College² and work abroad made her rather "non-local" in terms of state of mind, which transfused into her performances. Even staged on the big stage, they were, to a certain extent, chamber in nature. She was primarily working with the actors, often being quite demanding

in her pushing for active creative endeavor, and yet effectively helping them by conveying and communicating her ideas. "The ensemble is the prime reason why the director can torment the actor as much as he chooses" (Overchuk, 2007). She was modeling certain key messages of the theatrical production by changing the structure of the play and quite often resorted to an architectonic retrospective, whereby the finale of the piece would be demonstrated first, and the theatrical production would cover the characters' reflections on how had they got to this specific result of their actions. The narrator(s) character(s) are present in practically every second theatrical production by Babenko, ever and again "alienating" from the action in dialogues with themselves, the audience, a partner, or eternity.

Although Babenko's stage direction flourished in the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s and 2010s were marked by her active theatrical production work. Two consecutive theatrical productions based on V. Vynnychenko's *A Lie* (Brekhnia) (1989) and *Black Panther and Polar Bear* (Chorna pantera, bilyi vedmid) (1989) became visible in the theater realm, especially the second one, referred to as a new dawn for Vynnychenko's interpretation, and as staging of Ukrainian culture as not "provincial" one, but aristocratic, inspired by European salons of the late 19th century. Conditional theater techniques were also employed in these psychological theatrical productions by A. Babenko. Larysa Kadyrova, the actress who played the principal characters in both productions, was reading the author's text and stage directions to the audience during the production; a freeze-frame film technique was incorporated to comment on the events of the play. *A Lie* has a double ending. According to the first variant, the principal character, after the "dying" scene, came to life and continued her "magnificent" existence in the role, and the second ending was final (Lypkivska, 1992, p. 9).

During the 1990s, A. Babenko continued to stage at least two theatrical productions annually, elaborating comprehensively on women's individuality issues (Shashko, 1997). A new phase in her work was the opening of the Chamber Stage of the Theater; in fact, the platform came into being thanks to her efforts. The first theatrical production was *The Idiot* (Idiot) in 1999, and shortly after she staged 14 productions featuring A. Chekhov's works and themes. Stage design (though not without exceptions) was of secondary importance in A. Babenko's direction, as was the musical and lighting score. Certain elements and symbols were often repeated in theatrical productions (doors, leaves, or a book) thus, creating the right mood. This is especially true for the Chamber Stage: in most cases, its stage design consisted of a table, a chair, and costumes capturing the spirit of the era.

¹ Now the Kyiv National I. Karpenko-Karyi University of Theater, Cinema, and Television.

² The Boris Shchukin Theater Institute at the Evgeny Vakhtangov State Academical Theater.

In the work on Chamber Stage productions, A. Babenko's stage direction methods of using the above-mentioned techniques are even more perceptible. Thus, in the theatrical production *The Cherry Orchard* the characters play through all the events of the piece from the point of recollection—events happening in their family farmstead and reasons why the orchard was cut down. At the beginning of the play, Ranevska and Lopakhin meet in Paris and have nothing to say to each other; A. Babenko tries to convey with her production that the only feeling of characters is longing for the past and irretrievably lost moments of happiness. To help Ranevska (L. Borovska) and Lopakhin (Yu. Chekov), the director adds another actress (O. Lyuta), who helps them remember the course of actions and play through the scenes of the play. Minimal music design, lighting score, and scenography—Vienna chairs, street lamps, and snow—aid in creating the desired atmosphere.

In one of her last theatrical productions in a smaller space, *St. Nicholas Evening* (*Sviatomykolaivskyi vechir*) by R. Horak, dedicated to the Ukrainian writer and public figure Olha Duchymynska (1883–1988), A. Babenko's method of alternating three types of stage existence is also vividly presented. In the first one, the three actresses in the play “verbalize” the life story of this extraordinary Ukrainian woman, reminiscing on her past. In the other one, some key episodes of her life are presented in the here-and-now mode. Another important directing emphasis is the contrast between the destinies of Duchymynska and Iryna Vilde: the latter was more loyal to the Soviet regime and enjoyed a productive creative life and recognition. This theatrical production of the last years of Babenko's creative work was included in the cycle of presentation of the lives of outstanding Ukrainian artists described by R. Horak. Clearly, the author wrote them, adapting to a large extent to Babenko's creative method: from the retrospective position on their lives, and the director endued them with melancholy and nostalgia for the inevitability of long-gone events. There are “almost no decorations on stage but this minimalism is advantageous, too. A small antique table, a telephone, and a chair” (Babenko, 2016). The stage design and costumes functioned to enhance this “mood” and were characteristic of the time.

