

Slovak Theatre Criticism

The first sheepish signs of theatre reflection in Slovakia can be spotted before 1920, however, the expansion of professional theatre criticism has been naturally associated with the establishment of professional theatre. The developmental stages of contemplation and writing about theatre copied the curves of theatrical development as such, although the criticism itself often became a target of criticism for lagging behind the dynamic changes in creation. From the awkward beginnings through gradual professionalization in the 1940s, stagnation and servile builder doctrine in the 1950s, upswing in the "golden" 1960 and normalization (self)censorship to the modern existential fights in the era of freedom – the road of the Slovak criticism and theatre studies was quite twisted. All time periods were characterized by polarization and side-taking based on world views (religious or party affiliations), culminating in the 1990s when the disputes about the quality of theatre were suppressed by politically motivated controversies.

In addition to milestones, such as the foundation of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (1949) and the Theatre Institute (1961), criticism was able to develop also thanks to the existence of professional periodicals – starting with *Our Theatre* (since 1928) through *Film and Theatre* (1957), *Slovak Theatre* (1957), *Stage* (1959) and others, up to the brief existence of a biweekly *Theatre at the Turn of the Eras*. The 1990s were turbulent in this regard, dominated by the fight for media space, which was manifested by the rapid emergence and quick extinction of several professional magazines. On the other hand, the new millennium brought a certain reset, which helped stabilize the situation. The journal *kôd* – concretely about theatre, under the auspices of the Theatre Institute in Bratislava, has been attempting a complex reflection on the activities in the area of performance arts at home and abroad since 2007. Specialized periodicals focusing on dance theatre or opera were founded, electronic platforms for criticism developed consistently with current trends. Male and female critics (this profession saw a significant feminization particularly in the last three decades after the revolution) in Slovakia, just like everywhere around the globe, searching for and finding the ways to defend the importance and *raison d'être* of criticism in the current dynamic era of enormous technological advancements and overwhelming stimuli in the real and virtual worlds.

One of the first professional periodicals dedicated to theatre started to come out in 1928. *Our Theatre* transformed from magazine *Slovak Amateur* (founded in 1925) to a journal aimed at both non-professional theatre and all theatre as such.



The biweekly *Dialog* was a bridge between two eras, published from January 1989 to the last volume published in December 1990. Thanks to the timing, the magazine managed to capture the course of the revolutionary events of November 1989 in the area of theatre and culture in a unique way.



The journal *kôd* – concretely about theatre arose from the need to stabilize the dramatic reflection in an era of worsening situation in the publishing of independent theatre periodicals. Since 2007, it has been the only professional monthly dedicated to professional theatre, particularly dramatic theatre, as well as music, dance and puppet theatre.



Theatre Monitoring (www.monitoringdivadiel.sk) is a project of the Slovak Centre of AICT (International Association of Theatre Critics). It is one of the pioneering initiatives in terms of moving the theatre reflection to the internet.



Magazine *Stage*, devoted to non-professional theatre, facilitates the reflection of non-professional plays and events. The individual volumes have themes, no. 5/2002 was dedicated to theatre criticism, where the theatre studies scholar Ján Jaborník published his comprehensive study about the development of criticism.



Poll about theatre criticism published in journal *Intermagazine about Theatre* in the early 1990.



Festival New Drama 2016 hosted an academic conference *Quo Vadis Theatre Criticism, Theatre Magazines* with presentations of critics and editors from the Slovak and Czech theatre periodicals who discussed the state of the current criticism.



The critical platform at the Touches and Bonds festival is the space where the creators and critics can meet in a mutual dialog.