

Billing, Christian M.; Drábek, Pavel

Introduction: the significance of scenography in a Czech context

Theatralia. 2011, vol. 14, iss. 1, pp. 9-23

ISBN 978-80-210-5571-1

ISSN 1803-845X (print); ISSN 2336-4548 (online)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/115552>

Access Date: 01. 12. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

Christian M. Billing
and Pavel Drábek



Introduction: The Significance of Scenography in a Czech Context

This special issue of *Theatralia/Yorick* is an exciting new historical and theoretical study of the significance of Czech Stage Art and Stage Design – both diachronically and as an investigation of synchronic practices specific to a number of key historical periods, individual artists and important theoreticians. The essays in this volume include several studies of discrete historical phenomena: medieval stage practice and its scenographic elements (Petr Uličný and Kateřina Vršecká); the costuming and scenic practices of central European Baroque theatres (Jana Spáčilová and Sylva Marková); the scenographic legacy of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Czech family marionette theatres (Jaroslav Blecha); the invention and early performance programmes of the *Laterna Magika* of Josef Svoboda and Alfréd Radok (Eva Stehlíková); and a study examining the radical disruption of (and experimentation with) stage space undertaken in Moravian and Silesian theatre from 1960 to 1989 (Tatjana Lazorčáková). Other essays focus in detail on selected aspects of the work of important (but sometimes overlooked) Czech practitioners: the ballet scenography of František Zelenka (Lada Bartošová); the scenic designs of Karel Zmrzlý (Lucie Pelikánová); and the paintings and set designs of Jaroslav Malina (Joseph E. Brandesky). Our special issue also contains two important studies evaluating Czech articulations of the significance of scenography as a discrete sub-discipline of theoretical inquiry within the wider field of Theatre

and Performance Studies: an account of the project of the Czech *Scenographic Encyclopaedia* and the series of journal issues it advanced – the *Prolegomena* (Šárka Havlíčková Kysová); and an evaluation of early Czech contributions to the theorisation of scenography (Barbora Příhodová). Finally, there are two important appendices: one giving a detailed account of the extensive Czech collections held in the Theatre Research Institute of Ohio State University (Nena Couch); and a second providing a detailed explanation of the creative design process that led to a recent Czech production at the *Národní divadlo v Brně* (National Theatre, Brno) of *Výlet pana Broučka do Měsíce* (The Excursion of Mr Brouček to the Moon) by Leoš Janáček (Pamela Howard).

It is the opinion of both the editors of and the contributors to this volume that scenography is one of the most vital aspects of theatre – for it is in the interaction of the combined practical and aesthetic disciplines that this term both defines and contains that the essential *urstoff* of theatrical presentation lies. Apart from acting, it is scenography, with all its multi-valent plasticity, that separates live performance (in the here and now, in front of participating audiences) from the solitariness and stasis of the literary text (consumed in isolation and created in the mind's eye of an individual imagination). Increasingly therefore, the topics of scenic design and stage art (considered in detail in this volume) have become the central components of the academic discipline of Theatre and Performance Studies. Recent scholarship considering the interactive visual and spatial aspects of performance has allowed scholars of our own historical period to differentiate their understanding of theatre as a plural art-form from the more historically dominant (but certainly less sophisticated) literary, art-historical and musicological studies of play-texts, musical scores, librettos, and theatrical decorations that have habitually but unhelpfully considered individual elements of theatre in isolation from each other. It is our belief (and it has been a guiding principle of this volume) that the constitutive elements of performance need to be considered collectively, as part of a living visual, spatial, sonic and temporal whole. With such a perspective in mind, each essay in this volume not only offers analysis of selected material elements of production, but also demonstrates the ways in which such scenographic components of performance work together to generate, uphold, problematise, or undermine specific readings of particular play- or performance-texts (both dramatic and musical). We therefore urge readers to consider the proposition that it is always in the interaction between performed texts and the scenographic elements of the theatrical event in which they are embedded that cultural and aesthetic understandings of the dramatic and musical canon are formed during any given historical period, or social context.

