

The Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University



Art Sciences, Media, and Management Faculty

Doctoral program - Art studies - Theater studies "World theater - epochs, stages, aspects"

Ana Mirianashvili

The role of Theatre for Young Audiences in the  
twentieth and twenty-first centuries; Repertory problems

Doctoral study for the Ph.D. Degree in Art studies

Abstract

Scientific Supervisors:

[Tamar Bokuchava] – Doctor of Arts, Professor

Maka (Marine) Vasadze - Doctor of Arts, Associate Professor

Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

2022

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### **The object of research and its relevance**

In the present research, we try to discuss and analyze the history, development, and contemporaneity of professional Theatres for children and youth, or Theatre for Young Audiences in several European countries (Sweden, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, etc.), the United States, the Soviet Union, and post-Soviet Russia, as well as in Georgia, also the repertoire politics and the role of these theaters in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Historically, children's theaters simultaneously emerged in Europe, the USA, and the Russia/Soviet Union in the first decade of the twentieth century, although they underwent very different stages of development, which are discussed in the corresponding chapters of the paper.

Today, we - the researchers and theatre makers ask ourselves many questions – what is the role of youth theatre today? Where is the line between art and education? Is it necessary to make special performances for educational purposes or a commercially profitable show? How did the country's current social, political, or economic changes affect the children's theater? Is theatre entertainment or education? How did theatres form their repertoire policy in various countries? What are the main problems in contemporary theatre for children and youth? What main changes have taken place in the repertoire of youth theaters over the last century, and what trends are we dealing with in the 21st century? - And many more. In this paper, I have tried to analyze the abovementioned issues in detail on the example of youth theaters in different countries.

Unfortunately, there is no proper research related to youth theater in Georgia, and this paper is one of the first steps in this direction. At this stage, we have no scientific research in Georgia, where we will see what effect theatrical art has on adolescents at a certain age, and to what extent it develops the child's psyche, critical and artistic thinking, and perception of life. We do not know what impact theater has on children and adolescents; there is no scientifically proven opinion that a child should or should not attend a theatrical performance for one reason or another. Also, we do not have thorough, professional scientific research specifically on the history of Georgian Children and Adult Audience Theater.

## **Research purpose and methods**

As there is no scientific literature on children's / adolescent theaters in Georgian yet, in the research process I have translated and analyzed the theoretical works of foreign researchers and directors; I mostly relied on video recordings of performances, video and written interviews, a theoretical thesis of children theater researchers and practitioners, archival materials posted on the websites of specific children's theaters, etc. While working on the topic, I mainly used comparative and socio-cultural analysis, qualitative and inductive and deductive methods, and the principle of historicism.

The research process of European, American, Soviet, post-Soviet Russian, and Georgian youth theaters revealed several interesting factors, which are analyzed in detail in the corresponding chapters. The history and development of each theater discussed are individual and conditioned by the specific political, social, and economic situation and historical or artistic preconditions. In many developed countries, youth theater is the most important educational, social and artistic institution, however in some countries, on the contrary, the state doesn't pay big attention- in such cases the theaters are forced to work on commercially profitable projects, go for artistic compromises and thus hinder or stop the creative development. Despite the different historical, political, social, and economic circumstances, youth theaters worldwide have many things in common: lack of competent personnel, organizational difficulties, scarcity of dramaturgy and corresponding repertoire problems, financial and creative contradictions, and many more.

## **The structure**

In addition to the introduction and the final part, the thesis contains 5 main chapters and sub-chapters. Chapter 1, European children's theater: children's theater in Sweden - its emergence and the 1950s-60s of the twentieth century, the initial stage of the development of cultural policy in the country in the 70s, Susanne Osten, the founder of modern Swedish theater, the birth of Unga Klara theater, the acting troupe, the specifics of their work and repertoire policy; Some of Susanne Osten's landmark performances are also discussed: *Medea's Children*, *The Girl*, *Mother*, and *the Garbage*, *Babydrama*. In the first chapter, I also discuss the emergence and development of children's theater in the Netherlands; the work of one of the founders of the Belgian children's theater, Eva Ball, and the interesting history of the Berlin theatre "The Grips"; theater for the very young audiences in Europe in the twenty-first century (Italy, Poland, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Great Britain, and others).

In the second chapter of the paper, I discuss the youth theaters in the Soviet Union, the historical and social preconditions for the establishment of this type of theaters, the problems of artistic development, and the repertoire policy under the conditions of Soviet censorship. And in the third chapter, I try to analyze the Russian/Soviet theater for young audiences from the 90s to the present, as well as modern independent private youth theaters in Russia.

