

The Development of Children's and Youth Theatre in Hungary: the Path of Institutionalization and Beyond the Professional Sphere (1949–1989/1992)

ANITA PATONAY

Abstract: It was after the Second World War and the nationalisations that autonomous theatres for children and youth and theatre performances targeting this age group were first established in Hungary. In my study, I will present the institutional history of children's and youth theatres in the period 1949–1989/1992 and the children's and youth theatre-makers who were amateur theatre-makers alongside the institutionalised theatres. I will give an insight into the productions that were produced during this period, the problems faced by the children's and youth theatre community, and the contradictions that creators had to face during the period of state socialism. I will look at decisions, decrees, and laws on the medium of children's and youth theatre productions from 1949 to 1989/1992, in order to gain a better understanding of the cultural context in which amateur theatre groups produced performances in the context of children's and youth theatre culture, alongside the institutionalised children's and youth theatres.

A brief history of institutionalised theatres for children and young people

In Hungary, theatres were nationalised in 1949. On June 21, 1949, the government declared that privately owned or concession-operated theatres would be brought under state control. It was announced that the mandates of the theatre directors were no longer valid for the new season and that their successors would be appointed by the government. The theatres were placed under the supervision and control of the Thea-

tre Department of the Ministry of Culture. After the devastation of the Second World War, the transfer of the theatres to the state provided security: some buildings damaged in the war were rebuilt, the situation of actors, their employment and salaries, and the financial situation of the theatres were stabilised.¹ However, after nationalisation, theatres became rather similar: new structures, new operating procedures, and a centrally determined choice of works. Political decision-makers sought to use the theatre as a vehicle for the dissemination of 'communist' ideology. Cultural politicians sought to tighten their grip on theatres, strictly defining the nature, message, number, and target audience of the plays they could produce. Their aim was to ensure that the plays the political leadership wanted to see reached as wide a section of society as possible. The ideological-artistic line was thus framed by a system of control and authorisation/prohibition through the Ministry of Culture's College of the People, the Agitation and Propaganda Committee, the Dramaturgical Council, and the Ministry's Theatre Department.

At the time of the re-launch, some new theatres were organised specifically for children, as propaganda placed great emphasis on the ideological re-education of young people. Totalitarian political power saw itself as the source of all cultural value, so that all cultural and artistic phenomena became po-

¹ This tight framework was loosened by the 1970s and 1980s, but the party and state leadership kept the substantive decisions in their own hands until the fall of the system. This situation held until the mid-1990s.

litical issues. This was the time when the Youth Theatre,² modelled on the Komsomol Theatre in Moscow, and the Pioneer Theatre³ were created. In addition to these two theatres, the Hungarian State Opera House and the Erkel Theatre of the Hungarian State Opera House had also performed for children since 1949. The Youth Theatre and the Pioneer Theatre were merged in 1952 and renamed in 1954: the Youth Theatre became the Petőfi Theatre and the Pioneer Theatre became the Jókai Theatre.

There were several reasons for the merger. The main problem was that the representatives of cultural policy saw that the Youth Theatre had not succeeded in making its image into an outstanding theatre of socialist romanticism and that it had not succeeded in educating the youth to communist morality through plays. The official view was that the theatre's programming policy and the style of its performances were not sufficiently imbued with a militant spirit and that its links with the various youth organisations were weak. In contrast, the profile of the Pioneer Theatre was considered satisfactory by the promoters. The Youth Theatre was expected to produce more daring, more militant, and more revolutionary plays in line with socialist ideology.⁴ The Youth Theatre had to change its programming policy. Its plays had to be inspired by the lives of young people, while at the same time aiming to raise young people's literary literacy: "Its task is to educate our youth on loyalty to the Party and to popular democracy, on militan-

² Youth Theatre: established in 1949 in a former cinema. The theatre's target audience was adolescents.

³ Pioneer Theatre was established in 1949. Target audience was children under 14. It operated independently until 1952.

⁴ KOROSSY Zsuzsa, „Színházirányítás a Rákosi-korszak első felében”, in *Színház és politika*, ed. GAJDÓ Tamás, 45–137 (Budapest: OSZMI, 2007), 102.

cy, etc.”⁵ Finally, the merger of the management of the Youth Theatre and the Pioneer Theatre was justified by the fact that the two institutions' audience management and programming were not sufficiently coordinated; "a certain part of the youth was excluded from theatre education (secondary school students)."⁶ The aim was to unify audience management in order to educate the whole youth to become theatregoers. Common management also served to employ actors more economically. The afternoon performances of the Pioneers and the evening performances of the Youth Theatre made it possible to use certain actors together; by developing a common programme, it was easier to coordinate the actors' performances.⁷