INTRODUCTION

We are fortunate in publication of this special issue in that funds have been made available to us that have enabled the reproduction of over a hundred high-resolution images, the majority in colour. There is a lot to be said for measured ocular interrogation; and simply looking at the range of information communicated in the striking visualisations presented in this volume (information of a pragmatic, theatre-technical, material, stylistic, aesthetic and emotional nature) means that it soon becomes clear to the ‘reader’ of such images that that which is communicated visually in the theatre (i.e. that which involves ocular recognition and interpretive work by the biological retina of a real human eye working *in conjunction with* the cerebral mind’s eye of the same human subject’s interpretative imagination) holds at least as central a place in the construction of meaning as can any printed text, recited, played or sung passage – or indeed any explanatory literary-critical, theatre-historical or musicological discourse. Oftentimes, the power of the visual is just that much greater. We urge you to enjoy *looking*.

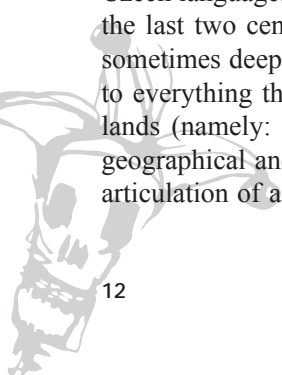
The Scenography Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research at the twelfth annual IFTR Congress in Moscow (1994) defined scenography as: ‘that discipline of theatre arts which includes all non-human elements of theatrical presentation, including sound.’ Such a bold definition is useful to our present project because it outlines an understanding of scenographic practice as a combination of numerous theatre-practical arts that includes: theatre architecture (both stage and house), lighting (natural or artificial), costume, make-up, settings and stage properties, as well as diegetically and/or extra-diegetically produced music and/or sound effects. It is precisely such combined elements of performance that are presented, contextualised and interrogated by contributors to this volume. The IFTR definition is moreover particularly helpful to our current project because, by deliberately side-lining acting (and any conception of the performer as the key biomechanical vehicle through which the words of an authorial play-text are communicated directly from writers to audiences), the concept of scenography evoked suggests a more holistic approach to the analysis of theatre making and, accordingly, acknowledges a wider semantic field of representation than that in which the spoken word (as a ghostly avatar of authoritative literary intention) is always given absolute priority.

As a conclusive definition, however, the IFTR statement is also slightly problematic in that it seeks (artificially in our opinion) to separate that which is ‘human’ in theatrical performance from that which is ‘non-human’. Accordingly, the creative tension instanced through the interplay of people, costumes, settings and theatrical space (the very stuff of performed drama for most theatre professionals

and audiences) gets somewhat lost. Those processes of engagement that lead to what is currently a buzz term in the discipline of Theatre Studies: ‘the liveness of the event’ can only be produced when living technicians and performers collide (sometimes literally) with the inanimate paraphernalia of production before another set of equally vital human entities: an audience. It would most certainly not be right for us to separate out the *Es-Ka* cycles (scenographic elements) appearing on stage in Pamela Howard’s 2010 production of *Výlet pana Broučka do Měsíce* from the actors (human elements) who rode them in order to create the circular visual ‘Waltz’ that dominated the opera’s great crowd scenes – and this is precisely because the stripping away of artifice relating to how a musical metaphor of this sort is made live (by humans) in theatres is in many ways the performative act that creates the theatrical valence of such a moment. Seeing a rendering or a maquette of this scene is nice, or a series of production photographs, or working drawings that demonstrate the mechanics of turning a 1920s tandem into the winged horse Pegasus, but no such document is a substitute for the primordially rooted *viscerality* of actually being in the theatre nightly; watching, hearing and feeling when such moments happen. In acknowledgement of the inextricable relationship between human experience and theatrical form, the essays in this volume frequently attempt to put humans back into the scenographic picture: as audience members, as performers (who wear particular costumes, or interact with particular stage properties and scenic items), as designers working in particular artistic, social and political contexts, or as technicians whose job it is to deploy new technology creatively to artistic effect. Several articles in this collection also speak to the profound sense of humanity that is often at stake in our very motivations for making theatre – because in a Czech context, such activity has historically not always been undertaken in an environment that has allowed for absolute political, ideological or religious freedom.