The fourth chapter touches on the history and contemporary model of American youth theater, which is radically different from European and Soviet/post-Soviet children's and adolescent theaters, to some extent it is separated from professional theater and belongs to more educational/social spheres. The fifth chapter of the paper is a research of the history and development of youth theaters in Georgia and consists of several sub-chapters: the first attempts to create a theater for children in Georgia, the birth of the youth theater, 1930-40s, the "rehabilitation" of the fairy tale as a genre in the Georgian theater for children and Russian theaters; from the 60s to the present, the twenty-first century, to the 2020s, Batumi Youth and Puppet Theater. In this chapter, I tried to analyze the different stages of development of Georgian youth theater from the point of view of repertory policy. In the research process, many problems were identified, which require separate, deeper research.

### **Summary**

Professional youth theaters emerged almost simultaneously - in the USA, Europe, and Russia, and later in the Soviet countries. It is significant that since the twentieth century, the concept of "adolescent/child audience" - a very important subgroup of the large theater audience - has been recognized in society worldwide; in different countries, society has recognized that a child/adolescent has a desire and need for aesthetic pleasure, art, and creativity; This kind of art should be created specifically for this subgroup, corresponding to its interests, intelligence, and educational level.

While analyzing the history and modern trends of the European youth theater, it was revealed that its development can be divided into two big stages: from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 60s, from the 60s to the modern times. From the 20s of the 20th century, performances intended for children were staged first by an amateur, and later by professional theater troupes; Mostly their repertoire consisted of adapted versions of children's literature or classic fairy tales. The 60s of the 20th century were a turning point for the development of European youth theater. It was at this time that protest demonstrations of left-wing students began in major European cities. It was not a protest caused by economic, social, or existential problems; The reasons were: the violation of the rights of working people,

children, and minorities, and feminism; The artists involved in the protest movement came out against the outdated creative approaches and the old artistic system, demanded an adequate and well-thought-out culture policy from the state.

The protest of the 1960s was a turning point for the development of culture in many European countries, including in terms of understanding and reforming youth theater in a new way. Work in this field became interesting for progressive-minded young creators, several independent theater troupes appeared, and theater "came out" from large halls and began to "move" toward its audience; Gradually, the subject of artistic search becomes a specific individual, an ordinary person, with his inner world, while in youth theater on the central place stands a child, his life, interests, surrounding world, rights, etc. The developed European society has concluded that minor citizens have the same rights as adults. This breakthrough happened at all levels - both political, social, and artistic levels.

The idea that the performance should correspond to contemporaneity and the child should share modern stories, unvarnished reality, sometimes with all the cruelty and ruthlessness, has been strengthened. The child - an individual, a self-sufficient person, with his life, rights, emotions, and feelings - became the center of creative research. For directors and playwrights, the true nature of children, their emotions and childish language, sincerity, unusual associations, and boundless imagination, a special attitude to play became a source of inspiration. If in the European youth theater of the 70s, relatively placard stories and improvisational style of work prevailed, in the '80s the repertoire was enriched with deeper and better-quality original plays. An interesting process began in the sphere of prose adaptation - playwrights and directors began to stage classic youth and adult literature, bringing up classical themes and texts, in this regard "Hamlet, The Little Prince of Denmark" (1985), "Iphigenia, the King's Daughter" by the "Teneteer" theater in the Netherlands is very interesting. " (1989), " Macbeth the Murderer " (1998), "Antigone" (1996), and others. In the same period in Sweden, Susanne Osten staged a performance based on Dostoevsky's "The Karamazov Brothers ", the children's tragedy "Medea's Children" and others; Eva Ball - one of the most important figures in the field of Belgian youth theater - begins her work in Belgium, etc. Over the decades, new forms emerged, boundaries between genres were erased, and dramaturgy and the list of adapted literature for youth theaters increased significantly. There were also dramatic and choreographic performances created specifically for very young audiences; Over time, youth choreography was separated from dramatic theater and now exists as a separate genre - youth choreography or choreo-drama.

It is interesting that the trends, which emerged in the 70s, deepened in the 10s of the twenty-first century and, at the same time, took a completely modern look, the main thing remained unchanged - the central figure in the European youth theater, the main subject of the creative search is still the child, his inner world, rights, interests, environment, family, etc. In the present work, these trends are discussed in more detail on the examples of the Swedish "Unga Klara", the German "Grips", the Belgian "Speeltheater/KOPERGIETERY", several Dutch theaters, and other European troupes.

