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UKRAINIAN CLASSICAL THEATRE

The theatrical art of Ukraine dates back to ancient times, when it was expressed in folk games, dances, songs and rituals. Since the 11th century the theatrical performances of skomorokhs are known. In the era of Kievan Rus elements of theater were in church rituals. The first samples of drama as a literary genre can be found in the recitations of the pupils of the Kiev Brotherhood School (Kiev-Mohyla Academy) and Lavra School (16th-17th centuries). The Lviv Brotherhood School and the Ostrog Academy were also considered important centers for the development of religious drama at this time. Ukrainian theater began to develop actively in the Baroque era (17th-18th centuries). In the 17th century, a two-story puppet theater (Vertep) appeared.

The formation of classical Ukrainian drama is associated with the names of Ivan Kotlyarevsky, who headed the theater in Poltava, and Hryhoriy Kvitka-Osnovyanenko, the founder of artistic prose in the new Ukrainian literature. Burlesque and expressiveness, along with picturesqueness and humor, characteristic of their works, defined the face of academic theater in Ukraine for a long time.

In the second half of the 19th century, the amateur theater movement spread in Ukraine. It was in amateur circles that the future leaders of the Ukrainian theater – playwrights and directors Mykhailo Staritsky, Marko Kropivnitsky, Ivan Karpenko-Karyy – began their creative activity. In Halychyna amateur performances became more active in 1848-1850.

The creation of Ukrainian professional theater in the part of Ukraine controlled by Russia, as well as the next stage of the development of realistic drama are associated with the name of Marko Kropivnitsky. His love for art brings him to the theater to see the famous artist O. Fabianskaya, who performed the role of a boy in some translated melodrama. The young man spent several days under the impression from seeing her act, after which he decided to marry her, forgot about everything in the world and began to write a play in Ukrainian at night. M. Kropivnitsky was a member of the theater circle, an amateur group that exhibited works by Ukrainian playwrights – I. Kotliarevsky (“Natalka Poltavka” and “Moskal the Sorcerer”), H. Kvitka-Osnovyanenko (“Matchmaking at Goncharivka” and “Shelmenko the Township Clerk”), M. Vashchenko-Zakharchenko (“Woman, Be a Soldier”), I. Kotliarevsky (“Natalka Poltavka” and “Moskal the Sorcerer”), M. Gogol (“The Inspector”). Marko Kropivnitsky replenished his knowledge on his own, in libraries. He and Ivan Tobilevich read the works of Smiles, Robert Owen, John-Stuart Mill, Spencer, Shakespeare, Byron, Goethe, Heine, Dumas, George Sand, Thackeray.

Kropivnitsky moves to Kharkiv in 1873, where he finds a good environment for the development of Ukrainian theatre. Kropivnitsky’s fame as an actor and director reaches far beyond the borders of Ukraine, and in the summer of 1874 he received an invitation from the entrepreneur Zizerin at the head of a small theater group to come with the Ukrainian repertoire on tour in St. Petersburg. The actor had great hopes for the further development of

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Ukrainian theater during his six-month creative journey through Galicia and Bukovina, where there were no prohibitions of the tsarist government. In 1875, Teofilia Romanovich invited him here as an entrepreneur of the theater society “The Rus’ Conversation.” Thanks to this trip, the western Ukrainian public, cut off from the Dnieper region by the state border, had an opportunity to get acquainted with the best examples of Ukrainian theatrical art.

The sad news of the Ems decree, which banned the use of the Ukrainian language in print, the import of Ukrainian publications and the staging of plays or lectures in Ukrainian, caught Kropivnitsky in Yekaterinoslav (now Dnieper city). In the fall of 1881 there was a permission to stage Ukrainian plays on the territory of the Russian Empire. This was a very important stage in the history of the Ukrainian people.

The new Ukrainian theater began its first steps in the fall of 1882 in Kremenchuk, where M. Kropivnitsky worked as a director and leading actor in the Russian troupe of H. Ashkarenko. A new era of Ukrainian theater began with the staging of the immortal “Natalka Poltavka.” Ukrainian works were staged in Kremenchuk for a month. In addition to “Natalka Poltavka,” local admirers of Ukrainian dramatic art had an opportunity to see performances of such plays as “Give Your Heart a Will, It Will Lead You into Captivity” by M. Kropyvnytskyi, “Matchmaking in Goncharivka,” “Shelmenko-Denshchik” and “Sincere Love” by H. Kvitka-Osovyanyanenko, “Harkusha” by A. Storozhenko, “Kum-Miller, or Satan in a Barrel” by D. Dmitrenko, “When There’s Sausage and a Shot, Any Quarrel Will Pass” by M. Staritsky and some others.

