

# The Modern Scenography in Eastern Siberia

## Problems and Perspectives of Development

Maria Voronova

Department of Humanitarian and Social Disciplines

Krasnoyarsk State Institute of Arts

Krasnoyarsk, Russia

E-mail: Gloria-nikita@mail.ru

**Abstract**—The article includes a survey of scenography in Eastern Siberia, and of Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk theatres in particular. It analyzes historic and modern aspects. The aesthetic particularity is determined on examples of domination of visual and literary bases in different cities of the region. There are problems of scenographic decor marked in the 1990s – a critical period for the country. Trends in development of the theatre decor art and scenography are identified and its probable ways are supposed on the base of particular stage plays of the latest 5 years.

**Keywords**—scenography; theatre decor art; Krasnoyarsk theatres; Irkutsk theatres; the artist's theatre; decorations; costumes; scenography development trends in regions

### I. INTRODUCTION

In his work “The Artist’s Theatre. Sources and Starts” (2006) the Doctor of Art History and leading researcher of scenography Victor I. Beryozkin, giving a brief review of the Russian artist’s theatre trends development, wrote: *“Despite the trend to evident growing interest to this aspect of the stage art, the artist’s theatre by its essence is a unitary and especially individual phenomenon... a result of some particular master’s creative work”* [1]. The same situation is observed in regions as well (in this article in particular – in Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk theatres) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half and at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The artist’s personality is extremely significant in formation of scenographic aesthetics. There are particular examples illustrating development of the theatre decor art in the region in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the present day.

### II. HISTORY

Firstly, one should understand why the 1950s are considered to be the starting point in scenographic outlook development. Precisely the beginning of the 1950s, a postwar period, was marked with a gradual but inevitable transformation in artistic decor of stage plays – from descriptive illustrating decoration of “the action place” (M. Pozharskaya) to the theatre with equal significance of the stage director and the artist. The terminology is reasonably subdivided from theatre decor to scenography – a more global concept displaying the unit of performing, stage-directing and artistic bases [2].

Despite the fact that the first steps in this direction were made in the capital theatres yet in the 1920s in theatrical experiments of plastic Avant-guard masters, in regions manifests of futurists and constructivists were embodied in a modified form much later. Only in the 1930s staffs of the so-called TRAMs<sup>1</sup> and RABTEMASes<sup>2</sup>, decorating such stage plays as “Girls of the year 1917” (1932) and “Girls of Our Country” (1933, by A. Mikitenko), displayed elements of Avant-guard trends. The decorations were made according to constructivism, using grounds – “tools” of geometrical shapes, round and rectangular, of various height, set on the stage area under different angles. There were undeniable references to Avant-guard performances of the 1920s, *“of the theatre, purposing not just to change stylistic devices, but to rebuild a person’s outlook, to remake the world”* [3]. But neither material nor creative facilities of Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk at that time stimulated creation of works on the capital level. Unfortunately the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1930s due to some factors wasn’t characterized with creative search. At the war and postwar periods the theatre as a rule existed as mobile propaganda teams. And only in the 1950s, after returning to normal life and stationary theatres, the development of the tendencies interrupted with the tragic events in the country’s life went on. Firstly the theatre decor and costumes referred to the illustrative method. But yet in works of such artists as G. Volkov (the Krasnoyarsk Pushkin Drama Theatre) there was a hint at striving for more figurative and symbolic decor with elements of simultaneous decoration. In works of G. Budrin (the Irkutsk Music Theatre) at the same time there was also evident striving for figurative structure.

In the 1960s, the Krasnoyarsk theatrical staff met artists graduated from the LGITMiK<sup>3</sup>, whose creative work became a significant page in the history of the TYUZ<sup>4</sup> as well as other Krasnoyarsk theatres. The ambitious experimental outlook of such authors as A. Korbut-Snitko, L. Rakhmanova, S. Stavtseva, O. Savarenskaya, R. Yunosheva

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviation made of the first letters of the Russian phrase meaning “theatres of the working youth”.

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviation made of the first letters of the Russian phrase meaning “working theatrical studios”.

<sup>3</sup> The Leningrad State Institute of Theatre Artistry and Culture

<sup>4</sup> The Young Spectators’ Theatre

gave an innovating character to performances decoration, thus prejudging the artist's theatre appearance. The basic trends were presented in works of the most outstanding persons: minimalism (L. Rakhmanova), attempts to adapt the 1920s avant-garde (A. Korbut-Snitko, later V. Zhuiko), stylization, schematism, popular print (S. Stavtseva and to some extent R. Yunosheva). Some new forms were established, such as "personage scenography", "action scenography".

