

Theatre Poster by Goran Merkaš in the Context of Varaždin Theatre Activities from the Mid-1970s to the End of the 1990s

Spomenka Dragović and Mirna Perec
Faculty of Teacher Education, Branch in Čakovec, University of Zagreb

Abstract

The main feature of the Croatian National Theatre in Varaždin in the period from the mid-1970s until the end of the 1990s were many premieres (drama, but also prose works) of contemporary Croatian writers, presented mainly in an adequate form of modern theatrical expression. We think that it is not possible to make a judgment on the complex production – reception process of the activity of the Scene without complete theatrical elaboration of performances from that period. The main aim of this work is to point to Goran Merkaš's theatre poster, as an equivalent constitutive factor of the complete activity of theatre life in Varaždin in the mentioned period, which both the audience and the critics have recognized as specific and authentic.

Key words: *co-creator of theatrical act; contextual analysis; visual identity of the theatre.*

Introduction and Methodology

This research of the theatrical history of Varaždin was inspired by a wish to take a critical stance towards contemporary Croatian/Varaždin culture, inevitably bearing in mind each of its past acts and providing a basis for not only national but also personal identity. Since the idea of contemporariness includes “a hidden thread of continuity as a kind of spiritual specificness” (Gašparović, 1968, p. 6), we have followed this thread while doing the research.

What discouraged us a little in the beginning proved to be all the more stimulating throughout the research – the fact that to reconstruct something which is marked by

temporality (Batušić, 1991) and cannot be repeated, just like a recently finished stage act, one has to embark on an adventure whose outcome is unknown. In order to “revive” the previously mentioned period in the history of Varaždin theatre as a vital space for communication among members of the social community, we started from the context analyses of a finished stage act (De Marinis, 1999), where the staged performance, a creative collective act itself, figures as one of the components of a complex production and reception relation; a template for a performance/ a stage act/ the audience.

In order to establish the most accurate and objective picture of the past theatre performances which are relevant for the period, in this thesis we research the distinctiveness and significance of Merkaš's theatre poster as an inevitable theatrical well, unlike a theatre performance, which is susceptible to temporality.

The first stage in the research of Goran Merkaš's theatre poster took place in the archives of the Varaždin theatre, where all of his posters were first listed and then photographed.

The central part of the thesis is primarily based on a series of conversations/interviews with competent participants in the life of the Varaždin theatre of Merkaš's time (Petar Veček, Ivica Plovanić, Marjan Varjačić, Darko Sačić), whose professionalism, experience and unselfish support helped us do the research about the Varaždin theatre poster. The Varaždin theatre poster was first put into the context of the mentioned period, and consequently into the context of the history of theatre.

Overview of Varaždin Theatre History until 1976

Varaždin enters Croatian theatre history in the 17th century when a Jesuit school theatre starts performing for the public, being the second theatre in the continental part of Croatia. It was just another one in a line of European theatres organised by the Jesuits as a part of the teaching process and work with students aiming at the promotion of faith, and at the same time being an exercise in the Latin language in front of the public.

The oldest theatre of ancient Varaždin opened in 1637, and operated continuously for 135 years (1637 to 1773). It staged public performances in front of the grammar school building or in an open space, which neither in content nor in interpretation differed from other Jesuit theatre performances of that time. In this region the Croatian language – the Kajkavian dialect in Zagreb and Varaždin (Batušić, 1978) – was soon introduced as the language in which performances were conducted together along with the Latin language.

Theatre in German, which appears in continental Croatia in the second half of the 18th century, has its beginnings in Varaždin in the middle of the 18th century. It will appear as a constitutional element in the development and the tradition of both Varaždin and the whole of Croatian theatre.

Theatre performances in 18th century Varaždin were held in the Grammar School, the Keglević Palace and the Bishop's Palace (Krčelić, 1952), which suggests the social structure of the audience. The audience slowly starts to change in the 1820s. Since

then performances were held in the Old City Theatre, which could seat 350 spectators, followed by a newly opened building of the present-day Theatre in 1873. This period is characterized by performances in German (Filić, 1955) which included drama (A.Kotzebue, J. Nestroy, F. Schiller, W. Shakespeare), operetta and opera, thus forming the taste of the Varaždin audience. However, at the same time both the Varaždin Theatre Volunteers (*Varaždinski kazališni dobrovoljci*) and the Croatian National Theatre from Zagreb as a guest theatre perform in Croatian. A. Femen initiated the founding of Varaždin Croatian Theatre Association (*Varaždinsko hrvatsko kazališno društvo* – 1898-1899) with the aim to stage performances in Croatian. This was the first professional ensemble in Varaždin, followed by the Permanent Theatre of the Croatian Society in Varaždin (1899–1900) with Ivan Milčetić as the head.

A permanent theatre was yet to be founded. It happened in the war year of 1915 when many a theatre closed. By staging Kalman's operetta *A true companion*, the City Theatre as a Permanent Croatian Theatre in Varaždin was founded in 1915. For seven seasons it was successfully and devotedly conducted by Andro Mitrović, whilst the artistic conduct (of the Intimate Theatre) was handed over to Branko Tepavec in the last season (1924/25).

As one of the three professional theatres in Croatia (the other two being in Zagreb and Osijek) in the years from 1915 to 1925 the City Theatre stages 191 drama premieres (6 of which were first-night performances of works by Croatian authors), and 34 music performances.

The repertoire included Croatian dramatists Milan Ogrizović, Josip Kulundžić, Ulderiko Donadini, Ivo Vojnović, Tituš Brezovački, Milan Begović, Srđan Tucić and Gustav Krklec. The premiere of *Gogol's Death* by Ulderiko Donadini could be highlighted as a remarkable achievement by Branko Tepavec in the season of the Intimate Theatre (1925), reviewed as a "theatre performance by which Varaždin was briefly on a par with Zagreb, the undisputed centre of Croatian drama theatre" (Senker, 2000, p. 21).

By the end of 1942 the Society of Croatian Theatre Volunteers was founded. Pavle Vojković, a painter and one of the most prominent Croatian theatre set and costume designers, started his career here.

After a break of two decades, the Varaždin theatre opens its door again in the season of 1945/46 as the August Cesarec National Theatre, renewing and establishing its repertoire in the next ten years; a repertoire in the Kajkavian dialect becomes one of the main orientations of the Theatre.

A big renewal of the ensemble both in quantity and quality happens in the season of 1956/57 with the arrival of Gavella's disciples and the opening of the Chamber Scene (1957). When this scene was established, it in a way became a characteristic of the Varaždin theatre, leading to a long-lasting and extremely successful co-operation with director Vladimir Gerić, which has continued until the present day. The repertoire of that period consists mostly of the works by Croatian authors.

Varaždin Theatre Scene from 1976 – 1996

The invitation by the *Prolog Tribunes*¹ in 1968, expressed collectively and published in the editorial of the first issue of *Prolog*, a Zagreb journal for the awakening of critically engaged drama and theatre, and not just politically but also socially and artistically, finds response in the repertoire of some of the Zagreb theatres at the beginning of the 70s, while at the same time the theatre life in Varaždin practically falls into lethargy.

The Varaždin Theatre literally faces closure after the turbulent year of 1971. However, it survives “owing to a small number of actors in its ensemble and a few politically involved lovers of theatre” (Dragović, 2008), as the Varaždin actor Ivica Plovanić, young at the time, has put it.

The Varaždin theatre life enters a new stage with the arrival of Petar Veček, a young, yet experienced director, prepared for the challenges in the theatre in Varaždin. This stage is in line with the manifesto of the mentioned *Prolog Tribunes* (and their editorial manifesto *Why we speak*), which is in favour of the co-operation of all playwrights, theatre directors, actors, critics and theoreticians who are dissatisfied with the current state in the Croatian theatre. With the arrival of Petar Veček, first as a director and later as a manager of the Theatre, and with the arrival of yet another director, Miro Međimorec, the Theatre experiences a revival and expands beyond the local boundaries, acquiring the epithet of one of the leading Croatian theatres of the time. With a small cast, in bad working conditions and almost no interest for the Theatre by the public, the Theatre had to envisage something new in the theatre, that New conceived as a radical means against the drowsiness in the theatre, where the audience, tortured by literature, has been sleeping for ages (Artaud, 2000).

Ivica Plovanić, a Varaždin actor, remembers the enthusiasm not seen before, which not only the cast but also the whole staff was overwhelmed by. This enthusiasm led to excellent staging of new Croatian dramas which followed.

According to the theatre historian and critic Marijan Varjačić, Veček's theatre adventure (boosted by Međimorec's new way of working with actors) proved paradigmatic in the context of the theatre as a centre of culture outside the centre, owing to the carefully chosen and created repertoire and not only its epigonic imitation (Dragović, 2007).