In the 2000s–2010s, the Big Stage productions, iconic and emblematic from the point of view of A. Babenko's methods of stage direction, were *Valentyn and Valentyna* (Valentyn i Valentyna) by M. Roshchyn (2006), *The Marriage* (*Zhenitba*) by M. Gogol (2009), and *Romeo and Juliet at the end of November* (*Romeo i Dzhulietta v kintsy lystopada*) by Ya. Otchenashenko and Ya. Balik (2011). In *Valentyn and Valentyna*, Babenko digresses from the structure of the play set by the author, making the leading narrators a group of teenagers who want to know whether love exists or the feelings are an illusion. The events of the play unfold from the perspective of the search for an answer to this question, after key scenes the director time and again

brings the young to the fore with reflections on the development of the relationships between Valentyn and Valentyna. Babenko completes this chain of repetitions and entrances of the narrators with the monologue of the Passerby, which instills in the characters and in the audience hope that love still exists. The artistic solution of the play was a non-literal repetition of the play of the same title produced in 1972—a doorframe filled the stage and symbolized the universality of the situation, as well as the intersection of human lives, representing the literal venue of the middle class.

In her latest theatrical productions of the 2010s, A. Babenko was increasingly liberating the set designer from any restrictions. The play *Women's House* (*The Price of Love*) by Z. Nalkowska, “with an exquisite scenography by O. Overchuk, weaving lacelike high into the air, covers the entire acting space with anxiety and gives hope through its flickering of oh-so-simple headlights... A whole essay can be written on this scenography (which is such a rarity in the theater)! The actors feel cozy in it. Although they are not given the opportunity to feel coziness in this play” (Kanarska, 2016). The theme chosen—a women's fate—is considered on several levels and in terms of ideology, it was a continuation of the director's many years of endeavors. The female protagonists in this theatrical production, both according to the plot of the play and the stage setting, discuss the issue of happiness for a woman in the family circle, with her husband, and in terms of fulfilling herself, addressing the audience all the time, as if in dialogue with it.

In the framework of the Maria Zankovetska Theater in the 1990–2010s, A. Babenko's artistic endeavor promoted the stylistic and aesthetic diversity of the creative manifestation of the theater because sometimes ponderous and patriotic, as well as popular operetta repertoire was complemented by intellectual aspects and experiments of changing the structure of the text. Such theatrical productions had their audience and retained the intellectual endeavors of the theater.

Vadim Sikorskyi, a director of the younger generation, was a different type of experimenter. In terms of training in both acting and directing, he was, among all the directors, trained in the Maria Zankovetska Theater. Following his graduation from the Acting Studio, he immediately began acting on the theater stage, becoming a successful actor. He studied directing under Serhii Danchenko, whose name is linked to the creative development of the group in the 1960s and 1970s. Danchenko greatly influenced Sikorskyi, they both were creating philosophical, metaphorical, and intellectual theater, skillfully avoiding falsehood. Since his first attempts as a director, Sikorskyi “has been searching for his own theater—a modern and highly intellectual one. He brings to the stage exemplars of high-quality modern dramaturgy, hitherto unknown to the Ukrainian audience” (Rosa, 2005, p. 77).

He has a penchant for theatrics; in many theatrical productions, he employs the “game” theater techniques.

The “functional crowd”, a bright element of theatrics, has become one of Sikorskyi’s major means of modeling action; the actors involved in it simultaneously play the characters in the theatrical production, the choir, the musical accompaniment, and the ballet. The director builds clear *mise-en-scènes*, often from the point of view of “describing” the actions of the characters. For every theatrical production, music is composed, serving as an integral part of it. The acting space is designed to be abstract, metaphorical, and free of signs of everyday life. Many theatrical productions use the platform as the scene of action. His theatrical productions are not necessarily aimed at intellectuals but rather at a conscious and experienced audience.

