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Time and Theatre

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Abstract: The article addresses the issues of the influence of time on the development of theatrical art, particularly the art of directing. The law of the correlation between form and content requires the search for new forms in art and the discovery of new meanings in accordance with the period in which we live. The article presents examples of the creative work of well-known directors who have influenced and continue to influence various trends in theatrical art.
Keywords: theatrical art, time, form, content, innovation, means of expression, acting, clichés, education.

No art form reflects the times and the public consciousness as fully and multidimensionally as the performing arts—and theater in particular. At the very least, that is its intended role. Recent tragic events—unjustified and brutal regional conflicts, hostility, chauvinism, and signs of nationalism and fascism—compel us to reflect on the root causes of these phenomena. Human spirituality and moral principles are not merely an adjunct to life; they are the foundation of human coexistence. The eternal struggle between good and evil, the affirmation of moral and ethical principles, and spiritual self-improvement are possible only through literature and art.

The second half of the 20th century saw a flourishing of dramatic art; it subtly exposed the socio-political and personal issues of the era, thereby influencing public consciousness. By its very nature, drama is predicated on a conflict of interests. The times demanded change in both form and content; old forms and clichéd content had outlived their usefulness. A generation of outstanding figures emerged who elevated the art of theater to new heights and transformed approaches to acting and directing. Figures such as Peter Brook, Giorgio Strehler, G.A. Tovstonogov, Yu. Lyubimov, M.A. Zakharov, A.V. Efros, O.N. Efremov, L.A. Dodin, P. Fomenko, and A. Vasiliev became the intellectual and artistic leaders of their time. In Uzbekistan, the flourishing and development of theater were shaped by the distinguished director A.U. Khodjaev, as well as by reformers such as E. Masofaev, M. Weil, and B.T. Yuldashev. Sadly, many of these brilliant luminaries have passed away.

What defined their contribution to the art of theater? Above all, the sheer scale of their personalities! Their incredibly broad horizons! Their thirst for knowledge and deep erudition. Their understanding of the profession's social significance. Their knowledge and artistic interpretation of the world around them. Their selflessness and love—both for people and for their craft. This post-war generation possessed a life experience that was as rich as it was arduous, alongside a zest for life and a hope to change the world for the better.

Their legacy is being carried forward by contemporary Uzbek directors such as O. Salimov, V. Umarov, S. Meliev, and B. Gafurov, as well as by younger directors like A. Kholmuminov, B. T. Yuldashev, O. Yakubov, and N. A. Gaibnazarova.

The work of directors Rimas Tuminas, Yuri Butusov, and Dmitry Krymov has become a defining phenomenon of the current century. Their innovative, creative, and distinctive visions have unlocked unexplored possibilities for imagery in theater—ranging from acting styles and

techniques to approaches to literary material—while revealing the profound underlying meanings of the works themselves.

Each of these directors is artistically unique, possessing a distinct style and signature. Rimas Tuminas is ascetic, austere, wise, and poetic in his staging choices—and truly magnificent in that very austerity. He eschews the technologies currently in vogue; the primary focus of his productions is light, music, and—above all—the ACTOR. Within the empty space of the stage, he articulates meaning through metaphorical *mise-en-scène* and the actors' nuanced psychological presence. His epic production based on Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* raises profound philosophical questions about existence: life and death, war and peace, love and betrayal. The monumental and visually stunning production of Mikhail Lermontov's *Masquerade*, along with *Eugene Onegin*, *Uncle Vanya*, and other works by Rimas Tuminas, reveal his exceptionally refined taste, the scale of his personality, and his ability to sense the pulse of the times—as well as its pain points and problems.

The productions of Yuri Butusov—who met a tragic, untimely death in 2025—leave a profound impression through their innovative form and emotionally charged staging. Rhythm, music, and dance dictate a unique mode of existence for the actors, shaping the very nature of their emotions. Their expressiveness, the metaphorical fluidity of their characterizations, and the immense emotional intensity—contrasted with an outward restraint and economy of gesture—mark a radical departure from conventional acting clichés. *King Lear* is a grand-scale Shakespearean tragedy rendered in a tragicomic, farcical key. *Flight* (based on the novel by Mikhail Bulgakov) features a completely unpredictable visual aesthetic. The production *The Son* is striking, showcasing not merely acting, but the actors' profound, lived experience of a seemingly mundane, everyday situation elevated to a level of tragic, epic intensity. The physical embodiment of characters and the impressive *mise-en-scène* serve as a revelation for the audience.

In the work of Dmitry Krymov, we witness a cascade of techniques and expressive devices drawn from both visual art and theater. His productions transcend the boundaries of traditional drama; he eschews the literal illustration of a dramatic text. While utilizing familiar storylines, Krymov invites us to view them from a completely different angle, laying bare hidden meanings. He absorbed the multifaceted art of theater from early childhood—a process in which his genetic heritage played a significant role. The son of the great director Anatoly Efros and the renowned theater critic Natalia Krymova, Dmitry received an education in the visual arts. His work undoubtedly reflects a unique blend of talents: his own gift for set design, the directorial experience inherited from his father, and his mother's critical, analytical mindset. The innovative approach seen in productions such as A.N. Ostrovsky's *The Dowerless Girl*, *Mozart Don Juan: The Dress Rehearsal*, *Seryozha* (based on L.N. Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*), *Kostik* (based on Chekhov's *The Seagull*), and *Gorki 10* is striking for its inventiveness, metaphorical imagery, and constant shifting of theatrical languages.

A new generation of Uzbek directors—including Boris Gafurov, Saifitdin Meliev, Askar Kholmuminov, Bobur Yuldashev, and Otabek Yakubov—while preserving their national identity, are constantly seeking modern forms and new insights into the content of dramatic material.