The Czech Context

The notion of ‘Czech’ theatre in this volume is not limited simply to theatre in the Czech language. Linguistic or ethnic purism has been a political constraint during the last two centuries that has resulted in a number of pitiful, embarrassing and sometimes deeply tragic consequences. In this journal issue, ‘Czech’ rather refers to everything that has taken place in the region historically known as the Czech lands (namely: Bohemia, Moravia and southern parts of Silesia). Such a broad geographical and cultural understanding of the word ‘Czech’ is necessary for the articulation of a more complex vision of stage art and scenography in the region.



INTRODUCTION

This is especially the case with performances that took place during the earlier periods discussed in this volume (the Middle Ages and the Baroque), as well as with any phenomenon that might be conceived of as trans- or inter-national – such as the family marionette theatres discussed by Jaroslav Blecha or, indeed, the more recent international theatre collaborations of Czech scenographers and theatre artists working abroad, or vice versa (such as Jaroslav Malina, Joseph Svoboda, or Pamela Howard).

In a sense, the complexity of the history of the Czech lands manifests itself in its theatre – especially given the fact that theatre was itself a formative aspect of the creation of Czech society. Since the eighteenth century, for any continental European society to have a theatre of its own was in a way to be creator of a social and political world. It was thus an ambition linked to many national, regional and urban desires for emancipation to have a producing theatre house at their centre (as recent research by Jiří Štefanides, Margita Havlíčková and Sylva Pracná has shown – see *Theatralia* issue 1, 2010). Onstage ‘worlds’ were accordingly not simply fictive locations for fanciful stories, but rather they constituted crucial forces deployed in the deliberate formulation of regional and national conceptions of everyday life, as well as articulations of personal and collective identity. In a quasi-Baroque sense, theatre has been referred to proverbially as ‘the boards that signify the world’. It is in such a cultural milieu, with theatre so central to the artistic, cultural, intellectual and political mind-set of the Czech people, that the role of the scenographer as the *demiurge* of the onstage world has come to hold its prestigious position amongst the theatrical professions.

Articles in this Volume

This special issue begins with a fascinating account by Petr Uličný of the use of portable representations of Christ in medieval religious festival performances, entitled: ‘Christ in Motion: Portable Objects and Scenographic Environments in the Liturgy of Medieval Bohemia.’ Based on significant archival research and detailed study of liturgical and religious-theatrical artefacts held in a number of museum and church sites across the Czech Republic, Uličný considers the historical development of carved wooden Christ figures in Easter-season liturgical drama during the Middle Ages. The author derives his interpretation of performed events from a combination of two- and three-dimensional visual records, surviving rubrics and other Latin-language documentation, in order to argue that, as the period progressed, the demands placed on carved figures of the Saviour became

increasingly complex. This fact, he asserts, led to increasing physical articulation of the Christ figure (making it more and more puppet-like) whilst also calling for its deployment in a variety of different (and increasingly complex) scenographic environments. Uličný considers the pulling of Christ on a donkey (in Palm Sunday processions), the complex arrangements for parading a crucified Christ on the cross, the removal of the body and its holding by Mary in versions of the *Pietà*, the placing of Christ's corpse in the Holy Sepulchre, and the staging of its Resurrection (all taking place over Easter). In each instance, Uličný uncovers an increasing level of theatricality in both the nature of the performance undertaken and in the stage properties it required. Finally, Uličný also considers the theatrical mechanics of hauling aloft statues of Christ into vaulted church ceilings during celebrations of the Ascension.

In a second article dealing with the medieval period, Kateřina Vršecká looks: 'Towards a way of Reading Scenic Space in Dramatic Texts of the Czech Middle Ages.' In this study, Vršecká considers theoretical formulations of theatrical space (both performative and dramatic) before proceeding to outline some of the methodological problems that pertain in 'decoding' individual performances of particular liturgical and para-liturgical dramas in known (but not necessarily extant) architectural environments. Vršecká's study is an intriguing combination of theoretical articulations of performance space and readings of medieval dramatic texts and their rubrics. The approach leads to some quite concrete formulations concerning the layout and use of space in a number of important Czech religious performance texts from the medieval period, including the *The Play of Merry* [sic] *Magdalene* and several dramas of the *Visitatio sepulchri* type.

