

Foreword

On October 25, 2024, an international academic conference was held by the Old Theater of Vilnius and the Music and Theater History Department of the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute. The theme of the conference was theater and the city, with the aim of commemorating the 111th anniversary of the theater building and highlighting the complex histories of the troupes that performed there. Presentations were given by speakers from Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, and Estonia.

The theater building on Jono Basanavičiaus Street (then Pohulian-kos Street) in Vilnius began operating on October 12, 1913 (October 25 according to the current calendar). Its creation was a private initiative of the Polish community in Vilnius, and its purpose was to promote professional Polish culture in a city that was still part of the Russian Empire. However, in the context of historical changes, the building became a meeting place for Polish, Lithuanian, and Russian artists, who exchanged ideas and works. After World War II, it housed the Lithuanian State Opera and Ballet Theatre, later the State Youth Theatre, and until 2022, the Lithuanian Russian Drama Theatre (now the Old Theatre of Vilnius). The theater stage showcased the work of prominent artists such as Juliusz Osterwa, Aleksander Zelwerowicz, Liudas Truiikys, Elena Čiudakova, Roman Viktiuk, Jonas Vaitkus, and many others. The Old Theater and its hosts have always occupied a special place in the cultural fabric of Vilnius and Lithuania, whose status was determined by the circumstances of a particular period in history.

This collection consists of articles developed on the basis of selected conference papers and specially commissioned texts. The topics explored by their authors go beyond the activities of the Old Theater and the cultural contexts of Vilnius and Lithuania. The first four articles provide a detailed overview of the issues surrounding Russian theater culture

from the perspective of the three Baltic countries. The main focus is on the contemporary transformations that have taken place in the Old Theater in Vilnius and in the historically Russian-speaking theaters in Riga and Tallinn.

The next group of three articles reveals the diversity of theatrical processes that took place in the Old Theater building in Vilnius. The authors reveal the complex circumstances surrounding the first Lithuanian drama and opera troupes in Vilnius. Alongside this is a case study from the history of Lithuanian choreography, which establishes the Old Theater of Vilnius as a space conducive to creative innovation.

The collection concludes with two articles set in Kaunas. The first presents newly discovered information about the musical initiatives of Lithuanian-Ukrainian societies operating here in the interwar period. The second responds to the general theme of the collection, analyzing the connections between theater and the city using the example of the contemporary city carnival as a case of participatory art practice that involves the community.

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