

Jan Císaf. *The History of Czech Theatre: A Survey*. Trans. Andrew Philip Fisher and Julius Neumann. Prague: AMU Press, 2010. Appendix. Glossary. Illustrations. Bibliography. 375 pp. Paper.

Czech theater gave us the word robot. In a thought-provoking play about a rebellious piece of technology, Karel Čapek explores the uncertain relationship between humanity and that which it creates. It is a timely piece in 1921. Moral relativism seems ubiquitous after World War I, and it resonates loudly with its Czech audiences. Soon *R.U.R.* enjoys international acclaim and puts Czech dramatists on the map. But how did this quintessential piece of experimental theater come into being? To understand how Čapek arrived, one must first understand where he came from. Non-Czech readers finally have the chance to do so.

The History of Czech Theatre: A Survey is an English translation of the book *Přehled dějin českého divadla*, which originally appeared in two volumes in 2006. This is the first comprehensive survey to appear in the English language. For this reason alone Jan Císaf's book is a valuable source for anyone interested in Central European theater development. The survey traces the evolution of Czech theater from its origins in the Middle Ages through the first half of the twentieth century. Císaf places special focus on the establishment of the National Theater and bourgeois theater, and the emergence of *mise-en-scène* theater in the first half of the twentieth century. The study does not include puppet theater, but does discuss opera, operetta, revue and, most thoroughly, dramatic theater. The book officially ends with the year 1945, although the author includes an eight-page appendix on post-World War II developments up to 1989.

The history is divided into two main sections corresponding to the original two volumes. The first (and shorter) section covers Czech theater's sixth-century origins to the year 1862, while the second section surveys the more intense development that occurred between 1862 and 1945. Císaf pursues a sociological approach to his history of Czech theater. Rather than describe the evolution of a theoretical art form, he presents the theater as a real-world institution run by individual personalities that clash or sympathize, that are influenced by historical events and respond to social situations. In the abstract to the book, Císaf describes theater as a "material institution dealing with down-to-earth concerns and functioning thanks to practical, sometimes even pragmatic decisions" (375). These pragmatic decisions often have to do with filling seats. This eternal problem is one of the author's main focuses, as the role of the audience, he argues, is particularly strong in the Czech context. At the heart of the nation's theater tradition, Císaf contends, lay the struggle of artistic directors to diversify and still satisfy the public's middle-class tastes. Císaf goes to great pains to explain how these bourgeois tastes formed and continued to influence theater through the war-time performances of the 1940s. Because of its status as the beacon of middle-class theater, the National Theater is the focus of much of the author's attention. It is not until the second to last chapter, while discussing experimental theater, that the author provides some information about smaller, alternative stages. However, the National Theater is emblematic in so many ways, representing the primary source of Czech professional theater for many years, while also acting as a symbol of national unity and identity, that one can hardly fault the author for this choice, especially in a survey.

The most clearly executed and engaging part of the book discusses what the author labels as the second phase of modern theater, which encompasses the avant-garde and experimental theater tendencies of the twentieth century. In this section the author defines his terms more clearly while also describing the plays in greater detail. Illuminating descriptions of the roles of prominent figures within this artistic moment, such as Hilar, Hoffman, Čapek, Frejka, Voskovec, Werich and others, comprise a good deal of the last two chapters. The author paints an intriguing picture of artists reacting to the tumultuous social changes of the inter-war period, and describes how they both rejected and converged with bourgeois theater. In this last portion of the book, readers learn of the culmination of director-led theater through descriptions of Honzl's

and other visionary directors' work, and we understand how much Czech theater has changed from the time when actors ruled the stage.

Despite the wide range of interesting topics covered, there are some issues both the average reader and the scholar might have with Císaf's *History*. Readability is often hindered by poor translation, typographical errors, and inaccurate subtitling. Navigation of the text, which covers fourteen centuries and mentions scores of theater pieces and historical personages, is not aided by an index. The selected bibliography is only one and a half pages long, which for scholars accustomed to American academic standards will seem minimal, and it does not include all sources mentioned in the book. In addition, the author often cites secondary sources when primary sources would be more appropriate. Furthermore, the sources will be useful only for readers of Czech, since all of them are in Czech. While the effort to make the text more accessible by adding a glossary is commendable, the end product is not very thorough. For example, the section entitled "plays" includes descriptions of only six specific works.

As a historical survey, the book might be used as an introductory text, although it presents some challenges for those with little or no background. The author often assumes knowledge of the field, which can be seen in his failure to define terms, clearly introduce historical personages, or describe pieces. For example, actors and directors are described as Dadaist, but Dadaism is not defined; plays are used as illustrations, but the average reader may be unfamiliar with their content. It will be more accessible for readers with some knowledge of both artistic movements/terminology and Czech theater, but worthwhile for those looking to understand the big picture of Czech theater history. Readers may not learn much in the way of details about specific works, but they will understand the major events, personalities and conditions that shaped Czech theater (and gave the world a word for robots).

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Anatoly Eφος. *Beyond Rehearsal: Reflections on Interpretation and Practice, Continued*. Trans. James Thomas. New York: Peter Lang, 2009. Chronology. Bibliography. Index. xii + 306 pp. \$81.95 (cloth).

Anatoly Eφος is often described as a disciple of Stanislavsky, and this placement in theatrical history is certainly apt, although Eφος never quite reached Stanislavsky's stature. The books Eφος wrote, here skillfully edited and, on the whole, skillfully translated by James Thomas, are also not the stuff of *An Actor Prepares* or *My Life in Art*, although they have undisputed value for anyone interested in modern Russian theater. Whatever his ultimate reputation in stage history might be, Eφος was a consummate theater professional whose written works provide an intimate and important perspective on the theater process.

The essays gathered here are taken and translated from Eφος's last two books: *Prodloužení teatral'nogo romana* [1985] and *Kniga chetvertaia* [1987, posthumous]. Notwithstanding Eφος's reputation for defining psychological states as the key to acting, the vital point of origin for his productions is revealed here to be an astute, thorough, and often highly original reading of written texts, including not only scripts of plays, but literary and theater criticism, the correspondence of predecessors such as Nemirovich-Danchenko, and the memoirs of directors and actors. As Stanislavsky's disciple, Eφος indeed shows due concern for the actors' inner states, but it is always qualified by a sense of the possibilities and challenges of their roles suggested by the author's script and by interpretations of it provided by literary culture.

In short, Eφος did his homework, and his own writings indicate ways in which some of the major theater productions of the late Soviet period, including *Don Juan*, *A Month in the Country*, and *Brother Alesha* were informed by a skillful reading of cultural possibilities. His insights