

THE INITIAL STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE RUSSIAN DRAMA THEATRE IN MOLDOVA

PERIOADA ÎNȚĂLĂ A DEZVOLTĂRII TEATRULUI DRAMATIC RUS ÎN MOLDOVA

NADEJDA AXIONOVA,

lector superior, doctorandă,

Academia de Muzică, Teatru și Arte Plastice

The article characterizes the initial stage of development of the Chisinau's Drama Theatre, that worked in Tiraspol and Chisinau from 1934 till 1941, and in Mary a Turcmen city from 1941 to 1944. This period is determined by the activity of such directors as G. Nazarkovsky, A. Bekkerev, V. Perov, V. Strelbitsky, V. Axionov and other representatives of theatre art. On the bases of archive materials it was possible to recreate the panorama of the performances staged by the theatre company during this period.

Keywords: archive materials, drama theatre, repertoire, director, stage.

Articolul caracterizează etapa inițială a dezvoltării Teatrului Dramatic Rus din Chișinău, care s-a desfășurat în perioada anilor 1934 – 1941, în Tiraspol și Chișinău, iar în anii 1941 – 1944 în orașul Marî din Turcmenistan. Această perioadă este determinată de activitatea regizorală a artiștilor G. Nazarkovski, A. Bekkerev, V. Perov, V. Strelbiți, V. Axionov și altor reprezentanți ai artei teatrale. Bazându-se pe materialele de arhivă, este efectuată o revizuire a spectacolelor montate pe scena acestui teatru în perioadele menționate.

Cuvinte-cheie: materiale din arhivă, teatru dramatic, repertoriu, regizor teatral, spectacol.

The Russian Drama Theatre was set up with the state support on the territory of the Republic of Moldova (then the MASSR) in the 1930s. Guest touring companies and local amateur clubs¹ played an important part of the process of its development. We can find general information about the evolution of this theatre in the publications if such artists as E. Golubeva, N. Rojkovsky, O. Goreansky, V. Josul, I. Grecul, L. Chemortan. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]. In an archive collection we could find the following statement: «In September 1934 on the basis of the mobile troupe of the Konotop House of Soviets of the Army in Tiraspol, under the guidance of the National Committee of Education of the MASSR was created the Russian Drama Theatre» [6, c. 254].

In 1934 – 1935 the theatre company opened its first season with the performance *Hatred* by P. Yaltsev. The audience was familiar with the creations of this playwright owing to his one-act plays, which were staged by a lot of amateur collectives on different platforms of the URSS. His many-acts drama *Hatred* written in 1929 quickly gained popularity. The author built its main conflict contrasting the personality of a highly educated intellectual, man of science, professor Charushkin with the whole world. Charushkin safely condemns the errors of the new Soviet governance and opposes lies and demagoguery. He was an example of selfless and fearless devotion to science, which contributed to the formation of high ethic and moral qualities of Soviet people. The director of the newly created Russian Drama Theatre was G. Nazarkovsky, who laid emphasis in this performance on the psychological revelation of the characters, making an effort to cultivate the viewer's sense of unconditional respect for education, knowledge and culture. The decor for this play was convincingly realized by Dekasov.

The theatre could give only one performance during the first two seasons because of the difficult financial situation². The second performance of this theatre was *Vagramov's Night* a romantically el-

1 After the formation of the moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1924) a lot of amateur, dance and drama groups, wind instruments orchestras and ensembles of Moldovan and Russian folk instruments were created there. The moldovan musical Capella *Doina* headed by Mihail Caftanat was formed in Balta in 1928 and a theatre troupe, headed by V. Viktorov was set up out of the most gifted amateur actors. The Moldovan drama studio run by A. Adashev was organized in 1930 [6]. In the documents of the Public Committee of Education of the MASSR from 1930-1931 there is mention of the existence of the State Russian Drama Theatre (directed by N. Kazarin).

2 Not supported by funds from the state, for insuring its existence, the theatre had to go on tours outside the MASSR. Because box-office takings were very low. In 1936 the Russian Drama Theatre was transferred to the jurisdiction of the newly formed Department

evated play written by the Ukrainian playwright L. Penvomaisky. This play was saturated with tragic pathos, exalted feats of heroism, which were committed in the name of the triumph of the revolution and the new way of social life. In this performance like in the play *Hatred* the director G. Nazarkovsky with the theatre collective set himself the task to influence the public psychologically in order to form communist ideals. The sets for *Vagramov's Night* were designed by Berneakov.