The following two articles in this collection deal with Baroque staging in Czech territories. Jana Spáčilová considers: 'Libretto as a Source of Baroque Scenography in the Czech Lands', and Sylva Marková investigates the 'Costume Collections of the Schwarzenberg Court Theatre at Český Krumlov Castle.' Spáčilová's article is stunning for its methodological insight and outlines a key new approach in the study of Baroque scenery. The author accounts briefly for the three conventional sources for the study of Baroque scenography: (i) visual documents (stage designs, theatre plans, period illustrations of specific productions); (ii) written documents (inventories, book accounts); and (iii) the surviving material fabric of extant theatres; before proceeding to argue convincingly for a fourth: the opera libretto. Combining analysis of the descriptive texts in operatic librettos from the period with a variety of surviving visual and textual resources from a number of significant Bohemian and Moravian sites, Spáčilová propounds a more sophisticated methodological

INTRODUCTION

approach to our conception of the scenic environments in which eighteenth century opera took place. Throughout her study, Spáčilová's approach is informed by visual and textual scholarship, as well as a significant amount of practice-based research through the author's own experience of staging operas at the Court Theatre of Český Krumlov Castle (one of the best preserved and most intimate Baroque theatre sites in the world). Spáčilová's innovative methodology imaginatively coincides with recent scholarship in nineteenth-century Czech scenography as pioneered by Bořivoj Srba in his book *V zahradách Thespidových* (In Thespis' Garden, 2009) – a volume reviewed by Eva Stehlíková in the last section of this volume.

In her study of: 'Costume Collections of the Schwarzenberg Court Theatre at Český Krumlov Castle', Sylva Marková limits her study to a single site, in whose documentary and physical costume resources the author explores one of the most significant surviving collections of original Baroque stage costuming in the world. Marková's study shifts conventional focus through one hundred and eighty degrees in order to ask not which costumes might have been used for texts known to have been performed at a particular venue, but rather what can one deduce about the repertoire of a particular theatre given the evidence of its costumes and costume inventory books? Deploying knowledge gleaned from a number of years both working with and cataloguing the collection at Český Krumlov, Marková analyses a number of specific play-texts and generic theatre types (including the German-language-adapted *Commedia dell'Arte*) in order to connect surviving or recorded costumes to known character types and dramaturgical genres. The result is a fascinating, highly detailed analysis of possible costumes used in one known-to-have-been-staged production of *The Strange Qualities of Love, and Old Age Tricked*.

With the work of Jaroslav Blecha, analysis moves forward into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Blecha (an undisputed world authority on Czech Marionette Theatre) takes as his subject a hitherto underexplored phenomenon: 'The History and Scenographic Influence of Czech Family Marionette Theatres'. Here, the author outlines an area of theatrical activity that, although well known in the collective memory of the Czech Republic, is not much talked about elsewhere. During the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries virtually every Czech family owned its own small-scale (table-top) marionette theatre, and Blecha not only outlines in his study the development of this phenomenon in cultural and technical terms, he also suggests the ways in which such an intimate and universally known style of theatre helped to develop national traditions of scenographic representation in larger scale professional marionette theatres and beyond – even into professional theatres using live human actors. Drawing on

a number of published collections of décor (from the major series of decorative settings published in central Europe and elsewhere during the period in question), Blecha argues for a re-positioning of the tradition of Czech family marionette theatre more centrally within our understanding not just of puppetry, but also of the development of scenography as a practised art-form in the twentieth century.