The repertoire of the Varaždin theatre scene was characterized by first-night showings of plays by young Croatian authors, which were staged as contemporary scenic expressions. Along with those, national and world classics were staged.

In order to decide upon the repertoire in an aesthetic way established upon “socially engaged dramas, to dismiss old dramaturgy props, and to engage aesthetically monitored events in the national dramaturgy” (Gašparović, 1968, p. 10) it was necessary to create new visual promotion material for the Theatre.

¹ Young Croatian writers, theatre critics and theoreticians involved in the publishing of *Prolog*, a theatre magazine which first came out in 1968

What proved as fertile ground for the commencement of modern theatre design and new visual identity connected to all theatrical activities was the idea to include the youngest generation of playwrights (Šnajder, Bakmaz, Senker, Mujičić, Škrabe and others) into the repertoire. They were all poetically engaged in the publishing of *Prolog*, and putting their plays on stage demanded a new expression based upon the physical and not on the literary word, as it had been common until then. This new way of production led to a new atmosphere, as well as to a new kind of reception of the theatre.

What contributed greatly to the successful interaction, both regarding the form and the content, of the new repertoire and the “new”, mostly young Varaždin audience, was the theatre poster (including supporting facilities) by Goran Merkaš and the photography by Ivica Plovanić, a prominent member of the Theatre cast and one of the closest professional associates of Goran Merkaš, who was often involved in the creation of theatre posters.

From the First Croatian *Periochae* to Merkaš's Theatre Poster

As a city of long and rich theatre history, Varaždin has been contributing greatly to the Croatian teatrography, ever since the distant 1710 when Jesuits ran the theatre there.

The oldest Croatian *Periochae* bears witness to the fact that even the oldest theatre of ancient Varaždin was well aware of the importance of announcing a theatre act and inviting the audience to attend it. The information about the performance was also considered important. The *Periochae* was a combination of a poster and a synopsis for the performance, created especially for the Jesuit play *Alvarus Luna*, performed on 15th September 1710. This ancient predecessor of the Varaždin theatre poster was printed in Graz and contains eight pages in Latin, the language in which the play was performed (although since the 17th century plays had also been performed in the Croatian language). The introduction bears the title of the play, the place and the date of publishing, as well as the actors, with a remark that the play was shown in honour of the bishop Juraj, the count of Patačić of Zajezda. An explanation on the origin of the content of the play follows, and then a detailed synopsis with the summary of the prologue and each act, together with its scene and the epilogue. At the end the main roles with the names of all the actors, as well as the choir members are listed. These twenty-six actors and singers were the first recorded Varaždin stage performers ever.

In 19th century Varaždin German theatre companies prevail. Their performances help audiences to acquire theatre culture, but they also lead to the foundation of a Varaždin theatre. The First preserved theatre notes for performances in German, for example the one from the year 1829 (*Genieren Sie sich nicht – Original-Lustspiel in einem Akt von Franz Holbein*) bear information concerning the performed play and the author. Nevertheless, they do not contain any information about the performers. On the other hand, the theatre poster from 1876 gives the name of the author (Victorien

Sardou), the title of the play (*Ferdinanda*), and the name of the performing company – *The J. Schulz Theatre Association*. Two more notes bear some more information about the plays in Croatian, and they date from 1861. One announces *The Master Servant*, “a sad play in two acts by Zetliz” on the 26th January, and the other one *English merchandise*, “a merry play in two acts by Kotzebue” on 27th January. The Varaždin Association of Theatre Volunteers is announced as the performer of both plays, with Dragutin Antolek Orešek as the director.

A theatre note from 1870 bears witness to the performance of a play by Croatian author Antun Nemčić, whose “happy play in four acts” *The Varmedjin restoration or who is going to be a big judge?* was on the repertoire of the Association of Theatre Volunteers on 19th April the same year.

With the first days of The Varaždin Professional Ensemble (1898 – 1899) under the management of Adolf Femen, the practice of inviting the audience to the show using a theatre poster was permanently established: on 2nd February 1898 the audience was invited to attend the performance of *Border Guard* by Josip Freudenreich and some further theatre announcements include *Equinox*, and then *Psyche* by Ivo Vojnović, as well as *Baron Franjo Trenk* by Josip Eugen Tomić the same year.

Merkaš's Poster – A Key Factor of the Varaždin Theatre Life from the Mid- Nineteen Seventies to the End of the Nineteen Nineties

Until the middle of the nineteen seventies, better to say until Goran Merkaš appeared as a professional associate of the Theatre, the theatre poster had only the informative role. The same was the case with a lot of theatre posters in other Croatian theatres, although regarding the announcements of theatre performances and all the information connected with them, the theatre poster was besides newspapers, radio and TV merely one of the aspects of media informing the public at the time.

The role of a theatre poster is threefold: it represents a play or a prose work as a template for the performance; further on, it is an interpretative visual image of a theatre show as a performance setting; finally, a theatre poster represents an original visual artistic expression.

As one of the few material traces left by a single act, a theatre poster becomes and stays a significant theatrographic source for researching into the past period/s. If a successful theatre photography is a successfully caught theatre moment snatched from evanescence, then a true theatre poster deserves more: besides interpreting the director's *reading* of the performance, it also refers to the existing conditions of the surroundings/time which has produced it, thus becoming its creator's observation point and a mirror intended for and finally offered to the recipient/(maybe a potential) spectator to be reflected in it (from personal, experiential vistas).

The making, as well as the rise of the recognizable Varaždin Theatre Poster – the expression established itself through its rise, soon to become a recognizable syntagma

– begins, according to director Petar Veček with Goran Merkaš, a painter and designer with university degree, who becomes a professional associate of the Varaždin Theatre (Dragović, 2008a).

Let us present the outlines of the curriculum vitae of Goran Merkaš. He was born on 15th December 1950 in Varaždin. Throughout his Grammar school days, which ended in 1969, he socializes intensively with Nenad Opačić, Boris Švaljek and Željko Prstec, all of them well-known artists today. Together with Švaljek he enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, where he obtained a degree in 1974, tutored by professor Šime Perić.

Soon after graduation, he was for the first time in his life awarded the first prize for a drawing at the 8th Youth Salon in Zagreb in 1976. His works were shown in numerous group exhibitions and also one-man shows in Varaždin, Zagreb, Karlovac, Čakovec.

In the course of his studies in Zagreb he regularly attended performances at *Teatar &TD*, then a cult theatre in Zagreb (by the end of the 60s and at the beginning of the 70s), where he got acquainted with the contemporary theatre and also the European framework of contemporary theatre design. He also learned about famous graphic designers who created under the influence of pop-art and conceptualism: Mihailo Arsovski created the visual identity for *Teatar &TD* in 1964; Boris Bučan designed theatre posters for the Gavella Drama Theatre.

Merkaš's professional association regarding design with the Varaždin Theatre began in 1977 and lasted for as long as twenty years, until his sudden and premature death in his hometown on 23rd October 1996.

As confirmed by Petar Veček in 1977 he invited Goran Merkaš to work for the Theatre permanently. He was so delighted with his graphics, paintings and drawings, that he provided him with a studio and a complete autonomy to work on theatre programmes and posters. "Everything that had to do with fine arts in the theatre was left to him completely from then on. Coming to the theatre, he found himself in it and the theatre found him, too" (Perec, 2010a). Totally devoted to the theatre, as Veček remembers, Merkaš attended performances from the first reading rehearsals to the last ones, trying to get the best possible insight into both the literary source for the performance and the work on it.

From the beginning of his career to the last day of his prematurely ended life, Merkaš (as he stated personally in an interview for the magazine *Striptiz* on the very day he died!) managed to establish a close co-operation with the whole cast, the director and technicians, collecting meticulously and precisely information for each theatre poster which had to be made. "It was something of a continuous interview lasting for many years /.../ during which I simply have to find an answer, that is to say a formula or a 'sign' of the performance or in the theatrical sense a graphic-literary pun" (Varjačić, 2009, p. 50).

Varaždin theatre actors (especially Ivica Plovanić), as well as other Merkaš's associates in the Theatre (Veček/Varjačić), encouraged his complete creative autonomy, regarding

his talent, studious work and devotion to the theatre as something extremely precious. Plovanić thinks that “his theatre posters would have never had the strength of artistic authenticity and interpretative precision in the sense of the correct reading of the play if it had not been for a strong connection between the Theatre, Goran Merkaš and his artistic competencies” (Perc, 2010).

In the course of two decades of his activities in the theatre, Merkaš created about 90 theatre posters as well as a large number of other printed theatre material which are now the legacy of his rich co-operation with the Theatre, primarily with the director Petar Veček. Merkaš studied and designed posters for all the plays Veček directed.

