

Prispevek prinaša kratek pregled ljubiteljskih gledaliških praks na Malti in ob tem pokaže, da malteški gledališki sistem skoraj v celoti temelji na ljubiteljskih praksah. Malta namreč ne premore dovolj občinstva in upravne infrastrukture za obstoj poklicnih gledališč, kar pomeni, da se z gledališčem preživlja le peščica ustvarjalcev. Kljub temu se je z napredkom na področju gledališkega izobraževanja v zadnjih tridesetih letih kakovost igre in uprizarjanja znatno dvignila ter razprla prostor vsebinsko in uprizoritveno zahtevnejšim predstavam. Prispevek se osredotoči na različne tipe ljubiteljskega delovanja, pri čemer izpostavi predvsem razlikovanje glede na dejstvo, da je Malta dvojezična država, kjer sta uradna jezika malteščina in angleščina, ter osvetli pomen skupnostne identitete in katoliške cerkve za razvoj gledališča na Malti. Na izzive, s katerimi se soočajo ljubiteljski gledališki ustvarjalci, pogleda v luči sprememb, ki pretresajo družbo, in izbir, ki jih te prinašajo. Novi zahodni gledališki stili vplivajo tako na dramsko pisavo kot na odrske ustvarjalce, obenem pa so preoblikovali tudi pričakovanja gledalcev o tem, kako uprizarjati družbena in politična vprašanja sodobne družbe.

Ključne besede: ljubiteljsko gledališče, polprofesionalno gledališče, usposabljanje, gledališko izobraževanje, gledališče v malteškem jeziku, gledališče v angleškem jeziku, katoliška cerkev

Vicki Ann Cremona je dekanja Fakultete za uprizoritvene umetnosti Univerze na Malti, kjer v okviru Oddelka za gledališke študije tudi predava. Med letoma 2005 in 2009 je bila ambasadorica Republike Malte v Franciji, med letoma 2009 in 2013 pa v Tuniziji. Področje njenih trenutnih raziskav je razmerje med gledališčem in oblastjo. Svoje prispevke, v katerih se osredotoča na gledališke dogodke in različne oblike javnih slovesnosti, od cestnih procesij do *commedie dell'arte*, redno objavlja v mednarodnih publikacijah. Naslov njene zadnje objavljene knjige je *Carnival and Power: Play and Politics in a Crown Colony* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Je članica izvršnega odbora Mednarodnega združenja za gledališke raziskave (IFTR).

Marco Galea je predavatelj gledaliških študij in vodja raziskovalcev na Fakulteti za uprizoritvene umetnosti Univerze na Malti. Osrednje področje njegovih raziskav je malteško gledališče v 19. in 20. stoletju oziroma vprašanja, povezana z jezikom, identiteto in reprezentacijo. Prispevke s teh področij objavlja v strokovnih in periodičnih publikacijah, uredil pa je tudi že več strokovnih publikacij. Na Fakulteti za uprizoritvene umetnosti že več let deluje kot koordinator digitalnega arhiva uprizoritvenih umetnosti na Malti.

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Ljubiteljsko gledališče na Malti

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Zgodovinski uvod

Malta je najmanjša država članica Evropske unije. Kljub gosti poselitvi je obenem tudi članica z najmanjšim številom prebivalcev, saj je leta 2018 štela nekaj manj kot pol milijona prebivalcev (NSO, *News* 1). Leta 2004 objavljena nacionalna raziskava je pokazala, da je le približno četrtina odraslih prebivalcev leto poprej obiskala gledališče, nekaj več kot polovica od njih pa si je ogledala manj kot štiri predstave (NSO, *Theatre* viii, 15). Naslednja nacionalna raziskava iz leta 2017 je sicer pokazala rahel porast števila gledaliških obiskovalcev, a je delež tistih, ki so si ogledali več kot tri predstave, ostal zelo nizek (4,2 odstotka prebivalstva) (NSO, *Cultural* 50). Raziskava iz leta 2004 je tudi pokazala, da večina vprašanih ni pripravljena odšteti veliko denarja za vstopnice (NSO, *Theatre* viii). Čeprav raziskava iz leta 2017 ni vsebovala istega vprašanja, pa je iz nje razvidno, da ostaja delež osebnega dohodka, ki so ga vprašani pripravljene (ali zmožni) odšteti za kulturne dejavnosti, zelo nizek (NSO, *Cultural* 107).

V tem kontekstu je torej razumljivo, da je gledališče na Malti bodisi ljubiteljsko ali pa – v najboljšem primeru – polprofesionalno, saj se gledališki ustvarjalci le stežka preživljajo zgolj z delovanjem na področju gledališča. Le peščica malteških gledaliških igralcev in režiserjev namreč živi – kljub težavam – zgolj od igranja in režiranja, pa še ti si v veliki večini odre delijo z ljubiteljskimi ustvarjalci. Večina malteških gledališnikov opravlja dela, ki niso povezana z gledališčem; nekateri so sicer za polni delovni čas zaposleni v osnovnih in srednjih šolah kot vodje dramskih krožkov, a veliko več jih honorarno dela na zasebnih večernih šolah, ki so jih ustanovili ljubiteljski gledališki ustvarjalci. Kot pogost vir dodatnega dohodka se pojavljata tudi delo na radiu in televiziji.

Ljubiteljska gledališča tako predstavljajo pomemben del sodobne gledališke scene, obenem pa imajo tudi ključno vlogo za sam razvoj gledališke umetnosti in uprizarjanja v malteškem prostoru. Vendar pa je pomembno zgodovinsko vlogo odigralo tudi poklicno gledališče, saj je na Malti več kot dve stoletji, od zgodnjega 18. stoletja do druge svetovne vojne, delovalo operno gledališče. Gledališče je zaposlovalo tako lokalne ustvarjalce kot tudi umetnike iz tujine, za njegovo delovanje pa je skrbela profesionalna ekipa (Cremona, »The Performance of Deeds«). Opera je v mesecih, ko predstave niso bile dovoljene oziroma zaželeni, na primer v postnem času (40-dnevni

post pred veliko nočjo), za izvedbo predstav najemala poklicne izvajalce od drugod, ponavadi iz bližnje Italije. Po uničenju namensko zgrajene operne hiše s 1100 sedeži, ki je bila porušena v bombnem zračnem napadu med drugo svetovno vojno, pa se je pokazalo, da je vzdrževanje poklicnega gledališča dolgoročno nevzdržno. Vsi kasnejši povojni poskusi za vzpostavitev profesionalnih gledaliških struktur so bili neuspešni (glej Galea, »Bodies without Organs« 101–113), predvsem zato, ker je moralo gledališče kot živa umetnost za gledalce tekmovati najprej s kinematografijo, nato pa še s televizijo.