In her article: ‘The National Theatre Ballets of František Zelenka’, Lada Bartošová attempts to reinstate the reputation of one of the foremost theatrical designers of the inter-war European Avant-garde. Zelenka was a key contributor to the development of the Czech Dadaist school of ‘Poetism’. He also worked alongside key theatre directors in Czech productions that explored, modified and worked with the significant theatrical energies explosively attendant upon the invention of cinema as an art form, and the concomitant rejection of stage Realism and Naturalism in favour of more radical theatrical forms and genres. Bartošová focuses her recuperative study on a less-well-known aspect of Zelenka’s output: his ballets. Through detailed analysis of costume and scenic designs for three major productions at the National Theatre in Prague: *Skleněná panna* (The Glass Virgin); *Fagot a flétna* (The Bassoon and the Flute); and *Uspavač* (The Sandman), the author outlines in very humanistic manner the ways in which Zelenka’s designs moved from an early sense of Russian-inspired Constructivism towards scenographic features more characteristic of a certain Czech irony and symbolism. In all of Zelenka’s stage designs there is a sense of freedom and humour as well as a fine spirit of optimism and hope; and Bartošová’s article becomes all the more poignant when she provides an account of Zelenka’s transportation, at the instigation of invading Nazi forces, to the Jewish Ghetto of Terezín and of his eventual death on a forced march evacuating the Auschwitz concentration camp towards the end of the Second World War.

Next, an article by Eva Stehlíková presents to readers: ‘The *Laterna Magika* of Josef Svoboda and Alfréd Radok’. The *Laterna Magika*, in its location in the *Nová scéna* behind the National Theatre in Prague is one of the best known theatrical landmarks of the world; but Stehlíková’s article deals not with this on-going institution, nor the theatre building in which it is today located, but rather with the development and early performance programmes of the *Laterna Magika* as a theatrical form from its first conception as an artistic collaboration between Josef Svoboda (1920-2002) and the film and theatre director Alfréd Radok (1914-1976). Stehlíková’s account defines the theatre form these key Czech artists developed as: ‘an example of a very successful attempt to realise poly-scenicness of the most sophisticated type’ (i.e. one in which complex interactions take place between live

INTRODUCTION

actors onstage and figures deployed on a film screen). The article provides a detailed account of the production processes and dramatic and scenographic content that led to (and was contained in) the first programme of the *Laterna Magika* at *Expo 58* (in Brussels). Subsequently, Stehliková describes and analyses the materials of the second (banned) programme of 1960, together with its political context. The article presents important new information regarding *The Opening of the Wells* and, in an astute analysis of that production, the author considers the importance of the early years of the *Laterna Magika* (during the period in which Radok was still involved) from political as well as theatre-historical and techno-aesthetic perspectives.

Lucie Pelikánová's article: 'The Scenic Designs of Karel Zmrzlý' provides an analysis of this important Moravian designer of the 1970s and 1980s, alongside a close reading of a number of his more famous operatic and theatrical designs. Zmrzlý's most important scenographic work was developed in collaboration with the director Milan Pásek at the State Theatre in Brno, as well as at the Mrštík Brothers Theatre in the same city. For Pásek's productions in Brno, Zmrzlý created thirty-six designs during the period from 1967 to 1989. Pelikánová accounts for the most important of these before undertaking detailed analysis of his drawings for the plays and operas: *Lulu* (A. Berg); *The Nose* (D. Shostakovich); *Dead Souls* (R. K. Shchedrin); *Halka* (S. Moniuszko); *Don Carlos* (F. Schiller); *Frank the Fifth* (F. Dürrenmatt); *Pélleas and Mélisande* (C. Debussy) and *Bluebeard's Castle* (B. Bartók). Pelikánová is an astute reader of scenic artists' renderings, and her analysis of Zmrzlý's use of painterly media (together with their effect on final scenographic realisations) is astute. The author frequently pays attention to the interplay of light and shade in the renderings, to airbrush and sable-brush techniques, as well as to the deployment by Zmrzlý of directional light – which subtle design practice influenced the work of lighting designers working on any of his sets.

