



# Operetta in Sarajevo Between the Two World Wars

Fatima Hadžić  
Univerza v Sarajevu  
University of Sarajevo

---

## Introduction

The National Theatre in Sarajevo<sup>1</sup> was established in 1919.<sup>2</sup> However, it took two years for the theatre ensemble to perform before a Sarajevo audience, i.e. to resolve problems with the theatre building and management,<sup>3</sup> and thus the ensemble spent the first season on tour (Tuzla, Brčko, Dubrovnik).<sup>4</sup> On the occasion of the opening ceremony organised from 22 to 24 October 1921, the doors of the National Theatre officially opened for Sarajevo audiences.

The National Theatre was a centre of Sarajevo theatre and cultural life, the first (and only) professional institution of culture and arts in the period

- 1 The National Theatre in Sarajevo was established as the “National Theatre for the Western Regions in Sarajevo”. In the text, the abbreviated name National Theatre is used.
- 2 Pursuant to the Decision by the Ministerial Council of the Kingdom of 1 September 1919, the following three categories of national theatres were defined: state (national) in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana, regional subsidised in Skopje, Novi Sad, Sarajevo, Split, and Osijek, and municipal (travelling) theatres in Niš, Kragujevac, Varaždin and Maribor. In line with this, on 1 October 1919 Government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes made the decision on the formation of the theatre; this was the basis for the decree of 17 November 1919, on the establishment of the National Theatre for Western Regions in Sarajevo. Josip Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata (1918–1929)*, vol. 1 (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1976), 66.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 66–9.
- 4 The National Theatre ensemble made its first performance in Tuzla, on 27 November 1920, in the theatre hall of hotel “Bristol”. They performed in Tuzla until 10 January 1921. *Ibid.*, 76.

between the two world wars (1918–1941). Despite all the difficulties it faced over the first decades of its work, this institution managed to maintain an annual repertoire, along with the required human and financial resources, and to develop a broad range of cultural activities which, besides theatre, encompassed literature, the visual arts, and music. The National Theatre hall soon became the haunt of diverse cultural activities, a popular spot for organising various events, concerts, and parties. Besides its regular theatre repertoire, the stage of the National Theatre hosted a number of operetta and opera ensembles, local and international artists.<sup>5</sup>

Since no operetta or opera house existed in Sarajevo or Bosnia and Herzegovina in this period, the introduction of theatre pieces with music, “pieces with singing” and operettas into the regular theatre repertoire, in an institution with its own human and financial resources, significantly affected the development of musical professionalism through the establishment of music ensembles (theatre choir and orchestra) and hiring of professional musicians (conductors and vocal soloists).

### Musical Repertoire

The musical part of the National Theatre repertoire consisted of pieces with singing and operettas. Besides these forms, which were part of the theatre repertoire together with plays, Sarajevo audiences had the opportunity to hear opera performances by visiting ensembles from Osijek, Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade, which visited the city several times. However, despite efforts to stage an opera with local forces,<sup>6</sup> there were no major initiatives to promote opera in the theatre repertoire.

Pieces with singing, very popular between the two wars, were very often performed on the Sarajevo theatre stage until the Second World War. This is a musical theatrical form with national-romantic and folk content, which owes its popularity to simple topics, close to ordinary people (the faithful sweetheart, friendship, blood-brotherhood, respect for parents and one’s elders, heroism and bravery, patriotism, etc.) as well as to rich stage effects that were supposed to evoke scenes from everyday life. Musical numbers – newly composed melodies, melodies composed “based on folk mo-

5 The theatre hall was the location of numerous concerts, art exhibitions, literary evenings, parties of confessional and humanitarian societies, celebrations, and occasional events. Josip Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata (1918–1929)*, vol. 2 (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1976), 86.

6 The 1928/1929 season saw the staging of Mascagni’s *Cavaleria Rusticana* and Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*. Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 1, 325–7.

tifs” or popular folk songs adapted for stage performance – were frequently featured, though they were not closely related to the plot.

During the first two seasons many pieces with singing by Serbian and Croatian authors were performed, such as: *Zona Zamfirova* by Stevan Sremac (1855–1906), *Koštana* by Borisav Stanković (1876–1927), *Školski nadzornik* by Kosta Trifković (1843–1875), *Đido* by Janko Veselinović (1862–1905) and Dragomir Brzak (1851–1904), *Put oko svijeta* by Branislav Nušić, and *Šokica* by Ilija Okrugić-Sremac (1827–1897). In the season 1922/1923, the first piece with singing with a topic from Bosnian and Herzegovinian life was staged. It was entitled *Aiša* and based on a text by the local author Svetozar Ćorović (1875–1919), with the music composed by František-Franjo Matějovský. *Aiša* (which premiered on 17 February 1923) was followed by a series of local pieces with singing.<sup>7</sup>

Since music was an important segment of the production of pieces with singing, the management of the National Theatre formed several music ensembles (choir, ballet, and orchestra) led by permanently employed theatre conductors, soon after the theatre’s establishment.<sup>8</sup> The theatre orchestra first appeared before a Sarajevo audience at the official theatre opening,