Until the end of the 20th century, the Soviet Union stubbornly maintained the idea that the professional youth theater was a purely Marxist idea, which was implemented only after the 1917 revolution, and did not admit the similar experience of Europe and America. Youth theater researchers also denied that the emergence of youth theater was based on a kind of background in pre-revolutionary Russian art. The Soviet youth theater lived by this "belief" for 70 years, however, the theater for young audiences could not have been born without a certain creative foundation.

As well as in Western European countries, amateur theatrical performances were part of the educational program in Tsarist Russia since the seventeenth century. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, theater art was a kind of educational tool for poor people. In the big cities of Russia, performances for children were mainly performed by amateur groups; For the most part, this happened in educational institutions, gymnasiums, lyceums, or family salons; Non-professional, amateur actors or children and adults participated in the performances. Before the revolution, there was no professional youth theater in Russia.

Soviet Russia was the first country in the world where the newly established youth theater was fully financed by the state. In the 1920s, theaters for the youth were first opened in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and later in various Soviet republics. Back in the 1920s, Alexander Bryantsev and Nikolai Bakhtin in the St. Petersburg Youth Theater developed a theater structure that spread to all Soviet children's theaters. They divided the theater into creative and pedagogic parts and thereby emphatically separated children's and adult professional theaters from each other. Bakhtin's principles were derived from his idea of a "theatrically educated audience", and the axis of the concept was that children's theater should become the foundation of moral, aesthetic, and ethical education of adolescents. In the 1930s, Bakhtin was accused of bourgeois liberalism and apolitical methods. The concept of a "theatrically educated audience" was considered "elitist", as if all this was against the supreme goal of the party and prevented the formation of a classless society. As a result, Bakhtin's concept changed and became more acceptable and favorable for the party. Instead of the aesthetic upbringing of the next

generation, the emphasis was placed on the ideological education of adults, and this principle has not changed for decades. The conflict between the modern Soviet child and his parents, whose minds are poisoned by bourgeois beliefs; The life of a Soviet child in a school and a pioneer organization; on the life of pioneer leaders and pioneers; the harmfulness of religion and the necessity of atheism; October Revolution and Civil War; The achievements of the Bolshevik Party, the struggle of revolutionaries in capitalist countries, five-year plans and tasks, collectivization and others - this is an incomplete list of topics that should have been acceptable and interesting for the Soviet youth and teenage audience.

Children's fairy tales and detective literature were banned for some time, as it was believed that seeing detective stories on stage would lead teenagers to criminal behavior. Already at the end of the 1920s, censors considered fairy tales to be an anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist phenomenon since they evoked "mythological and religious feelings, belief in supernatural power and hindered the development of the child's materialistic thinking."<sup>1</sup> Kings and queens, princes and princesses, and heroes of fairy tales became class enemies.

In 1934, at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, the theory of "social realism" was approved, which became the official doctrine of all branches of art, including for almost all theaters of youth audiences in the republics of the Soviet Union. Parallel to the Stalinist repressions, two genres of literature were "rehabilitated" - classical literature and fairy tales, although they were understood from the standpoint of socialist realism. The staging of classical drama became permissible only in the established realistic manner, where there would be no avant-garde and experimental elements, and, in everything, the principles of the Marxist-Leninist ideology were strictly observed. The "rehabilitation" of the fairy tale was based on the absence of Soviet drama for children and teenagers. At the 1934 congress, the famous poet and dramatist Samuel Marshak urged everyone to create new fairy tales that reflected Soviet ideology. Partially thanks to this kind of trick, society accepted a new "Soviet fairy tale" based on old fairy tales, surrounded by violent modern values and ideas. From that time, the literary adaptation of folklore and fairy tales began, and Eugene Schwartz became one of the great masters of this genre. His most famous plays are: "The Dragon", "The Naked King", "Cinderella", "Red Riding Hood", "The Princess and the Pig", "The Ordinary Miracle", "The Snow Queen", "The Brave Soldier" and others.

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet E, *The Soviet youth theatre, Moscow, "Iskustvo", 1971, p. 14*



For decades, the children's theaters of Moscow and St. Petersburg dictated the repertory policy of the theaters of young audiences throughout the Soviet Union. Almost everything that was staged in these theaters was immediately translated into the languages of other Soviet Republics. First of all, this was because there was no drama for children, only fairy tales and classic children's literature were adapted, and works acceptable to modern Soviet ideology were permitted; Being in a completely closed country, the artists could not see anything behind the iron curtain, could not follow the current processes and modern trends in the field of world children's theater.