The List of Goran Merkaš's Theatre Posters for the Performances Staged in the Varaždin Theatre

Below is a list in the chronological order of the first nights/premieres of the plays written and directed mostly by young authors and directors, which could be described as a distinctive feature of the Varaždin theatre of that time. The plays were accompanied by Merkaš's posters: Slobodan Šnajder: *Metastasis* (1976), Miro Međimorec director; Ivan Bakmaz: *Exercises in the Goethe Institute* (1977), Miro Međimorec director; Tomislav Bakarić: *A Nightmare* (1978), Petar Veček director; Miroslav Krleža: *Emerički* (1978) – based on the novel *Flags*, Miro Međimorec director; Slobodan Novak: *Seashell Hums* (1979), Miro Međimorec director; Ivan Bakmaz: *Credible Events with Dogs* (1981), Petar Veček director; Ivan Bakmaz: *Home Care* (1983), Vladimir Milčin director; Dubravko Jelačić Bužimski: *Midnight Game* (1985), Lawrence Kiiru, director; Slobodan Šnajder: *Silence of Duma* (1987), Petar Veček director; Janko Polić Kamov: *Mankind* (1990), Damir Mađarić, director; Ivan Supek: *Emperor Augustus' Lottery* (1992), Božidar Smiljanić director; Josip Kulundžić: *Amulet* (1992), Hasan Hasanović director; Ivan Bakmaz: *Stepinac, a Voice in the Desert* (1992), Petar Veček director; Miroslav Krleža: *On the Verge of the Senses* (1993), Ozren Prohić director.

Here you will find another list of Merkaš's theatre posters designed for staging of plays by foreign, mostly classic authors, in chronological order: Samuel Beckett: *Waiting for Godot* (1977), Ranka Mesarić director; Slawomir Mrożek: *A Fox and a Rooster* (1979), Petar Veček, director; Henrik Ibsen: *Wild Duck* (1980), Radovan Grahovac, director; August Strindberg: *Miss Julija* (1980), Petar Veček, director; Anton Pavlović Čehov: *Visnik* (1982), Petar Veček director; Fjodor Mihajlovič Dostojevski: *The Karamasov Brothers* (1984), Matko Sršen director; Ingmar Bergman: *Autumn Sonata* (1986), Matko Sršen director; Ödön von Horváth: *Kazimir and Karolina* (1986), Petar Veček director; Fjodor Mihajlovič Dostojevski: *Crime and Punishment* (1987), Vasilij Vasiljevič Sečin director; Slawomir Mrożek: *Tango* (1987), Joško Juvančić director; Reiner Werner Fassbinder: *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1988), Matko Sršen director; William Shakespeare: *As You Like It* (1990), Borna Baletić director; Danil Harms: *Elizabeta Bam* (1990), Ranka Mesarić director; Franz Kafka: *Process* (1994), Ozren Prohić director.

One poster was particularly highly praised by the trade. It was Merkaš's theatre poster for Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* (the first night held on 17th March 1995, directed by Bobo Jelčić). It was awarded as the best theatre poster in Croatia in 1996.

On the Features of the *Varaždin Theatre Poster* by Goran Merkaš, Croatian Painter and Theatre Designer

Marijan Varjačić, a long-time Varaždin Theatre manager and a close associate and friend of the painter points out that Merkaš's theatre poster reflects his point of view, and his design is a part of theatre performance aesthetics. Merkaš's design has to be perceived in the context of pop art, pop culture, and especially film, comics and music because, at the time he entered the Academy in Zagreb both American and European pop art reached their peak (Varjačić, 2009).

Darko Sačić, another prominent Varaždin artist, also perceives Merkaš's poster in the context of pop culture, which reached its peak at the time when he was receiving education, concluding that Merkaš was oriented towards pop art, too. He also emphasises "Merkaš's *obsession* with painting in a broad range, beginning with the fundamentals of fine arts Leonardo, Michelangelo and Dürer, all the way to Bacon and Warhol: all of which he knew how to incorporate into a poster and to delight with his choice in order to attract audience's attention" (Perec, 2010b).

Avant-garde performances, being totally opposite to the classical theatre, absolutely suited Merkaš's sensibility and his point of view, recalls Sačić in the same interview:

Merkaš's posters had the quality and also the irony which showed his perception of the world, well as of the regime which he considered crude. They depicted an absurd world full of anxiety often in a grotesque way with stressed details or flaws, either cunningly concealed or put in the foreground. The permanent inspiration for his painter's, draughtsperson's and designer's creativity, is manifold: along with the works of philosophy and literature, followed by rock music, film and comics, the axel of Merkaš's artistic point of view is a true need for promoting the idea of free living, thinking and creating. With his posters he was breaking taboos, false morality and hypocrisy, never leaving out humour with a dose of irony. His posters displayed famous persons from the current political life, culture and art. He always added a photograph or a caricature as a personal touch.

Merkaš was always there, inside the theatre building, attending many rehearsals in the course of making each show. That is why his posters represent a combination of talent, hard work and interest in performing arts.

Merkaš as a Designer of Complete Visual Identity of the Theatre and Theatre Magazines and as a Set Designer

Apart from his work on theatre posters, Merkaš is also important and recognizable as a creator and a designer of the whole visual identity of the Varaždin theatre. He paid great attention to other printed materials pertaining to the theatre, such as programmes, tickets, a theatre logo, all of which reflect his designing creativity.

Merkaš's designer work for Varaždin magazines is equally significant: he starts as a graphic designer for *Gesta* (1980), a magazine for culture whose time of publishing coincides with the period when the Theatre becomes the focus of social/cultural life of Varaždin: unforgettable hours of meetings with artists on Thursdays or Fridays, a series of evenings of jazz music, excellent theatre performances, demanding yet satisfied audience (mostly consisting of students)... Among frequent visitors to the Theatre of the "Veček Era" was also a significant number of Varteks workers², which is definitely a certain peculiarity in the whole of theatre life of Varaždin.

In 1993 the Varaždin Theatre began publishing *Kazalište* – the only theatre magazine in Croatia of that time. The initiators were Marijan Varjačić, Goran Merkaš and Ivica Plovanić. Goran Merkaš took over the art-graphic side of the magazine together with Ivica Plovanić, who was by then a master of theatre photography, while Marijan Varjačić signed most of the texts as a writer, especially those about the history of theatre.

Although only five issues of *Kazalište* were published, each issue is valuable today because, along with Goran Merkaš's designer handwriting, it contains a lot of texts about the history and the modernity of the Varaždin theatre scene. The unsurpassed design which Merkaš achieved in *Kazalište*, completed with numerous excellent theatre photographs by actor and author Ivica Plovanić, became a constitutional part of the aesthetics of the Varaždin theatre.

Ivica Plovanić remembers that period and the shared work on *Kazalište* as a period of excellent and fruitful co-operation with Merkaš, emphasising, as one of his closest associates and often a co-creator regarding the design, that Merkaš's opus raised the Theatre to the levels never seen before (Perc, 2010).

The 5th and last issue of *Kazalište*, a theatre magazine with excellent professional texts and unsurpassed design, comes out on 30th September 1996, just three weeks prior to Merkaš's sudden death.

Goran Merkaš was occasionally involved in the set design as well, mostly for the performances of the Croatian National Theatre in Varaždin. As a set designer he appears in *Hypochondriac* (1988) by an unknown Kajkavian author, directed by the whole cast, *Emperor Augustus' Lottery* (1992), directed by Božidar Smiljanić, as well as in *Much Ado About Nothing [Puno larme a za ništ]* (1993), directed by Vladimir Gerić.

In a nutshell, Merkaš's work in the Theatre was versatile, manifold and most importantly, recognizable.

² Vesna Stilinović, an actor, recalls the time when at the end of the 1970s they used to go to the Varteks factory to socialize with workers in order to prepare for Ante Armanini's play *Tivar Factory Workers on Strike*. They talked about many things connected with the performance and later saw excellent reactions on the part of workers when they watched the play in the audience. Regarding the way the play was staged it had been envisaged they would not understand it! (remark by S.D.)

Tributes and Awards; the Varaždin Biennial of Theatre Poster – Homage to Merkaš

Merkaš was awarded with many prizes for his theatre posters, both on the national and international levels. He got the 1st prize for his drawing at the 8th Youth Salon in Zagreb, but also a lot of acquisition prizes. He exhibited theatre posters at the 6th Exhibition of Yugoslav Theatre Poster and Graphic Design in Novi Sad in 1988, as well as at *ZGRAF 7* in Zagreb, 1995. He was also awarded for the best theatre poster in Croatia (1996), created for the performance of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* (1995) directed by Bobo Jelčić.