7 Local pieces with singing in the repertoire of National Theatre in Sarajevo: *Almasa* (text: Jovan Palavestra, music: Beluš Jungić, 1925), *Zlatija* (text: Osman Đikić, music based on folk motifs: B. Jungić, 1925), *Sevdah* (text: Branislav Nušić under the pseudonym ‘Halil Delibašić’, music: F. Matějovský and B. Jungić, 1927), *Lelei Kadr* (text: B. Nušić under the pseudonym ‘Halil Delibašić’, music: F. Matějovský and B. Jungić, 1927), *Nasrudin-hodžina čudesa* (text: Milan Ćurčić, music: A. Pordes, 1927), *Nasrudin hodžini ršumi i rusvaji* (text: M. Ćurčić under the pseudonym ‘E. Zebić’, 1930), *Od kako je Banjaluka postala* (text: Rasim Filipović, music: J. Plecitiy, 1939), *Na Struga dukjan da imam* (text: B. Jungić, music: Josip Majer, 1932), *Prikaza* (text: R. Filipović, 1935), *Zembilj* (text: M. Ćurčić, 1936), *Mošćanice, vodo plemenita* (text: R. Filipović, music: B. Jungić, 1940). Cf. Tamara Sarajlić-Slavnić, “Repertoar praizvedbi i premijernih predstava drame (1921–1996),” in *Narodno pozorište u Sarajevu: izložba 75 godina rada Narodnog pozorišta, 100 godina zgrade sa osvrtom na teatarski život Sarajeva prije osnivanja Pozorišta: teatrografska studija Repertoar Pozorišta (1921–1996), Prilozi o razvoju Drame, Opere i Baleta i teatarskom životu*, ed. Tamara Sarajlić-Slavnić (Sarajevo: Muzej književne i pozorišne umjetnosti BiH, 1998), 45–134.

8 From 1920 to 1941, theatre ensembles were headed by the following conductors: Josip Hladek-Bohinjski (1879–1940), Karel Moor (1873–1945), František Matějovský (1871–1938), Josip Rožđalovski (?–1931), Beluš Jungić (1892–1968), Otmar Hofer (?–?), Alfred Pordes (1907–1941 ili 1942), Jaroslav Plecitiy (1901–1961), Josip Majer (1888–1965) and Maks Unger (1888–1962). Cf. Fatima Hadžić, *Muzičke institucije u Sarajevu (1918–1941): Oblasna muzička škola i Sarajevska filharmonija* (Sarajevo: Muzička akademija, Institut za muzikologija, 2018), 42.

which lasted from 22 to 24 October 1921.<sup>9</sup> The theatre choir was formed at the end of the 1921/1922 season and, with short interruptions, was a permanent part of the ensemble. It was mostly young actors (thirteen new members were hired in the 1921/1922 season) who performed in the singing and choral numbers in pieces with singing.<sup>10</sup>

The popular pieces with singing were not favoured by theatre critics, who tolerated them as a “necessary evil” which filled the theatre’s cash register, justified as the first step toward the formation of a permanent theatre audience. However, pieces with singing were a constant in the repertoire of National Theatre, with the frequent production of new pieces at which attendance was always excellent.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the first two seasons consisted entirely of pieces with singing which, due to the loyalty of Sarajevo audiences to this form of stage performance, remained in the repertoire for several years.

### Introduction of Operetta: 1923/1924–1926/1927

The musical part of the repertoire was the most demanded and most visited one. It was Sarajevo audiences’ appetite for “musical performances” and light pieces with an entertaining character that brought about the introduction of operetta into the National Theatre repertoire, on two occasions – from 1923/1924 until its removal in early 1927, and again starting from the 1935/1936 season.

In the 1923/1924 season, influenced by the new theatre conductor Josif Rožđalovski, the theatre manager Dušan Đukić (1883–1927) introduced operetta to the repertoire.<sup>12</sup> Conductor Rožđalovski, “*energetic and persistent in the Czech way*”, managed, in a short time, to form a sound theatre choir that could meet the requirements of the genre.<sup>13</sup> The first season saw performances of the operettas *Mam’zelle Nitouche* by Louis-Auguste-Florimond Ronger Hervé (28 February 1924) and *La poupée* by Edmond Audran (21 April 1924). Season 1924/1925 saw the staging of Franz Schubert’s *Das Dreimäderhaus* (30 October 1924), Davorin Jenko’s *Vračara* (20 Decem-

9 Sarajevo, Academy of Music, University of Sarajevo, The Archives of the Institute of Musicology, *Program svečanog otvorenja Pozorišta Sarajevo*, 22.–24. 10. 1921.

10 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 1, 113.

