

## **Refurbishment of the Croatian National Theatre in Varaždin along with participation of the local community and economy**

When **helping** hands join ...

Over 50 companies from the area of the Varaždin County have participated in refurbishment of the Croatian National Theatre in Varaždin. The companies have donated the money or their products and services and the theatre has paid them back by tickets and performances.

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Siemens, Vindija, Fima, Tehnobeton, PBZ, Jamnica, T-HT, Dalekovod, Varteks, Croatia Airlines and so on until the number of companies reaches the number 55. The above does not refer to a competition for the most successful company in Croatia but to sponsors of the Croatian National Theatre in Varaždin. For the past two years, better to say since the assumption of the function of a theatre principal by Jasna Jakovljević in 2005, the largest companies in Croatia and the Varaždin County have been intensively sponsoring the above cultural institution by donations and various services. The Croatian National Theater in Varaždin is maybe the best example of co-operation between the private and cultural sector in Croatia. That's old hat! If culture is supported only by the mercy of the state it cannot respond fully to the requirements of the modern era. Although relevant financiers, Ministry of Culture, The Varaždin Municipality and the Varaždin County are not the only sources of financing any more, Jasna Jakovljević has brought with her arrival the badly needed vitality and energy. As a result, the income of the theatre has increased considerably, from 800,000 kunas in 2005 to 2.5 million last year. The above has been accomplished by attracting many companies to the theatre, by bringing back the public to that temple of culture in Varaždin (ca 100,000 this year). Besides, the theatre has achieved something what many cultural institutions could only dream of – break-even point in business operations, which can only be measured with profit in the private sector.

### **New plans in sight**

What we have in mind is the market oriented approach, in other words an interesting swap. On the one hand, the private sector enables refurbishment of the almost complete theatre by direct donations or services. So e.g. Dalekovod and Hep have installed lighting equipment to the amount of 150,000 kunas. PBZ has donated computer equipment, while CA has provided 30 free tickets. Further, Varteks has enabled storing of decor at their premises. Local entrepreneurs have always rendered assistance by donating money and

providing services and transport. It is in this way that they have enabled and facilitated guest performances, and in return they have been given seats, boxes, subscriptions, and even special closed performances for their own employees or, even, very pleasant, refurbished and adequate premises for parties, presentations, conventions, etc.

Such a sophisticatedly conceived approach has been supplemented by a better co-operation with other two cultural institutions, the Concert Office and the Baroque Evenings. Although Jakovljević modestly asserts that co-operation had existed even before she arrived, all agree that the co-operation has been raised to a completely new level, so that the Concert Office and the Croatian National Theatre co-operate together in various ways: in organizing programs, in joint productions, in joint appearances in the public, in issuing brochures and publications together, etc. Jakovljević further argues that impressive work has been accomplished with regard to refurbishment, in which a significant role has been played by the Ministry of Culture.

A multi-purpose terrace during summer, a few sleeping rooms and several flats for internal use have been refurbished. Among others, a concert hall has been anticipated, as well as construction of a smaller, informal stage (with the purpose of serving as a cabaret, reading and informal gatherings), two large halls with 350 seats and a main stage. Besides, the latest agreement with FIMA shall provide a stage for young audience and performances for children.

### **Nine opening nights this season**

The Theatre has been co-operating more intensively with many institutions. According to Jakovljević, excellent relations have been maintained with Čakovec, Krapina and Koprivnica. Good co-operation has been established with the American Embassy, and trans-border co-operation with Slovenia (Maribor, Ptuj), and regional co-operation (Vienna, Skoplje, Sarajevo). At the initiative of Dražen Vitez, Chief of the Police Station of Varaždin, an educative performance “Kaj sad” has been staged. The performance is dealing with the drug problem in the society.

Guest performances of other actors from the Zagreb Croatian National Theatre have been organized very often. Jakovljević further argues that in this way positive energy is exchanged and new freshness is brought into the theatre.

When speaking about the repertoire, the Croatian National Theatre boasts of preserving the Kajkavian tradition. It is preserved, e.g. by translations of Don Quijote or Hamlet into Kajkavian. The theatre is especially keen on attracting young audience and accustoming it to the theatre from the very early age. They are working on a Christmas story for that purpose; it is a musical spectacle that shall symbolically mark the return of music and opera to the Croatian National Theatre, which has been absent since 1963. The theatre also intends to establish an artistic school for children, which shall, if it succeeds, be a project of high significance.

The 2007/2008 season boasts of nine premiers, among which Vučjak (Wolf-dog) is anticipated for the next season. It shall be directed by Ivica Kunčević.

### **The second oldest theatre in Croatia**

The tradition of the theatre in Varaždin goes back to the year 1637 when it was established as a Jesuitical theatre in that town. The first public theatre was established in Varaždin in 1788; today's building was erected in 1873 according to the design of a Viennese architect Hermann Helmer. From 1898 till 1915 the theatrical life was organized by the Croatian Drama Company headed by the renowned philologist and literal historian Ivan Mičetić. A permanent theatre that staged drama program was finally established in 1915. Great men of the pre-war period made a career in that theatre, e.g. actor Zvonimir Rogoz and comedian August Cilić and opera singer Ančica Mitrović, and in the recent period Ivo Serdar, Franjo Majetić, Sanda Langerholz and others. Today's actors of that theatre are Ljubomir Kerekeš, Marinko Prga, Ines Boajnić etc. Since the Croatian independence until today, the theatre and its ensemble have been given almost 50 national and other awards and acclaims.