**Research on Dance - The Way to defining Slovak Ballet Identity**

**Abstract**

The subject of the paper is dance research in the KEGA project entitled *Slovak Choreographers and their work*, which is currently in the middle of a three-year project period. The author presents the main goals of the project and its individual stages, mentions the starting points that were the impetus for its elaboration, specifies the choreographic personalities that are the subject of the theatrical research, names the research team of internal and external experts, and introduces the related institutions at which the research will take place.

**Key Words**: dance research project, Slovak choreographers, historiography of Slovak professional dance

**Prologue (the historical context)**

Professional dance in Slovakia is closely linked to the Slovak National Theatre – the oldest and biggest professional theatre in the country, which was founded in 1920 in Bratislava (at that time young Czechoslovakia). The emblematic cultural institution has now successfully completed its 104th theatre season. The ballet company has been part of the National Theatre since its very beginning, which means that the professional ballet art in Slovakia has 104 years. But back than the young company did not have enough local artists, so we do not encounter the first ballet by a Slovak composer until almost 30 years after its opening (1949, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, music by Tibor Andrašovan, choreography by Stanislav Remar) and the first ballet by a Slovak choreographer only in 1960 – *The Knight's Ballad* “Rytierska balada” (choreography by Jozef Zajko, music by Šimon Jurovský). Since then, a number of ballets by Slovak choreographers have been performed on the stage of the Slovak National Theatre. This paper is about dance research project, whose subjects are Slovak choreographers and their work.

**Introduction**

Project named *Slovak Choreographers and their work*, the essence of which is theatrical research, was supported by the Cultural and Educational Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (KEGA). Project is nearing the half of the three-year period. The project is carried out at the Research Centre in cooperation with the Department of Dance and the Institute of Theatre, Film and Music of Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. Due to the organic connection between Czech and Slovak ballet, which is done by history, we also involved and cooperate with experts from the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.

WHAT is this project about?

The project is primarily aimed at raising awareness of the most important Slovak choreographers of ballet, presenting individual personalities and their individual choreographic language in a historical and social context, with the main goal being the publication of thorough research.

The chosen thematic area of the researched issue, which is Slovak ballet choreographers and their works, receives attention within the studies at the Dance Departments of Academy of performing Arts in Bratislava with an overlap to all study programmes of dance art and students of the new programme Dance Theory which is under the Institute of Theatre, Film and Music of the Academy of performing arts in Bratislava. This can be seen as a valid reason for the creation of a comprehensive professional text-image material that will expand the range of dance-oriented literature, so essential to the education of students and teachers in the dance arts. In parallel, it focuses on the goal of raising the visibility and popularization of the art of dance in Slovakia.

The subject of the research is the life and work of selected Slovak and, given the common history, Czech choreographers who have left a deep artistic trace in Slovak Professional dance. Within the framework of the research, we have internally divided the individual choreographic personalities into two categories: those active before 1989 and those who were active after 1989. Those four names you see marked by red colour are the Czechs who were working in Slovakia. The current research is not conducted in the chronological order in which the named choreographers worked or lived, but according to the preferences of the individual researchers - the authors of the studies.

**Project Importance**

There are several reasons for the project's inception and development, many of them overlapping.

The first and very motivating reason was the opening of a new multidisciplinary study programme at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava called Dance Theory. It is a study programme focused on an overview and orientation in historical and contemporary tendencies in the field of dance art. The project Slovak Choreographers and Their Work arises primarily from the need to create professional scripts, or let’s say an educational-popular publication, for this newly accredited study programme. Together with my colleagues, I plan to develop a comprehensive, not yet summarized material, which will focus on theoretical and theatrical information about the choreographers and their works in the context of more than hundred years old history of professional ballet in Slovakia.