11 Ibid., 146.

12 B. J, “Čitulja: Josif Rožđalovski,” *Pregled*, March 16, 1931, 203–4.

13 Ibid.

ber 1924), Audran's *La mascotte* (26 March 1925) and the comic opera *On i njegova sestra* by conductor Rožđalovski (11 June 1925).<sup>14</sup>

Theatre critics described Đukić's move as causing a decline in the quality of the repertoire, and a concession to audiences.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the audiences showed their love for operetta, which developed as early as in the Austro-Hungarian period,<sup>16</sup> with overcrowded halls and numerous repeat performances.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, bad reviews did not impede the push for the operetta "in both artistic and technical terms". During the 1924/1925 season, after Branislav Nušić (1864–1928) was appointed theatre manager,<sup>18</sup> operetta firmly established itself in the repertoire, the result of Nušić's persistent efforts to meet the requests of the majority of the ticket-buyers. Nušić replaced the former amateur choir with a professional one, encouraged cooperation with Sarajevo composers Jungić, Matějovský, and Rožđalovski, hired another full-time conductor Otmar Hofer, and the opera director and singer Vojislav Turinski from Belgrade.<sup>19</sup>

In the 1925/1926 season, five operettas premiered in the National Theatre: two by Leo Fall, *Die Dollarprinzessin* (17 October 1925) and *Die Rose von Stambul* (21 November 1925), *The Geisha* by Sidney Jones, *Gräfin Maritza* by Emmerich Kálmán (18 February 1926) and *Zigeunerliebe* by Franz Lehár (11 April 1926) which, together with three repeat performances (*Mam'zelle Nitouce*, *La poupée* and *On i njegova sestra*) meant there were eight in the repertoire.<sup>20</sup> In this season, the Sarajevo operetta company gave visiting performances in Mostar (April 16–25, 1926) and Niš (31 May–11 June, 1926).<sup>21</sup>

The operetta repertoire relied upon several professional singers while supporting and bit roles were "covered" by actors. Popular pieces with singing that made up the backbone of the theatre repertoire included song and dance, and actors were therefore required to both act and sing. However, the introduction of operetta required hiring professional singers.

14 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 2, 314–7.

15 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 1, 165.

16 The theatrical life of the Austro-Hungarian period was characterised by lively activity by visiting theatre troupes, which offered contents of Orphic character (musical burlesques, farces, and operettas). Cf. Josip Lešić, *Pozorišni život Sarajeva (1878–1918)* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1973), 237–47.

17 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 1, 165.

18 Three managers acted at the head of National Theatre in the 1924/1925 season: Dušan Đukić, Stevan Brakus and Branislav Nušić.

19 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 1, 210–1.

20 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 2, 317–9.

21 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 1, 224.

The stars of Sarajevo operetta included actors and educated singers such as Leopold Fridman<sup>22</sup>, Aleksandar Cvetković<sup>23</sup>, Micika Hrvojić<sup>24</sup>, Vojislav Turinski<sup>25</sup>, and Svetislav Đurkić<sup>26</sup>. Other participants included dramatic actors, who appeared in operettas “by force of circumstances”. The most successful among these were Andrija Ćurčić (1876–1935), Jelena Kešeljević-Gavrilović (1894–1962), Jolanda Đačić (1906–?), and Ljubica Stefanović (1888–1946).

Among the scarce “serious” audiences and theatre critics, operetta in the National Theatre provoked a fear of “suffocating” drama. Some performances of *The Geisha* and *Gräfin Maritza*, well-directed by Turinski, with properly prepared music and singing by conductors Rožđalovski, Hofer, and Jungić and a close-knit ensemble (choir, ballet), all with luxuriant scenery and flamboyant costumes, managed to overcome the audience’s interest in dramatic performances.<sup>27</sup> Operetta then assumed a serious musical and

- 22 Leopold Fridman (Leo, Lav, Friedmann – Mirković) (1904–1990) began his acting and singing career in Sarajevo as a member of amateur theatre troupes. He was employed in the ensemble of National Theatre from 1923 to 1926. He occasionally played supporting and bit roles in plays; however, the operetta was the focus of his work. In 1926, he went to study singing in Milan, and then in Vienna. He performed in Germany and Bohemia, and in 1930 he made his debut on the stage of Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in the role of Rigoletto (Verdi). In 1941, he emigrated to the USA. Josip Lešić, “Fridman Leo,” in *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, ed. Josip Lešić (Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971), 137; Anon., “Leo Mirkovic, 86, Dies; A Cantor in New York,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/09/13/obituaries/leo-mirkovic-86-dies-a-cantor-in-new-york.html>.
- 23 Aleksandar Cvetković (1900–1944) was employed from 1922 until the removal of operetta in 1927. He sang the entire operetta repertoire. From 1928 he worked in Belgrade, Zagreb, Cetinje, and Banja Luka. From 1934 to 1938 he was again hired by National Theatre in Sarajevo as a director and singer of operetta repertoire. In 1938 he moved to Belgrade. Josip Lešić, “Cvetković Aleksandar,” in *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, ed. Josip Lešić (Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971), 60–1.
- 24 Micika Hrvojić (1888–1953) was employed from 1920 to 1928. She acted and sang the entire repertoire of folk pieces with singing and operettas. In 1924 she celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her acting career. In 1928 she moved to Belgrade. Josip Lešić, “Hrvojić Micika,” in *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, ed. Josip Lešić (Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971), 210–1.
- 25 Vojislav Turinski (1886–1933) was engaged during two seasons (1925–1927) as a singer and director. Josip Lešić, “Turinski Vojislav,” in *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, ed. Josip Lešić (Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971), 554.
- 26 Svetislav Đurkić (1883–1957) was employed from 1920 to 1928, and once again, in the 1930/1931 season, upon which he retired. He performed both the drama and operetta repertoire. Josip Lešić, “Đurkić Svetislav,” in *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, ed. Josip Lešić (Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971), 113.
- 27 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 1, 225.