The renaming was determined by the political background of the 1953–1956 period. Stalin died in 1953, which caused a political détente in Hungary. Mátyás Rákosi resigned as head of government and was replaced by Imre Nagy. The easing of the situation had an impact on the life of the theatres, as their programmes became richer and more varied, and the freedom of works and creators slowly and steadily increased. The primary tasks of the Imre Nagy government included consolidating and rethinking politics, social issues, and the economy. Culture was only tackled from 1954 onwards, for example in the areas of restructuring the role of rural theatres, introducing ideologically different plays and genres into the programme, and optimising the theatre press.⁸ The ideological imperative to educate young people in a propagandistic way was thus, for a time, removed, and the name change helped to bring this period to a close. Two years later, in 1956, the youth character of the Petőfi

⁵ *Ibid.*, 107. All translations are mine, except otherwise stated.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ CSEH Katalin, „A teátrális demokrácia útjai: A színház szerepe az 1956-os forradalomban”, *Színház* 44, no. 8 (2011): 20–29.

and Jókai Theatres was abolished, and the youth character was let go. There followed a transitional period where, for a short time, there was no concentrated theatrical education for children and youth.

The State Déryné Theatre,⁹ which was founded in 1955, began performing plays for young people in 1959 and then for children in 1960, which helped to fill the gap in the demand for children's and youth productions during the transitional period.

In 1961, the Bartók Children's Theatre was founded, which became a defining institution in children's theatre culture as it focused on children aged 6–14, not only upper school children, like the Pioneer Theatre, but also younger children in the lower grades.¹⁰ "The theatre, as an educational institution, remained an important and controllable scene for ideological influence and a useful way of spending leisure time."¹¹

The Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP KB), the Ministry of Culture, and the Agitation Propaganda Committee, i.e. the state power and its institutions, continued to determine (children's) theatre thinking and programming policy. In order to develop the socialist theatre, the leadership aimed at the ideological and political analysis of the theatrical art

⁹ State Déryné Theatre was established in 1955. It provided theatre for small towns and villages not visited by rural theatres. In 1978, it continued to operate as the People's Theatre together with the 25th Theatre.

¹⁰ Bartók Children's Theatre was founded in 1961. They performed at the Bartók Hall and the Operetta Theatre. In 1972, it became the Bartók Theatre, and its target audience was young people. From 1974 on, it was known as the Budapest Children's Theatre. From 1985 on, it continued to operate as the Arany János Theatre until 1994.

¹¹ NÁRAY István, „Állapotrajz”, in *Gyermekszínházak Magyarországon*, ed. SÁNDOR L. István (Budapest: ASSITEJ Magyar Központ, 2006), 26.

process, the quantitative development of contemporary Hungarian literature, the promotion of genre diversity, and a more favourable development of theatre culture and audience numbers. In press propaganda, audience organisation, and programme propaganda, the distinctive support of socialist theatre also had to be more strongly asserted.¹² Law IV on Youth of 1971 provided a decisive legal background for the creators of children's and youth theatre productions, as it stipulated that in the Hungarian People's Republic the fundamental interests and aims of the state, society, and youth are identical and that youth, together with other generations, are building socialism, fighting for social progress, and ready to defend their socialist homeland and peace.¹³ The Youth Act included a provision for the socialist education of young people through culture:

“A major task of the public cultural institutions, the press, radio and television, theatres, film production and distribution companies, publishers, and book distributors is the socialist education of youth, and the shaping of young people's interests and tastes. The bodies responsible for the cultural education of youth should support literary, film, theatre, musical, artistic, and other cultural works that promote the socialist education of young people.”¹⁴

¹² „Jegyzőkönyv az MSZMP KB Agitációs és Propaganda Bizottságának üléséről – 1971. október 12.”, in *Szigorúan titkos: Dokumentumok a Kádár kori színházirányítás történetéhez, 1970–1982*, eds. IMRE Zoltán and RING Orsolya (Budapest: PIM–OSZMI, 2018), 49.

¹³ *Törvény az ifjúságról*, Országos Ifjúságpolitikai és Oktatási Tanács, 1971. Kiadja az Országos Ifjúságpolitikai és Oktatási Tanács Ifjúságpolitikai Titkársága (Budapest: Szikra Lapnyomda, 1971), 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

The programming policy of the main state children's theatre was also influenced by the passage quoted above, and thus the ideological and political influence that dominated the adult theatre structure was also typical.¹⁵ In relation to the plays presented, the political leaders tried to meet the perceived or real expectations, but they were also given the opportunity not to present a play that did not please the management of a theatre.¹⁶

Throughout the history of public children's theatres, the question of which age groups to address has been a constant. István Kazán's¹⁷ ambition to turn the Bartók Theatre into a youth theatre was eventually rejected by the regime.¹⁸ In the 1972–73 theatre season, it was decided that the theatre should only take into account the needs and characteristics of the primary school age group and that it should develop its programming policy accordingly.¹⁹ Although the word "children" was removed from the name of the Bartók Theatre, cultural policy considered it important that it should remain a children's theatre and not be concerned with youth.