During the third theatrical season the Russian Drama Theatre announced and produced such performances as *Liubovi Iarovaia* by K. Treniov, *At the Bottom* by M. Gorky and *Dangerous Meeting* based on the play *Beautiful Woman* by I. Stalsky. As it is known, K. Treniov was one of the first playwrights who showed the revolution in the traditions of socialist realism. The play *Liubovi Iarovaia* captures the public not only by displaying the tragical days of the civil war and the stress-paced action, but also by the collision of strong characters. According to the research of philologists and linguists the character and representation of Liubovi Iarovaia supplemented the national type of a Russian woman, that was created by A. Pushkin, I. Turgenev, L. Tolstoy, A. Nekrasov and M. Gorky. The life of K. Treniov's heroine was given to her last breath to the cause of revolution. The high moral qualities of this woman were an excellent example to follow by the playwright's contemporaries.

In the play directed by G. Nazarkovsky was shown how the family conflict outgrew from personal differences to an irreconcilable confrontation between two social camps. Knowing that her husband Mihail was in the whites' camp, Liubovi Iarovaia without any hesitation handed him over to commissar Koshkin, even though she knew that he would be immediately shot. Her position is firm: „The new world is bought with blood”. The performance decor was made by Berneakov.

The line of socially significant themes and ideas found their development in G. Nazarkovsky's subsequent performances. So, in the production of the play *At the Bottom* by M. Gorky the director contrasted “The masters of life” (the rooming house owner Kostiliov, the policeman Medvedev, Vasilisa) and the inhabitants of the shelter abandoned at the bottom of life. G. Nazarkovsky convincingly built the relationships between Vasika Pepel and Vasilisa, Mihail Kostiliov and Natasha, where the social and love conflicts of the heroes were revealed. Eternal questions of life values, the sense of human existence, the truth and lie were shown in this performance.

The next Russian Drama Theatre's production was made by director A. Bekkerev. It was the performance *Dangerous Meeting* based on the play *Beautiful Woman* by I. Stalsky (Malighin) that is about the sabotages of “the public enemies”. A common theme in those years, the disclosure of espionage activities by valiant security organs is further developed. The director V. Voinovich implemented two productions in the same style: *Confrontation* based on the play by the brothers Tur & L. Sheinin and the drama *Beacon Lights* by L. Karasev. Vasiliev designed the two sets for both these performances. The next premiere was *The Gadfly* by E. Voinovich, a production of director B. Veretsky.

The plays *Confrontation* and *Beacon Lights* haven't left a significant mark in the history of the Russian Drama Theatre from the MASSR. The fate of *The Gadfly* was happier because in this performance like a manifesto was proclaimed the freedom and struggle for the liberation of the people. It was a performance that disclosed the romantic destiny of Artur Berton, his mysterious birth, the betrayal of the loved ones, the staged suicide and the tragic unrequited love, carried through the whole life.

So, in the activity of the Russian Drama Theatre of the 1930s were approved patriotical ideas, that appealed to forming a positive world outlook, asserting the image of a positive hero – a builder of a new society, an optimist who sacredly believed in the victory of communism. By staging *Liubovi Iarovaia* a heroic drama by K. Treniov, *At the Bottom*, the classical play by M. Gorky, *The Gadfly*, a romantic production by E. Voinoch – the Russian Drama Theatre from the MASSR contributed to the formation of the public's active position.

The director A. Voinovich also set himself the goals of upbringing the younger generations in the performance *How the Steel Was Tempered* based on the novel by A. Ostrovsky. The plays *The Spy's Trail*

by A. Diuna, *The Boarder Guards* by V. Bill-Belotserkovsky directed by B. Veretsky were penetrated with heriocal pathos.