theatrical form with the highly competent musical ensembles (conductors, directors, choir and ballet):

*At the time, the Sarajevo theatre had such an elaborate and comprehensive operetta troupe, both in terms of soloist material and singing choir and ballet chorus, and was so well-equipped that it could compete with the best ones in Yugoslavia.*<sup>28</sup>

Operetta performances helped the theatre overcome the financial crisis it has faced on opening, and created a permanent theatre audience in Sarajevo.

### Removal of Operetta: 1927/1928–1934/1935

Three years after the introduction of operetta into the regular theatre season, at the moment when National Theatre managed by Nušić “got itself on its feet”, on the eve of the beginning of the 1926/1927 season, the Ministry of Education sent instructions to all regional theatres with regard to planning their repertoires, with an extremely negative view on performing operettas:

*Frivolous Budapest and Vienna operettas (Fala, Kalman, Lehar, etc.) should be particularly avoided. If it becomes absolutely necessary, for financial or special local reasons, to include operetta in the repertoire, then perform only classical operettas (Lecocq, Offenbach, Millöcker, Planquet, Suppé), which may raise serious musical and theatrical interest. In this way, regional theatres will not divert from their goal, and will avoid the criticism that they nourish questionable art on their stages and they serve to protect destructive foreign influences.*<sup>29</sup>

The operetta ensemble (choir, orchestra, ballet, and soloists) of Sarajevo’s theatre could not fulfil the interpretative requirements of “classical operetta” and, having been forbidden to perform the Vienna-Budapest operetta, it became too heavy a burden for the theatre budget. When the Ministry of Education, with its decision of 18 January 1927, decreased the subsidy by 240,000 dinars,<sup>30</sup> Nušić was forced to transform the musical part of the theatre repertoire. The choir and orchestra were retained, but operetta was “*removed or occasionally performed in the scope and with the staff*

28 B. J, “Čitulja: Josif Rožđalovski,” 204.

29 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 1, 237–8.

30 *Ibid.*, 239.

*that exists and that works on dramas, though without special fees*”, while the need for an orchestra in a drama was “*either removed or reduced to a minimum.*”<sup>31</sup>

A few times the management found a way out of financial crisis by reducing expenditures related to the musical part of the ensemble. Still, this was not the only reason for such actions. The relationship with musical ensembles depended on the theatre’s repertoire policy, which was designed by the theatre manager, whose artistic beliefs<sup>32</sup> typically did not correspond to the taste of the majority of Sarajevo audiences. This led to a distinctive hesitancy, which wavered between the focus on popular and profitable pieces where music was widely present, and more serious though poorly attended dramatic works.

In this season, the ensemble managed to stage three new operettas, although operetta was now pushed to the backseat compared to the previous season. The operettas performed included Kálmán’s *Das Hollandweibchen* (27 November 1926), Oskar Nedbal’s *Polenblut* (31 March 1927), and Oscar Nathan Straus’s *Die Teresina* (3 May 1927).<sup>33</sup> When operetta was removed from the repertoire, Fridman, Cvetković, Hrvojić, and Đurkić left Sarajevo, and the occasional performances of operettas were exclusively the responsibility of the dramatic ensemble.

Sarajevo’s cultural public was divided concerning the function of operetta in the National Theatre. After an article on the “crisis of our theatres” published in March 1927, the journal for political and cultural life *Prehled* conducted a survey aimed at finding a solution to both the financial and artistic problems.<sup>34</sup> One of the six survey questions pertained to the

31 Ibid., 241–2.

32 From its establishment to the outbreak of the war in 1941, the managers of National Theatre included Stevan Brakus (October 1920–November 1923), Dušan Đukić (November 1923–December 1924), Stevan Brakus (December 1924–February 1925), Branislav Nušić (February 1925–April 1928), Mirko Korolija (April 1929–December 1930), Milutin Janjušević (December 1930–April 1941). “Uprave Narodnog pozorišta u Sarajevu,” in *Narodno pozorište u Sarajevu: izložba 75 godina rada Narodnog pozorišta, 100 godina zgrade sa osvrtom na teatarski život Sarajeva prije osnivanja Pozorišta: teatrografska studija Repertoar Pozorišta (1921–1996), Prilozi o razvoju Drame, Opere i Baleta i teatarskom životu*, ed. Tamara Sarajlić-Slavnić (Sarajevo: Muzej književne i pozorišne umjetnosti BiH, 1998), 351–2.