Between 1974 and 1985, the Budapest Children's Theatre became the main theatre

¹⁵ IMRE and RING, eds., *Szigorúan...*, 141–144.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 102–105.

¹⁷ István Kazán (1924–2006): theatre director. Director of the Hungarian People's Army Theatre between 1956 and 1962. Between 1962 and 1969 he was chief director of the Attila József Theatre, and from 1974 to 1977, he was chief director of the Budapest Children's Theatre.

¹⁸ „A Művelődési Minisztérium előterjesztése az MSZMP KB Agitációs és Propaganda Bizottság számára az 1981/82-es színházi évad tapasztalatairól, az 1982-es nyári és az 1982/83-as színházi évad programjáról – 1982. június 22.”, in IMRE and RING, eds., *Szigorúan...*, 568.

¹⁹ „Jegyzőkönyv az MSZMP Agitációs és Propaganda Bizottság üléséről – 1973. június 26.”, in IMRE and RING, eds., *Szigorúan...*, 149.

for state children. The word "child" was reintroduced into the name, which clearly identified the main age group of the state theatre: primary school children. István Kazán was the first director of the Budapest Children's Theatre, and Judit Nyilassy²⁰ was its director from 1977 on. Under István Kazán's direction, between 1974 and 1977, the number of performances for children increased to two hundred and seventy in one season, and fifty evening performances were given for young people. The theatre performed for four age groups: preschoolers were treated to *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Trallala and Lallala*, while 8–10 year olds were treated to *Fairy Ilona*, Andersen tales, and *King Matthew's Shepherd*, 11–14 year olds to *The Beggar and the King*, *The Invisible Man*, and *The Three Tailors*, and *Wait an Hour and Manhood* were for the older age group.²¹ In 1974, Kazán said that the aim of the Children's Theatre was to develop a theatre-going audience and to extend the impact of theatre to all children in Budapest so that they could go to the theatre that was right for them at least twice a year.²²

Apart from the Budapest Children's Theatre, the productions for children by the rural theatres did not receive much attention; the ministry only expected them to have a children's theatre production, but what they should play for children was not the focus of attention. Thus, in 1973, Nelly Litvay and Colodi's *Pinocchio*, directed by Tamás Ascher,²³

²⁰ Judit Nyilassy (1929–2007): director of the Bartók and Budapest Children's Theatre between 1972 and 1977, and then director and chief director between 1977 and 1985. She retired in 1985.

²¹ ABLONCZY László, „Színházba járó közönséget nevelni...: Beszélgetés Kazán Istvánnal, a Budapesti Gyermekszínház igazgatójával”, *Magyar Hírlap*, 1974. márc., 29., 6.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Tamás Ascher (1949–): Kossuth and Jászai Mari Prize-winning Hungarian director, university professor, merited artist.

was presented in Kaposvár. The production of *Pinocchio* was a defining moment in the history of children's theatre, as it was cited as an example that highlighted the fact that if a theatre, its management, and its director care about children, then so will the actors, and that this is how a production can be created that can give children a lasting experience.

In the mid-1970s, an initiative was launched by the theatre profession and the Ministry of Culture to address the issue of children's and youth theatre. It was a way of giving creators of theatre for children and young people the opportunity to discuss professional issues. In the twenty-five years since nationalisation, there had never been an initiative to address the theatrical aesthetics of children's theatre. Thus the first Children's Theatre Review in 1974,²⁴ which presented children's productions from seven theatres, was born. It was the first time that children's theatre companies from the capital and the other cities met: the State Déryné Theatre, the State Puppet Theatre, the Budapest Children's Theatre, the National Theatre of Pécs, the Jókai Theatre of Békéscsaba, the Csiky Gergely Theatre of Kaposvár, and the Kisfaludy Theatre of Győr.

The next major initiative in theatre and cultural policy was a survey. In 1977, the State Youth Commission (ÁIB)²⁵ and the

²⁴ In the framework of the Budapest Art Weeks and within the Children's Aesthetics Week, the Hungarian Children's Theatre Review was held between 11–22 October 1974, organised by the ASSITEJ, the Hungarian Centre of the International Association of Children's and Youth Theatres. (MORVAY), „Gyermekesztétika hete”, *Esti Hírlap*, 1974. okt. 11., 2.