The political inflections attendant upon Czechoslovakia's status as a sometimes-rebellious member of the Eastern Bloc and the delicate line trod between state authority and theatrical radicalism is next explored in Tatjana Lazorčáková's article: 'The Function of Irregular Space in Moravian and Silesian Theatre, 1960-1989: Experiment, Protest, Alternative'. Lazorčáková's piece is a part of a wider research project hosted by the Faculty of Arts, Palacký University entitled: *Moravia and the World: Art in the Open Multi-cultural Space* (MSM 618959225). This project is based on an extensive collection of materials processed for the *TACE Project* (*Theatre in Experimental Space / Experiments with Theatre Space*, 2009). Lazorčáková's article attempts to archive and interpret some of the theatrical activity of the oppositional Avant-garde during the years of reactionary repression

following the suppression of political reforms enacted immediately before and during the Prague Spring of 1968. Dealing primarily with theatre in Moravia and Silesia during the 1970s and 1980s, Lazorčáková considers the theatrical and social implications of the appropriations, subversions, reversions and inhabitations of space undertaken by experimental theatre companies such as: *Divadlo Husa na provázku* (Theatre Goose on a String); *HaDivadlo* (Ha! Theatre); *Studio Ypsilon*; *Divadlo na okraji* (Theatre on the Fringe); *Drak* (The Dragon) and *Naivní divadlo Liberec* (The Naïve Theatre of Liberec). In a highly competent historical account, Lazorčáková demonstrates some of the many ways in which alternative Czech theatre of this period pre-empted the interrogations of space that have become typical of later movements such as site-specific theatre, installation-based performance, and politically inflected street theatre and carnival.

With Joseph E. Brandesky's contribution: 'Permanent Interaction: Reflections on the Paintings and Designs of Jaroslav Malina', we return to the work of an artist central to the history of twentieth century Czech (and world) stage design. Due to the significant global attention paid to his contemporary and compatriot, Josef Svoboda, Jaroslav Malina's light has not burned as brightly as it might otherwise have done outside his homeland. As one of the foremost scholars of Czech theatre working in the United States of America, and as an organiser of numerous international exhibitions of Czech theatre arts, Joseph E. Brandesky seeks in his contribution to our volume to redress this imbalance. Building on the recent exhibition of Malina's painterly work in relation to his scenic design (that the author curated in 2008: *Jaroslav Malina: Paintings and Designs*), Professor Brandesky's article in this volume presents and analyses the relationship between numerous key paintings and stage designs undertaken by Malina from the 1970s to the present. With the critical eye of an art historian, as well as a significant scholar of scenography and stage art, Brandesky teases out the interrelation and symbiotic relationship between the two halves of this creative artist's output. The article presents artworks ranging from landscape through female nudes to symbolic and figurative works – but always the juxtaposition of such works against scenic renderings and sketches brings insight into the ways in which line, form, colour and texture create visual meaning in both artistic contexts.

The final two articles in the journal are theoretical in their intention: Šárka Havlíčková Kysová offers: 'A Journey into Theatrical Space: The Project of the *Scenographic Encyclopaedia* and its *Prolegomena*'; and Barbora Příhodová considers: '*The Specificity of Scenography: a Czech Contribution to the Theory of Scenography*'. Both articles were written as part of the research project:

INTRODUCTION

Czech Structuralist Thought on Theatre: Context and Potency (Český divadelní strukturalismus: souvislosti a potenciál; 2011-2015), which is financed with funds from GAČR (the Czech Grant Agency), no. P409/11/1082. Havlíčková Kysová's article presents an initiative that is probably little known outside the Czech Republic, but one that should be. The article outlines a project of the 1970s, driven largely by Miroslav Kouřil at the Theatre Research Institute in Prague, to create a *Scenographic Encyclopaedia* that would be a comprehensive treatise examining a variety of key topics relevant to Theatre Studies. The project built on (and significantly developed) the theoretical models offered by the Prague Semiotic School and sought to place the visual and presentational aspects of theatrical performance at the centre of theoretical formulations of dramatic art and theatrical product. Although the *Scenographic Encyclopaedia* was itself never realised, the project did lead to the publication of twenty issues of a journal dedicated to ironing out the theoretical issues relating to the eventual production of such a work: the *Prolegomena scénografické encyklopedie* (Preliminary Discussions Relating to the Scenographic Encyclopaedia). This important journal covered topics as diverse as theatrical semiotics and the use of Marxist theory as a fundamental mode of analysis of the theatrical event. The complete bibliography of the *Prolegomena* is being prepared and will be available at the website of the Department of Theatre Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University (<http://www.phil.muni.cz/kds>). Havlíčková Kysová's article here provides the key documentary and analytical introduction to that project.