33 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 2, 320–1.

34 The survey consisted of six questions: “1. *Is the crisis of our theatre of financial or artistic character?*; 2. *What do you think about the artistic result of this season, in terms of the repertoire and engaged acting forces?*; 3. *Have the reviews, written or oral, been up to standard, and have they encouraged raising of the theatre’s artistic level?*;

need to remove operetta. In the following issues, the journal published responses by some of the respondents – using the educational and artistic dimension of theatre, the intellectual elite mostly “sentenced” operetta to the poor fate it encountered that season.<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to see the opinions of some survey respondents, which differ greatly in some respects. Jovan Palavestra (1893–1959), for example, a writer and theatre critic, provided comments and advice on how both operetta and pieces with singing, beloved by audiences, could be brought closer to artistic expression:

*In Sarajevo, operetta has substantially resonated with audiences. It should be maintained, though with more careful selection and more conscientious preparation, retouching of trite textual and musical spots and passages; directing should skilfully balance on the verge between beautiful and trite. If, for instance, an operetta cannot include at least a hint of art ballet (if it is enabled by individual musical passages), then one should avoid entertainment of the variety show kind, regardless of the applause accompanying it. If an operetta, due to its text and comic nature, dictates the actors’ ‘buffa’, let experiments follow the line of moderation. It is the director and conductor’s task to bring operetta closer to the reputation of opera and farther from variety show; thus retouched and ‘cleansed’ operetta will still be so suggestive as to respond to the audience’s demands but with taste.<sup>36</sup>*

Vladislav Tmuša (1888–1954), a writer, stated that operetta is completely unprofitable and that therefore it had to be removed from the repertoire:

*Due to the audiences who look for such things, operettas should be occasionally performed; however, it is related to far greater expenses than actual revenues. Since drama paid for the operetta in the past as well, operetta should definitely be removed now.<sup>37</sup>*

The writer Jakša Kušan (1900–1980) believed that operetta could be retained, but that its proper position should be defined:

*4. What repertoire is needed for the heterogeneous Sarajevo audience?; 5. Should operetta be removed?; 6. What roads lead to overcoming the crisis?” Anon., “Anketa o krizi sarajevskog pozorišta,” *Pregled*, June 12, 1927, 9.*

35 Ibid.

36 Jovan Palavestra, “Anketa o krizi sarajevskog Nar. Pozorišta,” *Pregled*, Juli 3, 1927, 6.

37 Vl. Tmuša, “Anketa o krizi sarajevskog Nar. Pozorišta,” *Pregled*, July 3, 1927, 7.

*People want entertainment, so let them have it; it should in no case dominate in the theatre and live on the expense of drama and comedy. I believe that it is to a great extent to blame for the artistic crisis. If someone gets used to operetta, they will not be able to bear dramas, even the lightest ones.*<sup>38</sup>

It is also interesting to read the opinion of a “common theatre patron”, a certain Isak Perić, who calls himself a “*friend of theatre*” in the survey.<sup>39</sup> Perić believed that operetta should not be removed but rather however that it should be improved:

*The first reason is that it fills the house and the second – as unbelievable as it seems – that it educates the audience musically. It is only operetta that can make even more serious musical pieces, such as opera, reach unmusical and uneducated audiences. As trite and ‘immoral’ as it is, when we endure the repertoire such as ‘Werewolf’, ‘Blameless Husband’, ‘Kiki’ and ‘Peg, My Darling’, we should endure operetta as well.*<sup>40</sup>

The division of the cultural public with regard to the removal of operetta is evident here. Theatre critic Ivan Peserle (1882–1932) condemned the decision to remove operetta from the repertoire, and the reason he gave was that it the genre was an expression of the taste of most of the Sarajevo audience, and it also gave an opportunity for the theatre to make more money, which in turn would allow the performance of serious literary works, which were not popular among broader audiences.<sup>41</sup>

Upon the arrival of manager Mirko Korolija (1886–1934), near the end of the 1928/1929 season, smaller ballet and choral ensembles were again engaged. Despite the limited financial resources, pieces with music, singing, and ballet were reintroduced in the repertoire, and plans included the staging of an opera with the theatre’s resources.<sup>42</sup> Thanks to efforts by conductor Alfred Pordes, Mascagni’s *Cavaleria Rusticana* (28 September 1928),

38 Jakša Kušan, “Anketa o krizi sarajevskog Nar. Pozorišta,” *Pregled*, July 10, 1927, 7.

39 This may be merchant Isak Perić, who was involved in the production and trade of fabrics in Sarajevo. See Eli Tauber, “Jevreji kao nerazdvojni dio razvoja privred i kulture u Bosni i Hercegovini,” in *Identiteti Bosne i Hercegovine kroz historiju: zbornik radova*, ed. Husnija Kamberović (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2011), 98. [https://issuu.com/institutzaistorijusarajevo/docs/identitet\\_bih\\_knjiga\\_1/98](https://issuu.com/institutzaistorijusarajevo/docs/identitet_bih_knjiga_1/98).