²⁵ The State Youth Committee (ÁIB) was an organisation dealing with youth policy issues from 1974 to 1986. It was established on June 13, 1974 as the successor to the National Youth Policy and Education Council. The Council of Ministers supervised it directly.

Ministry of Culture carried out a joint survey of the situation of theatre performances for children and young people.²⁶ The survey found that the number of children and youth theatregoers had increased over the previous five years, but that working conditions meant that the People's Theatre²⁷ was able to take productions to fewer venues and that there was a maximum demand for children and youth performances in the cultural centres. The demand was there, but most of the actors and directors working in children's theatres were penalised by being assigned to children's plays, given only a few rehearsal slots to prepare for a production. In addition, there was no interest in children's productions either from the theatre profession or from critics, while they had a lot of work to do because they had to play to a lot for the children.

Judit Nyilassy faced the same artistic and economic difficulties identified in the survey in 1977, when she replaced Kazan as director of the Budapest Children's Theatre. Judit Nyilassy inherited a situation in which the Children's Theatre had to continue many performances and replace actors who had left. Nyilassy saw the enormous difficulty of her task in the fact that the category of children's theatre director did not exist in 1978. She was aware of the existence of aids and could rely on the experience of others, but she felt that this was a job best learned in the profession, largely by instinct.²⁸ Judit Nyilassy emphasised differentiation according to the age of the children, so she even divided the upper school pupils into two groups: 5–6 and 7–8 graders, which was a highly innovative idea in 1978, but everyday life over-

²⁶ NÁNAY István, „A gyerekek és a színház”, *Színház* 11, no. 9 (1978): 14–21, 16.

²⁷ People's Theatre: The People's Theatre was created in January 1978 by the merger of the State Déryné Theatre and the 25th Theatre.

²⁸ RÉVI Judit, „Gyermekszínházi adósságaink”, *Népművelés* 25, no. 12 (1978): 34–36, 34.

rode this initiative. Nyilassy saw a huge obstacle, apart from the difficulty of age group classifications, in the fact that children's theatre work was not attractive to actors, as it was not attractive to the theatre profession or to critics.²⁹

In the Budapest Children's Theatre, under the direction of Judit Nyilassy, in the 1980s, there was already a performance where actors and children acted out a folk tale, the Cat Master or Puss in Boots, together.³⁰ Judit Nyilassy was therefore concerned with creating a new kind of audience relationship, which she wanted to achieve through physical theatre by involving the audience, innovating in a way that could reform traditional children's theatre performances and, through them, the profession. Part of the period under Nyilassy's leadership also signified a new way of working more closely with schools. The theatre launched a competition for primary school teachers with the support of the Pedagogical Institute of Budapest. The theme of the entries was how to prepare pupils for theatre performances and how to lead sessions on the theatre experience. At the same time, a professional collective of teachers, sociologists, and aestheticians was formed to analyse the problems of theatre-school, and theatre-audience response. Both initiatives aimed to bring theatre closer to its audience, to be able to influence young people, to enable teachers and theatre management to work together more organically, and to produce even better children's productions. Nyilassy also set up a youth studio stage, which was a crucial decision in terms of company building as it meant that the artists had to stage not only fairy tales but also dramas, comedies, and unconventional theatre ventures closer to adult theatre.³¹ One

²⁹ Ibid., 36.

³⁰ FÖLDÉNYI F. László, ed., *Tanulmányok a gyermekszínházról* (Budapest: Magyar Színházi Intézet, 1987), 6.

³¹ NÁRAY István, „Berzsián, a Bohóc, Jean és a többiek”, *Színház* 13, no. 8 (1980): 1–4, 3.

can see how much Judit Nyilassy tried to innovate, but such performances did not become a trend at the Budapest Children's Theatre.

The state socialist system paid attention to artists working with children and young people to the extent that, with the support of the Ministry of Culture, the ÁIB established the Youth Prize for Excellence and gave artistic awards to artists whose work was also related to youth, thus showing the value of working with young people. Both institutionalised and non-professional, amateur theatre artists in the field of children's and youth theatre have been awarded such prizes for high quality work in the field of children's theatre education or for their work in the artistic education of pre-school children, for their work in promoting theatre and drama, or for their outstanding work in the development and dissemination of children's theatre.

The International Children's Year of 1979 can also be seen as a cornerstone of the cultural context of children's theatre, as it was in the context of the preparation of the Children's Year that theatre for children, the writing of plays for children, literature, the quantity and quality of performances, the uncritical nature of children's theatre, children's aesthetics, and children's psychology began to be addressed. In the framework of the International Year of Children, the Kaposvár International Children's Theatre Meeting was held, with four foreign and six Hungarian companies. In general, it was noted that theatre and audience had become more concerned with educating young audiences, especially in theatre-school relations. Visits to the theatre in schools had become an integral part of class teachers' work, and in several schools this activity had been included in the reward criteria for teachers.

