

**THEATRICAL ENTERPRISE AS A PHENOMENON OF THE  
MODERN BELARUSIAN ART: CHARACTERISTICS, ORIGINS, PERIODS**

**Purpose.** The research studies the private theatrical enterprise in Belarus in its historical retrospective and highlights the key characteristics of the phenomenon and the main periods of its development. The research methodology is the use of combined methods: historical-comparative and art analysis. This **methodological** approach allows presenting the theatrical enterprise as an integral artistic phenomenon and disclose the principles of its functioning. It also helps to identify a number of reasons, which have had a significant impact on the development of the private theater business on the territory of modern Belarus from the end of the XVIII century until the beginning of the XXI century, depending on political, social and economic changes. **The scientific novelty** of this work lies in the extension the concepts of a private theatrical enterprise not only as a business initiative, but also as a form of the operation of the art of the theatre. Comparative analysis of the activity of Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Jewish and local theater groups on the territory of Belarus allows realizing the fundamental differences in organization, management and financing of a non-repertory theatre and state theater, as well as to identify its fundamental characteristics. **Conclusions.** Thorough understanding at the modern stage of historical evolution of the activity of a non-repertory theatre in Belarus contributes to the expansion of theatrical proposals and supports the necessity for further development of private stage equally and in parallel with national drama theatre.

**Keywords:** dramatic enterprise, private theater, producer, touring enterprise features, origins of enterprise, stages of theatrical enterprise development.

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**Театральна антреприза як явище сучасного білоруського мистецтва: ознаки, витоки, періоди**

**Мета роботи.** Дослідження пов'язане з вивченням розвитку театральної антрепризи в Білорусі в його історичній ретроспекції, виділенням ключових характеристик явища і визначенням основних періодів її розвитку. **Методологія** дослідження полягає в застосуванні сукупності методів: історико-порівняльного та мистецтвознавчого аналізу. Зазначений методологічний підхід дозволяє уявити театральну антрепризу як цілісне художнє явище, розкрити принципи її функціонування і виділити ряд причин, які мали значний вплив на розвиток приватної театральної справи на території сучасної Білорусі з кінця XVIII і до початку XXI ст., в залежності від змін політичних, соціальних і економічних реалій. **Наукова новизна** роботи полягає в розширенні уявлень про театральну антрепризу не тільки як підприємницьку ініціативу, а й форму функціонування сценічного мистецтва. Порівняльний аналіз діяльності на території Білорусі російських, українських, польських, єврейських і вітчизняних театральних колективів дозволяє глибше усвідомити принципові відмінності в організації, управлінні і фінансуванні сценічної діяльності антрепризи перед державними театрами, а також виявити її основні характеристики. **Висновки.** Осмислення на сучасному етапі історичного досвіду розвитку театральної антрепризи в Білорусі дає опору для розширення театрального пропозиції і служить твердженням необхідності подальшого розвитку приватної сцени в рівній мірі і паралельно з державним драматичним театром.

**Ключові слова:** драматична антреприза, приватний театр, продюсер, гастролі, ознаки антрепризи, витоки антрепризи, етапи розвитку антрепризи.

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**Театральная антреприза как явление современного белорусского искусства: признаки, истоки, периоды**

**Цель работы.** Исследование связано с изучением развития театральной антрепризы в Беларуси в его исторической ретроспекции, выделением ключевых характеристик явления и определением основных периодов ее развития. **Методология** исследования заключается в применении совокупности методов: историко-сравнительного и искусствоведческого анализа. Указанный методологический подход позволяет представить театральную антрепризу как целостное художественное явление, раскрыть принципы ее функционирования и выделить ряд причин, которые оказали значительное влияние на развитие частного театрального дела на территории современной Беларуси с конца XVIII и до начала XXI вв., в зависимости от изменений политических, социальных и экономических реалій. **Научная новизна** работы заключается в расширении представлений о театральной антрепризе не только как предпринимательской инициативе, но и форме функционирования сценического искусства. Сравнительный анализ деятельности на территории Беларуси русских, украинских, польских, еврейских и отечественных театральные коллективов позволяет глубже осознать принципиальные различия в организации, управлении и финансировании сценической деятельности антрепризы перед государственными театрами, а также выявить ее основополагающие характеристики. **Выводы.** Осмысление на современном этапе исторического опыта развития театральной антрепризы в Беларуси дает опору для расширения театрального предложения и служит утверждением необходимости дальнейшего развития частной сцены в равной степени и параллельно с государственным драматическим театром.