Poklicno gledališče na Malti je skozi zgodovino temeljilo predvsem na »uvozu«. Čeprav je velik del ustvarjalcev in tehničnega osebja prihajal iz lokalnega okolja (zlasti glasbeniki in tehnično osebje, pa tudi nekaj pevcev), so na odrih uprizarjali skoraj izključno operna dela italijanskih skladateljev in jih v italijanščini tudi izvajali. Nekoliko poplošno bi lahko rekli, da je malteško poklicno gledališče sledilo trendom večjih italijanskih opernih hiš tako v repertoarnem kot tudi uprizoritvenem smislu. Glede na prevladujoč položaj italijanskega jezika in kulture v času od konca srednjega veka pa vse do začetka 20. stoletja, ko je bila italijanščina jezik oblasti in sodstva, je italijanski vpliv na razvoj malteškega gledališča povsem pričakovan. Večina predstav je bila namenjena višjim slojem malteške družbe in kolonizatorjem. Zgodovinsko gledano je namreč šele z nastankom ljubiteljskega gledališča v 19. stoletju prišlo do razcveta gledaliških praks v ljudskem jeziku, ki so že same po sebi poseben kulturni fenomen.

Gledališče v malteškem jeziku se je začelo razvijati šele potem, ko se je jezik začel zapisovati in uporabljati v šoli ter literarnih delih. Pomemben je bil prispevek prekaljenih profesionalnih izvajalcev, kot je bil recimo Luigi Rosato (1795–1872), ki je deloval v edinem poklicnem gledališkem ansamblu tistega časa. Vendar pa so konkretne pobude za vzpostavitev gledališča v malteščini prišle od ljubiteljskih dramatikov in izvajalcev (Galea, *It-Teatru Malti I*). V štiridesetih letih 19. stoletja so različne ljubiteljske skupine pričele ustanovljati majhna, improvizirana gledališča v pristaniškem območju. Ta so bila namenjena zlasti nižjim slojem prebivalstva, ki si vstopnic za predstave poklicnega gledališča (kjer so bile operne predstave na sporedu vse leto) niso mogli privoščiti in ki so seveda bolje sprejeli predstave, odigrane v malteškem jeziku. V teh gledaliških skupinah so pogosto nastopali nepismeni ali polpismeni izvajalci pod vodstvom bolj izobraženih posameznikov, kot so denimo učitelji ali vladni uradniki, ki so predstave tudi pisali in režirali.¹ Ljubiteljske gledališke skupine so tako kmalu postale poglavitni vir razvedrila za nižje sloje, saj so do konca

¹ Carmelo Camilleri (1821–1903), najuspešnejši in plodnejši dramatik in igravec 19. stoletja, je bil uradnik; Pietru Pawl Castagna (1827–1907), ugleden dramatik in režiser, je bil učitelj, ki se je povzpел do mesta direktorja osnovnih šol in na oder postavil veliko predstav, vendar so mnoge od njih pravzaprav ustvarili njegovi učenci; Mikelang Borg (1868–1939), ki je v zadnjih letih 19. in prvih desetletjih 20. stoletja vodil najuspešnejšo gledališko skupino na Malti in prevedel oziroma priredil mnogo dramskih del, pa najbrž najbolje ilustrira položaj ljubiteljskega ustvarjalca v malteški družbi tistega obdobja. Zaposlen je bil kot zdravstveni inšpektor in tiskar, a je poleg tega izdal svoj časopis in večji del vsebin zanj napisal kar sam, kot impresarij je vodil operno gledališče ter se aktivno zavzemal za sindikalizem in pomagal ustanoviti Delavsko stranko Malte.

stoletja v skoraj vseh malteških mestih in vaseh vzniknili gledališča, ki so jih uredili na majhnih prizoriščih, dostopnih lokalnim skupnostim. Ta so bila izjemno dejavna, saj so se na odrih tedensko odvijale različne predstave. Običajno so tovrstni večeri gledališkega razvedrila vključevali melodramo v petih dejanjih, komedijo in kratko farso. Navdih za stvaritve so ljubiteljski gledališčniki črpali predvsem iz profesionalnih predstav lokalne operne hiše oziroma tujih od gostujočih skupin in iz italijanskih dramskih del, ki so bila takrat na Malti zelo razširjena. V prvih nekaj desetletjih je njihov repertoar zajemal zlasti prevode in priredbe italijanskih iger oziroma igre v drugih evropskih jezikih, ki so na otok prišle prek italijanskih prevodov. Iz italijanske tradicije so prevzeli tudi nekatere uspešne žanrske usmeritve.

Priljubljenost ljubiteljskega gledališča v malteščini je privedla do razcveta dramatike. V času od štiridesetih let 19. stoletja do začetka 20. stoletja je bilo izdanih na stotine dramskih del, časopisi pa so celotne številke posvečali gledališkimi, predvsem ljubiteljskimi, aktivnostim. Čeprav je repertoar ljubiteljskih gledališč pretežno vseboval žanre, ki bi jih lahko imeli za minorne, so ta ključno prispevala k večji dostopnosti do gledaliških odrov in tako razširila krog obiskovalcev, obenem pa so pripomogla tudi k ustanavljanju novih gledališč, med katerimi nekatera delujejo še danes. *Teatrin* (dobesedni prevod »gledališčece«), kot so imenovali tovrstna gledališča, je bil tudi priročen medij za izražanje nacionalističnih in drugih političnih pogledov, a sta njihov pomen in priljubljenost po drugi svetovni vojni začela upadati. Do sredine 20. stoletja se je ljubiteljsko gledališče na Malti razvilo v svojevrsten kulturni fenomen. Nogomet, kinematografi in kasneje, od začetka šestdesetih let 20. stoletja, televizija v domačem, malteškem jeziku so postajali vedno večja konkurenca, število obiskovalcev – in posameznikov, ki so želeli sodelovati v predstavah – pa se je vztrajno zmanjševalo, kar je privedlo do ukinitve mnogih gledaliških skupin, preostale pa so bile prisiljene občutno zmanjšati število uprizorjenih predstav na sezono.

Gledališče v malteškem jeziku je že na samem začetku svojega razvoja sredi 19. stoletja hitro postalo sredstvo za razširjanje nacionalističnih idej in premislek o vprašanjih identitete. Ko se je boj za priznanje malteščine zaostрил, se je dramatika v lastnem jeziku začela pojmovati kot način, s katerim bi lahko malteška literatura prodrla na nova polja. Kopica uglednih avtorjev je pričela pisati za gledališče – a ne zato, ker bi bili posebej nadarjeni za dramatiko, temveč z namenom razvijanja in širitve nacionalne literature in kulture, ki pred razglasitvijo samostojnosti leta 1964 nista bili v celoti prepoznani in cenjeni. Po razglasitvi neodvisnosti so nekateri pomembni dramatik v očeh javnosti obveljali kot relevantni družbeni kritiki, prelomna dramska dela, ki vzdržijo primerjave z nekaterimi znamenitimi romani ali drugimi literarnimi deli, pa kot ključna za utemeljitev nacionalne skupnosti in premislek o vprašanjih, s katerimi se je ta soočala.