The 1970s were marked with new names and as a result – new aesthetics. Stable and long-lasting cooperation of the Stage Editor and the Artist as a competent author of the descriptive idea was being formed. The examples of such cooperation in Moscow theatres included Yuri Lyubimov and David Borovsky in the Taganka Theatre, Mark Zakharov and Oleg Sheinits in the Lenkom (the Lenin Komsomol Theatre); in Krasnoyarsk – creative alliances of S. Stavtseva and G. Oporkov, L. Rakhmanova and I. Shtockbant, V. Zhuiko and Y. Mochalov. Due to some objective reasons those ones, unlike the situation in the capital, were short-run as a rule. Anyway an important tendency was outlined: an accent on the visual aspect of stage decor as a priority in Krasnoyarsk theatres and domination of the literary aspect in Irkutsk theatres. Irkutsk is a birthplace of the outstanding writers Alexander Vampilov and Valentin Rasputin. The specificity of dramaturgy and the narrative, philosophic spirit of performances influenced scenography. In works of such artists as Y. Surakevich (more than 200 stage plays in different theatres, among them "Macbeth" in the Irkutsk Drama Theatre) and A. Plint ("The Cherry Orchard", etc.) the method of stage area conceptual design was vividly displayed. Such decoration required analytical approach and reflection on symbolism of every object. There was almost no color, but graphic means of expression, contrast tonal and texture techniques prevailed. In the Krasnoyarsk scenography the color, the picturesque base and an experiment were still extremely important. Artists and stage editors of the regional theatres earned all-Union recognition (S. Stavtseva, E. Kochergin, K. Ginkas and G. Yanovskaya, A. Kozhenkova and others). By dynamization of stage objects every artist strove to feel "the climate of an action", often accentuating development of a descriptive image through time [4]. For authors the decor art was a method of self-expression, contemplation over the world pattern. In scenography transformations of stage objects became some extra means of expression, decorations act while being transformed in front of spectators. Decor objects existed as full performance players, as personages. Those trends were actual up to the year 1995, when the latest large regional exhibition of theatre artists was organized.

### III. BASIC PROBLEMS OF THE PRESENT-DAY SITUATION IN SCENOGRAPHY

The 1990s were a hard period in the country's life. It was marked with an ideological destruction, a change of values and an impossibility of the current forms of the theatre existence due to the economic situation. Anyway there was a positive factor of Russian specialists' learning the situation in theatres of Western Europe and the whole world. The

information required understanding and analysis, so in Krasnoyarsk under support of the Culture and Art Committee the magazine "Trassa" was established. It wrote about current processes in the regional culture [5]. The theatre artists' exhibition of 1995 included participation of 25 artists and more than 300 works [6]. Despite the fact that it proved a high level of the participants' professionalism and a wide range (all the theatres of the Krasnoyarsk region were presented), it also revealed some problems. The exhibition included theatre decor painting, graphics, layouts, elements of requisite and decor, as well as installations and performances, thus relating to the Contemporary Art Biennale which was organized in the Culture-Historical Centre in the district of Strelka.

The impartial analysis of that situation and coming to revelation of scenographic trends determining the present-day cultural climate required learning a large amount of materials. As few monographies on this theme have been written for the present, and they all mainly describe the situation in Moscow and Saint Petersburg theatres, this article was basically written with use of periodicals ("Trassa", "Stsena" and other magazines), catalogs of art exhibitions (in the information about personal exhibitions of theatre artists) and materials from artists' private archives. As a result I have determined the four basic directions in the work of theatre artists and stage decor in Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk scenography from the late 1990s up to the present day: 1) a repertoire theatre transformation displayed in change of the repertoire and basic decor concepts; 2) a variety of new forms (enterprise troupes appeared while stationary forms of the theatre still existed) which gave birth to eclecticism in artistic techniques; 3) new technologies and contemporary art forms came to the theatre, positioning the visual aspect of a play almost more significant than the action one; 4) a great variety of invited stage decorators destroyed the unitary essence of the theatre and caused multiculturalism. Let's view each of the abovementioned trends in detail [7].

#### A. Repertoire Theatre Transformation

The theatre changes in the post-Soviet period caused growing interest to European and American dramaturgy, thus dealing with philosophic, extremely actual themes, the theatre of absurdity. The decor of such plays had much in common with contemporary art tendencies. Conceptualism ("The Captain's Daughter" by A. Pushkin, 2004-2005, the Krasnoyarsk Drama Theatre, the stage director is R. Markholin, the artist is I. Nirod<sup>5</sup>), minimal use of color ("The Crime and the Punishment" by F. Dostoevsky, 2016, the Krasnoyarsk Drama Theatre, the stage director is A. Ogrev, the artists are M. Lukka, A. Mokhov<sup>6</sup>), interest for textures (using natural earth and water in a great number of performances). Such examples could be found to some extent in different plays: "Alice" (a derivative work by L.

