

ISCKMC 2022**International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****THEATRICAL LIFE OF DON REGION AT THE BEGINNING OF
THE 20TH CENTURY**

Olga Valerievna Semenova (a)*, Elena Lvovna Shchukina (b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Federal Research Centre Southern Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences (SSC RAS), 41,
Chekhov Ave., Rostov-on-Don, Russia, oliko_sov@mail.ru

(b) Southern Federal University, Institute of Sociology and Regional Studies, 160, Pushkinskaya Str., Rostov-on-
Don, Russia, elshukina@sfedu.mailto:elshukina@sfedu.rurumailto:elshukina@sfedu.ru

Abstract

This paper studies the theatrical life of the Don region in the fateful period, which received the poetic name of the Silver Age, when bold, innovative experiments in the field of art took place. Revelations and prophecies were expected from art. The theater became a temple, a school, a political and social platform. The subject of research interest included two aspects, on the one hand, an attempt was made to clarify the activities of professional directors, actors, critics, writers in the field of the improvement of the theatrical repertoire, experiments to create a "new theater" that could influence the mindset of the public. On the other hand, due to the changing socio-political reality on the eve of the Russian revolutions, the social composition of the public was changing, which required clarification of the possibilities for the mutual influence of theatrical art and the audience. The methodological basis of the study was, first of all, historical methods, in particular, comparatively historical and problem-chronological. The authors concluded that the historical and cultural heritage of the Don Host Region was quite multifaceted and multilayered, which was due to the multicultural composition of the population of the region. A certain contribution to the enrichment of cultural and, in particular, theatrical life was made by representatives of the Don Cossacks, Don Armenians, Greek, Jewish diaspora, which needs further interdisciplinary research and clarification.

2357-1330 © 2022 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, Don region, theatrical life

1. Introduction

The historical and cultural heritage of Russia at the beginning of the 20th century was the period of the Silver Age of Russian culture, which made a significant contribution to the treasury of world culture. The turn of the century was a defining moment in the history of the state, when the question of the future path of the country was being decided, which had become relevant in our time. "The development of Russian culture over the course of several centuries was significantly influenced by the culture of the leading European countries" (Shchukina et al., 2016). However, the theatrical system developed by Stanislavsky, had been the basis for the functioning of professional drama theater all over the world for a century. At a critical period in Russia's development, when "not everything was as golden as the brilliance of its domes" (Houghton, 1973), the faith in the unlimited possibilities of culture, art, their transformative revolutionary role, contributed to the creative search of the artistic elite of that time. Art tried to take on a messianic role, find a recipe for changing real life according to the laws of harmony and beauty. At the same time, the provincial theater had to adapt to the interests of the audience and take into account their preferences and needs.

The provincial theater has never been completely isolated from the metropolitan stage, but still, it lived its own life and played its own rules. The capital scene was imperial, state, privileged. The provincial theater has always been private since the days of serfdom. This explains its originality and many difficulties. A feature of the provincial theaters was the repertoire race, when farces were staged along with highly artistic works, greater dependence on audience requests than in metropolitan theaters. It determined the role of art lovers, mainly from the local merchant nobility, in material support and organization of cultural life.

The nature of the provincial theater of the Don Host Region was significantly affected by the increase in the educated population in large cities: Rostov-on-Don, Taganrog, Novocherkassk, Nakhichevan-on-Don, due to their industrial growth. During this period, the first higher educational institution was opened in Novocherkassk, and Rostov-on-Don became a university city. The most beautiful stone theater buildings were built, which became a part of the architectural treasury of the cities of the Don, where prominent Russian directors and actors worked.

2. Problem Statement

The relevance of the topic is determined, firstly, by the need to comprehend the place and role of theatrical life in the socio-political history of Russia at the beginning of the last century.

Secondly, the topic touches upon the need to study the cultural factor in the transformational processes of the Russian Empire in the inter-revolutionary period.

Thirdly, the relevance is also determined by the approach to the insufficiently developed problem of the Silver Age in the Don region, its relationship with the cultural processes of the capital cities: St. Petersburg and Moscow. In recent years, the study of the cultural history of the Russian provinces has become particularly relevant. In Russia, with its vast expanses and distances, the extraordinary originality of regional, national, social and cultural traditions, the provinces always played a big role in the historical fate and determined the multicolored cultural life of the country.

The main source of research into the cultural life of the province was the central and local periodicals. The advantage of periodicals, as a source, is in its systemic nature. It allowed presenting the worldview, psychological state, creative searches of the artistic intelligentsia of that time. Memoirs, letters, notes of actors, directors, playwrights, theater administrators, critics, artists, composers, and, finally, people of various professions and social status – theater lovers, listeners, became an extensive empirical base for the study.