In the 1990s, V. Sikorskyi made a name for himself with a number of productions: *Vasyl Svystun...* (Vasyl Svystun...) by V. Herasymchuk (1992), *Carmen* by P. Merimee (1991), *A Grain of Rice* by A. Nicolaj (1993), and *The Threepenny Opera* by B. Brecht (1998). Even the first theatrical productions by V. Sikorskyi differed from 1990s productions in their national-patriotic and psychological bearing both in form and content. The theatrical production of *Knock* by J. Romain (1996) became an example of a purely conditional theater, in which such renowned actors as B. Mirus, T. Lytvynenko, K. Khomiak, P. Beniuk, along with their younger colleagues O. Sikyrinskyi, O. Harda, and L. Nykonchuk, were enacting the situations brought up by the director. For example, V. Yakovenko (*Knock*) not only played the leading role according to the storyline suggested by the author but was also a narrator, “presenting” each part of the production to the audience in a pointedly theatrical manner. To that end, a chalkboard was used on which each act was being indicated.

As early as the 1990s, Sikorskyi’s method of work within the framework of subjective theater was in stark contrast to the productions by other directors of Zankovetska Theater, who yet gravitated towards psychologism. The news media referred to F. G. Lorca’s *Blood Wedding* as “A new piece that is worthy of the attention of theater enthusiasts. Although the theatrical production has numerous flaws, the sense of the new is overwhelming” (Rudieva, 2000). V. Sikorskyi rendered the story of fatal ardent love as if with the dashes of a brush: certain key episodes were highlighted and “magnified”, while the secondary ones were left out. In such “slow motion” scenes, the actors existed truthfully, conveying the dialogues of their characters without exaggeration or overacting. Instead, pointed theatrics around such scenes “enveloped” the action, which is also manifested in the functional crowd, the use of puppet symbols, and the platform—the scene of action. These techniques became deeply rooted in Sikorskyi’s directing technique, in his subsequent theatrical productions they took on a “purer” form and brought him the standing of an experimenter and director of a different, non-Zankovetska Theater aesthetic. However, it is the creative work of V. Sikorskyi that can be considered a true continuation

of the tradition of this theater group, a “link” connecting the theater generations.

A number of Sikorskyi’s theatrical productions in the 2000s became the pinnacle of his creative work. He directed such tragedies as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* by K. Kesey and D. Wasserman (2002), *The Kaidash Family* (Kaidasheva simia) by I. Nechui-Levytskyi (2003), *Amadeus* by P. Shaffer (2006), *The Story of a Horse* after L. Tolstoy (2009), *Tales about Ivan...* (Nebylytsi pro Ivana ...) by I. Mykolaichuk (2010), which are staged following a material challenging for any director. The said theatrical productions were not homogeneous in terms of the director’s techniques. The productions of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and *The Kaidash Family* involved extensive work in terms of meaningfulness and the level of combination of different theatrical languages, while also being chamber and not populous in nature. They manifested a trait of Sikorskyi’s directing, which did not always work in favor of his theatrical productions but in these specific pieces it had a positive effect. Namely, in theatrical productions (especially) based on prose, he would highlight the key theme, while leaving out the secondary ones. Such a monoact in complex multi-layered prose helped Sikorskyi to make the action in the theatrical production concise and free of unimportant details.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest by K. Kesey and D. Wasserman highlighted the confrontation between the sick free-spirited McMurphy (Ya. Yukhnytskyi) and tyrannical and meaninglessly authoritarian nurse Ratched (L. Nykonchuk). The number of principal characters was narrowed down to a few patients, a nurse, and one orderly. However, it was precisely the situation that filled the ideological layer to the point that any other secondary storylines would be superfluous on the stage; the metaphor of life as a prison in this case was self-sufficient. *The Kaidash Family* was also laconic in plot compared to the novel; there were only seven actors involved in the play. The director presented the audience with a parable about the moral degradation of a person due to peer pressure and life circumstances, “a play about the pettiness of people and their self-obsession” (Rosa, 2005, p. 81). Young married couples—Lavrin and Melashka and Karpo and Motria—exemplify the gradual transformation of pure and innocent dreams into nothing filled with anger and hatred. The father of the family, Omelko, witnesses these processes, therefore, on his deathbed, he begs God for forgiveness for them, because they are “not to blame”—for so goes the world.

