

## **PERFORMANCES BASED ON SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS IN ZHYTOMYR THEATRICAL HISTORY**

### **The main idea**

William Shakespeare is a genius playwright whose ideas are timeless and remain relevant to this day. His characters live in a world where different laws and ideologies prevail, but they are all united by the spirit of Shakespearean England and the desire for a better world. His works, translated into almost all languages of the world, have a huge impact on the consciousness of modern man. For that reason, it is important to play this plays everywhere, especially in Ukraine, where are both alongside self-sacrifice, patriotism, loving hearts, and discord between clans, cynicism, and greed. However, most people become familiar with Shakespeare only through the pages of the school curriculum, which can sometimes be difficult to understand as classical literature is taught purely from a theoretical or historical perspective. Therefore, to immerse oneself in the essence of the problems raised by the Great Bard and the high spirit of the Renaissance era, the best solution is to recreate Shakespeare's plays on stage and attend performances.

### **Scientific novelty**

During this research, we wanted to find as much information as possible about Shakespearean productions at the Ivan Kocherha Zhytomyr Ukrainian Academic Music and Drama Theatre and about the theatre itself. Were analysed the works of famous theatre researchers, both Ukrainian (including Vasyl Vrublevsky and Oleksandr Chirkov) and Polish (Jan Prusinowski and Jarosław Komarowski). However, as with diving deeper into the available information from books and the internet, it was realized that it was not sufficient to fully explore the topic. So were conducted interviews with actress and Honoured Artist of Poland Tetiana Solomiichuk, as well as with director and Honoured Artist of Ukraine Petro Avramenko. He shared his perspective on Shakespearean plays, described the challenges he faced during the production of “Love and hate in Verona” (it was a play based on the postmodern tragedy “The plague on both your houses” by H. Goren) and outlined his plans for future works. Furthermore, this work is not just a list of performances, but rather an emphasis on the changes in the reception of the works of the great playwright by the people of Zhytomyr and also the interpretation of the classics by the artists of the Zhytomyr Academic Ukrainian Music and Drama Theatre named after I. A. Kocherha. So speaking about the interpretation, it is well seeing from the interview with Petro Avramenko. He sees in Shakespeare's works elements of cinematographic framing, a kind of anticipation of cinema art. The director emphasizes that all conflict situations occur as they are outside of space and time. And in order to achieve full immersion in the play, the director made a very skilful move by dividing the audience into two families: Montagues and Capulets, only with the help of coffee. And today, the supporter of postmodern interpretation of classics Petro Avramenko speaks about plans to stage the comedy “Hey, Juliet” by Ephraim Kyshon on the Zhytomyr stage. Despite the fact that the today's performances are more postmodern, the original spirit of the

classics can still be felt in them. As a great example there is the metaphorical use of a minimal amount of scenery on the stage, or the depiction of blood with the help of a red scarf, as it was in the production of “King Lear”.

It should be noted that many productions of Shakespearean plays took place in the 19th and 20th centuries, and therefore, there is little information available online about them, such as photos from the shows, audience reviews, and so on. It was founded information about the performances of African American actor Ira Aldridge in Zhytomyr, who played Hamlet in 1865 and Othello in 1866 [7, 13]. Aldridge was closely connected to Shakespeare in his entire creative work. The actor did not just love the playwright, but saw him as a great thinker who sympathized with the fate of humanity. Moreover, he emphasized his wilfulness, his search for justice, his protest against social laws and conventions that shackled human reason and will. However, this information is only preserved in the theatre's archives, and there has been no research specifically devoted to Shakespearean productions, making the materials presented in this work truly unique and important from a scholarly perspective on the city's theatrical life [5].

### **The practical significance**

The purpose of the project is to collect statistical information on productions of William Shakespeare's plays and adaptations of his works that have been staged in the territory of Zhytomyr from the 1860s to the present day. It also aims to identify trends in modern interpretations of Shakespearean works in the contemporary development of theatre (since the arrival of director Petro Avramenko). Additionally, the goal was to emphasize the importance of studying the issues presented in these works and their contemporary interpretation, which helps expand the target audience. Moreover, during the analysis, was founded a close connection between the state of Ukraine and the quality of performances. In Soviet times, foreign productions had no success at all. Since the establishment of the theatre, mostly by Polish troupes [8], reviews of performances have not been preserved, and subsequent performances were rare and with long intervals, and mostly played during theatre tours. The original troupe of the Zhytomyr Theatre in 1985 staged “The Merry Wives of Windsor,” which received a completely negative review. As the newspaper “Soviet Zhytomyrshchyna” wrote (September 30, 1985), “The Merry Wives of Windsor” is a “loose and unfinished production”. [2, p. 351]. There were attempts to stage “The Taming of the Shrew” in 1945, but it remained only on paper. The renewed European perspective on the legacy of the great playwright came with the years of Independence. After all, there was complete access to cultural exchange with the West and a decline in all kinds of censorship. Thus, in 1993, under the direction of V. Tolok and V. Kulavina, the staging of “King Lear” was carried out, which to some extent determines all subsequent approaches to the interpretation of Shakespeare's heritage by Zhytomyr theatre artists. As the performer of the role of Cordelia, Tetiana Solomiichuk recalls, "despite the difficulties with understanding the classical English staging, the performance still inspires and conveys the spirit of that time, which passes to the actors and the audience.

### **The theoretical basis**

The theoretical basis of the work combines theatre studies [3] and authentic archival sources [6]. The historiographical search for the development of theatre art in Zhytomyr was based on Vasyl Marcelovich Vrublevsky's monograph “Melpomene on Pushkinska” [2], essays on the history of the theatre in the book by M.D. Stanislavsky

and L.A. Rubinstein “Theatre of Zhytomyr” [7], as well as a jubilee booklet by Tetiana Danchuk [3]. The book by Prof. O.S. Chirkov “Zhytomyr Theatre yesterday and today: essays” played a significant role in the research, as it is not only the view of an expert and researcher of drama, but also a response of an inspired theatre practitioner [8]. During the research, were used methods of searching for archival printed and video materials, as well as the method of interviews and live communication with the artists who participated in the staging and performance of the plays. Based on recorded interviews, we obtained a basis for describing the plays themselves, the impressions they made on the audience, and the themes they presented.

### **Conclusion**

The work contains a comprehensive list of plays performed on the Zhytomyr stage from the first quarter of the 19th century to the present day, intended for the formation of a corresponding article in the project “Ukrainian Shakespeare Encyclopedia”. Analysis of audience reviews, reviews from theater experts, and interviews with artists from the Zhytomyr Ukrainian Academic Music and Drama Theatre named after Ivan Kocherha allows conclusions to be drawn about the attitude of modern audiences to the works of William Shakespeare, to determine the approaches of artists to the interpretation of the classics, and the prospects of Zhytomyr Shakespearean theatre. The project aims to popularize Shakespeare's plays in modern theatre, as well as emphasize the importance of contemporary interpretation of Shakespeare's works and their relevance. Information about the theatre's plans for future productions is provided.

And now we can proudly repeat the words of the leading theatre scholar Professor Chirkov, the head of the Scientific and Creative Complex “Dramaturgy” at Ivan Franko Zhytomyr State University, about how “the theatre has grown to Shakespeare” [8].

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