Dealing with a theoretical understanding of the concept of scenography from a similar period of Czech thinking is Barbora Příhodová's article on the specificity of scenography as a technical term, and its development as a theoretical domain within the wider field of Theatre Studies. Příhodová presents to non-Czech readers for the first time what is probably the most elaborate theoretical treatise dealing with stage space and the theatrical event written during the latter half of the twentieth century: *The Specificity of Scenography* by Vladimír Jindra (1920-1979). Jindra was one of the leading Czech scholars of Theatre Studies and the originator of the concept of the Prague Quadrennial. His theoretical work deals primarily with scenography. In her study, Příhodová considers the first and the most important problem of understanding the visual aspects of performance: their very *essence*; and she considers the ways in which Jindra and the other key theoreticians of this period (particularly Růžena Vacková) focused on the visual elements of performance in order emphatically to testify to the inextricability of the ocular spectrum from the wider range of phenomena that constitute the theatrical register. Příhodová argues

that as well as being fiercely theoretical, Jindra's writings also reflect practical Czech scenography of the 1950s and 1960s (as it was represented by 'Svobodian-Trösterian' artistic practice); thus Příhodová argues that there emerged a productive dialogue between theatrical theory and artistic output during these years – a rare correlation of philosophy and practice that led to the emergence of both Czech scholarship and Czech stage practice as global forerunners in their respective fields. Dealing with a complex set of theoretical texts, Příhodová negotiates a clear throughline for her readers in an investigation that ultimately concludes with the observation that: 'what really makes the differences and pushes forward the development of the visual elements of theatrical performance is the relationship between these and other elements of theatrical representation'. It is from this point of view, Příhodová argues, that the twentieth century witnessed the gradual fusion of all elements of visual theatrical representation into a rather complicated total synthesis, as is represented in design terms by the work of Svoboda and others.

The review section of this volume evaluates recent works on Czech scenography. These include two film documentaries: Hans Van Severter's *Master of Dramatic Space* on Jaroslav Malina (reviewed by Joseph E. Brandesky), and Jakub Hejna's *Divadlo Svoboda* on the work of Josef Svoboda (a film by the scenographer's grandson, reviewed by Eva Stehlíková). Book reviews include assessments of a recent *magnum opus* by Bořivoj Srba, a leading Czech theatre historian, who in 2009 published the conclusions of nearly three decades of research dedicated to nineteenth century Czech scenography on the leading Prague stages (reviewed by Eva Stehlíková), and an appreciation of *Josef Svoboda: Scenographer* – Helena Albertová's monograph dedicated to the work of the world's leading figure in twentieth century stage design (reviewed by Christian M. Billing). Also in this section, Jitka Matulová discusses Jiří Valenta's 2010 edition of a volume that categorises, presents and analyses painted theatre curtains from the Czech lands – itself a valuable contribution to the knowledge of Czech theatre history.

Finally there are two highly insightful appendices to this special issue: Nena Couch details to readers an invaluable resource for the study of Czech theatre design: the 'Czech Collections of the Theatre Research Institute at Ohio State University'; and Pamela Howard relates the process that led to her: 'Staging Brouček: [in] The World Premiere of *Výlet pana Broučka do Měsíce* by Leoš Janáček'. Couch's contribution outlines the historical reasons behind the development of a significant collection of Czech theatre holdings at Ohio State University and enumerates some of their contents; in particular, some key designs by twentieth century Czech designers are discussed, as well as the contents of the Jarka M. Burian collection (which significant resource was gifted to the University by the reputed scholar himself).

INTRODUCTION



Pamela Howard. Stage Design for the Prologue of *Výlet pana Broučka do Měsíce* (The Excursion of Mr Brouček to the Moon) by Leoš Janáček (1917). The Chorus of Street Cleaners and Svatopluk Čech. National Theatre, Brno, 2010.

Those who are unfamiliar with these important resources will be surprised by the extent of the holdings; all scholars of Czech theatre will be heartened by the open invitation to consult the collection with which Professor Crouch concludes her piece.