**Ключевые слова:** драматическая антреприза, частный театр, продюсер, гастролі, признаки антрепризы, истоки антрепризы, этапы развития антрепризы.

Timeliness of the research topic. The private theatre company holds a specific place in the modern Belarusian stage practice. In spite of the short term of existence<sup>1</sup> in the contemporary history of the Republic of Belarus, the private theatre company has demonstrated stability of functioning in the setting of unstable market economy. The result is that the private theatre company experience was factored in when developing the Pro-

gramme of Priority Directions for the Development of the Theatrical Business in the Republic of Belarus for the years 2001–2010, approved by the collegium of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus, in the matters of organisational-legal, financial and economic activities of theatres of various forms of ownership.

Timeliness of the research of the modern Belarusian private theatre company is also determined by the fact that performances of private theatre companies are marked by a fairly high artistic level, they are winning recognition from the audience and critics, picking up awards at international theatre festivals, and are studied at the higher education institutions in the cultural sector of Belarus<sup>2</sup>.

Research objective. This brings up the questions: what is the private theatre company as a form of organisation of the scenic work, which are its basic components; how historic and current events have influenced the private theatre company all-in-all, and how well its traditional functional characteristics have preserved. We will try to answer these and other questions in our study.

Rendering the basic material. Historically, the private theatre company was interpreted as a 'private entertainment (theatre, circus and others), set up and led by a director of a theatrical company' [8, 43] and also as a 'combination of economic and legal relations emerging between the entrepreneur director of a theatrical company and various persons and institutions with regard to public performance of scientific, literature, musical, and artistic works' [1, 107]. The base characteristics of the private theatre company are presence of the entrepreneur director of a theatrical company<sup>3</sup>, absence of financial backing from the government, self-sufficiency and mobility of the concern due to the absence of a permanent creative team and a stationary ground for its performances. Initially, the private theatre company was focused on travelling, touring activity, which dictated inconstancy of the members too. Actors were gathering for a certain period to work together on a certain production.

The private theatre company left its mark in the history of the Belarusian theatre twice. The first evidence of touring private theatre companies dates from the last quarter of XVIII century, when a company of performers from central Poland was playing in Minsk in 1778 and a company led by W. Bogusławski was working in Grodno in 1784 [7, 7]. A re-emergence of the private theatre company in Belarus dates from late XX century and is related to the activity of own creative associations<sup>4</sup>. And this was absolutely no coincidence because private initiative underlies the functioning of the private theatre company.

The private theatre company is a form of mobile entrepreneurship in which all economic issues, attributed to organization of the stage play, are resolved by its director. Hence, it appears that development of the private theatre company as any other type of entrepreneurship is possible only under the market economy conditions. There is a period in the history of Belarus (1919–91), characterised by domination of the centrally planned command economy, when the State was the only possible entrepreneur and any private initiative was suppressed instantly. That is why, the private theatre company in the 1920s in Belarus was suspended and later disappeared at all owing to extirpation of private property and nationalisation of enterprises according to a decree of the Council of People's Commissars "On the unification on the theatre business" of August 26, 1919.

Correspondingly, the period of transition to market relations starts with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the gaining of sovereignty by Belarus; and democratisation of public life begins. The creative liberty that workers of culture and arts got then, led to a fundamental rearrangement of the structure of artistic creativity. Instead of the State order, rude censorship and ideological pressure, Belarusian stage actors received an opportunity of self-fulfilment beyond the walls of the stationary theatre.