A new stage in the development of the national theatrical art begins in late October 1882. It was then that Kropivnitsky was fortunate enough to create a troupe called “Theatre of Coryphaei” in Elisavetgrad (now the city of Kropivnitsky). It included such later famous masters of the stage as Mykola Sadovsky (Tobilevich), Maria Zankovetska (Khlystova, née Adasovska), N. Zharkova, A. Virina, A. Markova (Odintsova), I. Zagorsky, L. Manko and others. Over time, the troupe was joined by Anna Zatykevich-Karpinska (Kovtunencko), Panas Saksagansky (Tobilevich), Ivan Karpenko-Kary (Tobilevich), Maria Sadovska-Barilotti (Tobilevich) and others. Their performances began on October 27, 1882 with the production of “Natalka Poltavka.” It was in this performance that the renowned Maria Zankovetska made her professional debut as Natalka.

Mykhailo Staritsky (1840-1904) studied at the Poltava gymnasium, and together with Mykola Lysenko entered Kharkiv University. In 1861, Staritsky and Lysenko spent New Year’s holidays in Poltava region at their comrade’s, the author of the Ukrainian anthem Pavlo Chubinsky. They traveled around Ukraine on foot, collecting folklore. When in May 1861 Taras Shevchenko was reburied, Kyiv students Mykhailo Dragomanov, Petro Kosach, Tadey Rylsky, Mykola Lysenko and Mykhailo Staritsky harnessed into a funeral wagon and delivered him to the Church of the Nativity on Podol. In 1871 he settled in Kyiv. He entered into creative cooperation with Mykola Lysenko – they jointly organized the “Society of Ukrainian Stage Actors.” In August 1883 Mykhailo Staritsky was offered to head the “Theatre of Coryphaei.” Staritsky’s theater toured all over Russia with great success. 1885 Staritsky left the Coryphaei troupe and founded a new one of young actors. Staritsky was a true teacher of young Ukrainian writers and played a great role in organizing the literary and social life of the 1890s. Mykhailo Staritsky reworked plays by other authors and staged prose works. This is how he wrote “Christmas Night,” “The Drowned Woman,” “Sorochintsy Fair,” “Taras

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Bulba,” “Gypsy Aza,” “Chernomortsy,” “Following Two Hares,” “Fashionably” and others.

Ivan Karpenko-Karyy is a Ukrainian writer, playwright and actor. The pseudonym Karpenko-Karyy combines the name of his father and his favorite literary character Ignat Karyy, the hero of T. Shevchenko’s play “Nazar Stodolia.” Survived arrest and exile. In 1886, the first “Collection of Dramatic Works” by I. Karpenko-Karyy was published in Kherson. In 1890 he wrote the comedy “One Hundred Thousand.” In 1900-1904 he created his own troupe, wrote the plays “The Master,” “Vanity,” “The Sea of Life.”

I. Tobilevich (Karpenko-Karyy) most fully realized himself in the genre of comedy, which, thanks to the unique individual creative manner of the playwright became a distinctive phenomenon in the history of Ukrainian culture. It was Ivan Karpenko-Karyy who established the genre of comedy in Ukrainian literature as a canonical universal form of artistic depiction and modeling of the most diverse manifestations of relationships between people and the organization of their inner world in the system of coordinates of universal values. The pinnacle of Ukrainian drama of the early 20th century was the tragedy “Savva Chaly” (1899, published 1900). It is about a concrete historical figure of the 18th century, the leader of Ukrainian rebels, who defected to the enemy. The play widely reproduced pictures of the national liberation struggle, and at the same time it is full of high poetry, marked by subtle psychology. In total I. Karpenko-Karyy wrote 18 plays. Ivan Franko wrote about Ivan Karpenko-Karyy: “What he was for Ukraine, for the development of its social and spiritual life, is felt by everyone who has seen on stage or at least only read his works; it is understood by everyone who knows that he was one of the fathers of modern Ukrainian theater, an outstanding artist and at the same time a great playwright, which has no equal in our literature.”