In the pre-October period, the main direction of research was local history notes, often written by non-professional historians and researchers. During the Soviet period, under the dictates of the authorities, the state in all spheres of life, this research tradition was lost. In the post-Soviet period, there were tendencies of growing interest in the cultural history of the province. Moreover, the Don is a kind of region with significant features and a specific historical fate as part of the Russian state. Therefore, the study of the history of his theatrical life of the early 20th century is important and relevant at the present stage, both for a full understanding of the artistic life of the country as a whole, and for filling gaps in the history of the cultural life of the region.

In modern research literature, the question of the leadership of forms of creativity in that period is raised. Soviet historiography in every way emphasized the role of social and political thought, the natural sciences, and their achievements in the era of the Silver Age. Now, when transformational processes are being carried out in our society, the life-creating, philosophical ideas of the culture of the Silver Age, formed by both philosophers and figures of literature and theater.

It is not possible to list all the numerous research approaches that affect cultural processes. Significant conceptual rethinking of the theory of culture in foreign epistemology begins in the 1980s, as "cultural turn", which allowed Hofstede to define culture "as collective mental programming" (2001). In our opinion, the theoretical studies of Hofstede, Jamisson, Girtz and others in a certain way allow a deeper understanding of the studied period in the field of the influence of art on a viewer.

Currently, the research tools are being enriched with information and communication and GIS technologies: using GIS technologies, the SSC RAS has developed an electronic map of historical and cultural monuments, which allowed visualizing, among other things, theatrical architecture monuments of the Don region (Semenova et al., 2021).

3. Research Questions

The need for a sociocultural rethinking of the relationship between a theater and a viewer of the Russian provinces at the beginning of the 20th century is important. In this very period the mechanisms of the influence of spectacular arts on a viewer and listener were clarified. The theories of "theatricalization of life", "theatricalization of the theater" were formed, the role of the manipulative impact of the spectacle on the mindset of the mass public was updated. A new reading was given to the conceptual search for theatricality by Evreinov, which Carnicke defined as a theatrical instinct (Carnicke, 1989). Evreinov was called the first and chief theater expert of the Eastern European theater. However, in our time his name is familiar to a fairly little number of specialists. His ideas and the ideas of other theorists and practitioners of a theater were developed and conceptualized in relation to the socio-cultural and game analysis of society in the works of Bakhtin, Hoffman, Guy Deborah, Ortega y Gasset, Huizinga.

The figures of the "Silver Age" of Russian culture, in every possible way actualized the role and place of theatrical art in society, the degree of its impact on the psychology of a viewer. At the beginning of the 20th century, a theater became one of the main means of communication for the urban population. A little later, it was replaced by cinema. The growth of cities led to the quantitative growth of the public and the demand for spectacular arts.

The most successful theaters were open in large cities with a sufficient number of spectators. Several theaters were located in Rostov-on-Don. Being one of the commercial and industrial centers of the South, it made one forget that it was only a county town: in terms of the abundance of entertainment, according to the European manners of local bigwigs, it overtook many provincial cities in terms of the wealth of the dominant part of the population. The drama theater reached a high level. The operetta flourished, which for the first time as a genre appeared precisely on the Don land, in the troupe of Valiano, performing in the Taganrog and Rostov-on-Don.

On the stage of the Don theaters, in Novochoerkassk, an outstanding actress of that period, Komissarzhevskaya started her career. Such famous actors as Blumenthal-Tamarina, Dalsky also played there. Prominent directors Sinelnikov, Sobolshchikov-Samarin, sought to form the preferences of the public, develop realistic art on stage and acquaint viewers with the works of Gogol, Chekhov, Ostrovsky and Tolstoy. On the provincial stage there was a search for new stage forms. Symbolist dramas by Andreev, naturalistic plays by Artsybashev and others were staged. Russian symbolism, represented in this period by the plays of Andreev, Blok, Bely, Ivanov, Sologub etc. changed the value orientations of the audience by means of theatrical art.

During the search for new theatrical forms and closer communication between viewers and a stage, it was necessary to deepen the moral connection between an theatre manager, director and public. This determined the nature of the studied issues: whether the theatrical public itself has the right to choose the plays presented on the stage? how to find the link that would connect the audience with a theater and strengthen the unity between the audience on the one hand and an theatre manager, director and author on the other? Ultimately, a theatrical spectator took the most direct part in the formation of the repertoire of a theatre, expressing attitude towards it through material approval or disapproval of the plays. In the largest theaters in the region, the play was staged 2–3 performances. If the play was staged 10 or more times, then it became the sensation of the season.