Prav tako pomemben odraz ljubiteljskega gledališča na Malti je gledališče v angleškem jeziku, ki se je na otoku razvilo v angleškem kolonialnem obdobju, ki je trajalo od leta 1800 do 1964. Na začetku 19. stoletja je gledališče v angleškem jeziku predstavljalo alternativno obliko razvedrila za angleško govoreče prebivalce, ki jim osrednje gledališče, ki je uprizarjalo opere in je bilo abonmajsko, ni bilo tako dostopno. Abonmajski model je namreč velikemu številu Angležev, zaposlenih v državnih uradih, onemogočal pridobitev sezonskih vstopnic, saj so običajno na otok prispeli šele, ko so vstopnice že pošle. Poleg tega so bili britanski prebivalci bolj naklonjeni predstavam v njim znanih žanrih v maternem jeziku. Uprizarjane predstave so bile bodisi domačemu okolju prirejena dramska dela in muzikali z londonskih odrov bodisi predstave, ki so jih napisali ali sestavili lokalni angleško govoreči prebivalci in uradniki in so bile prav tako prirejene lokalnemu kontekstu. Uprizarjali so jih v gledališčih, postavljenih v vojaških kompleksih, do katerih lokalno prebivalstvo sicer ni imelo dostopa, spet druge skupine pa so svoje predstave igrale na lokacijah, kjer so uprizarjali tudi dela v malteščini. Angleško govoreče ljubiteljske gledališke skupine so v lokalni prostor prinesle tudi britanske žanre, kot je recimo božična pantomima. Lokalno prebivalstvo je gledališče v angleškem jeziku sprejemalo zelo počasi. Izobraženi sloji prebivalstva so bili preveč navezani na italijansko kulturo, da bi sprejeli jezik in kulturne manifestacije novih kolonizatorjev. Razvoj britanskih žanrov v malteškem kontekstu je spodbudil šele nastanek novega družbenega sloja, ki je imel vsaj osnovno znanje angleščine, to pa se je zgodilo šele v 20. stoletju (glej Galea, »The Pantomime Other« 117–120). Do razmaha angleščine je namreč prišlo leta 1914, ko je bila razglašena za uradni jezik sodstva (Frendo 112). Ob koncu kolonialnega obdobja so ljubiteljske gledališke aktivnosti v angleščini prevzeli britanski civilni prebivalci pa tudi nekateri malteški ljubiteljski ustvarjalci, ki so se angleščine naučili tako dobro, da so lahko nastopili ob boku angleško govorečih igralcev. Ta tradicija je na Malti izjemno vitalna še danes, čeprav je mestoma zdrsnila v polprofesionalno oziroma komercialno aktivnost, njen vpliv pa se kaže predvsem v tem, da se britanski žanri, kot je recimo božična pantomima, danes množično uprizarjajo v malteškem jeziku bodisi kot večje produkcije v osrednjih gledališčih ali kot šolske produkcije.

Analiza stanja sodobnega ljubiteljskega gledališča na Malti mora upoštevati vprašanja, ki pomembno vplivajo na gledališko dejavnost v državi, kot so recimo demografija, dostopnost izobraževanja na področju gledaliških praks in ponudba predstav, ki jih lahko uvrstimo med ljubiteljske.

Gledališka infrastruktura

Nicholson idr. podajo naslednjo opredelitev ljubiteljskega gledališča: »dejavnost [...] samoupravnih organizacij, katerih poglobilni cilj je ustvarjanje gledaliških predstav« (4).

Raziskava mednarodne raziskovalne skupine STEP (Project on European Theatre Systems) je pokazala, da se ljubiteljsko gledališče v celinski Evropi pogosto povezuje s podeželjem oziroma nemestnimi območji (glej npr. Bremgartner 371). Primer Malte v tem smislu predstavlja anomalijo. Za Malto bi lahko rekli, da je »mesto država«, saj njen arhipelag meri le 316 km², ruralna območja pa so zelo redka in nikoli oddaljena od mestnih središč. Z naraščajočo urbanizacijo je namreč prišlo do združitve vasi in mest v eno neprekinjeno gosteje naseljeno urbano območje, konurbacijo. Tisto, kar ločuje eno območje od drugega, je občutek pripadnosti skupnosti, ta pa se običajno povezuje s pripadnostjo lokalni župniji in njenim tradicijam, čeprav katolicizem kot glavna religija v državi naglo izgublja moč.

Dejstvo, da je Malta izolirana od celinske Evrope, je pomenilo, da se gledališče na otoku ni razvijalo z istim tempom kot na kontinentu, prav tako pa tudi ni vedno ubralo istih poti razvoja. Ta se je omejeval tudi z državno cenzuro, ki je bila ukinjena šele leta 2012, pomemben dejavnik pa je bila tudi prisotnost katoliške cerkve v širši družbi, ki je lastnica številnih gledališč in tako ohranja določen nadzor tako nad tematikami kot tudi nad uprizoritvenimi pristopi v svojih gledališčih. Dandanes na Malti delujejo številna gledališča, v katerih deluje veliko število gledaliških skupin, od polprofesionalnih, ki delujejo v večjih in uglednejših gledališčih, do resnično ljubiteljskih, ki so aktivne v župnijah oziroma drugih lokalnih okoljih. Osrednja gledališča se nahajajo v prestolnici Valletta. Leta 1732 zgrajeno Gledališče Manoel (cca. 572 sedežev) (Cremona idr., *Spazji Teatrali* 160) velja za malteško narodno gledališče, čeprav uradno tega naziva nima. Pretežno se uporablja za koncerte in manj za gledališke predstave, ki pa so po večini polprofesionalne. Druga prizorišča v državni lasti vključujejo še gledališče Spazju Kreattiv s 186 sedeži, ki se nahaja v prostorih mestnega kulturnega centra (158), gledališče na prostem Pjazza Teatru Rjal (cca. 806 sedežev) (152) in Republic Hall, ki domuje v Mediteranskem konferenčnem centru (cca. 1400 sedežev) (150). Med pomembnejša prizorišča štejemo še Valletta Campus Theatre (cca. 132 zložljivih stolov) (162), ki je v lasti Univerze na Malti, in Catholic Institute Theatre (cca. 833 sedežev) (138) v neposredni bližini prestolnice Valletta in v lasti katoliške cerkve. Nobeno od naštetih gledališč nima lastnega igralskega ansambla, vsa pa svoje prostore oddajajo v najem.

Produkcije v večjih gledališčih imajo običajno do šest ponovitev, na manjših prizoriščih pa nekoliko več, pri čemer v skupnostnih gledališčih navadno odigrajo le premiero in morda še kakšno ponovitev, saj v teh okoljih ni zadostnega števila gledalcev za več ponovitev. Za razliko od Narodnega filharmoničnega orkestra in nacionalne plesne skupine ŽfinMalta, ki zaposlujeta poklicne izvajalce, pa nedavno nastala narodna gledališka skupina Teatru Malta, ki jo je leta 2017 ustanovil Arts Council Malta, izvajalcev ne zaposluje za polni delovni čas (glej Cremona, »Theatre in Malta« nepag.), temveč jim nudi le kratkoročne angažmaje za posamezne produkcije.

V smislu delovnih procesov Teatru Malta sledi polprofesionalnim in ljubiteljskim pristopom, saj vaje potekajo v večernih urah, ko igralci končajo svoje delovne obveznosti. Glede na opisano torej ne preseneča, da lahko pri večjem delu malteške gledališke produkcije opazimo nekatere značilnosti, ki jih sicer običajno zaznamo v ljubiteljskem gledališču, obenem pa predstave številnih ljubiteljskih skupin nastajajo v tesnem produkcijskem sodelovanju s profesionalnimi ali komercialnimi projekti. Kot primer tovrstne strateške povezave med ljubiteljskimi in profesionalnimi projekti navajamo eno pomembnejših produkcij gledališča Teatru Malta, ki je imela premiero septembra leta 2018.