A bright event in the Russian Drama Theatre's life was the production of the performance *The Break* based on B. Lavreniov's play, which was produced by G. Nazarkovsky in 1939. Following the playwright the director moved the audience to revolutionary Kronshtadt of 1917. He convincingly showed the collapse of the old world. That political situation was reflected through displaying the conflict in the captain Berseniev's family: between Tatiana - his eldest daughter and her husband, lieutenant Stube. This conflict is going beyond family relations. The performance *The Break* directed by G. Nazarkovsky showed the people's fate who were caught up in a revolutionary situation of "breaking" the life principles and who had to join different sides of the barricades³. The other performances, produced by director G. Nazarkovsky, also asserted the power of spirit and moral tenacity of the Soviet people. Among these performances were *General Consul* by L. Sheinin, *Collusion* by N. Virt, *Olga Ivanovna* by Ia. Ialuner, *Uriel Acosta* by K. Gutzkov.

In 1940, when the MSSR was formed many creative collectives including the Russian Drama Theatre and the Moldovan Musical-Drama Theatre were transferred to its capital Chisinau city from Tiraspol [7, p. 8]. The official opening of the Russian Drama Theatre in Chisinau took place on November 7, 1940 with the performance *The Break* by B. Lavreniov. Significant performances of this season were also the plays *Platon Krechet* by A. Korneychuk and *The Auditor* by N. Gogol.

The performance *Platon Krechet* was staged by the director of the Russian Drama Theatre Ia. Perov and the set designer Poleacov. It was a play about a "new person" – a Soviet doctor-surgeon, who is trying to extend human lives and is constantly seeking the truth. Gogol's comedy was staged by director V. Strelbitsky⁴, the décor was made by Poleakov.

In the autumn of 1940 The Committee on Art Affairs of the USSR sent Veacheslav Axionov to work in the Russian Drama Theatre in the Moldovan SSR. Veacheslav Axionov a graduate of the theatre school at the M. Gorky Academic Art Theatre was an adherent and follower of K. Stanislavsky's ideas and principles. By that time he was an experienced actor and director who showed himself with his works in the Kharkov, Kiev, Vitebsk theatres⁵.

The period between 1940 and 1941, when V. Axionov came to work in Chisinau's at the Russian Drama Theatre was rather difficult for the company's activity. The theatre collective had a lot of tours throughout the republic, facing material, organizational and administrative difficulties. On April 1 1941, two months before the outbreak of hostilities on the Moldovan territory, V. Axionov was appointed manager and artistic director of the Russian Drama Theatre in Chisinau [8]. His main task was the preservation of the theatre in war time, ensuring its function and taking care of improving the staff's professional level.

The theatre was temporarily closed during the first days of the war. One part of the male cast were enrolled in the army, another part was evacuated. Some artists, who found themselves in the rear areas of the USSR, joined the Moldovan song and dance ensemble and different concert groups. The Russian Drama Theatre moved at first to Odessa, from there to Cherkesk city (Cherkesk Autonomous Okrug of the RSFSR) in 1941–1942, and in August 1942 it moved to Mary city of the Turkmen SSR [9].

Now it is difficult to restore in details all the events of the war time. The information about them is very fragmentary and contradictory. Only thanks to some certificates, document copies, and other accounts of eyewitnesses which were saved, we can restore the life of that time. In the Axionov's fam-

3 Good directing and a clear sense of ideological purpose became the bases of selecting exactly this play for opening the theatre season in 1940. It was the first season after the theatre troupe came back to Chisinau.

4 V. Strelbitsky began his creative activity in 1921 at the Saratov theatre named after N. Chernishevsky. Since 1945 he worked as an actor in many city theatres: Kerch, Barnaul, Novocherkassk, Tambov, Grozny, Nalchik, Pyiatigorsk and Kostroma. He began his activity as a theatre director in 1935. In 1940–1963 he worked at the Chisinau Drama Theatre.

5 In the Axionov's archives there are documents confirming facts about V. Axionov's activity during his whole life: different kinds of references, certificates, etc.

ily archive there is a poster about the theatre tours in the cities of the Turkmen SSR in 1942 with the production *Russian People* based on a play by K. Simonov. It was staged and directed by V. Axionov and A. Gorshko, his assistant. The sets were designed by D. Zlatov and the musical accompaniment was by S. Frolov.

The Moldovan Musical-Drama Theatre's artists, the artists of the Moldovan Capella *Doina* and those from the Nikolaev theatre got together in the Turkmen SSR. All of them were united because of the small number of artists in these theatre companies. So, the United Russian-Moldovan Drama Theatre was founded in the city of Mary of the Turkmen SSR [10].