In the period of the so-called "Ottepel", the idea of raising the new generation in the communist and revolutionary spirit gradually casts many doubts throughout the Soviet Union, this was facilitated by the destruction of the cult of the "Great Leader" and the rehabilitation of the repressed in the 1930s. Along with staging modern and classical foreign plays, a new generation of directors boldly begins to understand classical literature in a new way. Like the European theater, the 1960s of the 20th century is a kind of turning point not only in the life of youth but also in the life of other dramatic theaters.

An interesting theater reform begins, which is carried out step by step by young directors: in 1956, the life of a new theater, "Sovremennik", begins with Viktor Rozov's play "Forever Alive", later, in 1964, Yuri Lyubimov opens the "Taganka Theater". The basis of this interesting process was largely determined by Anatoli Efros's creative searches of the 50s and 60s. During these years, he tries to carry out an interesting theatrical reform in the Central Children's Theater of Moscow, and later in the Moscow Drama Theater (Lenkom). Efros led the Moscow Central Children's Theater for 10 years, and it was during this period that he dramatically changed the repertoire policy; He began to understand the classics in a new way, also staged plays by Viktor Rozov, Sergei Mikhalkov, and other modern authors, and paid less attention to the traditional children's repertoire. It was no longer pure Youth Theater, on the contrary, under the leadership of Anatoly Efros, the Central Children's Theater turned into a Youth theater, and this trend partially spread to other youth theaters in the Soviet Union.

In the 1990s, the political and economic situation in the country changed dramatically, and because of this, the managers of the Theater of Young Audiences had to adapt their historical function to the new reality; the so-called period of "perestroika" almost killed the theaters of young audiences in all the republics of the former Soviet Union. The material crisis pushed theater toward its progress, reorganization, and, changes. Only those theaters that adapted the repertoire to audiences of all ages have survived, an example of this is even the Theater of Young Spectators in Moscow. Already in the 80s of the XX century, the theater

deviated from the creative and ideological course of the children's theater, and since then it has been an interesting creative laboratory under the leadership of Henrietta Yanovskaya and Kama Ginkas.

During the research, several interesting aspects were highlighted: state and independent theaters operating in the post-Soviet space are radically different from each other, the principal difference is both from a creative point of view and from a management point of view - independent, private theaters are more family-type creative troupes, while for the large state theaters, this intimacy is related to a kind of luxury, the strict age division of the repertoire, the balance of classical and modern literature, the subscription system, etc. is still a priority.

In the 10s and 20s of the 21st century, the concept of "family-type theater" is increasingly gaining popularity in large cities in Russia, where the audience is offered a performance that is equally interesting for both the child and other family members. It is significant that in the post-Soviet spaces, this approach became relevant only at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, while in the countries of Western Europe (Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, and others) this trend was still in the 70s-80s of the last century. The trend still develops more in the direction of both art forms and theatre management.

In addition to the obvious differences in the repertory policy and the financial part, there is also a fundamental difference in terms of attitude and approach to the audience - the state theaters continue to adhere to the principle when a parent takes a child to the theater, watches a play with him or buys a year-long season ticket, and entrusts the child's theatrical development to the school. In such a model, a parent or family member is a passive observer who is only responsible for solving financial issues and transportation, while independent troupes are increasingly trying to stage family-type, interactive performances, where both the elder and the younger will be actively involved in the process.

Unlike European and Soviet/post-Soviet theaters, youth theater in the USA has always been separated from professional theater and assigned to more educational and social fields. For decades, it was formed as a kind of "other field", "theatre and non-theatre" and was mainly aimed at inculcating certain behaviors in children, developing social skills, and was considered as "one of the ways of entertainment and education suitable for children."<sup>2</sup> This concept led to a kind of marginalization of the field - children's theater was not perceived by the audience and

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<sup>2</sup> Bedard Roger L., Negotiating Marginalization: TYA and the Schools, *Youth Theatre Journal*, 2003. p. 17

professionals as a serious, "real" art, and this stigma follows the US children's theater to this day.

Until the 60s of the 20th century, theater for children in the USA was mainly at the amateur level, not going beyond public and educational activities. The development of the professional youth theater was largely facilitated by the formation and development of the ASITEJ. However, the roots of the formation of this professional theater should be found in the beginnings of amateur theater.

According to American researchers, the formation of children's theater was determined by the country's social, ideological, cultural, and economic situation at the end of the 19th century. Several basic factors should be considered: the flow of immigrants to the USA, the formation of different settlements, and the establishment of educational systems focused on the needs of the child. In the process of the birth/development of the US children's theater, the pressure factor from society turned out to be important - its adult part categorically opposed the employment of children in professional theater and considered it a violation of their rights.