He participated in the exhibition of graphic design called the Biennial of Graphic Design in Zagreb in 1996, as well as in the world exhibition of posters in Osnabrück, Germany, (1996/97), where his poster for the play *Process* (1994,) based on the motives by Franz Kafka and directed by Ozren Prohić was published in the catalogue of the exhibition.

The Varaždin Theatre hosted the Exhibition of Drawings and Theatre Design by Goran Merkaš in 1993. The Čakovec culture centre also organized an exhibition of theatre posters and drawings by Goran Merkaš in 1996.

The Zagreb ULUPUH Gallery hosted the exhibition Homage à Goran Merkaš – the visual identity of the Croatian National Theatre (HNK) in Varaždin in 1997.

The exhibition entitled The Set and Costume Designs by Pavle Vojković and the Theatre Design by Goran Merkaš was organized in 1988 in the Theatre Gallery of the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences (HAZU) in Zagreb. The organizer was the HAZU's Department of the History of the Croatian Theatre and the HNK in Varaždin.

Many prizes that were awarded to Merkaš for his posters are a formal proof of his long and successful work, and his theatre design ranking as one of the most successful in Croatia. To honour him, the exhibition called the 1st Biennial of Theatre Posters was opened in the concert hall of the Varaždin National Theatre. Authors of theatre posters from almost every theatre in Croatia participated in the exhibition in the season 2007/2008. This was also an opportunity to get an insight into the Croatian rich theatre and design production.

Final Theses

The mid-nineteen seventies saw the making and the rising of a recognizable *Varaždin theatre poster* owing to Goran Merkaš, a painter and a designer with a university degree, who became a professional associate in the Varaždin Theatre. Owing to the specific and original poster by Merkaš, the Theatre is soon to become both recognizable and recognized in the area of visual and fine arts as specific and unique. It may be stated that thanks to Merkaš's theatre posters (as well as particular performances of the) the Varaždin theatre earned the status of a renowned theatre in Croatia. In addition, it won numerous prizes in the country and outside its borders.

Merkaš did not only synthesize and interpret the play for which he created the poster; he also presented the Varaždin Theatre through his original art. His complete

theatrical and designing opus as authentic author's handwriting, pervaded by his painting, has been uniquely *theatre-sensitive*. Merkaš's theatre posters are not only visual interpretation of performances, they also represent original art and design value; they are authentic works of art through which Merkaš often polemicizes and communicates – often with irony and anxiety – with the world around him, no matter whether he refers to the reality/ facts or theatrical/ artistic fiction as inspiration.

As a consequence of the mentioned arguments and conclusions, this work aims at giving arguments for the underlying thesis about Merkaš's theatre poster as a part of the aesthetics of a single performance but also of the entirety of the Varaždin theatre life from the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s. This period represents the awakening of the Varaždin theatre scene on the Croatian theatre map, and even beyond it. The Varaždin theatre poster left behind by Goran Merkaš stays a permanent *artistic identification* of the Varaždin Theatre. Merkaš's recognizable creative and designing work has marked the entirety of visual identity of the Varaždin theatre – theatre programmes, tickets and a logo as a valuable and permanent testimony of his designing work.

By giving Merkaš, a designer of theatre posters, complete freedom of creation, the Varaždin Theatre did not only get international recognition of its programme and its activities, but it also proved to be an ideal medium for a top theatre poster owing to its continuous collaboration with an artist who, through his versatile and rich theatrical and designer opus, literally *lived* theatre.

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This work, a modest contribution to Croatian theatrology. It is dedicated to Goran Merkaš and the memory of the Varaždin Veček's theatre.

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Spomenka Dragović

Faculty of Teacher Education, Branch in Čakovec
University of Zagreb
Dr. Ante Starčevića 55, 40 000 Čakovec, Croatia
spomenka.dragovic@gmail.com

Mirna Perec

Faculty of Teacher Education, Branch in Čakovec
University of Zagreb
Dr. Ante Starčevića 55, 40 000 Čakovec, Croatia
mirna.perec@gmail.com

Kazališni plakat Gorana Merkaša u kontekstu djelovanja varaždinskog kazališta od sredine 70-ih do kraja 90-ih 20. stoljeća

Sažetak

Bitna značajka varaždinskoga HNK u razdoblju od sredine 70-ih do kraja 90-ih godina 20. stoljeća jest niz praižvedbi (dramskih, ali i proznih djela) suvremenih hrvatskih autora, uprizorenih u pravilu adekvatnom formom suvremenog scenskog iskaza, popraćenih Merkaševim kazališnim plakatima kao vizualnom interpretacijom uprizorenih djela. Kako o kompleksnom produkcijsko-repcijskom procesu djelovanja Scene nije moguće donijeti relevantan sud bez teatrografske obrade recentih scenskih uprizorenja toga vremena, nakana rada je argumentirati kako značaj, tako i specifičnost varaždinskog kazališnog plakata slikara i kazališnog dizajnera Gorana Merkaša, s ciljem da se na njegov kazališni plakat ukaže kao na konstitutivni čimbenik djelovanja varaždinskog kazališnog života navedenog razdoblja, koje je i publika i kritika prepoznala kao specifično i samosvojno.

Ključne riječi: kontekstualna analiza; sukreator kazališnoga čina; vizualni identitet.

Uvod i metodologija

Ovo je istraživanje varaždinske kazališne povijesti potaknuto željom kritičkog određenja spram suvremene varaždinske/hrvatske kulture – a u nju je neminovno utkan i svaki njezin prošli čin – kao temelja ne samo nacionalnog već i osobnog identiteta. Kako suvremenost obuhvaća „skrivenu nit kontinuiteta kao svojevrsni duhovni specifikum“ (Gašparović, 1968, str.6), taj je istraživački rad nastao upravo slijedom traga navedene niti.

Činjenica – u početku pomalo obeshrabrujuća – kako rekonstrukcija nečega usudno obilježenoga temporalnošću i neponovljivog poput minulog kazališnog čina (Batušić, 1991), podrazumijeva i neminovno upuštanje u neku vrstu avanture s nepoznatim ishodom, pokazala se tijekom istraživanja sve poticajnijom. S nakanom ponovnog „oživljavanja“ navedenog razdoblja djelovanja varaždinskog kazališta kao bitnog komunikacijskog prostora članova društvene zajednice, pošlo se od kontekstualne

analize minolog scenskog čina (De Marinis, 1999), pri čemu uprizorena predstava – i sama kolektivni stvaralački čin – biva tek jednom od sastavnica kompleksne produkcijsko-recepcijske relacije: predložak predstavi/scenska izvedba/publika.

Kako bi se utvrdila što je moguće točnija, objektivnija slika davno minulih kazališnih predstava relevantnih za istraživanje razdoblje, u ovom se radu istražuju specifičnost i značaj Merkaševa kazališnog plakata kao nezaobilazanog teatrografskog vrela, nepodložnoga temporalnosti na način same kazališne predstave.

Prva faza istraživačkoga rada na kazališnom plakatu Gorana Merkaša odvijala se u varaždinskom Kazališnom arhivu, gdje su svi Merkaševi plakati najprije popisani, a potom i fotografirani. Središnji dio rada utemeljen je ponajprije na nizu razgovora/intervjua s kompetentnim sudionicima varaždinskog kazališta istraživanaog razdoblja (Petar Veček, Ivica Plovanić, Marjan Varjačić, Darko Sačić) bez čije stručnosti, iskustva i nesebične potpore ovo istraživanje o varaždinskom kazališnom plakatu – kontekstualiziranom tijekom istraživanja u proučavano razdoblje, a potom i u cjelovit povijesni pregled Kazališta – ne bi moglo biti realizirano.

Pregled varaždinske kazališne povijesti do 1976. godine

Dijelom hrvatske kazališne povijesti Varaždin postaje u 17. stoljeću javnim izvođenjem predstava isusovačkog školskog kazališta, drugoga po redu u kontinentalnoj Hrvatskoj, a tek jednoga u nizu europskih što su ih isusovci organizirali kao dio nastavno-pedagogijske djelatnosti s ciljem promicanja vjere, ali i vježbe u latinskom jeziku pred javnošću.

Najstarije kazalište drevnog Varaždina koje s djelovanjem započinje 1637. održalo se u kontinuitetu od 135 godina (1637.-1773.) izvodeći ispred gimnazijske zgrade ili pak na otvorenom prostoru javne predstave koje se ni sadržajno ni interpretativno nisu razlikovale od ostalih isusovačkih kazališnih manifestacija onoga vremena iako se na ovome području uz latinski kao jezik izvođenja, i hrvatski (kajkavština u Zagrebu i Varaždinu) počeo vrlo rano uvoditi u predstave (Batušić, 1978).