Sikorskyi achieved the parable structure in *The Kaidash Family* using film editing for the stage structure, where every part of the stage setting and every replica were meticulously calibrated. In one single episode, the meeting of Melashka and Lavrin, the director manages to render the couple’s entire relationship development. In the next episode, Melashka is already Lavrin’s wife and terrorized by her mother-in-law. With her third entrance, the girl becomes

“tough-skinned” and responds appropriately to her mother-in-law and Karpo’s wife Motria, which ends in a terrible fight. The scenes of static scenography are replaced by the revolving of the stage, in one part of which there is an almost identical *mise-en-scène* of Omelko at the table, drinking alcohol with the godfather of his child. It is repeated several times and is a clear example of the degradation of a person’s life plans, because at the beginning the men talk zealously about the need to dig a way for their carts through the hill, and at the end, the same remarks make it clear that the way is never going to be dug. The actors’ personalities in this theatrical production, like in other productions by V. Sikorskyi, look vibrant—they have enough opportunities to demonstrate their talent; in a rather “tough” stage setting, the director gives them the freedom to express their individuality.

Sikorskyi’s “game” theater” dates back to the 2010s; the key productions including *The Story of a Horse* by N. Rozovskyi (2009), *The Lost Letter* (Propala hramota) after M. Gogol (2013), *The Naked King* by E. Schwartz (2016), *The Hutsul Year* (Hutsulskyi rik) after H. Khotkevych (2018), *Tales about Ivan...* by I. Mykolaichuk (2010), and *The Witch of Konotop* (Konotopska vidma) after H. Kvitka-Osnovianenko later in 2021. In most of these theatrical productions, he proceeded with his study of folk life and spirit in his references to Ukrainian artworks. However, their most important quality was specifically the form of directing. An active engagement of a functional crowd, with which the characters in the theatrical production were forming a single choir ballet of participants in crowd scenes and narrators of the story presented. The platform as the scene of action, outside of which the actors would sometimes “wait” for their turn to play, and the theatrics emphasized in costumes, design, and choreography solutions.

The Witch of Konotop, V. Sikorskyi’s last Big Stage production, is the most crystallized exemplar of his “game” theater. The popular design of the stage, through which the audience watches a kind of nativity scene with folk-styled ornaments, bright design colors, and *motanka* dolls (actors)—emphasizes the festivity and theatrics aimed at “creating the right mood” (Kozyrieva, 2021) at the beginning of the pandemics. Throughout the entire play, there is a choir on stage—residents of the city of Konotop, performing certain dance routines and repeating them—also aimed at creating a sublime, non-everyday mood. There is a leading narrator in this theatrical production, giving the floor to the characters and comments on the events of the play. Behind Ihor Poklad’s famous songs with a tinge of comedy, a deep meaning is embedded—the primordial issues (topical at the time of theatrical production) of the inefficiency of the government structure and the sinfulness of everyman, preventing people from living in peace and harmony.

Thanks to the creative work of Sikorskyi, the Chamber Stage of the Maria Zankovetska Theater became

established as a separate creative platform able to compete with the city’s young experimental groups, also operating in a small space, and introduced another vector of endeavors into the Zankovetska Theater. Sikorskyi staged *Enigma Variations* by E. E. Schmitt (1999), *The Professional* by D. Kovacevic (2002), *Art* by Ya. Reza (2004), and *The Emigrants* by S. Mrozhek (2019), each of these works having become the theater’s long-standing asset. The play *Enigma Variations* by E. E. Schmitt (1999) was a little-known piece at the time of its production; its first interpretation became a theater event. In the 1990s, the leader of the underground in Lviv was the Les Kurbas Theater, which operated in a small space. Thus, V. Sikorskyi, by mastering the small stage, proved the universal aptitude of the Zankovetska Theater tradition even in vitro of an unconventional stage. Over the next 20 years of operation, the Chamber Stage of the Zankovetska Theater became an integral part of the Theater’s endeavors.