Thus, the private theatre company, conceived by Belarusian stage directors as a one-time theatre project for professional Belarusian actors, non-demanded by state theatres, soon became an event much bigger than creation and public show of one stage play. Activities of the creative teams led by N. Pinigin (Nicola-Theatre), M. Abramov (Theatre Stars), V. Ushakov (Stage Virtuosos), E. Voloboyev (Belarusian Seasons) and I. Zabara (Little Theatre) grew systematic and approached the theatre where it concerns the level of organisation of the scenic work. With their creative atmosphere, a shaped assembly of actors and stage directors who were fulfilling their creative potential in the interests of the audience.

However, notwithstanding that the private theatre company in Belarus was first mentioned in the last quarter of XVIII century, the dawn of the private theatre company form can be traced from the moment the theatre was born in Ancient Greece (V century BC). We can call first attempts of management of theatre the activity of Choregoi – wealthy Athenian citizens who assumed all costs related to preparation of the chorus for dramatic competitions (teaching the chorus, rehearsals, making theatre costumes). Although the expenditures on maintaining the chorus were very sizeable, discharging Choregos' duty was honourable [2, 37].

The first documented example of theatre entrepreneurship is a contract, signed in 1545 between a French "story" performer A. l'Eperonniere and M. Ferrer, "the wife of sieur Ferrer, a funfair conjurer by trade" [4, 590], which can be regarded as the official start of management of the theatre in the world.

The emergence of the private theatre company in the Belarusian land, as defined by historian S. Kul-Selverstova, was "a distinction of penetration of the bourgeois entrepreneurship in the theatre and could happen only when the society felt the need in permanent spectacular displays. The incipience of the commercial theatre meant preparedness of the spectator and presence of some tradition of public entertainments" [3, 50].

And indeed, the slow growth of Belarusian towns and evolution of the socioeconomic and cultural relations contributed to the development of the private theatre company. Directors of theatrical companies had enough revenues from the performances in big cities, enabling them to run diverse repertory, scenery, costumes, stage-properties and also to lease theatre buildings for a fixed period and thus create a steady theatrical season<sup>5</sup>.

We distinguish three periods in the history of the private theatre company in the Belarusian lands. The first: 1770–1830s – activity of Polish private theatre companies; the second: 1831–50s – activity of Polish-Russian private theatre companies; and the third: 1860–1919 – predominantly activity of Russian and Ukrainian private theatre companies and co-partnerships<sup>6</sup>.

Such uneven time intervals in the bounds of the designated periods are due to the nature of political, economic and sociocultural processes in the Belarusian lands. Thus, after the three carve-ups of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, eastern (1772), central (1793) and western (1795) Belarusian lands (within the boundaries of its current territory) were integrated into the Russian Empire, where the czar government began pursuing the step-by-step centralised policy of their (lands) merger with the main Russian regions.

In early XIX century, the main audience of private theatre companies was made of the most well-to-do layers of the population, predominantly former Polish lieges. And the private theatre companies' repertory policy to a certain degree reflected the stage trends of the Warsaw and Krakow theatres. The genre diversity of dramaturgy works was prevailed over by drama, vaudeville, comic opera and melodrama. Pieces by W. Bogusławski, J. Drozdowski, W. Shakespeare, J.-B. Molière and operas by G. Paisiello, A. Salieri, J. Stefani and others were played on the stage.

The next period of evolution of the private theatre company was brought about by the 1831 events (the rebellion in the territory of Poland, western Belarus, Lithuania and western Ukraine) which resulted in the authorities' close attention to the theatre functioning in the Belarusian lands mostly in Polish. The inexorable process of Russification of the touring collectives started, when vaudevilles in Russian were added gradually to the stage plays in Polish. A well noticeable social change in the hall is taking place too. Democratic public comes to the theatre: petty officials, vulgar herd, and craftsmen, who bring in their aesthetic demands to the theatre.