Kazalište njemačkoga govornog izraza koje se u kontinentalnoj Hrvatskoj javlja drugom polovinom 18. st., u Varaždinu će otpočeti s djelovanjem već sredinom 18. st., a pokazat će se konstitutivnim elementom razvitka i tradicije kako varaždinskog, tako i cjelokupnoga hrvatskoga glumišta.

Varaždinski glumišni prostori 18. st. – a to su, uz gimnazijsku zgradu, Keglevićeva i Biskupska palača (Krčelić, 1952) – ukazuju i na socijalnu strukturu publike koja se polako mijenja od 20-ih godina 19. st. otkad se predstave izvode u Starom gradskom kazalištu (gledalište za 350 posjetitelja), a potom, od 1873., u novootvorenoj zgradi današnjega Kazališta. U tom razdoblju u Varaždinu (Filić, 1955) prevladava kazalište njemačkoga govornog izraza, oblikujući uprizorenjem dramskih (A. Kotzebue, J. Nestroy, F. Schiller, W. Shakespeare), operetnih i opernih naslova ukus varaždinske publike. Ipak, usporedno s njima Varaždinski kazališni dobrovoljci, jednako kao i

gostujuće zagrebačko Hrvatsko narodno kazalište, izvode predstave na hrvatskome. S ciljem osnivanja stalnog kazališta koje bi djelovalo na hrvatskom, osnovano je, pod vodstvom A. Femena, Varaždinsko hrvatsko kazališno društvo (1898.-1899.) – prvi varaždinski profesionalni ansambl, a potom i Stalno kazalište Hrvatskog društva u Varaždinu (1899.-1900.), s Ivanom Milčetićem na čelu.

Do osnivanja stalnog kazališta dolazi ratne 1915. godine kada su mnoga kazališta prestajala s radom: izvedbom Kalmanove operete *Vjerni drug* 1915. otvoreno je Gradsko kazalište kao stalno hrvatsko kazalište u Varaždinu kojim sedam sezona predano i uspješno “ravna” Andro Mitrović, dok je u posljednjoj (1924./25.) sezoni umjetničko vodstvo (Intimnog teatra) povjereno Branku Tepavcu.

Kao jedno od triju profesionalnih kazališta u Hrvatskoj (uz Zagreb i Osijek) od 1915. do 1925. godine Gradsko kazalište premijerno izvodi 191 dramsko djelo (od toga 6 praiizvedbi djela hrvatskih autora) i 34 glazbena djela.

Na repertoaru su hrvatski dramatičari: Milan Ogrizović, Josip Kulundžić, Ulderiko Donadini, Ivo Vojnović, Tituš Brezovački, Milan Begović, Srđan Tucić i Gustav Krklec, pri čemu, kao posebno značajno ostvarenje, izdvajamo praiizvedbu *Gogoljeve smrti* Ulderika Donadinija u sezoni Intimnog teatra (1925.) Branka Tepavca, ocijenjenu „kazališnim činom kojim se Varaždin nakratko ogledao sa Zagrebom, neprijepornim središtem hrvatskoga dramskog teatra“ (Senker, 2000, str. 21).

Potkraj 1942. godine osnovano je Društvo hrvatskih kazališnih dobrovoljaca, u kojem je započeo s radom i slikar Pavle Vojković, jedan od najistaknutijih hrvatskih kazališnih scenografa i kostimografa.

Nakon prekida od dva desetljeća, u sezoni 1945/46., varaždinsko Kazalište ponovno je otvoreno kao Narodno kazalište „A. Cesarec“ i narednih desetak godina protječe u znaku obnove i repertoarnog ustaljenja: kajkavski repertoar postaje jednim od bitnih opredjeljenja Kazališta.

Velika obnova ansambla, kako u kvantitativnom tako i u kvalitativnom smislu, uslijedit će u sezoni 1956/57. dolaskom Gavellinih učenika, kao i otvaranjem Komorne pozornice (1957.), svojevrsne specifičnosti varaždinskoga glumišta, čijim osnutkom započinje i dugotrajna, iznimno bogata i uspješna suradnja s redateljem Vladimirom Gerićem, nastavljena do danas. Na repertoaru spomenutog razdoblja prevladavaju uprizorenja dramskih djela hrvatskih autora.

Djelovanje varaždinske kazališne Scene od 1976. do 1996. godine

Zahtjev *prologovaca* iz 1968. godine, iznesen skupno u uvodnome članku prvoga broja zagrebačkoga časopisa Prolog, za buđenjem kritički angažirane drame i kazališta angažiranih – i to ne shvaćeno uskopolički, već angažiranih i društveno i umjetnički – pronalazi početkom 70-ih (doduše samo u nekim kazalištima) odjeka na zagrebačkom kazališnom repertoaru, dok varaždinski kazališni život u to vrijeme gotovo zamire.

Varaždinsko je Kazalište, nakon burne 1971. godine, doslovno pred zatvaranjem, a opstaje, prema riječima ondašnjeg mladog varaždinskoga glumca Ivice Plovanića,

zahvaljujući malobrojnom glumačkom ansamblu, ali i nekolicini politički podobnih zaljubljenika u kazališnu umjetnost (Dragović, 2008).

Nova faza u varaždinskom kazališnom životu – u skladu s imperativom spomenutih *prologovaca* (i njihovu uvodnom, manifestnom članku *Zašto istupamo*) za suradnjom svih dramatičara, kazališnih redatelja, glumaca kritičara, teoretičara nezadovoljnih postojećim stanjem u hrvatskome kazalištu slijedi dolaskom Petra Večeka, mladog, no već okušanog redatelja, spremnog na kazališne izazove u Varaždin, na profesionalni angažman. Nastupom Petra Večeka, najprije kao redatelja, a potom i ravnatelja Kazališta, a s njim i redatelja Mire Međimorca, Kazalište oživljava i izlazi iz lokalnih okvira da bi nedugo potom steklo epitet jednog od vodećih hrvatskih kazališta toga razdoblja. S brojčano slabim ansamblom, lošim uvjetima rada, gotovo nikakvim interesom publike za posjet Kazalištu, krenulo se prema novom u kazalištu, pojmljenom na način radikalnog sredstva protiv drijemeža u kazalištu u kojemu gledatelji, podvrgnuti literarnoj torturi već stoljećima – spavaju. (Artaud, 2000).

Ivica Plovanić prisjeća se kako je dotad nedoživljeni entuzijazam preplavio ne samo glumački ansambl nego i cijeli kolektiv, što je otvorilo prostor izvrsnim uprizorenjima novih hrvatskih drama koje su uslijedile, dok kazališni povijesnik i kritičar Marijan Varjačić drži kako se zahvaljujući promišljanju i kreiranju repertoara, a ne tek njegovim epigonskim oponašanjem, Večekov kazališni pothvat (potpomognut Međimorčevim *novim* načinom rada s glumcem op. a.) pokazao paradigmatičnim u kontekstu kazališta kao kulturnog središta izvan centra, a repertoarno određeno varaždinske kazališne scene od sredine 70-ih postaju upravo praiizvedbe djela mladih hrvatskih autora, uprizorene suvremenim scenskim iskazom, a paralelno s njima izvode se domaći i svjetski klasici (Dragović, 2007).

Estetičko promišljanje repertoara zasnovanog na „uprizorenju društveno angažiranih drama, odbacivanje zastarjelih dramaturških rekvizita uz neophodno estetsko angažiranje i praćenje zbivanja u domaćoj dramaturgiji“ (Gašparović, 1968, str.6) nužno je podrazumijevalo i nov vizualni popratni materijal Kazališta.

Uvrštavanjem u repertoar najmlađe književne generacije (Šnajder, Bakmaz, Senker, Mujičić, Škrabe i dr.) poetički okupljenih oko *Prologa*, uprizorenje čijih je drama zahtijevalo i nov scenski iskaz zasnovan na fizičkoj ekspresiji, a ne kao dosad na višestoljetnoj vladavini literarne riječi, pokazalo se plodnim tlom za početak modernog kazališnog dizajna i novoga vizualnog identiteta vezanog uz svekoliko kazališno djelovanje. Zahvaljujući navedenim produkcijskim uvjetima, stvoreno je ozračje i za nov način recepcije kazališnoga čina.

Uspješnoj interakciji, i formalno i sadržajno, novog repertoara, ali i ”nove” varaždinske, mahom mlađe publike – pridonijeli su, u respektabilnoj mjeri, kazališni plakat (i njegovi popratni sadržaji) Gorana Merkaša i kazališna fotografija (istaknutog člana glumačkog ansambla) Ivica Plovanića, jednog od najužih Merkaševih profesionalnih suradnika, nerijetko i sukreatora kazališnih plakata.