Sikorskyi’s talent to build relationships on an active human nerve and avoid both everyday life and falsehood, not only survived on the small stage but also grew in strength. His *Art* by Ya. Reza was staged in the white space of a white room, and the audience was as if the guests (curated by Vlodko Kaufman). At first glance, three friends were trying to sort out their relationship. However, according to the director’s concept, the audience was presented with the timeless issue of misunderstanding between close people, the inability to love and forgive, “the art of living among people and loving them as they are” (Zabolotna, 2012). It was designed with accurate semantic accents in the dialogues between the friends, accurate casting, and the fulfillment of the potential of the actors, young and inexperienced artists at the time of production.

For his theatrical productions, Sikorskyi chose “the drama of intellectual tension” (Sikorskyi, 2003, p. 96), the semantic projection “man–universe” was constructed of such material; he managed to find the truth of existence in the “society of performance” using the conditional theater’s means of expression, within which the actor existed following the laws of psychologism and resorting occasionally to grotesque accents. However, not every theatrical production of his became an outstanding creative achievement due to Sikorskyi’s penchant for “monoact”, neglecting the scale of the piece for the sake of “purity”, and aestheticization of the creative expression.

Conclusions

The desire for development, diversity of their techniques, and Europeanization in form and content, combined with a strong desire to preserve one’s national identity, is characteristic of Ukrainian artists and art institutions of the 1990s–2010s of different levels. In this context, the creative work of the Maria Zankovetska Theater, a national-level group and the largest theater in the West of Ukraine, is exemplary.

The three names of the directors and their creative endeavors reflect the different directorial ideas, thanks to whom, collectively, the Maria Zankovetska Theater's response to the demand of the time was quite diverse. As a manager, Fedir Stryhun developed the theater university of Ukrainian studies and made sure that not a single element hampered his concept of the theater group. He himself undertook the mission: in certain manifestations to develop poetic theater, and in others—current and political theater, to recover for his contemporaries the means and artistic mechanisms of the Theater of Coryphaei,

the Ukrainian patriotic and education-oriented actor's theater. Alla Babenko complemented the Theater's creative image by the creation of an intellectual psychological vector, often experimenting with the structure of theatrical production. Vadym Sikorskyi's theater was conditional, metaphorical, sometimes pointedly theatrical, more modern in form, which also had a positive effect on the artistic expression of the group as a whole. As a result of such production diversity, the Maria Zankovetska Theater's entire period of the 1990s–2010s was marked with evolution and artistically distinctive, self-sufficient creative manifestation.

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Батицька Т.

Аспекти режисерської діяльності Національного академічного українського драматичного театру ім. Марії Заньковецької 1990–2010-х років

Анотація. Розглянуто основні риси творчості трьох режисерів Театру ім. Марії Заньковецької 1990–2010-х років: Федора Стригуна, Алли Бабенко та Вадима Сікорського. На основі аналізу знакових для кожного постановок виокремлено їхні методики роботи над виставою, окреслено тематичне та змістове коло як робіт митців, так і театру загалом. Досліджено різноманіття художніх прийомів режисури означеного періоду, серед яких присутні елементи психологічного, поетичного, умовного театрів у вимірі естетики, а також політичного, філософського, інтелектуального за змістовою складовою, консервативного, експериментального характеру — за новизною застосування сценічних рішень. Визначено, що художнє обличчя формував керівник Ф. Стригун, його художні орієнтири були головними в означений час, його творчість орієнтувалася на суспільний та культурно-просвітницький запит молодшої української держави, менше ваги було відведено сучасним сценічним рішенням, цю лакуну заповнювали його колеги А. Бабенко та В. Сікорський.

Ключові слова: Театр ім. Марії Заньковецької, режисура, репертуар, психологізм, театральність, умовний театр.

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