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a serious "progressive movement" began in the United States, which sought to protect American values and ideals of the middle class. The amateur theater troupes of this period, which were formed in the newly developed neighborhoods of various cities, mostly had an educational function: Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago (1889), Ellis Minnie Hertz's educational theater in New York (1903), Karamu House in Cleveland (1915) and "Junior League" founded by Mary Harriman in 1901 and others. Usually, these women belonged to a high social class, but they actively fought for the rights of immigrants and people from a low social class. For decades, children's theater was a non-professional, amateur, and mostly educational.

Between 1888 and 1920, children's shows were often staged on Broadway in New York, which were mainly commercial and correspondent more to the taste of parents. In his essay "Negotiating Marginalization, TYA and the Schools," American theater scholar Roger Bedard emphasizes that highly professionally staged and performed original children's productions are still a rarity in the United States.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, youth theater in the USA did not develop as a professional theater for children, where professional, adult actors participated in performances for children, but was formed in a completely different form and model - a theater troupe where amateur children, students or adult non-professionals are united; Often, such troupes operate in schools and universities and play the appropriate dramaturgy: plays for children and adults, as well as classical literature. Such a form and status of youth theater was

also conditioned by a kind of arrogant, frivolous attitude of professional ("senior") theater, which over the years became a certain stereotype.

In fact, in the USA, a different attitude towards children's theater was caused first of all by the historical conditions and ideological discourse, according to which the aesthetics of youth theater is reduced to the level of a school-educational course, theater for children is thought of as a nonserious, entertainment spectacle. One of the reasons was that no relevant literature was created for years.

The 1960s-80s are a period of creative progress in the development of American youth theater. At that time, playwrights began to search for new forms and artistic language, which should be understandable and interesting for modern children, but these creative searches were still opposed by traditional commercial shows, musicals re-sung a thousand times, and the repertoire, acceptable to parents and teachers.

Today, several hundred professional troupes carry out performances for children and adults. Usually, the most often performed plays are fairy tales, adapted prose, classic children's drama, and musicals: "The Beast and Beauty", "The Legend of King Arthur", "Aesop's Fables", "Little Women", "The Hobbit", "Cinderella", "Rumpelstiltskin", "The Sound of Music", "Mowgli", "Aladdin", "The Wizard of Oz" and others. According to the data for 2018-19,<sup>3</sup> a third of professional theaters do not have their own space and they organize tours throughout the country almost throughout the year. Those troupes have their building and stage, work specifically with specific schools, and on weekends and evenings the performances are held at the open box office.

Another factor hindering the creative development of American children's theater is that the performance is perceived as a commercial product, a product for sale. Every year theater troupes offer schools performances that fit into their educational program, thus maintaining long-term contracts with schools and being financially secure, so that they do not lose the relevant subsidies. The majority of professional groups depend on the income received from schools, therefore they are obliged to conform to the ideology and clichés acceptable to the school.

Since the 90s, the Broadway stage has been filled with musicals based on Disney animations. Children's theaters in Nashville, Dallas, Arizona, and Seattle tried to introduce new trends, however, even in the first decade of the 21st century, commercial interests overshadow creativity and prevent the development of youth theater in other directions. A children's

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tyausa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CSS-Exploring-the-Landscape-of-TYA-FINAL.pdf>

performance is still a one-time entertainment show for the public, an indulgent spectacle that has nothing to do with serious art.

Mark Twain considered youth theater one of the twentieth century's greatest achievements - primarily, he meant the educational and social impact of children's theater in the United States. Even in the 21st century, American children's theater is mainly still developing in this direction, there are separate attempts for youth theater to take a place among the „serious art“, although the commercial factor hinders the development of the theater in this direction. Today, 80 percent of professional theater companies offer their audiences the same plays or adaptations that have been staged many times, and this does not help the development of the field.

American youth theater, as well as European and Soviet theaters for young audiences, is a twentieth-century achievement, although due to different political, social, economic, and cultural circumstances, all three of them have developed in different ways. In some respects, American and Soviet children's theaters resemble each other, over the years both were too dependent on the demands of the school (teachers, parents) and this determined their repertory policy. In the case of the USA, development was hampered by commercial competition and financial dependence on educational institutions; In the case of the Soviet Union, on the contrary, the state materially provided theaters for young audiences, but at the same time placed them in the framework of strict ideological censorship. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in both countries, children and adolescents were considered as a separate type of audience, and youth theater was put only in an educational and social context; Theater art has become a kind of pedagogical tool and seems to have lost the element of aesthetic enjoyment, creative search.