Od prve hrvatske periohe do Merkaševa kazališnoga plakata

Kao grad duge i bogate kazališne tradicije Varaždin daje značajan prinos hrvatskoj teatrografiji još davne 1710. godine, u vrijeme djelovanja Isusovačkog kazališta.

O tome da je i najstarije kazalište drevnog Varaždina itekako bilo svjesno važnosti najave scenskog čina, poziva publici da mu nazoče, jednako kao i informacija o predstavi, svjedoči i najstarija hrvatska perioha – kombinacija plakata i sinopsisa predstave – nastala upravo za varaždinsku isusovačku predstavu *Alvarus Luna*, izvedenu 15. rujna 1710. godine. Navedena, davna prethodnica varaždinskom kazališnom plakatu tiskana je u Grazu, a sadrži osam stranica na latinskome, jeziku izvođenja navedene predstave (iako se od 17. stoljeća predstave na varaždinskom području izvode i na hrvatskom jeziku). Uvod periohe sadrži naziv drame, mjesto i datum izlaženja i izvođače, uz podatak da je drama prikazana u čast biskupa Jurja grofa Patačića od Zajezde. Slijedi objašnjenje podrijetla građe komada, potom i detaljan sinopsis drame sa sažetim opisom prologa i svakog čina po scenama zatim epiloga. Na kraju su navedene glavne uloge s imenima svih glumaca, kao i članova zbora. Tih dvadeset i šest glumaca i pjevača prvi su zabilježeni varaždinski scenski izvođači.

U 19. stoljeću u Varaždinu prevladavaju njemačke kazališne družine, čije predstave pomažu stjecanju kako kazališne kulture tako i osnutku kazališta u njemu. Prve sačuvane kazališne cedulje za predstave na njemačkom jeziku, primjerice ona iz 1829. godine – *Genieren Sie sich nicht (Original-Lustspiel in einem Akt von Franz von Holbein)* pružaju podatak o izvedenoj predstavi i autoru, ali bez podataka o izvođačima, dok kazališni plakat iz 1876. godine, uz autora (Victorien Sardou) i naslov uprizorenja (*Ferdinanda*), navodi i izvođača – Kazališno društvo J. Schulza. Nešto više podataka o predstavama pružaju i dvije kazališne cedulje predstava na hrvatskom jeziku iz 1861. godine, jedna najavljujući 26. siječnja *Gospodara roba*, „žalosnu igru u 2 čina od Zetliza”, a druga, 27. siječnja *Englezke robe*, „veselu igru u 2 čina od Kotzebua”; kao izvođač oba scenska djela navodi se varaždinsko Društvo kazališnih dobrovoljaca, ravnatelja Dragutina Antoleka Oreška.

Kazališna cedulja iz 1870. svjedoči i o izvođenju dramskog djela hrvatskog autora Antuna Nemčića čija je „vesela igra u 4 čina” *Varmedjinska reštauracija ili tko će biti veliki sudac?* bila na repertoaru Društva kazališnih dobrovoljaca 19. travnja iste godine.

S početkom kazališnog djelovanja prvog Varaždinskog profesionalnog ansambla (1898. – 1899.), pod upravom Adolfa Femena, ustaljuje se i kazališna praksa pozivanja gledateljstva na predstavu kazališnim plakatom: 2. veljače 1898. godine publika je pozvana nazočiti izvedbi *Graničara* Josipa Freudenreicha, a kazališne objave slijede za *Ekvinocij*, a potom i *Psyche* Ive Vojnovića, jednako kao i ona za izvedbu *Baruna Franju Trenka* Josipa Eugena Tomića iste sezone.

Merkašev plakat – konstitutivni čimbenik varaždinskog kazališnog života od sredine 70-ih do kraja 90-ih 20. stoljeća

Do sredine 70-ih godina XX. st., točnije do pojave Gorana Merkaša kao profesionalnog suradnika Kazališta, kazališni plakat ima isključivo informativnu funkciju, jednako kao i mnoštvo plakata u ostalim hrvatskim kazalištima, unatoč činjenici da je u to vrijeme kazališni plakat, s obzirom na oglašavanje kazališne predstave i podataka vezanih za nju, uz novine, radio i TV, tek jedan od medija informiranja javnosti.

Zadaća kazališnog plakata u pravom značenju toga pojma trostruka je: on prezentira dramsko ili prozno djelo kao predložak predstavi, nadalje, interpretativni je vizualni prikaz kazališne predstave kao izvedbene odrednice te naposljetku, kazališni plakat predstavlja i samosvojan likovni umjetnički izraz.

Kao jedan od malobrojnih materijalnih tragova što ih za sobom ostavlja pojedino uprizorenje, kazališni plakat (p)ostaje značajnim teatrografskim izvorom za proučavanje prošlog/prošliih razdoblja. Ako je uspjela kazališna fotografija sretno zaustavljen kazališni trenutak otet prolaznosti, pravom je kazališnom plakatu namijenjeno više od navedenog. On se, uz interpretaciju redateljskoga *čitanja* predstave, nužno referira i na aktualnost sredine/vremena iz koje/g proizlazi, postajući time istodobno i kreatorovim motrištem i svojevršnim ogledalom, namijenjenom i u konačnici i ponuđenom recepijentu/(možda tek potencijalnom) gledatelju da se i on (iz osobne, *iskustvene* vizure) ogleda u njemu.

Nastanak, jednako kao i uspon prepoznatljivog, 'varaždinskog kazališnog plakata' (a njegovim usponom i navedena sintagma postaje općepoznata, op. a.) – ističe redatelj Petar Veček – započinje upravo dolaskom Gorana Merkaša, akademskog slikara i dizajnera, kao profesionalnog suradnika u varaždinsko Kazalište (Dragović, 2008a).

Navodimo u glavnim crtama profesionalni životopis Gorana Merkaša: rođen 15. prosinca 1950. u Varaždinu. Tijekom Gimnazije, koju završava 1969. godine, intenzivno se druži s Nenadom Opačićem, Borisom Švaljekom i Željkom Prstecom, danas poznatim likovnim umjetnicima. Zajedno sa Švaljekom upisuje se na Akademiju likovnih umjetnosti u Zagrebu, gdje je diplomirao u klasi profesora Šime Perića 1974. godine.

Potom slijedi i prvo priznanje: dobitnik je prve nagrade za crtež na 8. salonu mladih u Zagrebu 1976. godine. Izlaže na brojnim kolektivnim izložbama, a samostalno u Varaždinu, Zagrebu, Karlovcu, Čakovcu.

Tijekom studija u Zagrebu redoviti je posjetitelj predstava Teatra&TD, tada (krajem šezdesetih i početkom sedamdesetih) *kultnoga* zagrebačkoga kazališta, gdje se susreće sa suvremenim kazalištem, ali i s europskim okvirima suvremenog kazališnog dizajna, ali i sa znanim grafičkim dizajnerima koji stvaraju pod utjecajem pop-arta i konceptualizma: Mihailo Arsovski kreira 1964. vizualni identitet Teatra &TD; Boris Bučan oblikuje kazališne plakate za Dramsko kazalište *Gavella*.

Merkaševa profesionalna suradnja na dizajnerskom planu s varaždinskim kazalištem započeta 1977. godine traje punih dvadeset godina, sve do nagle, a prerane Merkaševe smrti u rodnome gradu, 23. listopada 1996. godine.

Kako nam je posvjedočio osobno, Petar Veček poziva 1977. godine Gorana Merkaša – oduševljen njegovim grafikama, slikama i crtežima – u Kazalište na stalni angažman, gdje Merkaš, uz vlastiti atelje, dobiva i potpunu slobodu rada na kazališnim programima i plakatima. „Sve što je u kazalištu bilo likovnog predmeta od tog je trenutka bilo potpuno prepušteno njemu. Dolaskom u teatar, on je našao sebe, ali je i teatar našao njega“ (Perc, 2010a).

U potpunosti posvećen kazalištu, prisjeća se Veček, Merkaš je nazočio predstavama od prvih čitaćih pokusa sve do posljednjih, nastojeći steći što potpuniji uvid kako u književni predložak po kojem je rađena predstava, tako i u sam način rada na njoj.

Od početka djelovanja do same iznenadne, a prerane smrti, prikupljajući pedantno i studiozno podatke za svaki kazališni plakat u nastajanju, Merkaš je uvijek iznova uspostavljao (kako osobno iznosi, u intervjuu za *Striptiz*, na sam dan smrti!) blisku suradnju s cijelim ansamblom, redateljem i tehničkim osobljem, nešto poput „višegodišnjeg kontinuiranog intervjua (...) unutar kojega jednostavno moram pronaći odgovor, odnosno nekakvu formulu tj. “znak” predstave, ili pak u kazališnom smislu grafičko-literarnu dosjetku“ (navod prema Varjačić, 2009, str.50).