In the 1850s, performances in Russian became a habitual phenomenon, and by now Polish-Russian and peculiarly Russian private theatre companies are touring Belarusian lands, showing translated plays by Polish dramaturgists (W. Bogusławski, L. Dmuszewski, A. Żółkowski, J. Kamiński, A. Fredro). Notably, the sense of authors' plays not infrequently was changed after the translation. Music and drama troupes stood out for their close attention to the works of Western European composers combined with Russian and Ukrainian pieces of theatrical music: V. Bellini, G. Donizetti, G. Rossini, A. Verstovsky, S. Davydov, I. Kotliarevskyi and H. Kvitka-Osnovyanenko [5, 269-273].

In the 1830s-50s, vaudevilles acquired a very wide currency. The social structure of the auditorium, now supplemented with artisans by origin, demanded plain and understandable pieces. Private theatre companies acceded to this request with performances after plays by D. Lensky, P. Karatygin, F. Koni and A. Sukhovo-Kobylin. The tendency of obligatory presence of simple vaudevilles on the private theatre companies' repertory remained until early XX century.

The most influence on the overall theatre picture had the period related to the activity of chiefly Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish private theatre companies. The political events of 1863-4 (the uprising in the territory of Belarus, Poland and Lithuania led by K. Kalinowski) sparked another wave of government repressions, which was followed by the final prohibition of performances in Polish and establishing monopoly of the Russian theatre. The system of government control was improved considerably in the 1830s. In keeping with the Censorship Statute, introduced in 1865 (and existing until 1905), all censorial institutions were concentrated in the Chief Directorate of Censorship and Print (subordinate to the minister of internal affairs and existing till 1917) [7, 34]. This novelty substantially streamlined the censoring of dramatic works, but permission for showing this or that play now depended on a panel, the Board of the Directorate.

Moreover, the urban expansion in the 1860s, the development of commodity-money relations and the broadening of the hall audience opened up a certain space for commercial entrepreneurship. Russian directors of theatrical companies (A. Danilovitch, G. Derkach, A. Kartavy, P. Pavlov and others) understood the Belarusian public perfectly well. Farce, operetta, melodrama and vaudevilles of entertaining sort attracted attention of local gentlefolks: noblemen, officials, officers and landlords. Kitchen-sink comedies and dramas drew non-manual workers, artisans, merchants and townspeople. The classic and best modern dramatic works were meant for members of intelligentsia, intellectuals and students.

On their repertory Russian troupes offered, on the one hand, 'pseudo-historic' (as defined by Yu. Pashkin) plays by N. Polevoy, N. Chayeva, romance-nationalist melodramas by N. Kukolnik, S. Gedeonov, entertaining works by I. Shpazhinsky, N. Borisov, Western European 'edifying' dramaturgy by V. Ducange, A. Dennery and M. Fournier and so on [7]. On the other hand, on the repertory playbills were pieces by N. Gogol, M. Lermontov, I. Goncharov and A. Ostrovsky. In the 1880s-90s, staged novels by F. Dostoyevsky and L. Tolstoy were getting over the footlights. In early XX century, directors of theatrical companies (N. Arbenin, E. Beliaev, E. Kovalevsky, P. Struisky and others) turned to the realistic dramaturgy by M. Gorky and A. Chekhov.

In parallel with private Russian theatre companies in late XIX-early XX centuries, a remarkable role in the theatre life of Belarus was played by performances of Ukrainian actors under the leadership of A. Vitvytska, D. Haidamaka, V. Hrytsay, M. Kropyvnytskyi, M. Sadovyi, P. Saksahanskyi, M. Starytskyi, F. Khmara and others. Despite the Russian monarchy's ban on shows in Ukrainian (what made leaders of collectives to call their troupes Russian-Little Russian), private theatre companies were introducing the Belarusian audience to pieces of national dramaturgy – works by H. Ashkarenko, I. Kotliarevskyi, M. Kropyvnytskyi, L. Manko, M. Starytskyi, O. Sukhodolskyi, T. Shevchenko and so on.