Most professional youth theaters in European, Russian, and post-Soviet countries, as well as in the United States, are united by the International Association of Theater for Children and Youth - ASSITEJ. The Association was established in 1965 as an international alliance of professionals involved in theatre for children and young people. There are 83 national centers globally. Every three years, one of the member countries hosts the International World Congress and Festival, where professionals and amateurs working in the field of youth theater gather; Performances, forums, seminars, workshops, as well as meetings of the Board of members are held during the two weeks. Every year, a collection of articles, studies, reviews, etc. is published. ITYARN, the International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network, is the international research network of ASSITEJ International, theater scholars, who are

members of the national centers of ASSITEJ, and independent researchers from all over the world are united in the organization.

During the presented research, an interesting trend characteristic of modern Russian and European children's theater was revealed - small-scale independent troupes try to teach parents to speak a common language with children, play with them, develop imagination, think of stories, and stage performances. Once, many decades ago, naturally occurring family children's performances gave impetus to the emergence of professional youth theaters; today, in the modern world, youth theaters are somehow trying to bring this tradition back to families.

Despite that youth theater in Europe, Russia and the USA arose almost parallel to each other, three different lines of their development emerged during the research process. American youth theater is characterized by a close connection to the educational system and the corresponding ideology. I think, in some ways, American and Soviet children's theaters are similar in that historically both were (and still are) too dependent on the demands of the school (school administration, teachers, parents) and this determined their repertoire policy.

Like other types of art, youth theater is also characterized by a kind of cyclicity. I think in some countries it has already gone through one big cycle of development and moved to the next stage, which cannot be said for example about the youth theater in the USA, which, despite a rather powerful financial and technical base, still cannot go beyond the framework established over the years. It cannot come out of the influence of the educational system. In some cases, the youth theater returns to its archaic beginnings - it comes out in open spaces, and city squares, approaching its audience; In some cases, it becomes more intimate, such as small family-type private theaters and small theater laboratories.

In Georgia, as well as in other countries of the world, there was no professional theater for children until the beginning of the twentieth century. The first youth theater in Transcaucasia was established in Tbilisi, based on the railway drama circle. The initiators and first enthusiasts were the young Nikoloz Marshak and Konstantin Shakh-Azizov (later the director of the Moscow Central Children's Theater and the first president of the Soviet Center of ASSITEJ).

The first premiere of the Russian Theater for Young Audiences took place on April 18, 1927, and this date can be considered the birthday of the professional children's theater in Georgia. The play "Hiawatha - Chief of the Iroquois" by Nikolai Ognev, written according to Longfellow, was staged by Nikolai Marshak. Soon, the issue of opening a Georgian theater for adolescent audiences arose, it was headed by the young director Aleksandre Taqaishvili, and at the end of 1928, two children's theaters were already functioning in Tbilisi, the Georgian and

Russian theaters for young audiences. These youth theaters (as well as this type of theaters in the Soviet republics) were largely nourished by the repertoire of the children's theaters in Moscow and St. Petersburg, almost all the plays staged there, were translated and staged, together with the translated Soviet dramaturgy, original Georgian plays were staged, which were not of high artistic value.

The repertoire of the Georgian troupe of the 30s-50s of the 20th century is dominated by plays depicting historical-revolutionary struggles, but from the end of the 30s classical dramaturgy is also involved: Moliere's "Skapin the Schemer", William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet", "The taming of a shrew", Alexander Ostrovsky's "A profitable position", Alexander Pushkin's "Captain's Daughter" and others. In the repertoire of Russian youth theater, fairy tales, classic dramaturgy and prose already prevail. In the following years, in the 40s and 60s, the repertoire of the Georgian theater for young audiences was diversified with children's plays by various authors. In the repertoire of the Russian theater for young audiences of the same period, we can see fairy tales, as well as classical dramaturgy and plays imbued with the Soviet spirit. For decades, the repertoire policy of Georgian and Russian troupes was almost identical and did not go beyond the Soviet ideological framework.

With the onset of the so-called "Ottepel" period in the entire Soviet Union, including Georgia, the idea of bringing up the new generation with a communist and revolutionary spirit is gradually being questioned. This was facilitated by the destruction of the cult of the "Great Leader" and the rehabilitation of the repressed in the 1930s. Along with the modern and classical foreign plays, like their colleagues working in Russia, the new generation of Georgian directors is boldly starting to understand classical literature in a new way, and the Tbilisi Youth Theater is no exception, where these young directors take their first professional steps. Changing the artistic face and name of the so-called "Elder Brother" - Moscow Central Children's Theater undoubtedly had a great impact on the Tbilisi Youth Theater as well. Since the end of the 60s, the theater is gradually undergoing a transformation from a theater for children/teenagers to a youth theater. If we look at the repertoire of the 60-the 80s, we can see this process - year by year the number of performances intended for preschool and 6-10-year-old children decreased.

