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THE OPERETTA – AND ME

Thesis

First of all, please let me thank to the University for giving me a chance to take part this postgraduate course, and I also would like to thank my master, Mr. Miklós Szinetár for helping me to write this book about the operetta. I think I have been better now at recognising the questions and problems of staging operettas than previous times. And last but not list I have to thank all of you for reading my book and being here now to take questions for helping my work.

Well, now I should state my thesis but to be honest I have to say you that unfortunately I don't have any thesis at all.

To state something also means to deny something else at the same time. It is daylight now – ergo – it cannot be night. In this way I cannot say that I would have these at all.

Seen from the point of view of modern science one can talk about the world using complementary truths only, because reality can only be explained this way. The fact that something is being watched changes the fact and therefore one must be very careful to state something.

Talking about the operetta I have been trying to raise some of the problems of the theory and the practice of the music-theatre in order to state that there are many things to be watched here.

Nowadays in Hungary the music-theatre is said to be the second class area of the theatre art, even though it is very successful and many people watch it with pleasure, so it isn't all the same how to make this success.

From the end of the seventies in the last century the genre of operetta has been pushed into the background giving way to musicals and rock-operas. Although it can be said that the new Anglo-Saxon forms of the music-theatre couldn't have come into being without its operetta-parent, nowadays they exist with their own rules. The music-structure of the musicals (including the entering songs, duets, choral works, dramatic finales) is based on the operetta-form, but the music-world of rock-operas is similar to the real operas.

The genre of the musical and rock-opera deviate basically from the operetta: it is made of rock, pop, and other plastic things. The “team of four-horses” created by the dramaturgy of the operetta is disappearing and the traditional rules have changed. Strangely enough, however, these rules are not getting richer. They are getting poorer and consequently the talent and the personality of the actors are far less important in these modern genres as in the operetta. Even though the world concept of the operetta includes some absurd circumstances as well, the style of playing belongs to a world sunk into oblivion. The “chaos without any causes” is getting to be smooth and waveless, the foolish tales are coupled with a foolish mood of interpretation.

The theatre-makers do not try to find up-to-date clothes to dress the operetta. Neither review nor theory help the operetta-directors in their work. The traditions have died behind the operetta like the everyday way of life has gone backward from it as well. The operetta fans are a disappearing species and the new generations have turned away from this genre altogether. To be an operetta-director or actor is not in vogue any longer.

Nevertheless, we strongly believe in the operetta and are confident that this genre still belongs to our national and cultural tradition and deserves cultivation. With tender irony, underlying the grotesque elements, reaching back to the roots of the original richness of the operetta one can find a successful attitude and up-to-date forms to convey important messages on the stages of the twenty-first century. The new trend of the theatre needs to be changed if we want these dreams come true and the operetta cannot let to be sunk into second rank status. All our resources should be mobilised staging the operetta if we really want to achieve this.

Nowadays this is just not happening. If a director wants to stage an operetta he has to struggle with difficulties in the same way as a director of a drama or a tragedy, and he find the other problems of conditions and circumstances of staging as well. And further more, he must battle with the fact that the operetta-fans do not have patience if the director tries to dress the operetta in modern clothes, and the younger generation that might have liked it in the first place, do not go to see operettas at all.

The operetta came from several countries in Europe, but some of its best creators were Hungarians – that is why we must not let this genre to die. At the time of globalisation, at this moment of connecting with Europe, we strongly believe that the cultural values entrusted to us must be taken great care of in order to preserve it and share it with the world community.

And finally I must confess that I am personally an avid operetta goer and enjoy this genre very much. Further details can be found about these questions in my book where several examples are given from my experience as a director and actor. Hopefully I was able to raise some of the questions concerning the present day status of the operetta and it will also further help finding some of the answers to these questions.