Gre za adaptacijo drame *Avenija [Boulevard]* največjega malteškega dramatika in romanopisca Francisa Ebejerja iz leta 1964 (Crow in Galea 25-6). Ebejer je kljub temu, da si je že v mladih letih prislužil sloves nadarjenega dramatika in da je nekaj svojih v angleščini napisanih romanov izdal v Veliki Britaniji in Združenih državah Amerike, večino življenja preživel kot šolski učitelj in poklic zapustil šele, ko se je lahko predčasno upokojil. Svoje drame je tudi režiral in v predstavah sodeloval tako z igralci iz *teatrina* kot tudi z drugimi poklicnimi igralci. Ponovna obuditev drame leta 2018 v produkciji Gledališča Manoel, kjer je igra doživela tudi svojo krstno uprizoritev, se je prav tako opirala na kombinacijo profesionalnih in ljubiteljskih prvin: besedilo je bilo drastično okrajšano, v ansamblu pa je bilo poleg poklicnih plesalcev iz narodne plesne skupine ŽfinMalta, ki so v predstavi tudi igrali, še manjše število polprofesionalnih igralcev in ljubiteljev. Koreografijo in scenografijo sta prevzela poklicna umetnika, medtem ko je režiser opravljal naloge, ki bi jih v profesionalnem okolju sicer zaupali dramaturgu.

Izobraževanje

Področje poklicnega izobraževanja za igralce, plesalce in glasbenike je na Malti razmeroma slabo razvito in zakonsko neurejeno, kar je neposredna posledica omejenega kulturnega trga in pričakovanj, da bo za gledališko razvedrilo poskrbela ljubiteljska gledališka produkcija, tudi na vidnejših kulturnih prizoriščih. V splošnem diskurzu o uprizoritvenih umetnostih na Malti ima namreč »talent« prednost pred izobraževanjem. Ker na otoku ni možnosti za poklicno usposabljanje, se nadobudni mladi igralci običajno odpravijo na študij v tujino (v Veliko Britanijo, včasih pa tudi v ZDA, Italijo in druge države); mnogi se ne vrnejo, saj imajo v velikih mestnih središčih dosti boljše možnosti za delovanje kot doma. Tisti, ki se, običajno delujejo v okoljih, ki bi jih lahko opredelili kot ljubiteljska. Malteški ljubiteljski dramski klub (Malta Amateur Dramatic Club – MADC) z več kot stoletno tradicijo je nastal po modelu britanskih podeželskih ljubiteljskih gledaliških skupin in ljubiteljskih dramskih društev v britanskih kolonijah (glej Becker 710-1). Danes klub za svoje produkcije angažira tako izšolane igralce kot tudi tiste, ki niso nikoli obiskovali programov strokovnega

usposabljanja. Po razglasitvi samostojnosti leta 1964 sta na pobudo British Councila na Malto prišla strokovnjaka za področje gledališča v izobraževanju,² ki sta leta 1977 ustanovila Akademijo za dramsko umetnost (Academy of Dramatic Art – MTADA), ki je nudila izredni večerni program izobraževanja iz giba, glasu, improvizacije in interpretacije (glej Aquilina 89). Ta je sčasoma prerasla v državno Dramsko šolo (Drama School), ki se danes imenuje Šola za dramsko umetnost in ples (Malta School of Drama and Dance), kjer potekajo večerni programi pod vodstvom malteških gledaliških pedagogov. Poleg tega je pod okriljem Ministrstva za izobraževanje začel delovati tudi Dramski oddelek (Drama Unit), ki se posveča predvsem izobraževanju na področju gledališke umetnosti ter občasno organizira delavnice v državnih osnovnih šolah. Leta 1988 je Univerza na Malti zagnala dva programa, gledališkega in glasbenega, kasneje pa še plesnega, ki so prerasli v Fakulteto za uprizoritvene umetnosti (School of Performing Arts), ki zdaj nudi diplomski, magistrski in doktorski študij s teh področij, poleg tega pa zagotavlja tudi pedagoško izobraževanje. Na prelomu stoletja se je pojavilo večje število dramskih šol oziroma programov gledališkega izobraževanja ob delu, med katerimi je tudi nekaj podružnic mednarodnih dramskih skupin. Vodijo jih ljubiteljski ali polprofesionalni ustvarjalci, ki so se želeli preživljati z uprizoritvenimi umetnostmi, a so hitro ugotovili, da bodo to lahko počeli le, če se podajo na področje izobraževanja. Med njimi je tudi nekaj (žanrsko) najboljših igralcev v državi. Te dramske šole nudijo občasne in izredne programe, delavnice in druge programe usposabljanja. Ker sektor ni v celoti zakonsko urejen, se kakovost programov in strokovnega kadra ter njihove infrastrukturne zmogljivosti zelo razlikujejo. Univerza in nekatere dramske šole organizirajo delavnice s tujimi poklicnimi ustvarjalci. Nedavno so na Visoki šoli za umetnost, znanost in tehnologijo (Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology) začeli izvajati dvoletni dodiplomski program iz uprizoritvenih umetnosti, ki se bo predvidoma preoblikoval v magistrski študij. Leta 2017 je bila ustanovljena tudi državna srednja šola, ki zagotavlja usposabljanje na področjih vizualne in uprizoritvene umetnosti. Udeleženci izobraževalnih programov redno sodelujejo z različnimi uprizoritvenimi skupinami v državi.

Raznolikost ljubiteljskih gledališč – raznolikost predstav

Čeprav lahko v pretežnem delu malteške gledališke produkcije zaznamo prvine ljubiteljskega delovanja (naj bo to pomanjkljiva poklicna usposobljenost ali pa odsotnost plačila), pa obstajajo tudi gledališke formacije, ki svojo dejavnost same opredeljujejo kot ljubiteljsko. Ena od njihovih pomembnejših značilnosti je izbira uprizoritvenega jezika.

² Adrian Rendle je bil ljubiteljski režiser v Tower Theatre, delal pa je v londonskem West Endu. Poleg tega je poučeval na Akademiji za dramsko umetnost Webber Dougals in na Kraljevi akademiji za dramsko umetnost. Peter Cox je sodeloval kot koordinator za področje gledališča v izobraževanju.

Čeprav je angleščina eden od uradnih jezikov, večina prebivalstva govori državni jezik, malteščino, prav tako v malteščini poteka večji del gledališke produkcije, kamor lahko prištejemo tudi večino novih dramskih del malteških avtorjev. Kljub temu se na malteških odrih angleščina pogosto uporablja, saj gledališča redno uprizarjajo dela angleških in ameriških avtorjev v izvirnem jeziku. Obstajata vsaj dve ljubiteljski gledališki skupini, katerih predstave potekajo skoraj izključno v angleščini, in sicer MADC na glavnem otoku Malta in Gozo Creative Theatre Club na manjšem otoku Gozo, kjer poskušajo z angleščino privabiti tudi angleško govoreče prebivalce.

Preostale ljubiteljske skupine, ki bi jih lahko opredelili kot skupnostna gledališča, pa v uprizoritvah uporabljajo pretežno malteščino. Praviloma je njihovo delovanje odvisno od povezav s katoliškimi župnijami ali drugimi verskimi organizacijami. Njihov repertoar sloni na produkciji verskih dram, pogosto v povezavi z verskimi prazniki, kot sta božič ali velika noč (Malta ima tudi dolgo tradicijo pasijonskih iger), uprizarjajo pa tudi druga dela. Od krovnih organizacij običajno prejemajo določeno finančno podporo, a se zato občasno srečujejo tudi s pritiski za prilagajanje katoliškemu nauku.

