

The first period of the professional theatre in Spišská Nová Ves

The professional theatre in Spišská Nová Ves was created quite late, five years after the establishment of other theatres of the Bagar Theatre network. The Village Theatre in Bratislava (Dedinské divadlo v Bratislave) consisted of five theatre ensembles which operated throughout the whole Slovakia. However, in 1956 the theatre was reorganized and instead of five, two theatre ensembles were created. They were moved to Trnava and Spišská Nová Ves.

On 19th January 1957, the nineteen-member theatre ensemble left Bratislava and on 20th January they arrived in Spišská Nová Ves. The official name was The State Touring Stage, Theatre Ensemble Spišská Nová Ves and it changed to Regional Theatre in Spišská Nová Ves on 1st May 1959.

On 16th February 1957, the premiere of the play *A Tea Party at the Senator's (Čaj u pána senátora)* by Ivan Stodola directed by Milan Bobula took place. Milan Bobula was the first director, artistic director and later became the managing director as well. The production was very successful. It was appreciated by audience as well as by critics who highlighted the work of the director who had studied at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and had been the student of Janko Brodáč. They praised the acting performance of Anton Trón as well. Until the end of the season, the theatre put on another two plays – a fairy tale for children by J. Švarc *Enchanted brothers (Zakliati bratia)* and a comedy for adults by V. K. Klicpera *Hadrian from Rimsy (Hadrián z Rímsov)*.

During the existence of the professional theatre, several theatrical productions were created. They were very popular and appreciated by many critics. The first one was the play *Tania (Táňa)* by Alexej Arbuzov (directed by Juraj Šeregi) with an excellent acting performance of Brigita Bobulová. Another production which was praised was *Old History (Stará história)* by Zeyerov (directed by Milan Bobula). In this production, the director applied some aspects of commedie dell'arte in a creative way and created very successful piece. The production of Katajevov's play *Crazy Sunday (Bláznivá nedel'a)* (directed by Igor Ciel) was a complete success according to critic StanoVrbka. The production of Maeterlinck's *The Mayor of Stilmond (Stilmondský starosta)* (directed by Milan Bobula) was also very valuable, however the production of Verhaeren's *Philip II. (Filip II.)* (directed by Vladimír Petruška) was really groundbreaking. The most significant acting performances were those of Ján Mišura (as Philip II.) and Pater Gažo (as Don Carlos). *Aristocrats (Aristokrati)* written by Nikolai Pogodin and *The Crucible (Salemské bosorky)* by Arthur Miller, both directed by

Milan Bobula, are those of the best productions. An *Irkutsk Story (Irkutský príbeh)* by Alexey Arbuzov (directed by Oto Katuša) became the defining production of the theatre.

The most significant actors, who worked in the Regional Theatre and later played in other theatres, were Milan Drotár, Peter Gažo, Brigita Bobulová (State Theatre Košice, Slovakia /Štátne divadlo Košice/), Anton Trón, Ján Mišura, Margita Mišurová (Jonáš Záborský Theatre, Prešov /Divadlo Jonáša Záborského Prešov), Milan Kiš (Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra/Divadlo Andreja Bagara Nitra), Ivan Palúch, popular film and theatre actor, and others.

Milan Bobula directed many productions but he was also a managing director in Jonáš Záborský Theatre in Prešov and in State Theatre Košice.

Even though the Regional Theatre was very successful in producing many plays and started a creative co-operation with other Slovak theatres, it was shut down on 30th June 1963 together with theatres in Žilina and Trnava due to an administrative intervention. Professional theatre in Spišská Nová Ves has been shut down for a long period of seventeen years.

Mgr. Emil Spišák, ArtD.

The second period of the professional theatre in Spišská Nová Ves

After the Regional theatre was shut down, the inhabitants and representatives of the town of Spišská Nová Ves did not accept the situation and started to urge authorities to recreate the professional theatre. At the end of 70's the most favourable time came and on 1st January 1980 the second professional theatre was created. It was called **Ensemble for children and youth of Jonáš Záborský Theatre, Prešov, Subsidiary in Spišská Nová Ves**. The main aim of the theatre in Spišská Nová Ves was to begin with the production for children and youth. The theatre in Spišská Nová Ves was not independent, it was one of three theatre ensembles of Jonáš Záborský Theatre, Prešov until 31st of December 1991.