The problem of the dependence of a theater repertoire on the preferences of the audience was of great concern to theatrical figures.

Often in pre-revolutionary articles, and even publications of the Soviet period, the idea is that Rostov-on-Don is a "city-merchant, city-dealer", alien to cultural traditions and therefore the public was only interested in light, entertaining genres of art: operetta, circuses, miniature theatres. If we consider the cultural life of the city in the second half of the 19th century, then these opinions were partly true, but a deeper acquaintance with documents, reviews of theatrical performances, tours, performances of musicians in the 10s of the 20th century allows concluding that there is diversity, versatility, saturation of cultural life, growth of requests, public standards.

The pre-revolutionary public was heterogeneous. Researchers identified three categories of viewers with different preferences. First of all, this was the cultural elite, theatrical intelligentsia, theater

critics and theorists, directors and playwrights, actors who determined "the essence of theatrical activity in serving public needs."

The second category was the "big audience", mostly bourgeois-philistine, which was the main visitors of a theater. The third was the common people, the educated or poorly educated part of urban population (Petrovskaya, 1990).

A provincial theater had to serve several masters at once – both the public and material success. This feature for the Don theaters, according to local critics, was significant. At the same time, the results of the seasons showed that several performances on the stage, for example, in the 1912/1913 season at the Rostov Asmolovsky Theater, put on plays of highly artistic content. The play by Tolstoy "The Living Corpse", was staged 14 times. "The Karamazov Brothers" by Dostoevsky was staged 5 times. "The Days of our life" by Andreev was staged 5 times. "The Cliff" by Goncharov was staged 5 times. "The Passers-by" by Ryshkov was staged 5 times. "Three Sisters" by Chekhov was staged 3 times (Lohengrin, 1914).

The following factors contributed to the improvement of the quality of the theatrical repertoire in the cities of the Don: firstly, the struggle of leading theatre managers and directors for a serious repertoire: Sinelnikov, Sobolshchikov-Samarin, Mardzhanov, Zarayskay. Secondly, the competition between theaters and clubs led to better staging of plays, the creation of a creative ensemble. Thirdly, the great role of criticism, led to the fight on the pages of the periodical press with base farce plays. Fourthly, it resulted to frequent tours of creative teams from other cities of the Russian Empire and premieres of the capital's theaters.

In general, when analyzing the relationship between the provincial theater and the public, it should be emphasized that the role of dominant preferences was very important. However, the analysis of the responses, reviews of performances showed that the prevailing preferences were formed under the significant influence of the progressive thought of modern philosophers, publicists and, above all, critics. The theater begins to play a more important role in the cultural life of provincial cities than before. The playwright and the director were feeling a fundamentally new audience, which had been replenished by the general population.

4. Purpose of the Study

This paper updates the problem of the relationship between a theater, theatrical art and audience of the Russian provinces in the period of the Silver Age, as well as to identify the characteristic features of the development of theatrical life in large cities of the Don region at the beginning of the 20th century.

5. Research Methods

As a methodological basis of the study, the following methods were used: comparative-historical, problem-chronological, systemic and complex methods of analysis. The authors relied on the works of researchers, which gave theoretical justification for the concepts: "cultural life", "artistic life", "theatrical life".

6. Findings

The paper analyzes the history of the theatrical life of the Don region, which was experiencing rapid development during this period. Being an important component of the artistic life of Russia, it developed in line with the general trends of the culture of the Silver age, acquiring specific features after the defeat of the first Russian revolution: value orientations changed, there was a loss of ideals among a part of the artistic intelligentsia. The crisis of the worldview became the dominant feature of the socio-cultural life of Russia in this period of time. In addition, the development of theatrical life was influenced by the First World War, which modified the content of the theater repertoire.

In the theatrical life of the studied period, the following trends were distinguished: the increase in the number of miniature theaters, clubs, and creative associations of theatrical intelligentsia; the expansion of concert activities, attracting a much larger audience to theatrical art than before; the democratization of the public, the introduction to the art of the general population, workers, artisans; the growth of the influence of the masses on the repertoire, mass culture began to take shape (cabaret theatres); the artistic intelligentsia of the capitals was searching for new forms of theatrical art: Meyerhold's "Conditional Theater", Evreinov's "Ancient Theater", Mardzhanov's "Puppet Theatre", "Free Theater"; the following dynamics of the theater repertoire was traced: from the predominance of symbolist dramas by Andreev, Wedekind, Pshibyshevsky, Sologub in 1907–1910, to realism in the repertoire of 1910-1917, productions of plays by Ostrovsky, Turgenev, Chekhov and others.