Produkcija ljubiteljskih gledaliških skupin na malteških otokih je izjemno raznolika in zajema različne zvrsti: od melodrame do gledališča »u fris« in izjemno priljubljenih muzikalov, vključuje pa tudi operne predstave, v katerih glavne vloge odpojejo poklicni izvajalci iz tujine, stranske in zborovske vloge pa prevzamejo lokalni, malteški izvajalci.

Ena od prednosti ljubiteljskih gledališč v primerjavi s komercialnimi in »poklicnimi« je ta, da komercialne gledališke skupine (z izjemo ene ali dveh) nimajo svojih lastnih prostorov, medtem ko ljubiteljskim skupinam uprizoritvene prostore navadno nudijo župnije in verske skupnosti. To jim omogoča zelo nizke produkcijske stroške in obenem kontinuiteto delovanja, kar je za komercialna gledališča na Malti precejšnja redkost.

Izzivi ljubiteljskega gledališča

Od sredine 20. stoletja so si različni deležniki s področja uprizoritvenih umetnosti prizadevali zagotoviti vsaj neko obliko »poklicnega« statusa, čeprav soglasje o tem, kaj naj bi ta status obsegal in na čem naj bi temeljil, nikoli ni bilo doseženo. Kot v mnogih drugih državah tudi na Malti velja, da sta poklicni in ljubiteljski status na nasprotnih polih, ambicija večine igralcev pa je seveda pridobitev poklicnega statusa, ki jim potencialno zagotavlja možnosti preživetja.

Žal pa med bolj poklicnim in ljubiteljskim gledališčem na Malti le stežka načrtamo ločnico, razen z vidika kakovosti in ravni samega uprizarjanja. Malteški organi financiranja uprizoritvenih umetnosti namreč ne razlikujejo med tema dvema

kategorijama, kriteriji za dodelitev sredstev pa so pogosto nejasni.³ Vendar pa glede na lokalno gledališko ponudbo niti najpomembnejša prizorišča na nacionalni ravni ne morejo zares predstavljati ljubiteljskih, polprofesionalnih in profesionalnih produkcij kot ločene platforme. Posledično tudi recenzenti v svojih ocenah med njimi ne razlikujejo. Pravzaprav se gledalci pogosto odločajo za ogled predstav, v katerih nastopajo ugledni, a ne nujno profesionalni igralci. Poleg tega tudi cene vstopnic niso zmeraj pokazatelj kakovosti uprizoritve, razen v skupnostnih gledališčih, kjer so vstopnice običajno tudi občutno cenejše. V situaciji, kjer ni prave ločnice med tem, kaj je profesionalno in kaj ne, ne profesionalno in ne ljubiteljsko gledališče nimata pogojev, da bi v celoti uresničili svoj potencial.

Največji izziv za ljubiteljsko gledališče na Malti je trenutno najbrž dejstvo, da ne zmore privabiti mladih izvajalcev, in to zaradi več razlogov. Občutek pripadnosti skupnosti, ki je v preteklosti spodbujal tovrstno produkcijo, ni več tako močan kot nekoč, saj imajo mladi danes neprimerljivo več možnosti za preživljanje prostega časa. Drug pomemben izziv so dramske televizijske serije, ki priljubljenosti navkljub pogosto ostajajo na ravni neizvirnih telenovel. Mlade igralce »slava«, ki jim je na dosegu roke, ko se pojavijo v kakšni od televizijskih nadaljevanj, izjemno privlači, četudi za svoje delo pogosto ne dobijo plačila, medtem ko izkušenejši igralci zahtevajo honorar. Produkcijski stroški televizijskih nadaljevanj so zato zelo nizki in se običajno povrnejo z oglaševanjem.

K usihanju skupnostnih gledališč so pripomogle tudi boljše prometne povezave, ki obiskovalcem omogočajo hitrejši dostop do osrednjih gledališč, ki se zvečine nahajajo v prestolnici Valletta. Kot drug pomemben izziv pa je vredno omeniti še vprašanje prestiža. Skupnostna gledališča – ne neupravičeno – običajno povezujejo z amaterizmom, te oznake pa se je težko znebiti. Ker navadno nimajo na voljo dovolj sredstev, le stežka pritegnejo sposobne in ambiciozne izvajalce, ki raje sprejemajo vloge v prestižnejših gledališčih in tako pritegnejo obiskovalce, ki so poprej zahajali v gledališča v svoji skupnosti. Dober primer takšnega preobrata je osrednje gledališče v lasti katoliške cerkve, Catholic Institute Theatre, ki je župnijskim gledališčem »ukradlo« precej dobrih igralcev in velik delež obiskovalcev.

³Arts Council Malta, ki se je ob ustanovitvi leta 2002 imenoval Malta Council for Culture and the Arts, je leta 2009 zagnal umetniški sklad (Arts Fund), kjer lahko umetniki z različnih področij, ne le gledališki, zaprosijo za projektna sredstva. Valletta Cultural Agency, ustanovljena ob zaključku projekta Evropska prestolnica kultura 2018 v Valletti, razpisuje pozive za kulturne projekte, ki prav tako niso namenjeni izključno gledališču. Sicer pa lahko ustvarjalci pridobijo sredstva v obliki sponzorstev in oglaševanja zasebnih subjektov. Skupnostnim gledališčem sredstva občasno podeljujejo tudi lokalni kulturni odbori.

Zaključek

Z razvojem gledaliških šol in terciarnega izobraževanja na področju gledaliških študij so se spremenila tudi pričakovanja javnosti, ki si želi na odrih gledati vsebinsko in uprizoritveno kakovostnejše predstave. Prav tako so se posledično zmanjšale razlike med ljubiteljskimi in polprofesionalnimi izvajalci, saj je na voljo več možnosti za izobraževanje, četudi je to pogosto nepopolno. Številna gledališča privabljajo gledalce s produkcijami, ki so vsebinsko drzne in kontroverzne. Med njimi so lokalne produkcije tuje sodobne dramatike, na primer *Razdejani* [Blasted] avtorice Sarah Kane ali *Zašiti* [Stitching] Anthonyja Nielsona (Cremona, »Anthony Nielson's Stitching«), in dramska besedila malteških avtorjev. En tak primer je nedavno uprizorjena drama *Repubblica Immakolata* avtorice Simone Spiteri, ki naslavlja različna družbena in politična vprašanja, kot so okoljska degradacija, nasilje v družini in vpliv velikih korporacij na politične odločevalce.

Vendar pa bo potrebnih še veliko raziskav, da bomo razumeli delovanje ljubiteljskega gledališča na Malti tako v prizmi dejavnikov, ki so v domeni gledaliških študij, kot tudi kot kulturni in antropološki fenomen. Poleg tega bi bilo smiselno preučiti, ali sistemska oziroma povečana podpora države koristi ljubiteljskemu gledališču ali morda vodi v drsenje k bolj komercialno usmerjenemu oziroma profesionalnemu gledališču. Proučevanje vloge in pomena usposabljanja ter izobraževanja na področju ljubiteljskega gledališča pa odpira povsem novo polje raziskovanja, ki ga na evropski ravni izvaja raziskovalna skupina STEP.

