

SINOPSIS

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LIT UP TRANSITION

If one only comes to think about the Bucharest National Theatre, it will make one's thoughts blow out of one's mind. And, under the present dwindling market economy, a sucker itself, what else, a theatrical colossus with several hundred souls on its staff (some say they are no less than 600) like the National Theatre is put under a question mark, of course. How else, if the theatre banks on some subsidy granted by the Ministry of Culture. It's a matter of survival. Its three halls, downstairs (The Big Hall, The Amphitheatre and the Studio) sum up 1,700 seats. Not to speak about Hall 99, less used. Production shops mechanical, energy, electronic, carpenter, tailor, dressmaker, tapestry, sculpture prop-work hard for whatever art decoration and stage management might mean. Serving production, which if gauged in the number of titles of plays staged is pretty amazing.

The National Theatre has known, with Andrei Șerban at its helm, a new historical and artistic time. A towering personality of our days, Andrei Șerban reinvigorated the worn-out institution, hard tried by the building up of the multi-laterally developed socialist society, by infusing into it the new climate of the year 1990, the year of the big break-out. The image of the theatre looks better and better due to its serious repertory (Antique Trilogy, The Night of the Kings), to the glamour of its new director and the plays staged by him. The great number of young actors on its staff sweep away the spinsterish air that used to dry up the first stage of this country.

It is a hard job to manage a theatre of such scope. A 90-strong actor staff-not yet completed (come on boys, what are you waiting for?)-is an impressive figure, isn't it? Technical and production personnel. Besides those serving other sectors, like organization, administration, economic, literary secretariat, etc., come to round off the 600-odd staff of the National Theatre. They have their own trade union, organized in March 1990, incorporated with its own account in banks and a leadership elected for two years (Matei Gheorghiu, Chairman; Bogdan Mușatescu, Vice-Chairman; Ilina Tomoroveanu, and technical stage manager, Adrian Negru), but they have a hard life in asserting a specific t.u. activity. To make it clear with the theaters draft law had to be drawn up, the National Theatre t.u. was invited once and this was all. Equally to any other Roumanian theatre they have to solve problems regarding professional tasks, the valuation of the actors, activity according to the number of rehearsals, a differentiation between actors who play a lot and don't get a greater pay and those who are seldom on stage and get equal pay. Asking them about possible solutions, Mr. Bogdan Mușatescu told me that "you can't do without with some of them, because they are not guilty that they are the offspring of an old structure." On the other hand, according to Matei Gheorghiu, at least, we cannot employ as westerners do, an actor on a limited term contract basis. The protection of the t.u. members' rights faces the same imperfections of the legislative system which, above all, makes no difference between specific jobs (like those in a theatre) and the common ones. What amazed me, though, is the fact that the trade union of the National Theatre is not updated with the laws regarding the organization and management of theatrical institution.

The inefficiency of structure was a topic broached also by Andrei Șerban, the general manager of the National Theatre. Obviously his directionship moves were rather prone on consolidating the theatre's artistic prestige than on managerial changes. Press, campaigns (pros and cons) about his productions or interviews seem to be inciting for him. Sometimes the discomfort of such commentary is associated to the discomfort of one's own attitude: the stage manager has to split a year into two distinctive parts: namely a time dedicated to plays, and stage productions at home and the other one to the big things he is making abroad.

A helpful hand in settling this problem is extended by his team, here at home (manager Constantin Măciucă), Administrative manager Mr. Vinătoru, Literary Secretariat, headed by Mrs. Adriana Popescu), but also his knowledge that all compartments are running on perfectly.

If the National Theatre management was to be perfected, it should consider a couple of things Andrei Șerban knows very well: the thorough alteration of the huge theatrical system, the earmarking of a budget stipend capable to buttress such changes and the need to be always present. His efforts to draw into the business younger stage managers, very good ones, to stage plays of the same worth like his have yielded poor results (Felix Alexa, Ștefan Iordănescu).

Exploration of the potentialities of Romanian playwrighting is still precarious. Serious, ample talk on this question proves necessary, and not only on this matter, another item being the professional qualification of some people involved in productive sectors. "They should be paid better for their highly skilled work", says Andrei Șerban. Maybe the new regulations concerning the labour contract will help the director of the National Theatre. Wait and see. For the moment being it is summer.

English version by Delia Răzdolescu

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