40 Isak Perić, “Anketa o krizi sarajevskog Nar. Pozorišta,” *Pregled*, July 10, 1927, 7.

41 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 1, 299–300.

42 *Ibid.*, 313.

and Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* (11 April 1929) were performed on the stage of the Sarajevo theatre.<sup>43</sup> Still, regardless of the relative success of such attempts, the staging of operas with local forces was premature, since Sarajevo did not have a sufficient number of high-quality singers who could perform even a lighter opera repertoire, nor were theatre ensembles able to meet the demands of opera performances.

Early in the 1929/1930 season, the first operetta by a local composer was staged. This work by Alfred Pordes, *Mis Ganimed*, in three acts, was based on a text by Fred Angermayer (1889–1951), and premiered on 19 October 1929. Critics received the work favourably, although noting that with a better libretto the musical part would have been more complete, assessing the libretto, based on the history of England in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century as trivial and weak.<sup>44</sup>

In the 1930/1931 season, the theatre again engaged a choir consisting of 16 members and a smaller ballet ensemble (six members of the ballet chorus and three ballet principals and head of ballet).<sup>45</sup> However, only a few months after its formation, the ballet ensemble was disbanded once again.<sup>46</sup> The newly appointed manager, Milutin Janjušević (1896–1941) formally ended the ballet as an independent artistic unit on 1 March 1931. In his opinion, the ballet ensemble performed rarely and without artistic results, and therefore

*it is generally redundant for a purely dramatic theatre, and its engagement as an independent artistic unit could not be justified even if it had a purely artistic aspiration, instead of being involved in ordinary cabaret-variety-show productions.*<sup>47</sup>

43 Performers included members of the Croatian Singing Choir *Trebevič* from Sarajevo, aided by guest opera singers and director Aleksandar Vereščagin (1885–1965). Encouraged by the success of this opera among both audience and critics, Pordes set to rehearse Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*; however, *Madame Butterfly* did not repeat the success of the first opera. *Ibid.*, 325–7; Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 2, 326–7.

44 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 2, 26.

45 *Ibid.*, 50.

46 In the period between the two world wars, ballet as an independent unit of National Theatre did not exist. Dance numbers in operettas and pieces with singing were left to actors, rather than professional ballet artists. Jolanda Đačić and Lidija Mansvjetova are referred to as heads and first choreographers. (Josip Lešić, "Balet Narodnog pozorišta u Sarajevu," in *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, ed. Josip Lešić (Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971), 18–9).

47 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 1, 50–1.

### Return of Operetta: 1935/1936–1940/1941

Upon the removal of operetta, following the decision of the Artistic Department, primarily in order to decrease expenses rather than for principled artistic reasons, the interest in theatre declined, the amount of money coming in also decreased, and, looking for a replacement for operetta, the management introduced plays of dubious quality, which again “*was no less detrimental for the educational and artistic role of theatre.*”<sup>48</sup> For this reason, the return of operetta to the Sarajevo stage in the 1935/1936 season, with Hervé’s *Mam’zelle Nitouche* (20 June 1936), was perhaps inevitable.

The re-introduction of operetta caused some opposition in the press, with one writer noting that

*as far as we know, some members of management have always been against operetta, which spoils the musical taste and does harm to drama. Now we seem to be witnessing a turnabout.*<sup>49</sup>

In the 1936/1937 season, four new operettas were staged: Schubert’s *Das Dreimäderhaus* (the date of the premiere is unknown), Carl Zeller’s *Der Vogelhändler* (2 January 1937), Arthur Sullivan’s *The Mikado* (17 April 1937), and Johann Strauss’s *Der Zigeunerbaron* (5 June 1937).<sup>50</sup> Regardless of the poor reviews of their premieres, they remained popular with audiences, including in the following season.

However, the return of operetta to the National Theatre did not achieve the same result as seen in Nušić’s time. Under Nušić’s management the works had been presented on a sound technical basis, but on its return to the stage operetta was introduced without special expenses or the engagement of a separate ensemble (soloists, choir, ballet, orchestra), i.e. without professional singers:

*how can musically educated people get involved in such a thing and how can a musical expert such as Mr. Marko Unger [Maks Unger, author’s remark], a composer and conductor, believe that an operetta sung by non-singers will be a sort of ‘introduction into music education of both the theatre ensemble itself and a broad audience’?*<sup>51</sup>

48 Ibid., 299.

49 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 2, 196.

50 Ibid., 343–6.

51 Ibid., 197.

Except for Paula Jesić<sup>52</sup>, an educated soprano, Aleksandar Cvetković, the main operetta star and the only director who was re-engaged in 1934, along with several singers, the other participants in operetta performances included members of the choir and dramatic actors.