In the 1980s, in addition to the main Children's Theatre, many places also held performances for children: the Radnóti Stage, the Játékszín, the József Attila Theatre, the

Thália Theatre, the Vidám Színpad, and various other theatre companies.

However, the year 1985 brought a change in the life of the Children's Theatre: the theatre was renamed Arany János Theatre, and its director was István Keleti³² until 1989, when János Meczner³³ became its director. István Keleti took over the management of the theatre in 1985, but the children's theatre remained the theatre for children aged 6–14. The name change was thought appropriate to ensure that children aged 12 and over would also like to go to the theatre, and they would not be put off by the term "children". The emphasis was also placed on the programming policy, which focused on productions that were about children of a particular age and on not wanting to act as a theatre that illustrated the compulsory reading.³⁴ Keleti did not see the children as pedagogical subjects but wanted to play with them,³⁵ and also aimed to dispel the fears of the actors of the Arany János Theatre about children's audiences. His theatrical thinking was based on children—on the existence and behaviour of children. It was with this in mind that Keleti staged *Emil and the Detectives* and *The Palace of Spotted Owls*. One hundred and ninety thousand children visited the Arany János Theatre every year. Eight performances were given every week. Five hundred and thirty people could fit into the theatre at one time.

³² István Keleti (1927–1994): theatre director, dramaturg, deserving artist. Founder of the Szkéné and the Pinceszínház (amateur theatres).

³³ János Meczner (1944–): director of the Kisfaludy Theatre in Győr, then of the People's Theatre, executive secretary of ASSITEJ, Jászai Mari Prize-winning director, theatre director, university professor, meritorious artist.

³⁴ BÁN Magda, „Csodát kell produkálni”, *Ország-Világ*, 1985. dec. 25., 18.

³⁵ FÖLDÉNYI F., ed., *Tanulmányok...*, 35.

By the second half of the 1980s, children's theatre had become more important as a theatrical issue. The first national children's theatre meeting, for example, was accompanied by a four-day international dramaturgical conference in Budapest in November 1987, the aim of which was to take stock of the dramaturgical problems of productions for children and young people of different ages. The conference, entitled "Ages and Dramaturgies" was attended by experts from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the GDR, the FRG, Spain, and the Soviet Union.³⁶ The conference was based on three keynote speeches by Katalin Gabnai,³⁷ István Keleti, and István Nánay.³⁸ Judit Páli, psychologist, and Miklós Baktay, sociologist, reported on their studies on the impact of children's theatre.³⁹ Katalin Gabnai spoke about children's theatre for preschoolers, the double consciousness of children watching theatre, children's experience of reality in theatre, the present tense of children's theatre, children's concentration time, and the use of music.⁴⁰ In his presentation, István Keleti explained the age group of the classical children's theatre audience, his opinion on how to activate children in the theatre, what kind of music is appropriate for children's theatre, how to set the stage, what kind of text to use and say in children's performances, what kind of performance style should be used in these performances, and the power of fairy

³⁶ SZ. N., „Dramaturgiai tanácskozás”, *Színház* 21, no. 2 (1988): 1.

³⁷ Katalin Gabnai (1948–): playwright, critic, university professor, one of the leading figures in Hungarian drama pedagogy.

³⁸ István Nánay (1938–): journalist, critic, university professor, a leading figure in theatre criticism.

³⁹ BAKTAY Miklós and PÁLI Judit, „A csillogó szemű gyerekközönség: Gyermekszínházi hatásvizsgálat téziseiből”, *Színház* 21, no. 2 (1988): 11–13.

⁴⁰ GABNAI Katalin, „A legkisebbek színháza”, *Színház* 21, no. 2 (1988): 4–6.

tales.⁴¹ And István Nánay posed questions to start the debate: Is there a need for autonomous theatre and performance for 12–16 year olds? If so, what kind? What themes are worth playing for this age group, and how?

It was typical of this period that few performances for children were performed, despite the large number of children's audiences. This shortage gave rise to a market for professional theatres, which mainly sought to meet the needs of community centres, and occasional companies were formed. By 1987, the issue of children's and youth theatre had been addressed. The formulation of a framework for what is needed to make a children's theatre production viable and effective was initiated.⁴²

*Children and youth theatre performances
beyond the professional sphere*

Documentation on theatre performances for children and young people outside the formal sector is extremely scarce. Laws and regulations are available that can provide some insight into the work of creators and groups who produced children's and youth theatre outside the professional sphere. The archival material of the State Youth Commission has not yet been processed and will therefore dominate the next section, since it provides a strong basis, in the absence of

⁴¹ KELETI István, „Mese és színpadi valóság”, *Színház* 21, no. 2 (1988): 6–8.

