

The HC UNIMA Message for World Puppetry Day

“In the spring a young man’s fancy lightly turns to puppetry”. A modified version of the poem bubbles up in me while through the window I look at the young willows shyly uncovering their white heads, announcing a new awakening and the arrival of Puppetry Spring.

It is no coincidence that the first day of spring is international, and so is the Croatian day of the art of puppetry, which is often categorized as follows: “Puppetry art is not age-related, but rather an artistic category”. Such a definition is entirely valid, but practice shows that in high percentages it is nonetheless child-oriented, while other – “major” or “true” puppet performances (according to theoreticians) occur only rarely, in the productions of certain “affluent” puppet theaters, at least here in Croatia.

All exhibitions of theater puppets at festivals and beyond display superb and masterfully made puppets by prominent craftsmen, but rarely are those who have brought these puppets to life even noted. And those are actors. Actors – puppeteers.

Personally, in this honor granted to me to express my thoughts on the art of puppetry, I would like to address the actors – puppeteers, faithful, modest, mysterious enthusiasts, hidden behind screens or masks, the wizards that give life, expression, ethics, and catharsis to puppets. Actors – puppeteers.

Actors of all sorts were described by the legendary Croatian actor and intellectual, Fabijan Šovagović: “An actor today is not a burden, he exemplifies drudgery. He no longer sleeps under circus tents. He is an ordinary citizen of this beautiful world. He complains, as he still is unable to protect himself through a union. He laughs and cries in airless improvisations of studios among dust. Everything must be done before death. Despite everything, he is still involved in the advancement of culture that he persistently, laboriously, carries on his fragile back. And he is happy to be alive!”

In such fairground tents, feasts and celebrations represent the history of Croatian actor – puppeteers. Some, the lucky ones, have fit into institutions today, while the others scratch together a living day by day giving their all to the acting art of puppetry. Well, you have to survive... They know that they are mainly oriented to the youngest, wandering through the big bang of their personal maturation. Those tiny eyes, angelically clear, in curiosity drink up the occasional spark and store them in the chips of their soul, and carry them, carry them further through the delights and difficulties of growing up.

And my sincere thanks and congratulations go to you, dear actors - puppeteers.

In the Croatian UNIMA, a part of the association of world puppetry, actors have discovered some hidden, latent hope. They are no longer marginalized, and the Academy of Arts in Osijek, in its ten years of existence, has aided in conquering the fundamental skills of the craft along with artistic freedom. This was a link that was lacking in Croatia. This can now be felt and seen in the contemporary art of puppetry.

Unfortunately, there are still only five Croatian artistic puppetry theaters, but in the last few years theaters in smaller towns, along with their regular “major” programs, have also fostered and created forms of the art of puppetry, while the number of independent puppetry companies increases every year, introducing freshness, dynamism, variety, and faith in the future of puppetry in Croatia

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