When Cvetković left in 1938 Lidija Mansvjetova<sup>53</sup> took over the directing of operetta which, under her leadership, experienced a clear improvement, becoming of a considerably higher quality than in previous seasons, in terms of directing, acting, singing, and music (conductor Majer). Among other reasons, the credit for this went to new members such as Stojan Jovanović (1900–?) and Vlada Zeljković (1906–?). Jovanović and Zeljković, together with the experienced Paula Jesić-Kosić, made up the backbone of the operetta ensemble.<sup>54</sup> The operetta ensemble of the National Theatre in Sarajevo was completed in early 1941, when the singers Zahid Nalić<sup>55</sup>, Nada Boškić<sup>56</sup> and Regina Čanić<sup>57</sup> were hired.

In the seasons 1937/1938 and 1938/1939, two new operettas were staged, *Mala Floramye* by Ivo Tijardović (31 December 1937) and Ralph Erwin's *Ich betrug' Dich nur aus Liebe* (2 June 1938), along with revivals of Nedbal's *Pollenblut* (3 November 1938), and F. Lehár's *Das Land des Lächelns* (19 January 1939). The last two seasons before the outbreak of the war saw premieres of

52 Paula Jesić-Kosić (1894–1978) was engaged from 1934, in drama and primarily in operetta, and carried its entire repertoire until the outbreak of 1941 war. Josip Lešić, "Jesić-Kosić Paula," in *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, ed. Josip Lešić (Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971), 234.

53 Lidija Mansvjetova (1893–1966) was engaged in the 1926/1927 season and then again from 1931 to 1946. She ended her career in Split in 1955. Josip Lešić, "Mansvjetova Lidija," in *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, ed. Josip Lešić (Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971), 316–7.

54 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 2, 241.

55 Zahid Nalić (1906–1984) was recruited for operettas and pieces with singing in early 1941. His lyrical tenor, exquisite interpretation of folk songs, and the repertoire he sang brought him enormous popularity. From May 1942 to 1943 he was confined in Jasenovac concentration camp. Upon the end of the war, he went to Russia. Safet Pašalić and Žarko Ilić, "Nalić Zahid," in *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, ed. Josip Lešić (Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971), 360; A. V., "Ruski predstavnik na Eurosongu porijeklom Tuzlak," *Tuzlainfo*, <https://www.tuzlainfo.ba/index.php/arhiva/29-novosti/1200-ruski-predstavnik-na-eurosongu-porijeklom-tuzlak>.

56 Nada Boškić (1915–?) was engaged from 1941 to 1943. Josip Lešić, "Boškić Nada," in *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, ed. Josip Lešić (Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971), 45.

57 Regina Čanić (1914–?) was engaged from 1941 to 1943, when she went to the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb. Josip Lešić, "Čanić Regina," in *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, ed. Josip Lešić (Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971), 68.

*Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss Jr. (4 May 1940) and Kálmán's *Silva Die Csárdásfürstin* (2 November 1940).<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusion

The influence of the National Theatre on the development of Sarajevo's musical life in the period between the two world wars was primarily reflected through the performances of pieces with singing and operettas. Including these works in the regular repertoire, as staged with the theatre's own human and financial resources, encouraged the formation of music ensembles and the hiring of professional musicians. However, maintaining the choir, orchestra, and ballet ensemble was very expensive, and therefore the ensembles were disbanded only to be formed again several times. Theatre management worked under the permanent pressure of theatre critics, who took a negative attitude toward the musical part of the theatre's repertoire. The quality of such musical-theatrical events rarely rose above average, due to the inadequate ensemble, which was generally composed of actors rather than musicians. Still, the musical part of the repertoire was the most demanded and best visited by audiences, and it was the Sarajevo audiences' appetite for "musical performances" and light pieces with an entertaining character that led to the introduction of operetta in the repertoire on two occasions, from 1923/1924 until its removal in early 1927, and again starting from the 1935/1936 season.

The great popularity of operetta in the period between the two wars is also proved by data on the number of repeat performances. Over two decades around twenty operettas were performed on the stage of the National Theatre, and on average they were stage twelve times each, while dramas were staged just three times on average: *Die Dollarprinzessin* (17 times), *Die Rose von Stambul* (14 times), *On i njegova sestra* (six times), *The Geisha* (12 times), *Gräfin Maritza* (13 times), *Zigenuerliebe* (14 times), *La poupée* (10 times), *Mam'zelle Nitouche* (nine times). If we add to these numbers pieces with singing, whose average number of appearances in the repertoire was also rather high, such as *Dido* (10 times), *Koštana* (10 times), *Almasa* (nine times), *Dorćolska posla* (eight times) and *Zlatija* (five times),<sup>59</sup> it is obvious what Sarajevo audiences demanded.

In the period between the two wars there were no serious attempts to promote opera in the theatre repertoire, nor was the staging of operettas

58 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 2, 346–54.

59 Lešić, *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata*, vol. 1, 218.

aimed at the formation of an operetta ensemble as a separate unit of the National Theatre. Instead, operetta was used as a means to strengthen the theatre's finances, without a clear vision of its development. Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore the significance of the "musical" activity of the National Theatre which, by introducing musical-theatrical forms in the regular repertoire, successfully bridged the period from the Austro-Hungarian era, when Bosnia and Herzegovina was visited by foreign opera troupes, to the establishment of the first permanent opera in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Second World War.