<sup>5</sup> URL: <http://theatre-krasnoyarsk.ru/pushkin/kapitan.php3> (date of visiting: 2018 may, 5).

<sup>6</sup> URL: <http://new.sibdrama.ru/performances.php?show=det&nid=88> (date of visiting: May 10, 2018).

Carroll, the Krasnoyarsk TYUZ, 2015, the stage director and artist is D. Akhmedov<sup>7</sup>), "People and Mice" (by J. Steinbeck, the Irkutsk Regional Drama Okhlopkov Theatre, the stage editor is A. Plint).

### B. A Variety of New Forms and Eclecticism

A conflict of the old and the new in the country's life was reflected in scenography as well, as a rule, on minor experimental and enterprise stage plays. Minimal decor details and maximal expression were an essential requirement for such performances. For example, in the performance "A Theatre Affair" (by M. Bulgakov, 2003, the Krasnoyarsk Actor Theatre, the artist is N. Vnukova) there were only three objects on the stage – a desk, a window and a toy horse. All of them were principally minimized by the artist. Thus, a human became the largest personage, the center of that little Universe. At the same time in stationary theatres there were preserved traditional forms of picture-by-picture illustrating of dramaturgic materials ("Romeo and Juliet" by S. Prokofiev, 2005, the Krasnoyarsk State Drama Theatre, the stage director is S. Bobrov, the artist is D. Cherbadzhi<sup>8</sup>), with a great share of historicism, an important role of color and common clarity of the stage solution. It was especially noticeable in musical theatres and in a less degree in drama ones. An eclectic and rather discrete character of the theatre image was formed. In a way in the regional theatres one could always observe a variegated multi-styled picture, but in the latest few years it has been displayed most vividly. The contrast of such performances demonstrates a serious gap between them. It seems that there are decades of artistic search between these two performances, though both of them were staged in Krasnoyarsk almost simultaneously. The reason is not only in orientation of a certain genre theatre on its spectators and corresponding decor aesthetics. We can observe such contrasts within one theatre.

### C. Innovative Technologies

New technologies in media art, light and stage construction facilities gave a strong impulse to development of the scenographic art. To some extent it resulted in aging and archaism of the traditional method of stage decor through making decorations, costumes, area solutions. Material forms gave way to virtual ones. So, it was not always necessary to decorate the drop-curtain or to make huge stage constructions – they were replaced with media technologies and perspectives. Artists got new opportunities to realize their ideas practically by themselves, independent of actors, decorators, stage workers, etc. In fact it was rather individual than collective work. The term "the artist's theatre" had never been more actual. The meaning of the stage director, actors and even the theatre building was rapidly diminished. Exceeding areas of traditional theatre buildings, the level and audacity of the latest projects testify that both the spectator and the stage editor now perceive first

of all the visual aspect of a performance and then the dramaturgical one. For example, the so-called "Theatre on the Roof" in Krasnoyarsk<sup>9</sup>.

### D. Invited Artists

A great number of invited artists was an important innovation in theatrical work. Earlier every theatre had a position of the chief artist, whose main task was supervision of all performances and preservation of the common decor conception, the theatre image. Later it became possible to invite an independent artist for each performance. That is why we can consider the Krasnoyarsk TYUZ of the 1960-1970s as "Stavtseva's theatre" and the Irkutsk Musical Theatre as "Budrin's theatre" with the single artistic way of development. This unity is not observed in recent performances. The variety of artistic approaches and authors' individualism can be considered as a positive trend, because spectators have an opportunity to watch plays, absolutely different in genre and decor style, within one and the same theatre. Anyway this variety has caused loss of aesthetic unity and targeted addressing a definite category of spectators. A paradoxical fact is evident: despite the increased theatre artist's significance he can't create a consecutive and multi-sided aesthetic program and his theatrical conceptions while being restricted with definite performances. The fragmental and discrete character of such decor turns into an endless alternation of forms and innovations, often deprived of any meaning and purpose.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The most vivid example of all the above-mentioned trends' embodiment can be observed in staging the play "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern" by Tom Stoppard at the Krasnoyarsk Pushkin Drama Theatre (2017, the stage director is O. Rybkin, the artist is E. Turchaninova, the light artist is D. Zimenko)<sup>10</sup> with use of only new technologies – video art, interactive projections, unhackneyed and surprising light effects. The total transformation of the stage area is combined with placement of spectators directly on the stage. The coloristic costume solution is minimalistic and contrast: there are only three colors – black, white and red. Contemporary and historic details are mixed in costumes – the eclectic approach is used for greater expression. The paradoxical solution corresponds to the intellectual character of dramaturgy. The whole range of contemporary scenographic facilities within a regional theatre is displayed. Let's hope that such premieres can offer a significant challenge for the Krasnoyarsk scenography development in All-Russian and the worldwide contexts.

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