For almost a year (from 1942 till 1943) the United Theatre was headed by director A. Lukianov and in 1943 was committed the act of transferring the theatre from A. Lukianov to V. Axionov, who was included in the theatre troupe as artistic director on March 24, 1943 [11]. V. Gerlak was appointed the Moldovan troupe's director [12].

Besides V. Axionov the theatre's directors-producers were Ia. Perov, V. Gerlak, V. Petrov, K. Frantsev and D. Lisenko. The main set designer was B. Tregubov, the music arrangement conductor was S. Zlatov, the ballet-master was V. Baronchuk. I. Portnov was the makeup artist, G. Rusanov and B. Bronshtein were assistants director [13].

The actors' troupe was big enough. So, the male group included L. Antonov, I. Aseev, S. Barel'li, B. Berenshtein, V. Visotsky, G. Bodoi, K. Bodoi, B. Bronshtein, R. Gavrilenko, V. Gerasimov, V. Golovchenko, I. Gurevich, P. Jidkovets, V. Ionitsa, A. Karlin, I. Kassvan, K. Konstantinov, D. Lisenko, V. Lilikumov, G. Rotaru, G. Rusanov, V. Savitsky, A. Stepanov, L. Stroinov, E. Ureke, K. Frantsev, T. Hadakov, V. Tsarevsky, Ia. Shendelson.

The female group comprised P. Antonova, A. Bezman, E. Butusova, L. Vilik, E. Garina, V. Garina, T. Gerlak, G. Goldshtein, E. Zveagintseva, E. Kazimirova, G. Lisenko, A. Lorskaya, E. Narodetskaya, A. Patenko, L. Perova, K. Raikopulo, P. Serebreakova, A. Smirnova, O. Stanchik, E. Tsurkan.

During the activity of the United Russian-Moldovan Drama Theatre while it was evacuated (1942-1944), its collective gave 118 patronage concerts. A significant number of performances were directed by V. Axionov. He directed the productions *Russian People* by K. Simonov, *The Third Pathetic* by N. Pogodin, *The Seagull* by A. Chekhov, *Love and Slander* by the Turkmen authors M. Muratov and A. Purliev. Besides that the director V. Petrov staged the performance *The Invasion* a play by L. Leonov.

Judging by preserved posters, the list of performances of that period included the productions: *The Life's Lesson* by V. Golovchiner, *The Dog in the Manger* by Lope de Vega, *The Earth* by Iu. Dolf, *In the Steppes of Ukraine* by A. Korneichuk, *The Fortress* by A. Ulyaninsky. The newspaper the *Chardjou Pravda* of May 1943 published two positive reviews about the performances of the United Russian-Moldovan Drama Theatre, *The Life's Lesson* by V. Golovchiner and *The Fortress* by A. Serafimov.

The Moldovan troupe of artists, headed by V. Gerlak, worked on the restoration of the historical play *The Gaiduks*. On November 6, 1943, on the eve of the XXVI anniversary of the October Revolution, *Two Julies*, a musical-literary show took place. The text was written by the director of the theatre A. Lukiyanov in collaboration with the head of the literary sector L. Axionova. (the musical arrangement was by S. Zlatov and P. Scherban, the dances were staged by E. Yasnitskaya and A. Opanasenko).

During its tours the company of the United Theatre also organized evening concerts of Moldovan music, songs and dances.

In the summer of 1940 The United Russian-Moldovan Theatre came back to Moldova and was divided into the Moldovan State Musical-Drama Theatre and the Russian State Drama Theatre in August 14 by the Order No. 435 of the Department of Arts. Both performing groups began to work in the *Express* theatre building.

So, in the history of the Russian Drama Theatre, which bears the name of A. Chekhov, there are many unknown and blank pages. There are no confirmed documentary facts of the material support of the theatre, the figures of directors and actors, who worked in the theatre, were not presented

as they merited the “scores” of the theatre productions were not showed. Probably, further archival researching will fill in these gaps, will adjust the current views on the history of one the biggest and largest theatres of the Republic of Moldova. However one thing is clear: the present conditions of the Russian Drama Theatre, which has developed for many decades in a difficult and contradictory atmosphere of the artistic culture of Moldova, is impossible to imagine without taking into account the period between 1934 and 1944, the organizational and creative experience, without the quests and finds, achievements and mistakes, which existed at that time.

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