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“The soloist of His Majesty People”: to the question of the honorary titles of the artists of the State theatres of Russia in 1917

Annotation

The article is devoted to the problem of the adaptation of the prize system which has developed in the Russian Imperial theaters before the revolution, to the new historical conditions which have arisen in 1917. The relevance of this absolutely still unexplored question is defined by the fact that it touches a number of more common issues, such as the history of theatre, the history of the prize system, the history of the revolutionary process in Russia. At the time of the old regime there were two honourable artistic titles – "the soloist of His Majesty" and "the honored artist of Imperial theaters". The first of them, having clearly monarchic sounding, was cancelled by the attendance order after the February revolution (owing to that a number of famous actors, including F.I. Shaljapin, remained "without a title"). At first the title of "the honored artist" disappeared from playbills too, but at the end of March it was decided "to legalize" it, though in a little deformed way – as "the honored artist of the State theaters". The reappearance of the old award was supported both by press as well as by artistic circles due to the high authority and outstanding talents of the awarded masters of theatrics. During 1917 only two persons were nominated to title – the harpist I.A. Pomazanskij and the opera singerin M.A. Slavina. As in the pre-revolutionary time the representation of the first nomimant passed through all instances up to the Supreme power and as a result it was approved by the Provisional Government. As for the awarding the honorary title to Slavina, for the first time the initiative proceeded from the troupe, and not from the administration; and as a result it led to the conflict and to the discussion on who has the right to award an honorary title in a "free" theater. This fact showed the growing wave of democratization in the State (former Imperial) theaters which during the revolution fancifully intertwined with the aspiration to keep the traditions of a "model" scene. It is curious that in 1917 Slavina didn't officially become "the honored actress" – the Provisional Government, distraught by the October revolution, didn't manage to consider this question.

Written by Gordeev P.N.

Tuesday, 21 November 2023 00:00



Keywords

Sources, honorary titles, the soloist of His Majesty, the honored artist, State theatres of Russia, revolution of 1917.

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Tuesday, 21 November 2023 00:00

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