

THE "TEATRE LLIURE"

THE TEATRE LLIURE WAS TO BE A NEW KIND OF THEATRE COMPANY, AND THE HIGH QUALITY OF ITS MATERIAL, THE ACTORS' PREPARATION, THE ADOPTION OF NEW CONCEPTS AND TECHNIQUES, THE CREATION OF A PUBLIC AND THE RIGOROUS TREATMENT OF EACH OF THE ELEMENTS THAT GO TO MAKE UP A THEATRICAL PRODUCTION PUT IT ON AN EQUAL FOOTING WITH THE BEST EUROPEAN COMPANIES.

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In 1976, when the initiative of starting a theatrical company and opening a theatre took the name of **Teatre Lliure**, it was following in the footsteps of the Frenchman André Antoine, who started the reform of dramatic technique in a modest hall in Paris—**The Théâtre Libre**—one hundred years ago. It is now felt that it played a historic role in the development of modern theatre. In the same way, Gràcia's **Teatre Lliure** has become a leading establishment in the history of Catalan theatre.

On 1st December 1976, when the **Teatre Lliure** opened its doors, seven other establishments in Barcelona had their seasons planned: Romea, Barcelona, Apolo, Español, Victoria, Talia and Sala Villarroel. Only two of them announced the occasional play in Catalan. So the opening of a new theatre and the creation of a stable company devoted exclusively to Catalan theatre was an important event. Those responsible for the enterprise were providing an effective response to the years of nomadism of independent theatre and the lack in conti-

nunity of dramatic initiatives and projects in Catalonia.

The hall the **Teatre Lliure** was to occupy was contributed by the cooperative society *La Lleialtat*, which was based in Gràcia, a district of Barcelona which was originally an independent town with a deeply rooted cooperativist tradition and a proliferation of clubs, theatrical groups, dances and, consequently, halls. Within a few months, the new installations were the most modern in the Spanish state. By the day of its inauguration, the members of the **Lliure** had completely reformed the premises, with a clear idea of the functional arrangement needed in a building devoted to the performing arts. The conventional structure, with its stage, stalls and circle, was transformed into an open, flexible one which allows its adaptation according to the formal, dynamic or economic requirements of each production.

On the opening night of the **Teatre Lliure's** first show—Lluís Pasqual's *Camí de nit*—the public gave an enthusiastic round of applause before the play started, even

before the house lights had been turned off. It was an acknowledgement of a dream that was coming true and a demonstration of the hope that the adventure that was starting would continue unhindered. This adventure has now given positive results. For ten years, the **Teatre Lliure** has been the only stable company with a theatre of its own in Barcelona and one of the most productive and prestigious Catalan theatrical institutions. Its constitution sets out the basic ideas which, from the very start down to the present moment, have decided its running and which were summed up in seven essential points:

1. A stable theatre.
2. Public performances.
3. Creative theatre for all.
4. Own premises.
5. Independent production centre.
6. Cooperative organization.
7. Public service, private management.

Exercising every creator's right to freedom and independence, the **Teatre Lliure** has offered a wide range of productions as regards styles and authors. Two constants—classical and European works—have predominated over the fashionable

trends of the last ten years. This is demonstrated by a few facts:

1. Except in two cases —Pablo Neruda and Tennessee Williams— all the plays presented have been the work of European playwrights. 2. Catalan playwrights have accounted for 23 %. 3. 48 % are twentieth century playwrights. 4. 22 % of the shows staged could be considered musicals. 5. 74 % of playwrights are classics, ancient or modern.

The **Teatre Lliure** has become a reality and, at the same time, has managed to create a public. Clearly, the situation of Catalan theatre is now quite normal. The reinforcement of the institutional establishments —**Centre dramàtic** (Teatre Romea), the **Josep Maria Flotats** company (Teatre Poliorama) and the Barcelona city hall's **Mercat de les flors**—, the commercialization of new enterprises —**Dagoll-Dagom**, **Tricicle**, **Teatre Condal**, **Tres × 3**— and the work of groups such as **Joglars** or **Comediants** has led to a large-scale mobilization of the public. It is an undeniable fact that the origin of all this activity lies in the work of the **Teatre Lliure**, which has provided creative drama for all, in a theatre where the community can gather to listen, watch and enjoy themselves in freedom.