The creation of the publication itself is closely related to the second reason why its realisation is very important. It is the current situation in the book fund, which does not offer sufficient quality and quantity of literature with an orientation on dance art in the Slovak language. There is virtually no professional publication that would comprehensively map Slovak ballet choreographic work, despite the more than a century-long history of professional ballet in Slovakia. Even the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, which is the only one in Slovakia to offer accredited university education in dance art, does not currently have adequate published study material capturing the tradition and contemporary trends of domestic ballet choreography. Partial information is offered by published contributions in the proceedings of the Dance Congress - Tanec.SK (VŠMU, 2014 - 2022), encyclopaedic entries in the publications Brief encyclopaedia of dance art (BARTKO Emil, Bratislava: Verbunk, 2018) and Encyclopaedia of Dramatic Arts in Slovakia I. and II. (collective of authors, Bratislava: SAV, 1989), publications Ballet SND (JACZOVÁ Eva, Bratislava: SAV, 1971), Images of Slovak dance art 1920-2010 (BARTKO Emil, Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2012) or History of the Slovak theatre I. and II. (collective of authors, Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2018 and 2020).

The research and the subsequent creation of the publication also contains a element of popularisation element, not only in terms of the general public but also in relation to experts from other fields.

**Participants**

As was mentioned before, the project is divided into several phases, with different professions taking priority in each phase. In the first phases it is the professionals carrying out the theatrical research, and in the last phase proofreaders, registrar, graphic designer, et cetera...

In the preparatory phase of the project, which took place before the actual KEGA support and later at the beginning of the calendar year 2023, I, as the leader of the project, approached experts in the field of dance art, who, I believe, will be invaluable to the project itself.

The core team of researchers currently includes Mgr. art. Ivica Liszkayová, PhD., the head of the Research Centre of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, Mgr. Miroslava Kovářová, ArtD. teacher on Dance department of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, Mgr. Miklós Vojtek, PhD., dance pedagogue and theoretician, Mgr. Eva Gajdošová, dramaturg of Slovak National Theatre ballet and Monika Čertezni, researcher of the Theatre Institute in Bratislava. I have also approached colleagues from the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague to collaborate on project, who should take on the treatment of those personalities and creative periods of individual choreographers that relate to the Czech Republic.

Among the institutions with which the project is developing cooperation are the Slovak National Theatre Archive represented by Silvia Kapráliková and Ingrid Karkalíková, the Archive of the National Theatre Archive in Košice led by Mrs. Spišiaková, the Theatre Institute in Bratislava, the Slovak National Library in city of Martin, the Slovak Radio and Television Archive, and, given the international reach of the selected personalities, it is likely that the list of institutions will also be supplemented by institutions abroad.

I am very glad that in the first year of the project we managed to involve students of the new study programme Dance Theory and I believe that the cooperation and participation on this project will be a big motivation for them in their future careers.

**Research process**

The project focuses on theatrical research in the field of Slovak professional academic dance and its stage processing. Due to the diversity of personalities subject to research and the large volume of choreographic works in various authors' styles, the theatrological research resembles a criminal investigation. Finding and completing relevant information is sometimes very difficult. Even the archives and other relevant institutions do not have all the necessary documents archived; in some cases, the information stored contradicts each other, in others it is only partial. There is a huge disparity between the archived documents; for some of the areas under study there is plenty of material, for others there is practically nothing to go on.
Since the availability of materials, its quantity and quality, varies, in some cases hundreds of newspaper articles, posters, photographs, programme bulletins, in the case of newer productions also video recordings, etc., as well as the time possibilities of the individual experts involved, the planned schedule of research was replaced by the individual preference of the authors. Reality showed that the best solution was not to impose on the authors the order of the personalities to be researched. Currently, each of the study authors is working on what he or she has deemed appropriate. The research is being conducted individually at different departments and institutions, and the individual researchers currently underway are at different stages: some are in the phase of collecting and mapping the available sources, others in the phase of finalizing the texts. Individual experts are working independently and sometimes in parallel on several activities at the same time.

**Conclusion**

Detailed theatrical research on Slovak choreographers and their work is one of the ways of defining Slovak choreographic identity. The creation of a representative comprehensive publication, which maps the given issue, will be intended for students in the newly accredited study field of Dance Theory at the Dance Department of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, but I believe that it will find its way to other readers and will contribute to the popularization of dance in Slovakia.
By obtaining support for the project, conditions have been created that allow for detailed research to be carried out with experts from internal and external environments, which will result in a coherent and professionally processed material. Although all activities lead to the project's objective - a professional publication - the process itself is also important, offering the experts the opportunity for professional growth and, finally, there is the dimension of expanding cooperation between the various departments and organisations.

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