Maria Sadovska-Barilotti was the sister of Ivan Karpenko-Karyy, actress (real name Maria Tobilevich-Barilotti, 1855-1891). She began her stage career in Mykolaiv in 1876 as a member of the Russian operetta group. Since 1883 she played in the troupes of M. Kropivnitsky, then M. Staritsky, M. Sadovsky, P. Saksagansky. During her 12 years of stage activity, she performed nearly all female roles in the operas “Natalka Poltavka,” “Zaporozhets beyond the Danube,” “Drowned Woman,” and also played major roles in many dramatic productions. M. Sadovskaya-Barilotti entered the history of Ukrainian theater as one of the first and most brilliant performers of vocal roles in operas and operettas, which were staged on Ukrainian stages in the 1870s and 1880s.

Mykola Sadovsky (real name Tobilevich; 1856-1933) was a Ukrainian actor, director, and public figure. From 1881 he participated in professional theater in the troupes of G. Ashkarenko, Marko Kropivnitsky, and Mykhailo Staritsky, and in 1888 he organized his own troupe. In 1898 Sadovsky’s troupe united with the “Society of Russian-Malorussian Artists” of the Tobilevich brothers (I. Karpenko-Karyy and P. Saksagansky), then two years later (1900) they were joined by the ensemble of M. Kropivnitsky. In 1905, at the invitation from Halychyna, Sadovsky headed the theater “The Rus’ Conversation” in Lviv, which (together with M. Zankovetska) contributed to a significant rise of theater culture in Western Ukraine. Returning to Kyiv, Sadovsky founded the first Ukrainian stationary theater, which began its work in 1906 in Poltava, and then operated until 1919 in Kyiv.

M. Sadovsky was a talented film and theater actor, was exceptionally plastic, simple, deep, sincere, although quite characteristic. He became famous in heroic-historical (Bogdan Khmelnytsky in the play of the same name by M. Staritsky; Savva Chaly of I. Karpenko-

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Karyy; Hetman Doroshenko of L. Staritskaya-Cherniakhovskaya) and heroic and everyday life (Dmitry in “Not Fated” by M. Staritsky, Afanasiy in “Burlaka” by I. Karpenko-Karyy) repertoire; on the Ukrainian stage he was the first Commander (“The Stone Master” by Lesya Ukrainka) and Gorodnichiy (“The Inspector” by M. Gogol); in addition, he performed in the opera repertoire and became famous as a performer of Ukrainian folk songs. As a theater director Sadovsky brought up a whole pleiad of Ukrainian actors, giving them great freedom in creating the characters.

Panas Saksahansky (real name Tobilevich; 1859-1940) was an outstanding Ukrainian actor, director, playwright and teacher of the Marko Kropivnitsky school, one of the coryphaei of Ukrainian domestic theater. In his stage name Saksahansky immortalized the birthplace of his mother Evdokia – she came from the town of Saksahan (now a village in Kamyansky district of Dnipropetrovsk region). He began his stage activity in Yelisavetgrad in the amateur circle under the direction of Marko Kropivnitsky. He participated in Ukrainian performances of Chernyshov’s troupe. He began his professional creative life in 1883 on the stage of the Mykolaiv Theater under the direction of Marko Kropivnitsky and Mykhailo Staritsky, performing the role of Vozny in “Natalka Poltavka.” From 1885 – a member of Marko Kropivnitsky’s troupe, from 1888 - participated in the troupe of his brother Mykola Sadovsky, in 1890-1898 and 1905-1909 headed the “Society of Russian-Malorussian Artists.”

A new period in the history of Ukrainian national theater began in 1917, when the Young Theater (since 1922 – Artistic Association “Berezil,” in 1926 transferred to Kharkov) of Les’ Kurbas (1887-1937) and the State Drama Theater named after Ivan Franko (founded in Vinnytsia in 1920, now – the National Academic Drama Theater named after Ivan Franko) appeared in Kyiv. During this period, a pleiad of talented actors appeared on the theater stage: Amvroosiy Buchma, Maryan Krushelnitsky, Valentina Chistyakova, Les Serdyuk, Natalia Uzhviy, Ivan Marianenko and others.

The best achievements and artistic discoveries of Ukrainian classical theater are very brightly and creatively continued in the modern Ukrainian theatrical art. Today, the play “Matchmaking in Goncharivka” successfully gathers the audience in the National Drama Theater named after Maria Zankovetska in Lviv. In the title role of Stets’ko is a modern idol of theatergoers – Vasyl Korzhuk, the hero of the Ukrainian War of Liberation, who after a year and a half at the frontlines returned to his native theater and continues the traditions of Ukrainian classical theater.