⁴² István Nánay, in his summary study on children's theatres published in 1987, explained in detail that the creators of theatre performances for children should not only concern themselves with artistic quality but also with the purpose, task, and method of their children's theatre activities. He found that “the vast majority of children's theatre productions do not meet the desired and expected standards, neither pedagogically, psychologically, nor artistically, and in many cases do more harm than good.” FÖLDÉNYI F., ed., *Tanulmányok...*, 3.

other documents, for understanding the circumstances and situation of children's and youth theatre performances outside the professional sphere in the period under study. These documents provide a picture of children's and youth theatre performances and how a particular state-supported opportunity inspired or even limited the theatrical thinking of the creators, which could have contributed to generating change in the field of amateur theatre-making. One such example was the 1971 Youth Act, which encouraged amateur companies to produce theatre for children and young people:

“[...] Young people must be introduced to the works of culture and taught to enjoy them. At the same time, Article 24 of the proposal also aims to enable young people to become not only passive recipients of culture but also creative participants, so that they can make their lives richer and more meaningful.”⁴³

Article 25 was about making good use of young people's free time. In this respect, the detailed explanatory memorandum explained:

“[...] Efforts should be made to ensure that young people spend their leisure time cultivating their minds, enjoying themselves in a sophisticated manner, developing their physical strength, and protecting their health.”⁴⁴

Since the mid-1970s, regulations on theatrical performances have undergone changes, including those relating to children's and youth theatre. In December 1974, a decree on the organisation of programme performances was published, which specified the performances that could be presented:

⁴³ *Törvény az ifjúságról...*, 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

"Only works that have already been published (published, broadcast, performed, or presented in a programme by a professional director) or that have been approved for performance by a specially appointed body (the Arts Council) or by the director may be performed in a programme. The professional performer or the head of the amateur artistic group and the director of the organising body shall be responsible for compliance with this provision."⁴⁵

This regulation made it even clearer what can be shown, what can be played, and who can be held responsible for the shows. The issue of revenue also became problematic, as:

"Only a professional performer holding a professional performer's licence issued by the National Philharmonic, the National Direction Office, or the National Centre for Entertainment Music (hereinafter referred to as a professional performer) may perform in a series of shows for a fee or other compensation."⁴⁶

This paragraph of the decree stipulated that anyone who did not have a performing arts licence could not be paid for performing or playing. This made it difficult for many amateur actors or encouraged them to perform for free as a hobby. It was not worth becoming a professional performer because there were many more regulations to meet, and as an amateur art group, the subject of the performance was not subject to a licence, although they could not be paid for

⁴⁵ No. 3/1974. (XII. 14.) KM Decree of the Minister of Culture on the organization of performances, 4. §., *Magyar Közlöny*, 1974. dec. 14. / No. 95. 1017.

⁴⁶ 5. §., *ibid.*

their work, so it was worth staying in the amateur category.

In the situation survey of 1977, cited above, the ÁIB and the Ministry of Culture stated that they were counting on amateur theatres and the performances they produced, as there was a huge demand for children's productions in the countryside and in the capital.⁴⁷ At the same time, however, most of the well-established amateur theatre companies had not yet recognised the opportunities that this public cultural situation offered them.

For a more complete picture of the performances for children and youth by amateurs, e.g. *Gyerekjátékszín*,⁴⁸ and some performers, e.g. Békés Itala,⁴⁹ see the cultural programmes of the construction and holiday camps.⁵⁰ The ÁIB and the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League (KISZ) together organised the cultural programmes of the camps centrally. The political leadership's approach to the cultural provision of

⁴⁷ NÁNAY, „A gyerekek és a színház”, 16.

⁴⁸ *Gyerekjátékszín* was amateur theatre founded by Éva Mezei in 1976. Until 1986, it produced performances for children and youth. This theatre group created the first TIE (Theatre in Education) performance in Hungary, the *King Matthias Was Here*, in 1978. Éva Mezei got the TIE form in England.

⁴⁹ Békés Itala (1927–): Kossuth and Jászai Mari Prize-winning Hungarian actress, a deserving and distinguished artist whose one-woman theatre for high school students and young adults was performed in pioneer and construction camps: *The Soul and Dance*, *Disco Itala* (1980), and *To Be or to Be Seen* (1981).