When the **Teatre Lliure** started its activities, it did so on the basis of a concept of drama which originated in an already worn-out Independent Theatre. Its intention was to free itself from the stagnation of the institutional and commercial theatre of the Spanish state under Franco. The **Teatre Lliure** was to be a new kind of theatrical company, and the high quality of its material, the actors' preparation, the adoption of new concepts and techniques, the creation of a public and the rigorous treatment of each of the elements that go to make up a theatrical production put it on an equal footing with the best European companies.

Although the different shows put on by the company have been the artistic responsibility of a range of directors —Lluís Pasqual, Fabià Puigserver, Pere Planella, Albert Boadella, Carlos Gandolfo, Carme Portaceli or Jordi Messalles— the **Teatre Lliure** has managed to develop its own particular trade-mark. This fact, one of the most important, has come about thanks to Fabià Puigserver's systematic work on over two hundred stage designs for prose plays, ballet and opera. Trained at the Warsaw School of Fine Arts and Scenography, he is one of those people for whom the work of the scenographer does



not stop at designing and making models. He likes to involve himself in the manipulation of the materials and in the construction work. His approach brings together the modern technique based on an overall conception of the aesthetics of a show and the traditional role of set designer which, in Catalonia, has produced such important scenographers as Joan Ballester (1837-1868), Francesc Soler i Rovirosa (1836-1900), Maurici Vilumara (1847-1930), Oleguer Junyent (1876-1956), Salvador Alarma (1870-1941), Josep Mestres Cabanes (b. 1898), etc.

The basis of what we could call the **Teatre Lliure** style can be summed up as follows:

- Constant investigation of the structural relationship between the scenic space and the audience space.
- The importance given to the treatment of the stage-floors, which take on a significant value.
- Use of costumes as a language running parallel to the actor's work and always at his service.
- The search for new materials and textures.
- The use of a predominant colour in every production.

The creative dynamics and the working methods make the figure of the director the principal element of the **Teatre Lliure's**

productions. Many of the decisions regarding programmes, casting and production are his responsibility. This is the most frequent approach in the majority of European theatres this century, especially since the emergence of the *mise-en-scène* concept, which gives the director full control of the creation of a new show, with a personal emphasis that goes beyond the basic idea of the chosen text.

The directors who have most frequently worked with the **Teatre Lliure**, and Lluís Pasqual in particular, have built up a style of acting and producing of their own. Pasqual comes from a background of independent theatre and trained at the **Lliure**, as well as spending periods with the **Narodovy** theatre, in Warsaw, with the **Piccolo** theatre and at the Milan **Scala**. He is one of the youngest and most respected directors of the Spanish state, and is now director of the **Centro Dramático**, in Madrid.

When the **Teatre Lliure** opened its first show, the average age of the actors was about twenty-five and their experience was relatively limited. Ten years later, the majority of these actors have become professionals of undeniable quality. The team-work and the continuity of actors and directors has led to the creation of a dramatic language of their own. A special factor in this respect has been the proximity of the audience. The actors perform at a distance of one metre from the public. This makes it necessary to create a balance between expressive gesture and intimacy and use voice, body and feeling with clockwork precision. Furthermore, the actors who have worked assiduously at the **Teatre Lliure** spend long hours training together and form part of a school which, without formalizing theoretical concepts, has created a style and a method born of day-to-day practice.

Since the 1978-79 season, two things have led the **Teatre Lliure** to perform away from its premises. One thing has been the interest which many towns around the *Països Catalans* have expressed in seeing its productions. The other has been the company's wish to represent Catalan theatre outside the country. In these cases, they have always performed in Catalan and have tried to show the background from which their productions have sprung and to explain their concept of the theatre.

In the *Països Catalans*, they have put on 224 plays in thirty-six places. They have been outside Catalonia on six occasions and given a total of 75 performances. ●