



59th MARIBOR THEATRE FESTIVAL SELECTOR'S REPORT

The present *selector's report* is, by necessity, only *provisional or partial*, as it is difficult for the selector to make a complete and complex picture of the state of Slovenian theatre after only one calendar year of seeing theatre productions for the purposes of the Maribor Theatre Festival's competition programme – which should be the desired content of this report. After all, it is, as we said, only one year in the life of this theatre, which is not even a theatre season, which we once wrote is nevertheless important in the life of the theatre – as a rounded manifestation of the creative will of this theatre, its artistic director, its artistic ensemble and, ultimately, its audience. It is therefore a year in which everything that happens can be as much the result of chance as of a deeper logic... But that being the case, let us nevertheless try to point out some of the characteristics of this theatre year, even if only temporary and partial, but hopefully not of an *emergency nature*.

From 6 January, when I saw the first production of 2023, to 22 December, when I saw the last, I saw about 100 productions in different production contexts, genres and casts. I didn't follow any preconceived concept when I saw the productions, it emerged spontaneously, more as an intuitive guide to navigate the productions viewed than as a solid system; to be quite precise, this *concept* was actually stimulated by the very productions in which it was most pronounced. Trying to describe it as succinctly as possible, I have included in the broader selection for the competition programme – and ultimately in the proposed selection – the productions that have, as much as possible, taken into account two criteria: *the criterion of context and the criterion of questioning the theatrical expression*. In other words, I was interested in productions that try to articulate a world beyond the text or the production or theatre as such, as well as in productions that seek – and to a large extent find – new means of expression for this articulation, both partial signs and a complete performance system.

Certain consequences necessarily follow from this *formula*. The first is probably that, when selecting the productions, those which were merely an *ideal* staging of a text were less interesting for me, it was not enough for me to see, just as an example, *Chekhov* being staged as *Chekhov*, or an *authentic Chekhov*, because in such a staging the context is precisely what is lacking, it even seemed to me, to give an example, that these types of productions were somehow *floating in the air*, in empty space, without any real connection to the world outside of them, and that they were therefore abstract, self-contained, even self-sufficient as a certain consequence. To call this type of production *bourgeois theatre* would, of course, require further explanation, which would not be too difficult, but for the moment let this suffice.



Some of the productions came closer to the *ideal* described above and *fulfilled* the first or the second criterion, or even both at the same time; but it is true that this part of the productions was, in my opinion, a minority in the past year, comprising about 15 per cent of what I saw, so that only two or three productions that could still conditionally be included in the competition programme were left out of the selection. The vast majority of productions, from which we usually judge the quality of the theatre year or the *condition* of Slovenian theatre at the moment, are more or less within the expected, repertoire-acceptable range, with highlights that undoubtedly deserve attention, but without any noteworthy incisiveness. To the question about the *current state* of Slovenian theatre, I can answer: solid, with no major upward or downward deviations, with a few distinct excesses, which I hope are included in the selection for the competition programme.

Nevertheless, I have to mention a *third* segment of performances that fall somewhere in the qualitative bottom half or even at the *bottom* of this year's assortment, often failing to reach the expected standards either in conception or in implementation, and whose excuse cannot be that they are simply a necessary part of the *usual* repertoire or subscription offer: in this year's contingent, there were more performances than I would have expected (since I do not usually have such insight into the whole production), that should not have been on the stage in the first place.

After the Covid *break*, the situation in the domestic theatre *establishment* seems to have stabilised. This does not mean that it is ideal, but it is certainly productive. In terms of content, it has become clear through seeing performances that I am most interested in theatre that settles into the world as its living perseverance, that finds or produces in it signs or reference points for (new) possibilities of action, co-existence, survival. In this respect, I found the most intriguing, to put it with some exaggeration, to be the *theatre with executive power*. More than the self-contained *aesthetic, bourgeois* theatre, which, despite more than a century of modern and post-modern experience, is still based on its relationship to the dramatic template, what stands out is the theatre that dismantles the narrow spaces of drama and penetrates into the social space, repeatedly only by reflecting, mirroring its contradictions, and often, even if naively, proposing a *new redistribution of values* within it, new social paradigms.

In this somewhat dispersed projection, we usually find modern man, who, so it seems, is now a wandering subject, not without a goal, but with a dispersed focus, sometimes not even seeming lost, but, so it seems, never able to put himself together again, to find himself. He is marked by a fundamental powerlessness to assert himself, to realise himself as a full-blooded member of society, family, partnership or corporation, even though he is able to reflect on his



situation in a lucid way, not always without embarrassment, and, more importantly, he does not give up in his quest to overcome it.

The subject thus staged necessarily sheds light on the social situation itself, on its hierarchies, which are transmitted both *downwards* and *upwards*, in other words: he systematically problematises these relationships, illuminated by a subjective beam of light. And so, the productions of this year's selection, whether subtly, directly or metaphorically, penetrate into social, familial and romantic relationships, into oppressive systems, into seemingly impenetrable corporate and media realities, and into the very hearts of various mechanisms of denial (racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia...), exposing one of the most prominent themes of the selection, and partly of the whole assortment, the theme of *violence*.

In a nutshell and with the necessary generalisation: the productions in this year's selection find their traumatic core sometimes in family or partner violence, sometimes in institutionalised or spontaneous violence, in the violence of ossified tradition or new (social) media and networks, they react to violence against gender and sexuality, against the *other* as such, whatever form it takes, especially against women, against the unconventional social and family community, against the exposed individual as such, and finally, even just against violence against language. And these productions do all this in a meticulous theatrical language, which is more often shaping than *dramatic*, more often very contemporary than classical or traditionally modern, more often improvised than *built*, relying on *primary* allusion more than on complex and transparent signs, resorting to their clever *entanglement* and witty *assortment* rather than their pure invention. And with all this, which is perhaps already a constant in Slovenian theatre and which this year's selection only confirms, they remain the most trusting of the actor.

Finally: I slightly missed more complex performances in independent production in this year's assortment, although I know that there are objective reasons for that; I was happy to discover some very original independent and forming theatre projects, mainly created in creative *workshops* of the young and the youngest theatre generation, which already seems to be (and last year's selection drew attention to this) entering the Slovenian theatre through the *main entrance*; and also the often surpassing condition of some of the representatives of the *old*, already established theatre *establishment*; in the programme, we will find, if we want to, some interesting confrontations of different generational poetics on similar topics... But, as I said at the beginning, despite the temptation, we will abstain from giving our opinion on the overall picture of Slovenian theatre at this moment and place. All of the above – and certainly much more – will, I hope, be revealed in the competition programme of the 59th Maribor Theatre Festival.

Festival
Borštnikovo
srečanje



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