⁵⁰ The KISZ organised the construction camps from 1957 onward. The construction camp movement contributed to the socialist education of young people, strengthened their community spirit, satisfied the seasonal labour needs of the national economy, and mobilised tens of thousands of people every year.

the construction camps and pioneer camps was to ensure that the performances were as valid and of the highest quality as possible. The aim of the ÁIB was therefore to ensure that the students spent their free time after the camps as meaningfully as possible, an aim that was also underpinned by the political dimension of the time: the idea of controllability. Theatres, groups, and artists were invited by the ÁIB to put on theatre, music, and other types of programmes for the camps.⁵¹

In 1976, in addition to the three hundred and three central performances of the professional theatres, amateur artists and groups performed three hundred times in the camp programmes organised by the Central Committee of the KISZ. According to ÁIB reports, the most successful programmes were performances where the artists were able to establish direct contact with the campers and thus involving them in the performance. This may have encouraged the artists to create a format for the summer performances that would engage and involve the campers in the performance.

In a report for 1980, the ÁIB stated that the amateur theatre movement was making the youth's contact with professional theatres more active. It was seen that the rigid boundary between professional theatres and the amateur movement was disappearing and that amateur groups' broad audience connections were helping to enrich the audiences of professional theatres and to make the theatrical experience more inclusive. In

⁵¹ "The 1975 summer youth holiday season has come to an end. According to the preliminary summary, the utilisation rate of the various ÁIB benefits, worth HUF 24.3 million and involving some 100,000 young people, was favourable. The institutional cultural programme of the summer camps and holiday camps included 150 performances." In *Tájékoztató – Jelentés az ÁIBT 1975. III. negyedévi tevékenységéről*, 2., Source: 1. doboz-XIX-A-99, 1975. szeptember 29.

particular, the Puppet Theatre and the Children's Theatre consciously developed their links with the amateur movement. The latter also hosted an annual meeting of children's theatres under the title "Children's Theatre – We Own the Stage!"

As well as performing in pioneer and builder camps, there were amateur theatre makers who were given other spaces to create theatre productions. One such artist was János Novák,⁵² who became a distinctive artist of the period with his work in the 1980s, which was different from traditional children's theatre. In 1980, he staged *Bors néni (Auntie Pepper)* at the University Stage. Novák's subsequent works were also influenced by the form of children's theatre that was already present in *Bors néni*: audience participation and singing together. Other performances of this kind included *Mowgli* at Játékszín, *The Eyelashes of the Wolf* at the Radnóti Miklós Stage and *The Storytelling Garden*.

There were also theatre companies that created good children's productions. One of these was a troupe of actors, mainly from the National Theatre company, directed by László Vándorfi,⁵³ which presented Sándor Weöres' *Peter the Deceiver* on the University Stage. At the beginning of the performance, the actors talked to the audience and, together with the musicians providing live music, taught the children a few mocking songs and sayings, asking them to shout and sing them out loud with the musicians during the performance if they heard such and such a text. Imre Katona⁵⁴ and Maya Szilágyi⁵⁵ were

⁵² János Novák (1952–): director, director of the Kolibri Children's and Youth Theatre, became a distinctive figure of the period with his works in the 1980s, which were different from traditional children's theatre. In 1980, he directed *Auntie Pepper* at the University Stage.

⁵³ László Vándorfi (1951–): director, actor, director of Pannon Castle Theatre.

⁵⁴ Imre Katona (1943–): director, dramaturg.

the key figures of the Universitas Ensemble between 1976 and 1987. They mostly performed in the framework of the University Stage, in the Hordó of the Eötvös Klub, under the name Universitas for a while, then Gropius. Gropius also had the professional aim of creating high-quality musical children's theatre performances. Their first children's production was in 1983, entitled *Cinóber*, which was then presented under the name Universitas. The play was inspired by E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Little Zaches Called Zinnober*. The dialogue was composed from sketches of real classic clown plays and improvisations. The group then performed Tor Age Bringsvaerd's *The Mighty Thespian* at the University Stage in 1983. Continuing the series of performances for children, in June 1985, Elek Benedek's *The Prince of Many Treasures* was performed on the beach in Gyula.

There were one-man theatres run by Kati Sólyom⁵⁶ and Itala Békés. They researched the material for the subject of their performances alone, wrote their scripts alone, created their productions alone, and involved only technicians and musicians in the execution. They became researchers, dramaturgs, directors, actors, teachers, costume designers, and visual designers in the process of creating and realising their performances.

This complex creative attitude also characterised the other amateur theatre groups: the Gyerekjátékszín, the Tércsínház,⁵⁷ and

the Lakásszínház.⁵⁸ These communities were part of the amateur theatre scene, which also had a defined need for a complex commitment, although in the Gyerekjátékszín and the Tércsínház the directors were one-man shows, with the other functions being shared between the members of the groups. Everybody did everything: dramaturgy, directing, cleaning, audience organisation, typing, and costume sewing. The creators of the Tércsínház reinforced the collective creation between the members of the group, i.e. everyone played all the different roles in the creative process.