Note that the influence of the Ukrainian theatre culture manifested also in the shaping of the Belarusian national dramaturgy. Thus, the play *Countrywoman* by V. Dunin-Martsinkevych (released in 1846, staged in 1852) narrative- and text-wise is very much like the play by Ukrainian dramaturgist I. Kotliarevskyi *Natalka Poltavka* (released in 1838, staged in 1819). And two works by M. Kropyvnytskyi *After an Inspection Visit* (1882) and *Made a Fool of Themselves* (1875) were translated into Belarusian and formed the repertory basis of the troupe of the 'father' of the Belarusian theatre I. Buynitsky.

It should be emphasised that I. Buynitsky's First Belarusian Troupe (1907-17), although the collective was amateur, formed its activity on basis of the private theatrical enterprise principle or organisation of the theatre business. I. Buynitsky had profits from his manor in Polivachi that enabled him build a certain resource base to create and finance First Belarusian Troupe. He paid for scenery and theatrical costumes, travelling expenses dur-

ing tours, hotels and actors' living wage. A certain portion of the Troupe expenditure was covered by takings from performance shows. But the ticket prices were not high and, obviously, revenues from their sale were miserly. Nevertheless, actors received money for their work from I. Buynitsky on a regular basis [6, p.45].

It is fair to say the private theatre company was the only possible form of organisation of the national theatrics in the period of its professional origination. Creation of the Belarusian theatre (with a permanent scenic ground, professional troupe and regular shows) did not find support from the government authorities of the Russian Empire and was ruled out.

The adoption of the decree "On the unification on the theatre business" by the Council of People's Commissars (1919) invoked the start of the process of nationalisation of the theatre arts. The plurality of the form of ownership in the theatrical business was eliminated: private theatre companies were either closed down or reorganised into state theatrical enterprises, and theatre buildings were nationalised. Artistic political boards were organised under theatres which themselves were shifted into the system of state five-year planning. Up to the 1980s, the Belarusian dramatic art was developing within the frames of state stationary theatre.

A new wave of the private theatre company movement in Belarus, as we mentioned in the very beginning, starts in late XX century and over the 20 years of its existence the private theatre company has created a steady alternative to the state repertory theatre. Renewal of scenic imagery of the legitimate drama and promotion of new methodologies is common with the modern activity of private theatre companies. Inside of private theatre companies Belarusian stage directors have the opportunity to do creative search and realise their creative concepts: form original repertoires and choose plays with allowance for topicality and audience sympathies. For Belarusian actors, private theatre companies have become a means of a fuller realisation of their creative abilities, a place of collaboration with new stage directors and partners.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> First private theatre companies in the sovereign Belarus emerged in 1997: the private theatre company Theatre Stars, led by stage director M. Abramov, started in Minsk first and a bit later started the private theatre company Stage Virtuosos, led by production director V. Ushakov.

<sup>2</sup> The history and practice of the private theatrical business is studied at the educational institutions Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts, Belarusian State Academy of Arts and also at the private educational institution A. M. Shirokov Institute of Modern Knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> French 'entrepreneur' – 'entrepreneur', 'owner' derives from the verb 'entreprendre' – 'undertake'.

<sup>4</sup> In the modern Belarus, private theatre companies exist in two variants: Belarusian creative teams and touring theatrical companies, mostly from Moscow and St Petersburg. In this article we focus only on Belarusian drama collectives.

<sup>5</sup> Under the migrational theatre system which existed on the Belarusian lands, a particular building was let in various years to different directors and theatrical companies. Under such conditions, existence of a theatre in a town was evidenced not by a special theatre room but by playing regular paid public performances. Such shows could be taking place in non-theatre and any premises suited for stage plays.

<sup>6</sup> Actors' co-partnerships – a form of association of actors which emerged in Russia in the second half of XIX century as an alternative to private theatre companies. A co-partnership was functioning on equity contributions from participants, the amount depended on each member's position in the company. Labour was remunerated thereafter in the form of "stamps" – conditional pay units.

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