Tours, performances by artists and musicians from the capital, as well as theater groups from other regions of Russia and abroad played significant role in the cultural life of the Don region.

During the studied period, there was an expansion and enrichment of the theatrical life of provincial cities. Performances attracted much more audience than before. There was a democratization of the audience, more and more new sections of the population were attached to art. They were not only attracted to art, some of them were directly involved in the organization of performances. Workers, employees, students of secondary and higher educational institutions organized folk theaters, clubs, orchestras.

The role of the artistic intelligentsia in the formation of the audience's preferences was great. The tireless, selfless work of such theatre managers and directors as Sinelnikov, Sobolshchikov-Samarin, Zaraiskaya, Mardzhanov, Stroev, critics and writers: Herzo-Vinogradsky (Lohengrin), Shaginyan, Pechkovsky, Tumansky, Karagichev and others allowed preparing and familiarizing the public with the perception of serious dramatic plays, appreciating the good play of the acting troupe and the quality of the director's productions.

New trends appeared in the ideological and aesthetic content of the theater repertoire: the public showed considerable interest in plays that analyzed the problems of the meaning of life and satirized the realities of the socio-political situation in the country.

The analysis of the activities of artistic and theatrical societies, clubs, dramatic partnerships and enterprise, branches of the IRTO (Imperial Russian Theater Society), drama courses allowed concluding that the Don theater life occupied a worthy place in the general cultural life of the country. This was confirmed by: productions of plays by local writers, primarily Chekhov, on the capital stage; quantitative

growth of theaters and democratization of the audience. The provincial theaters replenished the troupes of the capital's theaters with their talents, the natives of the Don successfully toured not only in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but also abroad.

7. Conclusion

The theatrical life of the provincial cities of the Don Region was unique, due to the national characteristics of the region and the social order of the local public, which, along with serious dramatic performances, willingly attended miniature theaters and operettas. Various genres, such as drama, opera, operetta, coexisted on the provincial stage. Their interaction led to the formation of such a phenomenon of provincial culture as theatrical symbiosis. During the studied period, there was a significant growth of cultural and educational institutions and the cadres of local artistic intelligentsia were being formed.

A feature of the development of the theatrical life of the capitals and the Russian provinces was the wide distribution of art associations, clubs, miniature theaters and theater plays staged on their own. In general, the first Russian revolution gave a particularly strong impetus to the development of provincial cultural life, which was associated with the introduction of new categories of spectators and listeners to theatrical art.

The Russian province as a historical and cultural phenomenon needs further research in order to recreate a complex picture of the “Russian cultural renaissance of the late 19th and early 20th centuries” (Kondakov, 1997). Historical research and conclusions of this work is only one of the steps in a comprehensive study of the posed problems. The originality of modern historical process is in the growing revival of the regional identity of the people, where the rich cultural heritage of the Silver Age is an exceptional spiritual resource.

Acknowledgments

The paper was prepared within the framework of the state task of the SSC RAS "Political and socio-cultural processes in the South of Russia in the context of modernization (XVII–XXI centuries)" No. 122020100347-2.

References

- Carnicke, Sh. M. (1989). The Theatrical Instinct: Nikolai Evreinov and the Russian Theatre of the Early Twentieth Century. *American University Studies: Ser. 26, Theater Arts*, 2, 247. Peter Lang.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values behaviors institutions and organizations across nations*. Sage Publications.
- Houghton, N. (1973). Russian Theater in the 20th Century. *The Drama Review*, 17(1), 5–13. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-drama-review-tdr/article/abs/russian-theatre-in-the-20th-century/261C38C9AE70081FF51099792A0CD61E#>
- Kondakov, I. V. (1997). *Introduction to the history of Russian culture*. Aspect-press.
- Lohengrin. (1914). Dramatic Season Endings. *Priazovsky region*. February 19th.
- Petrovskaya, I. F. (1990). *Theater and spectator of Russian capitals*. Art.
- Semenova, O. V., Arkhipova, O. E., Afanasenko, V. I., Podoyan, E. I., & Medvedev, M. V. (2021). GIS map of historical and cultural monuments in Rostov-on-Don (Russia). *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 117, 1387–1393.

Shchukina, E. L., Dyatlov, A. V., Serikov, A. V., Skudnova, T. D., & Posukhova, O. Y. (2016). Cultural Policy as a Factor of National Security in Modern Russia. *Man in India*, 96(7), 2217–2226.