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This article gives a short survey of amateur theatre practice in Malta. It demonstrates that the theatre system is based almost entirely on amateur practice, as Malta does not have the audience capacity and the administrative infrastructure to support professional theatre, and only a handful of persons make a living solely from theatre. However, the development of theatre education during the last thirty years has improved the quality of acting and staging and provided more scope for tackling challenging performances with regard to both content and mise-en-scène. The article looks into the different varieties of amateur theatre-making, taking into account issues such as the differing use of the two main languages of the country: Maltese and English. It discusses the importance of community identity as well as the role the Catholic Church has played in the development of theatre. The authors examine the challenges faced by contemporary amateur theatre-makers in the light of the changes occurring in society and the new choices that these changes determine. New Western theatre styles are not only influencing both playwrights and performers, but have also changed the expectations of contemporary spectators concerning the way the performance presents social and political issues.

Keywords: amateur theatre, semi-professional theatre, training, theatre education, theatre in Maltese, theatre in English, Catholic Church

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The Amateur Theatre in Malta

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Historical introduction

Malta is the smallest country in the European Union. Although it is the most densely populated, it has the smallest population, measured at just below half a million people in 2018 (NSO *News* 1). A national survey published in 2004 showed that only around a quarter of the adult Maltese population had visited the theatre during the previous year, and more than half of these had watched less than four performances (NSO *Theatre*, viii, 15). Another national survey published in 2017 found that there had been a slight increase in the percentage of people attending theatre performances. Still, the proportion of people who watched more than three shows remained very low (4.2% of the population) (NSO *Cultural* 50). The 2004 survey also showed that most of the population was unprepared to spend much money on ticket prices (NSO *Theatre* viii). The 2017 survey did not ask the same question but still showed that the proportion of income that people were prepared (or able) to spend on cultural activities was very low (NSO *Cultural* 107).

In this context, it is understandable that in Malta, theatre is either amateur or at best, semi-professional, in the sense that it is difficult for theatre-makers and actors to earn their living through merely appearing on or working for the stage. There are only a handful of theatre actors and directors in Malta who are managing, even though with great difficulty, to make a living solely from theatre and performance, and even in these cases, they have to share the stage with amateur performers. Most have other jobs which are generally not related to the theatre; a few teach drama in primary or secondary schools on a full-time basis, many more teach on a part-time basis in private evening schools that have been founded by a handful of theatre amateurs. Radio and television work also supplements income.

Amateur companies are therefore an essential part of the contemporary theatrical scene, and also a fundamental element of the development of local drama and theatre-making. However, the professional theatre has also played an important part in the history of theatre in Malta because for more than two centuries, from the

early 18th century to World War II, Malta had a fully functioning opera theatre. This theatre employed both foreign and local artists, and there was a supporting network of professionals working for and servicing this theatre (Cremona, “The Performance of Deeds”). During periods of the year when opera performances were not allowed or not desirable, such as during Lent (the forty days preceding Easter), other professional performers were engaged, usually from nearby Italy, to provide short seasons of plays. It was only after the bombing of the purposely-built 1,100-seat opera house during World War II that having a professional theatre proved to be unsustainable. All post-war attempts at having professional theatre structures failed (see Galea “Bodies without Organs” 101–113), mainly because live theatre had to compete for audiences with cinema and eventually with television.

Throughout its existence, professional theatre in Malta was mainly an imported product. Although a good portion of the personnel were Maltese (generally musicians and technicians, as well as some of the singers), the operas performed were almost always by Italian composers and sung in Italian. As a general rule, the Maltese professional theatre followed the trends set by the major Italian opera theatres with regards to repertoire and performance styles. The influence of Italian theatre in Malta was consonant with the dominance that Italian language and culture enjoyed in Malta between the end of the Middle Ages and the early 20th century when Italian was the language of administration and the law courts. Most theatre activity was aimed at the upper classes of Maltese society and the colonisers themselves. Historically, it was the birth of amateur theatre in the 19th century that set in motion the tradition of theatre in the vernacular, which is itself an important cultural phenomenon.

It was only when the Maltese language started being written, used in schools and in literature that a theatre in Maltese emerged. There was input from seasoned professional performers like Luigi Rosato (1795–1872), who worked in the only professional company of the time. However, the main energy to create a tradition of theatre in Maltese came from amateur playwrights and performers (Galea, *It-Teatru Malti I*). Around the 1840s, different groups of amateurs started setting up their small, makeshift theatres in the harbour area, mainly for the benefit of the lower classes, who could not afford the ticket prices at the main professional theatre (in which opera was performed for most of the year) and could much better relate to performances in their native tongue. These groups were often composed of illiterate or semi-literate performers and led by better-educated individuals, such as teachers or government clerical employees, who wrote for these companies and directed them.¹ These amateur theatres soon

¹ Carmelo Camilleri (1821–1903), definitely the most successful and most prolific playwright of the 19th century, as well as a comic actor, was a clerk; Pietru Pawl Castagna (1827–1907), another prominent playwright and director, was a school teacher who rose to the grade of Director of Elementary Schools, and in fact many of his recorded performances were by students; Mikelang Borg (1868–1939) who managed the most successful theatre company between the last years of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th, besides translating and adapting a large number of plays, probably best represents the image of the amateur in Maltese society of the period. He worked as a health inspector and as a printer;

became the main source of entertainment for the lower classes, with theatres being set up in practically every town and village by the end of the century, in small venues that were easily accessible to the local communities. These theatres were very active, performing different plays each week. A typical evening of entertainment would consist of a melodrama in five acts, a comedy and a short farce. The main inspirations were the professional performances that many of these amateur theatre-makers would have watched, either by the local opera company or by foreign touring companies, and the Italian play-texts that circulated widely in Malta. For the first few decades, most of the repertoire consisted of translations and adaptations of Italian plays, or plays from other European languages which would have been filtered through Italian translations. The more successful genres were also adopted from Italian theatrical traditions.

The popularity of amateur theatre in Maltese led to the printing of hundreds of plays between the 1840s and the early decades of the 20th century and entire newspapers dedicated to theatre, mainly amateur theatre activity. Although the repertoire consisted mainly of genres that may be considered as minor, the tradition was fundamental for making theatre accessible to a much broader sector of the population than it was before and also for the creation of many theatre spaces, some of which are still in use. *Teatrin* (literally meaning “small theatre”), as this kind of theatre was called, was also a useful medium for the expression of nationalistic and other political sentiments before its importance and popularity gradually died down in the post-World War II period. Until the mid-20th century, the amateur theatre was a very visible cultural phenomenon in Malta. Football, cinema and, eventually, from the early 1960s, television in Maltese became direct competitors. Amateur theatre saw the number of spectators, as well as the people interested in performing, steadily decrease to the extent that many theatre companies became inactive, and others had to limit themselves to producing only a handful of performances per season.

Already in its early development in the mid-19th century, theatre in Maltese quickly became a vehicle for transmitting nationalist ideals and discussing issues of identity. As the struggle for the recognition of the Maltese language intensified, writing plays in Maltese was seen as a way to extend Maltese literature to new fields. Prominent authors began to write for the theatre not because they were particularly gifted as playwrights but to develop a national literature and expand national culture, which was not fully recognised or appreciated before independence in 1964. After independence, key playwrights started to be seen as significant social critics, with landmark plays being recognised as making relevant statements about the national community and the issues it faces, comparable to prominent novels or other works of literature.

but he also published his own newspaper and wrote much of its content, managed the opera theatre on behalf of the impresario, was also active in trade unionism and helped found the Malta Labour Party.