New ensemble consisted of reprofessionalized amateur actors and one and only graduate of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava František Vaněček. Members of the ensemble attended many different workshops under the supervision of professors from Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava to gain some professional acting skills. There were several significant actors in the ensemble including Jozef Friňák, Albín Medúz, Sidónia Tobiášova (known as Szidi Tobias), Viliam Rozboril, Štefan Labanc, Dana Košická and others. The ensemble cooperated with many significant theatre personalities, Meritorious Artist (Honorary title in Eastern bloc states at that time) Viera Strnisková, Vladimír Durdík (Slovak

National Theatre in Bratislava), Peter Rašev, Ľubo Záhon (State Theatre in Košice) and others.

Directors including Vjačeslav Spesivcev, Jozef Pražmári, Jaro Rihák, Emil Spišák, Miroslav Dziak-Košický, Peter Kuba, Blaho Uhlár and others influenced the production of the theatre in a positive way.

The first production of the theatre was *Female Law (Ženský zákon)* by Jozef Gregor Tajovský (directed by Eduard Gürtler). The premiere took place on 11th January 1980. The most important productions of that period are *Snake's Prince (Hadí princ)* by Ján Stacho (directed by Ján Simkanič), *Tick, tack (Tik, tak)* by Ján Uličiansky (directed by Ján Uličiansky), *Snow White and Seven... (Snehulienka a sedem...)* by Lev Ustinov and Oleg Tabakov (directed by Emil Spišák), *Princess Maru (Princezná Maru)* directed by Blaho Uhlár), *I Had a Dog and a Cat (O psíčkovi a mačičke)* directed by Pražmári and Zavarský and even a musical *Turandot* by Gozzi (directed by Miro Košický). Director Miro Košický experimented with musicals when preparing the rock opera *Danko's Heart (Dankovo srdce)* in cooperation with a musician Juraj Szabados. The ensemble for children and youth cooperated with Russian avant-garde director Vjačeslav Spesivcev. They presented the production based on the novel *Scaffold (Popravisko)* by Chinghiz Aitmatov and *Demons (Besy)* by Dostoevsky. However the second production did not gain so much popularity as at that time the Velvet Revolution took place. New social conditions influenced the theatre in Spišská Nová Ves. Thanks to Miro Košický, who was a deputy of the National Council, theatre in Spišská Nová Ves became independent from the Jonáš Záborský Theatre in 1991. That is how the second period of the existence of the professional theatre in our town ended.

Mgr. Emil Spišák, ArtD.

The third period of the professional theatre in Spišská Nová Ves

On 1st January the professional theatre was created for the third time. It gained independence from the Jonáš Záborský Theatre and it was given the name Spiš Theatre (Spišské divadlo). It was a step in the right direction which saved the existence of the professional theatre in Spišská Nová Ves. After the year 1989 the conditions for the culture development were not very favourable, even the opera ensemble of Jonáš Záborský Theatre was dissolved and it is probable that the authorities would not have hesitated to dissolve the theatre ensemble in Spišská Nová Ves.