Our volume fittingly concludes with an insightful personal account of the design process and artistic journey that Pamela Howard embarked upon when called to design and direct the World Premiere of *Výlet pana Broučka do Měsíce* (The Excursion of Mr. Brouček to the Moon) by Leoš Janáček (1917). This was the first production of the opera to include the hitherto-unperformed Epilogue in an original creation by Pamela Howard for *Národní divadlo v Brně* (National Theatre, Brno) as part of the 2010 *Janáček versus Expressionism* festival. Howard's account is a treasure trove of information relating to the oftentimes-serendipitous nature of the design process. She relates the ways in which ideas and images accrue over time, and the systems of synthesis through which they are put in order to come up with a pragmatic and workable end product. In the case of *Brouček*, this was one that had at the same time to have its own historically and visually rooted identity in depictions

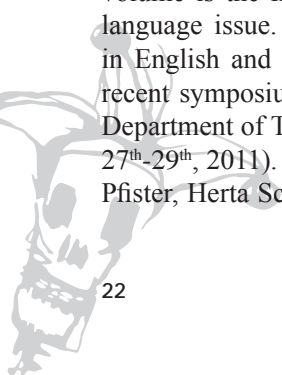
of inter-war Prague (with its characteristic architectures and iconographies) as well as its own idiosyncratic sense of theatricality. It is appropriate that a collection of essays and evaluations that has placed so much emphasis on the practicalities of the scenographic imaginary should conclude with the words of a major practitioner reflecting on her own work – applied to a leading Czech composer’s opus, and in a Czech context.

Conclusion

We hope that readers of this volume will concur, with us, that scenography is a complex and profoundly significant discipline precisely because it is so multifaceted (including as it does a variety of visual and aural elements); and also because it is dependent on the carefully managed interrelation of humans, performed text(s), objects (manipulated in space and time) and the controlled deployment of lighting (natural or artificial) as well as complex soundscapes. As a result of these multifaceted interrelations, design, scenography and the visual and aural elements of performance are in our opinion of fundamental importance in the making of theatrical meaning (and thus are central to the creation of performative and textual authority). They certainly have at least as much influence over our understanding of theatre as the biomechanical production of spoken or sung text by actors – or the literary and musical scores from which such professionals work.

Ultimately, we hope that readers of this special issue will agree that scenography has everything to do with what *Theatre* means in any geographical place and at any given moment of cultural history. We also very much hope that readers both enjoy and benefit from the significant range of materials so adroitly presented here by fourteen different authors with whom it has been a pleasure to collaborate over the last several months and years. It is certainly true to say that in a Czech cultural context, each of the elements accounted for is extraordinarily beautiful and particularly rich.

Theatralia is a scholarly review of current Czech thinking on theatre. The current volume is the first in the third year of a new series, and also the first English-language issue. The ambition of the editorial team is to issue further volumes in English and other international languages, such as the proceedings from the recent symposium considering the: *Prague Semiotic Stage Revisited* (held at the Department of Theatre Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno, June 27th-29th, 2011). That conference included presentations by Patrice Pavis, Manfred Pfister, Herta Schmid, Marco de Marinis, Fernando de Toro and other scholars of



international reputation. A collection of their presentations (dedicated to the heritage and theoretical potential of Prague School Theatre Theory) will appear in 2012. A monothematic volume also to appear in English in this series is one based on the ground-breaking PhD thesis of Šárka Havlíčková Kysová (a study that deals with the *Hastabhinaya: Hand Gestures in the Traditional Theatre Art of India*). Such efforts at international exchange and collaboration are intended to establish and foster active contact between Czech Theatre Studies and scholars abroad. They are equally attempts to pay a certain debt that the Humanities in the Czech Republic owe the international scholarly community as a result of many long decades of isolation.

We believe that this volume strongly testifies to the international impact of Czech theatre practice and Czech critical thinking about theatre, and that it will help to open further pathways of intellectual as well as artistic and cultural exchange. Above all, we hope that you enjoy it.

Christian M. Billing (Hull)
Pavel Drábek (Brno)
August 2011