Another vital expression of the amateur theatre in Malta is theatre in English. The British colonial period, which lasted from 1800 to 1964, saw the development of this type of theatre on the island. In the early 1800s, this started as alternative entertainment for British residents who had limited access to the main theatre that staged opera and for which tickets were allocated on a seasonal basis. This prevented many British personnel employed in the Services from finding seats because often their arrival and departures did not correspond to the time when season tickets were made available. Moreover, some British residents preferred other, more familiar, types of theatre in their mother tongue. Much of this entertainment was either a local version of plays and musicals featuring on the London stages or productions written or assembled by local British residents and Services personnel, which also referred to the local context. These performances were generally staged in theatres located in military compounds that were out of bounds to the local population. However, some groups also performed in locations they shared with the Maltese. These amateur companies introduced British theatrical genres such as the Christmas pantomime to the island. The uptake of this kind of theatre by the local population was very slow. The educated classes were too attached to Italian culture to adopt the language of their new coloniser and its cultural manifestations. It was through the creation of a new class that was sufficiently familiar with English that English genres started developing in Maltese contexts, and this did not happen before the 20th century (see Galea, "The Pantomime Other" 117–120). The use of English spread after 1914 when it was declared the language of the law courts (Frendo 112). By the end of the colonial period, amateur theatre activity in English had been taken up by British civilian settlers as well as by Maltese amateurs who had become sufficiently Anglicised to feel comfortable performing in English alongside native speakers of the language. This tradition is still very healthy today, although it has also sometimes shifted into semi-professional or commercial activity. The influence of this tradition was such that British genres such as the Christmas pantomime are now performed widely in Maltese, with performances ranging from large-scale productions in central theatres to school productions.

An analysis of the state of contemporary amateur theatre in Malta needs to consider issues that determine the functioning of theatre in the country, such as demographics, the availability of training for theatre-makers and the range of performances that can be considered as amateur.

Theatre infrastructure

The definition of amateur theatre given by Nicholson et al. is: "the work of [...] self-governing organisations whose primary focus is to make theatre" (4). Research by

the International Research Group STEP (Project on European Theatre Systems) has indicated that amateur theatre in mainland Europe is often associated with rural areas or areas outside the city (see Bremgartner 371). The case of Malta presents an anomaly. Malta can be described practically as a “city-state” due to the small size of the archipelago (316 km²), and the fact that the rural areas of the country are very limited in size and never distant from urban centres. Moreover, the ever-growing urban network has joined different villages into one continuous urban conurbation. What identifies one area from another is a community sense of belonging, which is often identifiable with a local parish and the traditions that go with it, even though Catholicism, the country’s principal religion, is on the wane.

The fact that the country is physically isolated from mainland Europe has meant that theatre in Malta did not progress at the same rate as that on the continent, nor did it always take similar directions. Development was also limited by state censorship, which was only abolished in 2012, as well as the crucial presence in society of the Catholic Church, which owns a large number of theatres and therefore exercises some control over which topics may be dealt with in the premises it holds, as well as the manner in which theatre is to be staged in these premises. Currently, Malta has several active theatre spaces that are used by a large number of theatre groups, ranging from the semi-professional companies working mainly in larger and more prestigious theatres to the truly amateur groups, often working in parish or other local environments. The main theatres are in the capital, Valletta. The Manoel Theatre (c. 572 seats) (Cremona et al., *Spazji Teatrali* 160), built in 1732, is considered to be Malta’s national theatre even though it does not possess the legal status for this title. It is used extensively for concerts and to a lesser extent, for theatre, generally of a semi-professional level. Other state-owned venues include the 186-seat theatre inside the cultural centre recently labelled Spazju Kreattiv (158), the open-air theatre Pjazza Teatru Rjal (c. 806 seats) (152) and the Republic Hall at the Mediterranean Conference Centre (c. 1400 seats) (150). Two other significant theatres are the Valletta Campus Theatre (c. 132 retractable seats) (162), owned by the University of Malta and the Catholic Institute Theatre (c. 833 seats) (138), situated just outside Valletta and owned by the Catholic Church. None of these theatres has its own performing company; they rent their premises out to companies for a fee.

Productions typically run up to six performances in the main theatres and a little longer in smaller theatres, although community theatres only stage one or two performances of a production because the potential audience does not allow for longer runs. Unlike the National Philharmonic Orchestra and the National Dance Company (ŻfinMalta), which employ full-time professionals, the recently established national theatre company, Teatru Malta, launched in 2017 by Arts Council Malta, does not employ performers on a full-time basis (see Cremona, “Theatre in Malta”

n.p.). It only contracts people who are cast for specific productions on short-term contracts. The work practices adopted by Teatru Malta follow the same lines as semi-professional and amateur companies: rehearsals are held in the evenings after the actors' working hours. As a result of this phenomenon, most theatre productions created in Malta include some characteristics that one would expect to find in amateur theatre, and many amateur performances share resources with more professional or commercial setups. To illustrate the close-knit relationship between amateur theatre and professional arrangements, we will use one of Teatru Malta's major productions (performed in September 2018) as an example.

The production was an adaptation of a 1964 play called *Boulevard*, written by Francis Ebejer, Malta's best-known playwright and novelist (Crow and Galea 25–6). Despite acquiring a reputation as a talented playwright relatively early in his life and also having a number of English-language novels published in the UK and the United States, for most of his life Ebejer worked as a school teacher, only leaving the profession when he could obtain early retirement. He directed many of the original productions of his plays, using performers from *teatrin* as well as other, more professionally trained actors. The 2018 revival of the play at the Manoel Theatre, in which the original production had taken place, likewise used a mix of professional and more amateur elements. It drastically reduced the text and mixed professional dancers from the National Dance Company, who were given the task to move and speak, with one or two semi-professional actors and some amateurs. The choreographer and the set designer were both professional artists, but the director had to perform tasks that in most professional settings would be entrusted to a dramaturg.

Training

A direct consequence of the lack of a substantial market, as well as reliance on amateur performers to provide theatrical entertainment, even in the more prominent venues, is that the professional training of performers (actors, but also dancers and musicians) has been underdeveloped and unregulated in Malta. Popular discourse about the performing arts in Malta privileges “talent” over training. As professional acting programmes do not exist, students who aspire to train as professional actors travel to other countries (usually the UK but sometimes the USA, Italy or other countries). With the knowledge that it is extremely difficult to make a living as a performer in Malta as well as attracted by the much larger theatre industries in metropolitan centres, many do not return. Those who return very often find themselves working in environments that could be defined as amateur theatre. The self-defined Malta Amateur Dramatic Club (MADC) that is over 100 years old, was initially inspired by provincial British amateur theatre companies and amateur dramatic clubs (ADCs) in other British

colonies (see Becker 710–11). The club regularly casts professionally trained actors alongside others who were never professionally trained.