Éva Mezei's Gyerekjátékszín was made up of mostly teachers and kindergarten graduates, liberal arts students, and early career teachers who wanted to teach children, but with a different method than the Prussian, hierarchical education; that is, they were more committed to pedagogy.⁵⁹ On the one hand, as teachers, they could make theatre and act as actors, and on the other hand, through theatre, they could play and think with children and young people. The latter gave them a strong foundation for their teaching careers and for their daily practice in schools and pedagogy.⁶⁰

The members of the ensemble of the Theatre on the Square, led by Hunor Bucz, went to work while doing theatre. Among them were carpenters, doctors, folk artists, plumbers, postmen, tailors, craftsmen, and children's librarians. The Square Theatre team was made up of socially disadvantaged

⁵⁵ Maya Szilágyi (1947–): actor, set and costume designer.

⁵⁶ Kati Sólyom: Jászai Mari and Aase Award-winning Hungarian actress and permanent member of the Pécs National Theatre. Her one-woman children's theatre productions include *Mesebál* (1970) and *Csipkefa* (1971), which were aimed at the kindergarten and school age groups.

⁵⁷ Tércsínház is an amateur theatre company founded in 1969 by Hunor Bucz. Since 1978, it has been running a dramatic playhouse for preschool and school children.

⁵⁸ Lakásszínház was founded by Péter Halász and Anna Koós. In 1974, they created *Guido and Tyrius*, which was performed twice to a mixed-age audience; the audience ranged from infants and preschoolers to primary school children, with adult chaperones.

⁵⁹ Cf. MEZEI Éva, „Színház a nevelésben: Theatre-in-education”, *Színház* 19, no. 11 (1986): 22–25, 22.

⁶⁰ Cf. ILLÉS Klára, ed., *Az élet tanítható: Mezei Éva rendező, drámapedagógus szellemi öröksége* (Pécs: Alexandra Kiadó, 2008), 274.

young adults with housing problems. Instead of working odd jobs, they made theatre. Hunor Bucz did not select the team members; there were no exams, and he welcomed everyone who wanted to join with open arms. A family-like, commune-like community was formed during acting. The Tércsínház “nurtured actors, audiences, and theatre”.⁶¹

The members of the Lakásszínház also made theatre while working, if they had a job. Anna Koós emphasised in an interview I had with her that no one was an actor in the Lakásszínház, everyone was just a human being, people who loved to act and wanted to bring joy to other people. A joy that took the audience out of their everyday lives.

Amateur artists and creative communities approached the realisation of performances for children either with the idea of thinking through theatre as a goal (Gyerekjátékszín, the one-man theatre of Kati Sólyom and Itala Békés, Péter Levente and Ildikó Döbrentey⁶²), their theatre took on a defining role by creating children’s performances (Tércsínház, *Bors néni* of the University Stage, József Ruszt’s School Theatre and Initiation Theatre⁶³), or they were acting for the theatre itself (Lakásszínház).

Children’s and youth theatre performances outside the professional theatre were therefore present in the 1970s and 1980s. What can be observed in the case of amateurs and one-man shows is that they chose

the age group themselves, wanting to play for children and young people. Their performances were adapted to play in different spaces, creating different formal versions where the audience’s position shifted from the traditional spectator’s perspective. These changes have been incorporated into their everyday operations, creating new variations on the spectator-actor relationship and the use of space in their performances, ideas, experiences, and ways of thinking that influenced professional children’s and youth theatre performances.

As a result of the institutionalised and non-professional children’s and youth theatre processes outlined above and the change of regime in 1989, three institutions or companies were established in 1992 that initially only performed children’s and youth theatre and that are still dominant in the children’s and youth theatre scene today: the Kolibri Children’s and Youth Theatre, the Budapest Puppet Theatre, and the Round Table Theatre Education Centre.

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⁶¹ BÓTA Gábor, „Közszemlére tett szenvedéstörténet”, *Magyar Hírlap*, 2006. márc. 3., 19.

⁶² Péter Levente’s and Ildikó Döbrentey’s performances on the Micro-Microscope Stage *Zúrhajó* (1982) and *Motoszka* (1984), which were for children aged three to seven.

⁶³ Among József Ruszt’s school theatre productions, *Csongor és Tünde* (1976) was for high school students, *Romeo and Juliet* (1975), and *Antigone* (1976) for middle school students. In Zalaegerszeg, the introductory theatre performances were aimed at secondary school students, e.g. the 1982 *Romeo and Juliet* directed by Ruszt.

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