The Spiš Theatre started in a very modest format. There were several guarantors – the Ministry of Culture, intendant, Regional Authority and the Košice Self-governing Region. It was not positive for the theatre's development. After the short period of enthusiasm, the staff and creative crisis started. Nevertheless the theatre was trying to create interesting productions. The first production of the independent theatre was *The Shepherd's wife (Bačovažena)* by Ivan Stodola directed by Miro Košický. One of the most important productions was *The Old Lady Visit (Návšteva starej dámy)* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt (directed by Miro Košický) starring Viera Strnisková, who cooperated with the theatre for five years. Another important production was *L'Annonce faite à Marie (Zvestovanie)* by Paul Claudel (directed by Michal Spišák). The production of the play *Moscow-Petushki (Moskva-Petušky)* written by Venedikt Yerofeyev and directed by Vitalij Mozgalin was appreciated by critics. The production of Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* directed by Tomáš Rosický was also very successful. One of the most specific productions was created when implementing two one-act plays *Mother (Matka)* by J. G. Tajovský and *In the Shadow of the Glen (V tóni doliny)* by J. M. Synge into one production. The next production directed by Miro Košický *Traces of Word and Script (Stopy slova a písma)* was also very specific as the theologians from Spišské Podhradie starred in the play. It is important to mention the productions of *Goldberg variations (Goldbergovské variácie)* by George Tabori and *Esther (Ester)* both directed by Miro Košický. The most appreciated production of that period was *Ivona, Princess of Burgundia (Ivona, princezná burgundská)* by Witold Gombrowicz directed by Polish director Andrzej Rozhin. It was the best production created in Slovak theatres during that period. The best productions directed by young director Monika Gerbocová were *Midsummer Night's Dream (Sen noci svätajánskej)* by Shakespeare and *The Loop for Two (Slučka pre dvoch)* by Ivan Bukovčan.

The most significant personalities of that period were directors Miroslav Košický, Monika Gerbocová, Tomáš Rosický and a dramaturge Štefan Fejko. The most significant actors were Dana Košická, Albín Medúz, Štefan Labanc, Mária Brozmanová.

In 2007 Mgr. Emil Spišák Art.D became a new managing director and in 2008 Prof. PhDr. Ján Sládeček PhD. became a new artistic director. The theatre ensemble was reconstructed and it consisted only of actors with university education, mostly graduates of the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica. The development influenced technical-administrative section as well. Spiš Theatre became typical repertory city theatre as theatres in Trnava, Zvolen, Martin etc. It focused mainly on the productions for adults but it presents the productions for youth and children as well. After 2007 new productions, which were very

attractive for the audience, were created. The first one was the play *All about men (Všetko o mužoch)* by Miro Gavran directed by Emil Spišák. Other important productions are: *Reconciliation or Adventure at Harvest Time (Zmierenie alebo Dobrodružstvo pri obžinkoch)* by Ján Palárik, *God's Poet (Pevec Boží)* by Július Barč-Ivan, *Beauty of Beauties (Krása krás)* by Božena Slančíková-Timrava, *The Bankrupt (Bankrot)* by Alexander Ostrovsky all of them directed by Ján Sládeček, *An Enemy of the People (Nepriateľ ľudu)* by Henrik Ibsen, *Charley's Aunt (Charleyho teta)* by Brandon Thomas directed by Emil Spišák, *Women's Law in Spiš Dialect (Ženský zákon po špiski)* by Jozef Gregor Tajovský (directed by Matúš Ol'ha), *Jánošík or the Truth is only One (Jánošík alebo Pravda je len jedna)* by Jozef Mokoš (directed by Peter Palik), *Ladies's Dressmaker (Dámsky krajčír)* by Georges Feydeau (directed by L. Vajdička), *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (Snehulienka a sedem trpaslíkov)* (directed by M. Gerbocová), *Thumbelina (Palculienka)* by H. Ch. Andersen (directed by Peter Palik), *Beauty and the Beast (Kráska a Netvor)* directed by Peter Palik.

Later a new studio was created for presenting the productions for demanding audience. The most successful productions are *Don Juan in Hell (Don Juan v pekle)* by G. B. Shaw directed by Ján Sládeček, *Uncle Vanya (Ujo váňa)* by Anton Chekhov, *Century According to Maria (Storočie podľa Márie)* by Peter Palik and Ján Jendrichovský (directed by Peter Palik).

Directors Ján Sládeček, Peter Palik, Emil Spišák and guest director Ľubomír Vajdička and others has contributed to the development of the theatre.

In 2018 Doc. PhDr. Michal Babiak became the artistic director of the theatre. His productions of *Three dancing in Vidermanec (Až tri v taňcu na Vidermaňcu)* (the play was written by Babiak himself), *The Restoration (Reštavrácia)* by Ján Kalinčiak and *Couples at Stake (Manželské hry)* by Matjaž Zupančič are those of the best productions of the Spiš Theatre. This is how the new period of the existence of the professional theatre in Spišská Nová Ves begins.

Mgr. Emil Spišák, ArtD.