In 1958, the director Shalva Gatsserelia started working in the Georgian Youth Theater, and from 1976 to 1996 he was the artistic director; this period is evaluated by researchers of Georgian theater as the "Golden Age" of the Georgian Youth Theater. In terms of plays, we can see that in the first stage of his creative work, children's literature occupies a large place, which is gradually replaced by national dramaturgy and plays based on modern or classic

works, which were not intended for children's audiences. During this period, other directors also staged in the theater periodically: Temur Chkheidze, Nana Kvashvadze, Davit Kobakhidze, Tengiz Maghalashvili, Nana Khatiskatsi, Ketevan Kharshiladze, Gogi Todadze, Otar Baghaturia, and others. During this period, the repertory policy and creative direction in the theater changed dramatically. Works of the Soviet spirit, classical dramaturgy, and national plays of a historical character were replaced by relatively modern Georgian and translated literature. It is significant that in this case, the directors choose the literary material to be staged according to what they want, not according to what the theater needs or what the children's audience is interested in.

During the leadership of Shalva Gatsserelia, the repertoire of the Tbilisi Youth Theater was enriched with many highly artistic and very interesting performances, although the target audience of these performances was older. At the end of the 80s, the theater for young audiences almost no longer responds to its name, and it can be said that the increasingly rarely staged children's plays are an attempt to repay a kind of debt on the part of the theater and not part of a well-thought-out creative strategy.

By the end of the 20th century, the Russian youth theater kept more of its usual artistic strategy and continued its usual repertory policy, staging plays for audiences of different ages in Russian: "The Cat That Walked By Itself" by Rudyard Kipling, "Hail to the Dinosaurs" by Gennady Mamlin, "The Ransom of Red Chief" by O' Henry, "Golden Key" Alexei Tolstoy, "Little Kakhi" Akaki Tsereteli, "The Starchild" Oscar Wilde, "The Snow Queen" Eugene Schwartz, Mark Twain "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn" and others.

The Georgian troupe often "borrowed" the repertoire from the Russian youth theater - in the repertoire of these two theaters of the 80s and 90s, the same titles are often repeated. In fact, during this period, the function of the children's theater was taken over by a more Russian troupe, and this is largely thanks to Nikoloz Jandieri, who was the director from 1973-82, and the artistic director of the theater from 1982 to 1998. During this period, the theater turned into a creative laboratory for young artists. Directors: Giorgi Margvelashvili, Levan Tsuladze, Davit Sakvarelidze, designer Shota Glurjidze, and composer Vakhtang Kakhidze created their first performances. The contribution of director Gia Kitia, who together with N.Jandieri managed the artistic side of the theater, should be specially noted. In 1994 Sh. Gatsserelia, together with the main core of the acting troupe, left the Georgian Youth Theater, which joined the Russian Youth Theater in 1999. The United Theater was named after Nodar Dumbadze and is still operating at 99 Davit Aghmashenebeli Avenue.



Despite many organizational, financial, and creative problems, an interesting process was taking place in the youth theater at the turn of the century, the theater did not stand in one place, which was extremely important at that time. The theater was focused on the children's audience, considering their interests and needs as much as possible - the repertoire of this period is dominated by classical fairy tales, musical concerts, and beautiful, magical spectacles, which were so lacking for children at that time. Often the performance went beyond the boundaries of the stage and the hall, and children were introduced to the fairy tale world right from the foyer of the audience. Often the performance went beyond the boundaries of the stage and the hall, and children were introduced to the fairy tale world right from the foyer of the audience. During the leadership of Gia Kitia and Nikoloz Jandieri, the Russian youth theater preserved and developed the form of the children's theater that it inherited, within the limits of limited possibilities. However, this could not and was not implemented in the case of the Georgian troupe.