Varaždinski glumci (posebno Ivica Plovanić), jednako kao i drugi Merkaševi suradnici u Kazalištu (Veček/Varjačić), zalagali su se, od samog njegova dolaska, za potpunu slobodu Merkaševa stvaranja, smatrajući njegov talent, studiozan rad i predanost kazalištu dragocjenim. Plovanić smatra kako njegovi kazališni plakati nikada ne bi imali te snage umjetničke autentičnosti i interpretativne preciznosti u smislu točnog čitanja predstave da nije postojala snažna veza između Kazališta, Gorana Merkaša i njegove likovnosti (Perc, 2010).

Tijekom dva desetljeća kazališnog djelovanja poslije Merkaša ostaje 90-ak kazališnih plakata, kao i velik broj ostalih kazališnih tiskovina, kao svjedočanstvo bogate suradnje s Kazalištem, ponajprije s redateljem Petrom Večekom, za čije je (sve) predstave Merkaš tijekom dizajnerskog djelovanja u Kazalištu, osmišljavao i oblikovao plakate.

Popis kazališnih plakata Gorana Merkaša za predstave varaždinske kazališne scene

Kronološkim redom navodimo praizvedbe/prve izvedbe hrvatskih mahom mladih, angažiranih autora, ali i redatelja – što je svojevrsna specičnost varaždinskog Kazališta navedenog razdoblja – popraćene Merkaševim plakatima: Slobodan Šnajder: *Metastaza* (1976.), redatelj Miro Međimorec; Ivan Bakmaz: *Vježbe u Goethe institutu* (1977.), redatelj Miro Međimorec; Tomislav Bakarić: *Mora* (1978.), redatelj Petar Veček; Miroslav Krleža: *Emerički* (1978.) – prema romanu *Zastave*, redatelj Miro Međimorec; Slobodan Novak: *Školjka šumi* (1979.), redatelj Miro Međimorec; Ivan Bakmaz: *Vjerodostojni doživljaji sa psima* (1981.), redatelj Petar Veček; Ivan Bakmaz: *Na kućnoj njezi* (1983.),

redatelj Vladimir Milčin; Dubravko Jelačić Bužimski: *Ponoćna igra* (1985.), redatelj Lawrence Kiiru; Slobodan Šnajder: *Dumanske tišine* (1987.), redatelj Petar Veček; Janko Polić Kamov: *Čovječanstvo* (1990.), redatelj Damir Mađarić; Ivan Supek: *Lutrija imperatora Augustusa* (1992.), redatelj Božidar Smiljanić; Josip Kulundžić: *Amajlija* (1992.), redatelj Hasan Hasanović; Ivan Bakmaz: *Stepinac, glas u pustinji* (1992.), redatelj Petar Veček; Miroslav Krleža: *Na rubu pameti* (1993.), redatelj Ozren Prohić.

Slijedi kronološkim redom i niz Merkaševih kazališnih plakata kreiranih za uprizorenja drama stranih autora, mahom klasika: Samuel Beckett: *U očekivanju Godota* (1977.), redateljica Ranka Mesarić; Slawomir Mrożek: *Lisac i pijetao* (1979.), redatelj Petar Veček; Henrik Ibsen: *Divlja patka* (1980.), redatelj Radovan Grahovac; August Strindberg: *Gospođica Julija* (1980.), redatelj Petar Veček; Anton Pavlovič Čehov: *Višnjik* (1982.), redatelj Petar Veček; Fjodor Mihajlovič Dostojevski: *Braća Karamazovi* (1984.), redatelj Matko Sršen; Ingmar Bergman: *Jesenja sonata* (1986.), redatelj Matko Sršen; Ödön von Horváth: *Kazimir i Karolina* (1986.), redatelj Petar Veček; Fjodor Mihajlovič Dostojevski: *Zločin i kazna* (1987.), redatelj Vasilij Vasiljevič Sečin; Slawomir Mrożek: *Tango* (1987.), redatelj Joško Juvančić; Reiner Werner Fassbinder: *Gorke suze Petre von Kant* (1988.), redatelj Matko Sršen; William Shakespeare: *Komedija zabluda* (1990.), redatelj Borna Baletić; Danil Harms: *Elizabeta Bam* (1990.), redateljica Ranka Mesarić; Franz Kafka: *Proces* (1994.), redatelj Ozren Prohić.

Posebno je zapažen i od struke visoko ocijenjen Merkašev kazališni plakat za uprizorenje *Woyzecka*, Georga Büchnera (premijerno izvedeno 17. ožujka 1995., u režiji Bobe Jelčića) – nagrađen 1996. godine kao najbolji kazališni plakat u Hrvatskoj.

O značajkama varaždinskog kazališnog plakata Gorana Merkaša, hrvatskog slikara i kazališnog dizajnera

Kako naglašava Marijan Varjačić, višegodišnji ravnatelj Kazališta, a umjetnikov bliski suradnik i prijatelj, koji Merkašev kazališni plakat drži njegovim svjetonazorom, a njegov dizajn dijelom estetike kazališne predstave, Merkašev dizajn valja sagledati u kontekstu pop-arta, pop-kulture, a posebno filma, stripa i glazbe, jer je u vrijeme njegovih početaka na Akademiji, pop-art, kako američki tako i europski, bio u zenitu (Varjačić, 2009).

I istaknuti varaždinski likovni umjetnik Darko Sačić, akademski slikar, jednako tako sagledava Merkašev plakat u kontekstu pop-kulture, koja je u usponu u vrijeme Merkaševa obrazovanja. Iako se i on u umjetničkom smislu kretao u smjeru pop-arta, „Merkaš je bio *opsjednut* slikarstvom u širokom rasponu, od temelja likovne umjetnosti, Leonarda, Michelangela, Dürera sve do Bacona i Warhola, a sve to znao je izvrsno ukomponirati u plakat i uvijek iznova je oduševljavao svojim odabirom; svojim je plakatima uvijek uspio zaintrigirati publiku i privući pozornost“ (Perec, 2010b).

Avangardne predstave, potpuna opreka klasičnome kazalištu, u cijelosti su odgovarale – prisjeća se Sačić u istom razgovoru – i Merkaševu senzibilitetu i svjetonazoru:

Merkaševi plakati odisali su kvalitetom, ali i dozom ironije koja je bila prikaz njegova viđenja svijeta, kao i režima koji je smatrao sirovim /.../ prikazivali su apsurdan i tjeskoban svijet, često na groteskan način naglašenih detalja ili mana, bilo lukavo sakrivenih ili stavljenih u prvi plan. Trajno nadahnuće njegovu slikarskom/crtačkom, jednako kao i dizajnerskom stvaralaštvu, mnogostruko je: uz filozofska i književna djela, potom rock-glazbu, film i strip, stožer Merkaševa umjetničkog svjetonazora istinska je potreba za promicanjem ideje slobode življenja, mišljenja i stvaranja. Svojim plakatima razbijao je tabue, lažni moral i licemjerje, a humor je uvijek bio prisutan u njegovu radu, i to s dozom ironije. Na njegovim plakatima često su se znale naći poznate osobe iz aktualnog svijeta politike, kulture i umjetnosti. Formi plakata uvijek bi dodao fotografiju ili karikaturu kao osobni pečat.

Merkaš se uvijek kretao unutar kazališta i bio na mnogim pokusima tijekom nastanka svake predstave, stoga su njegovi kazališni plakati spoj talenta, predanoga rada i zanimanja za kazališnu umjetnost.

Merkaš kao dizajner cjelokupnog vizualnog identiteta Kazališta, kazališnih časopisa i kao scenograf

Osim rada na kazališnim plakatima, Merkaš je značajan i prepoznatljiv i kao kreator i dizajner cjelokupnog vizualnog identiteta varaždinskog Kazališta. Veliku pozornost posvećivao je i ostalim kazališnim tiskovinama poput kazališnih programa, ulaznica, logotipa kazališta, koje su također vrijedno, a trajno svjedočanstvo njegova dizajnerskog stvaralaštva.

Značajan i nezaobilazan je jednako tako i Merkašev dizajnerski rad na planu varaždinskih časopisa: započinje kao grafički oblikovatelj *Geste* (1980.), časopisa za kulturu čije se vrijeme izlaženja ne podudara slučajno s onim razdobljem kada Kazalište postaje žarištem društvenog/kulturnog života Varaždina: nezaboravni višesatni susreti s umjetnicima organizirani četvrtkom ili petkom, niz večeri jazz-glazbe, izvrsne kazališne predstave, zahtjevna, ali zadovoljna (velikim dijelom studentska) publika, a među čestim posjetiteljima Kazališta *Večerkove ere* bio je i nemali broj Varteksovih radnika³, što je svakako svojevrstan kuriozitet u cjelokupnom kazališnom životu Varaždina.

