

INCLUDING INTERACTIVITY IN THE NATIONAL THEATRE

The audience development, educational workshops for youth and teenagers together with adjusted performances and workshops for people with special needs are one of the main *strategic goals* of National Kaunas Drama Theatre, which reflects and reveals the *mission* of the Theatre: to meet the audience's needs for professional stage art, to ensure its accessibility and to develop the creativity of children and youth as well as to encourage self-expression of young artists.

National Kaunas Drama Theatre is the oldest professional theatre in Lithuania, which is constantly looking for new ways to communicate with its audience. Due to the present times that could be recognised as the times of economic growth and the growth of competition, which exists even in the cultural sector, it is essential to be the leader in your own area. This also concerns the field of performing arts.

In Lithuania, theatre and all the stage arts were very popular 30 years ago, before the Restoration of Lithuania's Independence. However, currently theatre is competing with various other commercial fields of entertainment. In view of this, it is significant not only to maintain a high professional level of the performances, but also to keep searching for new ways of communication with our audience. Theatre is always facing the challenge and necessity to keep the performances and workshops more attractive and inclusive as well as to provide new and unexpected experiences instead of safe and passive monitoring of the performances or workshops. Thus, we have faced the great need of interactivity, which, while not being a new genre in Europe, is quite novel in Lithuania. Moreover, there is no theatre school where the methods of interactivity would be implanted. It stems from the fact that Lithuanian theatre has the long-established traditions of psychological theatre based on the Stanislavsky method and those directors, who work and experiment with other methods, are always searching for new possibilities to employ the unique and mesmerising theatre language. That is why the practical experience, collected and successfully practiced by different directors in different countries of Europe, is so significant to the National Kaunas Drama Theatre team. It is an excellent way to get the missing means (including methods) and to turn a new page of the theatre language with great elements of interactivity not only in the Kaunas Theatre, but also in all the country. This would ensure the fluent development and growth of the audience that desires to have a sensation of strong and real *offline experiences* that certainly cannot be gained by watching performances with a *fourth wall*.

During the quite long history of National Kaunas Drama Theatre, acting traditions have changed mostly due to the country's political regime. The first professional acting steps were greatly related to ethnographical theatre elements, which aimed to wake the national consciousness and to consolidate ethnic and cultural identity. This tradition lasted till the psychological-realistic theatre acting traditions. In these traditions actors seek to merge with emotions of the character, whereas the audience attempts to interflow with the performing actors at the same time. However, one element has never changed: *the separation* of two mentioned sides. Actors still pretend that they are not acting, while spectators act that they are not touched by the performance. The direct meeting of the actor and the spectator is still a rare and accidental case in the performances of National Kaunas Drama Theatre. After all, the high level of felt empathy and moral questions of the plays could be used in a more effective way during the performances, especially in the performances, which are dedicated to children and young audiences.

We feel the responsibility to bring up a new generation of the theatre audience with a well-developed critical thinking skill, which would be taken from the positive experiences in the field of the theatre. It is revealed that “Z” or “Google” generation is addicted to the new technologies and the great stream of information. Moreover, their social skills are poorly developed. For this reason, the mentioned generation sees their leader in a person (or an area) that provides *knowledge*, which could not be found on the internet. Interactive theatre is a great tool to concentrate on and raise emotional and social questions that are important to develop an open minded, empathetic and sustainable future society. All the surveys show that the habit to visit cultural institutions is formed in young days. Thus, it is necessary to find the contact with the audience by employing the acceptable theatre language in early days. As a result of the mentioned reason, we highly believe that participation in the performances, or in other words, the interactive theatre, is a great investment not only in our future audience, but also in the strong values of future society.

National Kaunas Drama Theatre