In his book *Rehearsal—My Love*, A. Efros writes: "Theater is not the truth of everyday life; it is the art of existence—philosophy is essential". [1]

[1] А.Эфрос. «Репетиция – любовь моя». М., «Искусство». !985г.

Alongside state-run institutions, the contemporary Uzbek theater scene features studio theaters that are constantly exploring new forms and modes of expression. For instance, the experimental studio "Art House Hamsa," led by the exceptionally talented director Sayfitdin Meliev, attracts significant interest from discerning audiences. Drawing on both domestic and international literature, Meliev preserves the original meaning while creatively transforming the material to infuse it with a distinct national identity. By combining profound psychological depth with ethnographic elements—such as traditional costumes, music, song, symbolism, and metaphorical staging—the director creates a unique artistic atmosphere in every production.

It is worth noting that S. Meliev is a prolific artist, having staged around 50 productions; often, he develops multiple projects simultaneously over the course of several years. His most ambitious production, Euripides' *Medea*, was staged at the Abror Khidoyatov Theater, where the title role marked a career pinnacle for the talented actress Gulbahor Yuldasheva. His other notable works include *O'lan*; *Father* (by I. Iman); *My Poplar in a Red Scarf* and *Red Apples* (by Ch. Aitmatov); *Oydan-da Go'zal* (by Cholpon); *The Fig* (by Elif Shafak); *The Seagull* (by A.P. Chekhov); *Every Song Is About Love* (based on N. Leskov's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*); and *The Woman Who Exuded the Scent of Basil* (based on A. Dumas's *The Lady of the Camellias*), among others. All his productions are distinguished by a fresh, unexpected perspective and unique artistic vision.

For many years, the experimental studio "Shamsi-i-Kamar," led by Kamaritdin Artykov, has been active. The theater's concept is rooted in the principle of minimalism—a necessity dictated by its limited resources, such as a small rented space and a complete lack of funding. A tiny team of three or four people manages to experiment and stage productions fueled solely by sheer enthusiasm. Artist and director Jamshid Valiev, along with artistic director and creative organizer K. Artykov, collaborate with just one or two actors to create small-scale productions that are profound in meaning and visually striking. With minimal props—and sometimes using only natural light—they engage the audience in a dialogue about pressing issues, the philosophy of life, and human relationships, prompting deep reflection on existence. "A living theater is always a thinking theater."

Productions include Jean Cocteau's *The Blue Square*; *Our—and Only Our—Little Prince* (based on A. de Saint-Exupéry); *Zhaidari Martin* (based on Jack London's *Martin Eden*); and adaptations of Franz Kafka's *Letter to His Father* and *The Metamorphosis*. In the one-man show *Testament*—based on N. Dumbadze's *The Dog* and J. Jondor's *The Needle*—a life-sized puppet (representing a grandfather) and a house slipper (acting as the dog) made a particularly strong impression; a single actor transforms these objects into living beings. In its silence, the puppet takes on a mystical, philosophical quality. Especially valuable in this theater is the quest for and invention of new forms, as well as the rejection of the clichés found in traditional theaters. The profession of a director is unique and complex; consequently, there are very few of them. This issue is particularly acute today. What lies behind the shortage of professionals in this field?

The profession demands a special kind of talent. There is a well-known saying: "You cannot learn to be a director; you must be born one." Leadership qualities, a creative spirit, life experience, powers of observation, a worldview, creative thinking, a broad outlook, a rich imagination, and the willingness to take risks and seek innovative solutions—these are the fundamental prerequisites for entering the profession. Unfortunately, experience shows that in recent years, theater schools have faced a decline in the overall quality of applicants—regarding their education and worldview as well as their cognitive abilities. Qualities such as memory, attention, imagination, creative vision,

cognitive function, and breadth of knowledge often fall short of the basic standards expected of applicants to theater schools, dropping significantly below acceptable levels.

In our view, the development of information technology—which impacts individuals in both positive and negative ways—along with significant shortcomings in the education system, has played an indirect role in this situation. Illiteracy is reaching alarming levels. Standardized testing in schools and universities stifles the development of critical thinking and verbal skills. It is no secret that the current generation rarely reads books, yet reading is the most effective way to cultivate imagination and creativity—the very wellspring of acting and directing. Training for these professions becomes more challenging year by year. Many students are characterized by immaturity, irresponsibility, a habit of spending excessive time on social media, and an inability to work on self-improvement. Unlike other art forms—such as ballet, opera, or music—that demand daily discipline, it is easy to be a dilettante in our field. An actor might naively assume that once the lines are memorized, the rest is up to the director. Yet, the professional demands of acting are incredibly vast; voice, speech technique, physical flexibility, dance, vocals, stage movement, and acting psychology all require constant self-development. The same applies to directing: it is easy to dabble as an amateur. You have a script and actors, you block the scenes, and the production is supposedly ready.

Recruiting 17- or 18-year-olds for directing courses is currently quite problematic. They lack life experience and basic knowledge of literature and the arts; their horizons are narrow, and their worldviews are not yet fully formed. Ultimately, the profession demands a mature personality, and directing education should ideally be a second degree pursued after completing a primary university education. Sometimes, students with clear aptitude for directing are encountered in acting programs; however, since the educational tracks for these disciplines differ, transferring them from one department to another is not feasible. One option—following graduation from the acting program—is to select graduates who demonstrate directing talent and have them continue their training in a two-year advanced directing course. This approach would help address the shortage of highly qualified professionals in this exceptionally demanding field.

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