

A concise mosaic of Romanian drama

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From the balcony of this centrally located building was proclaimed in 1989 the Romanian Revolution. No less than four cultural organizations have here their home: the Romanian National Opera, the Romanian National Theatre, the Hungarian and the German State Theatres. So many theatres, moreover, in three languages, may surprise at first sight, but after all, Timișoara is, with its 300,000 inhabitants, the second largest city in Romania. Each theatre organizes its own festival, but from the abundance of events that are held throughout the country each year, one stands out in particular: the Romanian Drama Festival.

For this year's 20th anniversary edition, the National Theatre prepared a cultural feast. Aiming to create a „panoramic view of last year's approaches to contemporary and classical Romanian drama“, programmer Oana Borș built „a mosaic, both in terms of themes and styles“. The festival opened with a play written and directed by the sexagenarian artist Mihai Măniuțiu, which presented an imaginary world of the dead, offering a meditation on this final act of life. Măniuțiu and his colleagues of the same generation, stage directors Gábor Tompa and Victor Ioan Frunză, seem to be interested in other topics than contemporary theater. On one hand, Tompa, well known for his interest in the Theatre of the Absurd, turned his attention to Eugène Ionesco, recreating **The New Tenant** after a period of ten years. On the other hand, Frunză's staging of **Furniture and Pain**, a text of playwright Teodor Mazilu, renowned for his having captured human conditions of emptiness and falsity during the Communist era, offered a new interpretation of the play, placing it in contemporary Romania.

Besides these few exceptions, all other productions were based on current topics that deal with present-day Romanian society, such as the faulty educational system (**Memories from the School Age** by Mihaela Michailov, a playwright well known for her strong involvement in social projects dedicated to children and teenagers), nourishment and land grabbing (**For Sale** by Gianina Cărbunariu, at the time being the most known Romanian director and playwright abroad) and the exploitation of baby-sitters „imported“ from the Philippines – one of the most interesting interrogative speeches on human rights in a country known for exporting domestic work (**Household Items** by Xandra Popescu). „The productions stand proof that artists actively participate to redefine civil society in Romania“, says Ada Hausvater, manager of the National Theatre for almost ten years and herself a

successful director.

Contemporary playwrights Alina Nelega and Saviana Stănescu were both present with two texts each. Written in 2005, Nelega's **Amalia Takes a Deep Breath** looks back at the Communist regime, recreating its universe in an outstanding monodrama, whereas **Caught in Traffic** (2014 play of the year) is a collection of seven feminine monologues. Herself an immigrant, Stănescu's plays deal with the risks and vulnerabilities of newcomers in search of the American Dream and with organ trafficking (**Aliens with Extraordinary Skills** and **Organic**).

One of the programme highlights was definitely **Children of Famine. Testimonies**. Being a unique event in the Moldavian theatre scenery (the Republic of Moldavia and Romania share a common language), the production of the National Theatre of Chişinău has as starting point Alexei Vakulovski's novel dealing with victims of the famine back in the '46-'47 which claimed about 300,000 victims. The documentary theatre performance directed by Luminita Țâcu proved simple, but of a powerful emotional effect.

The festival proposed also a drama competition which included one text by the more and more popular Elise Wilk and two plays by the only 17 years old Alex Teodorescu. This edition „aimed to honour only individual creations”, concluded Oana Borş, as „at the time being there are no trends, no aesthetic directions in Romanian drama“, which, however, „has become lately a central concern for state theatre repertoires – and this is a sign of theatrical health“.