Varaždinski HNK započinje 1993. godine, zahvaljujući inicijativi Marijana Varjačića, Gorana Merkaša i Ivica Plovanića, s objavljivanjem časopisa *Kazalište*, u ono vrijeme jedinog kazališnog časopisa u Hrvatskoj. Likovno-grafičku stranu časopisa preuzima Goran Merkaš u suradnji s Ivicom Plovanićem, tada već majstorom kazališne fotografije, dok je najvećem broju tekstova – posebice onima o minulim kazališnim razdobljima – autor Marijan Varjačić.

³ Glumica Vesna Stilinović prisjeća sa kako su potkraj 70-ih, pripremajući *Štrajk Tivarovih radnika* Ante Armaninija, odlazili među radnike u Varteks i s njima razgovarali o mnogim stvarima vezanim uz predstavu, kao i izvrsnih reakcija njih kao publike na toj predstavi, za koju se smatralo da će im, s obzirom na način uprizorenja biti nerazumljiva (op. S.D.)

Iako je izašlo svega pet brojeva *Kazališta*, svaki broj je i danas dragocjen jer sadrži, uz dizajnerski rukopis Gorana Merkaša, i niz tekstova o povijesti i suvremenosti varaždinske kazališne scene. Neponovljiv dizajn koji je Merkaš ostvario u *Kazalištu*, upotpunjen brojnim, vrsnim kazališnim fotografijama glumca i kazališnog fotografa Ivica Plovanića, postali su konstitutivnim dijelom estetike varaždinskog Kazališta.

Ivica Plovanić prisjeća se toga razdoblja i zajedničkog rada na *Kazalištu* kao godina izvrsne i plodne suradnje s Merkašem naglašavajući, kao jedan od njegovih najužih suradnika, a često i sukreatora na dizajnerskom planu, kako je Merkašev opus podigao Kazalište na razinu kakvu ono nikad nije imalo (Perec, 2010).

Posljednji, 5. broj *Kazališta*, kazališnog časopisa vrsnih stručnih tekstova i neponovljivoga dizajna, izlazi 30. rujna 1996. godine, samo tri tjedna prije Merkaševe iznenadne smrti.

Goran Merkaš se – uz crtež i kazališni dizajn – povremeno bavio i scenografijom, većinom za predstave HNK u Varaždinu. Kao scenograf, potpisuje *Hipohondrijakuša* (1988.) nepoznatog kajkavskog autora, u režiji ansambla, *Lutriju imperatora Augustusa* (1992.), redatelja Božidara Smiljanića, kao i *Puno larme a za ništ* (1993.), redatelja Vladimira Gerića.

Riječju, Merkašev posao u Kazalištu bio je svestran, raznolik i, što je bitno, prepoznatljiv.

Priznanja i nagrade; varaždinski Bienale kazališnog plakata – homage Merkašu

Merkaš je svojim kazališnim plakatima osvojio brojne nagrade na državnoj i europskoj razini. Dobitnik je 1. nagrade za crtež na Osmom zagrebačkom salonu mladih, ali i brojnih otkupnih nagrada. Kazališne plakate izlagao je na 6. izložbi jugoslavenskog pozorišnog plakata i grafičkog oblikovanja 1988. u Novom Sadu, kao i na zagrebačkom ZGRAF-u 7, godine 1995. Dobitnikom je i nagrade za najbolji kazališni plakat u Hrvatskoj (1996.), kreiran za predstavu Büchnerova *Woyzeka* (1995.), u režiji Bobe Jelčića.

Izlagao je na Bialu grafičkog dizajna u Zagrebu 1996. godine, kao i na svjetskoj izložbi plakata u Osnabrücku, Njemačka (1996./97.), gdje mu je u katalogu izložbe objavljen plakat za predstavu *Proces* (1994.) prema motivima Franza Kafke, redatelja Ozrena Prohića.

U varaždinskome HNK priređena je 1993. godine Izložba crteža i kazališnog dizajna Gorana Merkaša. Centar za kulturu Čakovec 1996. godine također organizira izložbu kazališnih plakata i crteža Gorana Merkaša.

U zagrebačkoj Galeriji ULUPUH organizirana je 1997. godine izložba *Homage à Goran Merkaš – vizualni identitet HNK u Varaždinu*.

U prostoru Kazališne galerije HAZU u Zagrebu, Odsjek za povijest hrvatskog kazališta HAZU i HNK u Varaždinu, organiziraju 1998. izložbu *Scenografski i kostimografski radovi Pavla Vojkovića i kazališni dizajnerski radovi Gorana Merkaša*.

Dodjela brojnih nagrada Merkaševim plakatima i formalna je potvrda njegovom uspješnom dugogodišnjem stvaralaštvu i kazališnom dizajnu, koji slovi kao jedan

od najuspjelijih u Hrvatskoj. U njegovu čast, 20. ožujka 2009., u Velikoj koncertnoj dvorani HNK u Varaždinu otvorena je izložba 1. bienale kazališnog plakata. Na 1. bijenalu sudjelovali su autori kazališnih plakata gotovo svih hrvatskih kazališta u sezoni 2007./2008. Tom je prigodom, izlaganjem svih prispijelih plakata, omogućen uvid u bogato hrvatsko kazališno-dizajnersko stvaralaštvo.

Zaključne teze

Nastanak kao i uspon prepoznatljivog 'varaždinskog kazališnog plakata' započinje sredinom 70-ih godina minuloga stoljeća dolaskom Gorana Merkaša, akademskog slikara i dizajnera, kao profesionalnog suradnika u varaždinsko Kazalište. Zahvaljujući specifičnom, originalnom Merkaševu plakatu, ono će uskoro postati i prepoznato i priznato (i) na planu likovnosti i vizualnog, kao specifično i samosvojno. Činjenica je: zahvaljujući Merkaševim kazališnim plakatima (jednako kao i pojedinačnim uprizorenjima navedenog razdoblja) varaždinsko Kazalište steklo je renomirani status u Hrvatskoj, a niz priznanja i izvan nje.

Merkaš svojim plakatima nije tek sintetizirao i interpretirao uprizorenje za koje je kreirao kazališni plakat, on je svojim originalnim likovnim nastupom ujedno predstavljao varaždinsko Kazalište. Njegov sveukupni kazališno-dizajnerski opus kao autentičan autorski rukopis prožet njegovim slikarstvom, neponovljivo je kazališno *senzibiliziran*. Merkaševi kazališni plakati nisu samo vizualna interpretacija predstava, oni predstavljaju i samosvojnu likovno-dizajnersku vrijednost; autentična su to umjetnička ostvarenja kojima Merkaš komunicira/polemizira – često ironično, nerijetko i tjeskobno – sa svijetom oko sebe, bilo da se pritom referira na stvarnost/aktualnost ili pak na kazališnu/umjetničku fikciju kao nadahnuće.

Slijedom navedenih argumenata i sudova, ovim se radom nastojala argumentirati ishodišna teza o Merkaševom kazališnom plakatu kao dijelu estetike kako pojedine predstave tako i sveukupnog varaždinskog kazališnog života od sredine 70-ih do sredine 90-ih 20-og stoljeća, koje razdoblje predstavlja proplamsaj varaždinske Scene na hrvatskom kazališnom planu, i šire. 'Varaždinski kazališni plakat' što ga je iza sebe ostavio Goran Merkaš ostaje trajnom likovnom *osobnom kartom* varaždinskog Kazališta. Navedeni sud ujedno vrijedi i za Merkašev prepoznatljiv kreatorско-dizajnerski rad na sveukupnom vizualnom identitetu varaždinskog kazališta -- kazališnih programa, ulaznica i logotipa kao značajnog, a trajnog svjedočanstva njegova dizajnerskog stvaralaštva.

Pružajući Merkašu kao dizajneru kazališnih plakata potpunu stvaralačku slobodu, varaždinsko Kazalište nije dobilo samo međunarodnu potvrdu svoga programa i svoga djelovanja: pokazalo se i idealnim medijem za vrhunski kazališni plakat, zahvaljujući svojoj kontinuiranoj suradnji s umjetnikom koji je svojim svekolikim kazališno-dizajnerskim opusom, u doslovnom smislu te riječi, živio kazalište.

Napomena

Ovaj rad, skroman prinos hrvatskoj teatrologiji, posvećen je Goranu Merkašu i sjećanju na – varaždinsko Večekovo kazalište.