### *Bibliography*

- Anon. "Anketa o krizi sarajevskog pozorišta." *Pregled*, June 12, 1927, 9.
- Anon. "Leo Mirkovic, 86, Dies; A Cantor in New York." *The New York Times*, September 13, 1990. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/09/13/obituaries/leo-mirkovic-86-dies-a-cantor-in-new-york.html>.
- A. V. "Ruski predstavnik na Eurosongu porijeklom Tuzlak." *Tuzlainfo*. <https://www.tuzlainfo.ba/index.php/arhiva/29-novosti/1200-ruski-predstavnik-na-eurosongu-porijeklom-tuzlak>.
- B. J. "Čitulja: Josif Rožđalovski." *Pregled*, March 16, 1931, 203–4.
- Hadžić, Fatima. *Muzičke institucije u Sarajevu (1918–1941): Oblasna muzička škola i Sarajevska filharmonija*. Sarajevo: Muzička akademija, Institut za muzikologija, 2018.
- Kušan, Jakša. "Anketa o krizi sarajevskog Nar. Pozorišta." *Pregled*, July 10, 1927, 7.
- Lešić, Josip. "Balet Narodnog pozorišta u Sarajevu." In *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, edited by Josip Lešić, 18–9. Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971.
- Lešić, Josip. "Boškić Nada." In *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, edited by Josip Lešić, 45. Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971.
- Lešić, Josip. "Cvetković Aleksandar." In *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, edited by Josip Lešić, 60–1. Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971.
- Lešić, Josip. "Čanić Regina." In *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, edited by Josip Lešić, 68. Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971.
- Lešić, Josip. "Đurkić Svetislav." In *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, edited by Josip Lešić, 113. Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971.
- Lešić, Josip. "Fridman Leo." In *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, edited by Josip Lešić, 137. Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971.

- Lešić, Josip. "Hrvojić Micika." In *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, edited by Josip Lešić, 210–1. Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971.
- Lešić, Josip. "Jesić-Kosić Paula." In *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, edited by Josip Lešić, 234. Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971.
- Lešić, Josip. "Mansvjetova Lidija." In *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, edited by Josip Lešić, 316–7. Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971.
- Lešić, Josip. "Turinski Vojislav." In *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, edited by Josip Lešić, 554. Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971.
- Lešić, Josip. *Pozorišni život Sarajeva (1878–1918)*. Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1973.
- Lešić, Josip. *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata (1918–1929)*. Vol. 1. Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1976.
- Lešić, Josip. *Sarajevsko pozorište između dva rata (1918–1929)*. Vol. 2. Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1976.
- Palavestra, Jovan. "Anketa o krizi sarajevskog Nar. Pozorišta." *Pregled*, Juli 3, 1927, 6.
- Pašalić, Safet, and Žarko Ilić. "Nalić Zahid." In *Narodno pozorište Sarajevo 1921–1971*, edited by Josip Lešić, 360. Sarajevo: Narodno pozorište, 1971.
- Perić, Isak. "Anketa o krizi sarajevskog Nar. Pozorišta." *Pregled*, July 10, 1927, 7. Sarajevo. Academy of Music, University of Sarajevo, The Archives of the Institut of Musicology. *Program svečanog otvorenja Pozorišta Sarajevo*, 22.–24. 10. 1921.
- Sarajlić-Slavnić, Tamara. "Repertoar praizvedbi i premijernih predstava drame (1921–1996)." In *Narodno pozorište u Sarajevu: izložba 75 godina rada Narodnog pozorišta, 100 godina zgrade sa osvrtom na teatarski život Sarajeva prije osnivanja Pozorišta: teatrografska studija Repertoar Pozorišta (1921–1996), Prilozi o razvoju Drame, Opere i Baleta i teatarskom životu*, edited by Tamara Sarajlić-Slavnić, 45–134. Sarajevo: Muzej književne i pozorišne umjetnosti BiH, 1998.
- Tauber, Eli. "Jevreji kao nerazdvojni dio razvoja privred i kulture u Bosni i Hercegovini." In *Identiteti Bosne i Hercegovine kroz historiju: zbornik radova*, edited by Husnija Kamberović, 87–102. Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2011. [https://issuu.com/institutzaistorijusarajevo/docs/identitet\\_bih\\_knjiga\\_1/98](https://issuu.com/institutzaistorijusarajevo/docs/identitet_bih_knjiga_1/98).
- Tmuša, Vl. "Anketa o krizi sarajevskog Nar. Pozorišta." *Pregled*, July 3, 1927, 7. "Uprave Narodnog pozorišta u Sarajevu." In *Narodno pozorište u Sarajevu: izložba 75 godina rada Narodnog pozorišta, 100 godina zgrade sa osvrtom na teatarski život Sarajeva prije osnivanja Pozorišta: teatrografska studija Repertoar Pozorišta (1921–1996), Prilozi o razvoju Drame, Opere i Baleta i teatarskom životu*, edited by Tamara Sarajlić-Slavnić, 349–52. Sarajevo: Muzej književne i pozorišne umjetnosti BiH, 1998.