The first decade of the twenty-first century was not so easy for the theater - for several years, the theater building was under renovation. In 2007, Gia Kitia and Nikoloz Jandieri left the theater and Mikheil Antadze was appointed as director (2007-2012). Interestingly, even in the 90s, Mikheil Antadze managed the "The Tale Theater". Even though it varied in its form and content between theater and birthday/entertainment center, this independent troupe can still be considered the first Georgian private/independent children's theater. They managed fairy tales staged in a small space with a small budget, with only a few people participating; They had easily portable scenery, costumes, and small props that could be brought outdoors or indoors, as well as in apartments, as needed. Obviously, from a commercial point of view, such an attitude is acceptable and justified, when the troupe has no claim to high professionalism and is mainly focused on income, however, during his leadership, Mikheil Antadze established such an approach in the professional state theater as well and thereby lowered the artistic level of the theater, which was already deplorable at that time. It is impossible to positively evaluate the repertory policy or the creative part of the youth theater of this period. It seems that in the management of a small-scale amateur troupe and a large, state theater, the correct distribution of creative, financial, and organizational vectors varies from each other. A few interesting performances staged by professional directors during this period, could not cover the great wave of low-quality, lame performances by dilettantes. Added to this were political, creative, and other conflicts within the theater, which greatly damaged both the troupe and the name and authority of the theater for young audiences.

Summarizing the last period (2012-2022) of the Tbilisi Youth Theater, it becomes clear that the Youth Theater returned to the Tbilisi theater map, albeit with a somewhat changed format: the new director, Dimitri Khvtisiashvili, removed all the old performances and started forming a new repertoire; He revived the troupe and hired a whole generation of young actors, who are today the core of this theater; In addition to the morning and afternoon children's performances, the theater also began to show senior evening performances.

The theater tries to introduce its creations to the audience outside of Tbilisi, conducts tours both in the regions of Georgia and abroad, and often participates in various children's and drama theater festivals. Like other children's theaters, the Youth Theater divides its repertoire into different age groups: 4-8 years - performances for children, 8-12 years - for adults, 13-18 - performances for teenagers, and evening performances for audiences aged 18+. Despite a large number of children's and youth performances, in the repertoire strategy of the Tbilisi Youth Theater of the 2020s, there is still a tendency to assert competition and equality with other "adult" theaters, which, as history has already shown us, is not profitable for the children's theater anyway.

In the research process, it became clear that children's theater in Georgia is still facing the same problems as a century ago: there is not enough quality dramaturgy for children, adults, and teenagers. Translated dramaturgy is also very scarce, and this is a hindering factor for the development of the field; An important problem is the stigmas and stereotypes related to children's theater, and the lack of professional personnel in this field.

In Georgia, the theater for young audiences has always experienced the influence of the "elder brother" - Russian and Soviet youth theaters, and at the same time was in a constant struggle with senior theaters. The reason for this should be found in the firmly established stereotype in the theater community, for some reason, it was always considered that working in youth theater is not so prestigious; Young directors are less interested in staging performances for children/adults. The majority of actors perceive the theater for young audiences as a kind of "temporary shelter", where they cannot imagine making a "serious" acting career. Such an approach causes a corresponding attitude in society as well. Unfortunately, professional criticism pays less attention to the theater for children/teenagers, and there is almost no research in this area.

Youth theaters in Georgia almost always had to prove that this theater is in no way inferior to other drama theaters, and often, this attitude determined the repertory course of the children's theater. This is especially visible in the period 60-80s, during the leadership of Shalva Gatsserelia, when the ambition of competing with "senior" theaters and a kind of "creative

wrestling" took the children's theater to a completely different vector, and the theater for youth resembled a regular drama theater, where sometimes children's plays were also staged. I think that particular factor made a fatal impact on the development of this theater, and I hope that after so many decades, in the twenties of the twenty-first century, the theater for young audiences will be closer to its audience, will listen and consider the interests and needs of the modern youth and teenage audience, will be contemporary and adequate in the selection of repertoire.

The research revealed another important circumstance, which is a common problem in the children's theater field in Russia and post-Soviet countries - the lack of professional criticism and research. To my surprise, this problem is acutely faced by American and Russian researchers; Theoretical works on leading European children's theaters, studies of directors and actors working in the field themselves, and interviews are mostly available only in their native language (Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Italian, Dutch, etc.).

Youth Theatre in general, as well as Georgian children's/adolescent theater, is an unexplored field in Georgia, and therefore I consider it particularly important that in my thesis I discussed as much as possible the history of the establishment and development of children's theater in Georgia, its repertoire policy under the conditions of Soviet ideological oppression and in the post-Soviet period. In the working process, several interesting trends and problems were identified, which require more in-depth research and the search for solutions.

While working on the thesis, I was constantly accompanied by the feeling that our theater community seems to be looking from a small, narrow window into the diverse world of children's/youth theaters of the world. Therefore, I think that the value of the present work lies, first of all, in the relevance of the research, since in this regard, we will not find any research in Georgian theater science. I hope my dissertation will be the first step to getting more researchers, directors, actors, and playwrights interested in children's theater because this is the area of theater arts where theory and practice are probably most closely connected.

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