After Malta became independent in 1964, the British Council brought in two experts on Theatre in Education² in 1977, who created the first Academy of Dramatic Art, (MTADA) which offered a part-time evening course that provided technical training in movement, voice, improvisation, interpretation and rehearsal (see Aquilina 89). This course eventually evolved into a state drama school, today called Malta School of Drama and Dance, offering evening courses and run by Maltese theatre educators. Another result of this collaboration was the institution of a Drama Unit within the Ministry of Education, which supplies mainly Theatre in Education, and some peripatetic teaching in state primary schools. In 1988, the University of Malta created two programmes, one in theatre and one in music, and later another in dance, which have together now grown into the School of Performing Arts, offering degrees in these subjects at Bachelor's, Master's and PhD levels. The university also provides teacher training in drama, music and dance. At the turn of the century, a series of part-time drama schools were launched, some of which are franchises of foreign companies. These are run by amateurs or semi-professionals who wanted to make a living from the performing arts and found that the only way they could do so was to invest in education. For certain genres, some of them are among the best actors in the country. The schools offer a range of short-term or part-time courses, workshops and training programmes. This sector is not fully regulated and the quality of programmes, personnel and facilities, as well as the outcomes, vary greatly. Both the university and some of the schools hold workshops with foreign professionals. Recently, the central vocational college in Malta, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, created an Advanced Diploma in Performing Arts, which will eventually be transformed into a BA course. In 2017, a full-time state secondary school, which provides specialisation in the visual and performing arts, was inaugurated. Many of the beneficiaries of this teaching and learning eventually feed into the country's various performing companies.

The variety of amateur theatres – the variety of performances

Although as we have seen, most theatre in Malta includes elements of amateur theatre (whether this is defined as the absence of professional training or in terms of monetary remuneration) there are also theatre formations that declare themselves amateur. One of the factors that distinguishes them is the choice of language.

² Adrian Rendle was an amateur director at the Tower Theatre and worked professionally on the London West End. He also taught at the Webber Douglas and Royal Academies of Dramatic Art. Peter Cox was engaged as a theatre-in-education (TIE) coordinator.

Although English is an official language, the language spoken by the majority of the population is the national language, Maltese, and a large proportion of theatre performances are in Maltese, including most new plays written by Maltese playwrights. However, English is widely used in theatres in Malta, as British and American plays are performed regularly in the original language. There are at least two amateur companies that perform almost solely in English, the MADC on the main island of Malta and the Gozo Creative Theatre Club based on the smaller island of Gozo. The latter performs in English because it also targets English-speaking residents.

Most other amateur companies perform mainly in Maltese and are best defined as community theatres. As a general rule, their existence is connected to Catholic parishes or other religious organisations. They perform religious drama, often related to religious festivities such as Christmas and Easter (there is a considerable tradition of passion plays in Malta), but also produce non-religious theatre. They generally receive some support from the mother organisation, but sometimes face some degree of pressure to conform to Catholic teaching.

The range of performances that are produced on the Maltese islands by amateurs is extensive, spanning from melodrama to in-your-face theatre, with musicals being very popular. The range even includes opera, in which professionals flown in from abroad sing the leading roles and Maltese perform the secondary roles and chorus.

One of the advantages that amateur theatres have over their commercial or “professional” counterparts is that, while commercial theatre companies in Malta do not (with one or two exceptions) have their own theatre, amateur companies usually have easy access to performing spaces which belong to parishes and religious orders. This affiliation makes it possible for them to keep costs of production very low and also enables continuity of existence which commercial theatre in Malta rarely enjoys.

The challenges amateur theatre faces

Since the mid-20th century, sectors of the performing community in Malta have tried to claim some sort of “professional” status. However, there has never been a consensus on what this status would entail and on what it would be based. As in many other countries, professional status and amateur status are considered the opposing ends of a spectrum. It is the ambition of most actors to lay claim to this professional status, which is generally expressed as the possibility of making a living from performing.

Unfortunately, there are very few tangible boundaries between more professional and amateur theatre, except in most cases, with regard to the quality and level of performance. Maltese funding authorities do not make distinctions between these

categories, and the criteria for allocating funds are often unclear.³ However, given the supply that is locally available, even the most important venues on a national level cannot really present amateur, semi-professional or professional performances as different platforms. Consequently, reviewers do not make this distinction when writing about these performances. In fact, spectators often choose to attend performances performed by well-known, but not necessarily professional, actors. Moreover, ticket prices do not indicate the level of the performance, except in community theatres, for which tickets are usually much cheaper. In this situation, in which proper distinctions between what is professional and what is not are not made clear, neither professional nor amateur theatres benefit from conditions that would enable them to develop to their full potential.

Presently, perhaps the greatest challenge that amateur theatre faces is that it is no longer attractive to young performers, for several reasons. The sense of community, which fuelled these theatres in the past, is no longer as strong as it was, with young people having many more options for spending their free time. A significant challenge is that of television drama which, although highly popular, often produces mediocre levels of soap opera. Prospective young actors are easily attracted to the “fame” that is available to them by acting in one of the many television drama series, even if they appear practically for free, while more seasoned actors expect remuneration. It is thanks to this situation that many television dramas are broadcast because they are relatively cheap to produce, and costs are recovered through advertising.

Quick transport has also contributed to the dwindling of community theatres, as spectators can more easily attend performances in the main theatres that are mostly situated in the capital, Valletta. Another challenge worth discussing is that of prestige. Community theatres, perhaps with some justification, have become associated with very amateurish theatre, and this label is tough to dislodge. As many of these theatres are ill-equipped, they find it challenging to attract capable or ambitious performers, who choose to perform in more prestigious venues, and to attract theatregoers, who in the past would have probably preferred to attend performances in their own community. The best example of this shift can be seen with the main theatre owned by the Catholic Church, the Catholic Institute Theatre, which has siphoned off many of the better performers and a considerable portion of the spectators from parish theatres.

³ The Arts Council, Malta, founded in 2002 and originally called Malta Council for Culture and the Arts, created an Arts Fund in 2009, where artists from all sectors, not only theatre, could pitch their projects to obtain funds. The Valletta Cultural Agency, which was created at the close of Valletta European Capital of Culture 2018, issues calls for cultural initiatives, but these are not exclusive to theatre. Otherwise, some funding is provided under the form of sponsorships or advertising by private entities. Community theatres sometimes receive aid from Local Councils.

Conclusion

The development of theatre schools and tertiary education in theatre studies has nurtured the growth of public aspiration for more high-quality performances, both in content and staging. It has also started to narrow the gap between amateur status and semi-professional performers because, although partial, more training is available. Certain theatre companies have attracted audiences because they have created plays that are daring and controversial in content. Some of these plays are either local productions of contemporary foreign works, such as *Blasted* by Sarah Kane or *Stitching* by Anthony Nielson (Cremona, “Anthony Nielson’s *Stitching*”), or have been written by Maltese authors. Simone Spiteri’s recent play, *Repubblika Immakulata*, is one such example. The play raises various social and political issues such as environmental degradation, domestic violence and the control of big business over the political class.

Much research, however, still needs to be undertaken to understand how amateur theatre in Malta functions both through instruments that are within the domain of theatre studies and as cultural and anthropological phenomena. It is also worth exploring whether systematic or increased state attention and support can be beneficial to amateur theatre or whether it might lead to a shift towards more commercial or professional theatre. Likewise, the role of training and education of performers within the amateur scene offers a new area of research that is now being addressed on a European level by STEP.

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