

*The coronation of “the accompanying comrade”
Sică Alexandrescu – A case study*

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Abstract: Have “People’s Artists” been famous artists, plain “nomenklatura” representatives in the artistic milieu or just “accompanying comrades”? What were the characteristics of the mechanism producing these “people’s artists” in the first years after the concept had been imported from the USSR? What are, in this context, the specificities of the Romanian theatre environment? Who are the people selected to become “distinguished artists”, “State Prize Laureate”, “Emeritus Masters of art” or “People’s artists” – and what justifies this hierarchy? Clearly, some of the members of the first generation of communist “theatre heroes” were truly artists who had earned a certain fame even before the Second World War. Others, however, had not – or they had earned an entirely different kind of status and fame in the artistic milieu. We shall try to uncover at least a part of the mechanism for selecting/producing “state artists”, by means of a case study focusing on possibly the most illustrative character for the stated theme: theatre director Sică Alexandrescu. With this in view, we used previous files of personal research concerning the political, ideologic and aesthetic debates in the first decades of the communist regime, we revisited archives, journal and cultural magazines collections and, of course, we revisited the articles and books written by the famous theatre director himself.

Keywords: Theatre Directing, Romanian Theatre, Theatre History, Cultural Policies

Historic context: theatre in the first decades after the Second World War

In contrast to other areas of science and arts, Romanian theatre appears to have welcomed the passing from a democratic regime to communism without any suspicions, or even with strange enthusiasm. If we look closely

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at the documents of the time, even before the nationalization that took place on June 11th 1948, a large portion of the private theatre companies, but especially some of the most important artists, be they directors, actors or scenographers, seemed to adjust as they went along, both in terms of artistic productions, and in terms of their public discourse - in interviews, articles and essays published in the press. Of course, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the country was, effectively, under occupation and censorship was becoming stricter by the day, between 1945 and 1948.

In fact, between 1945 and 1948, Romanian theatre was going through a (reality-denying) vibrant creation boom. Despite the fact that it could not use its main stage, which had fallen prey to the Allied bombardments in 1944, the National Theatre in Bucharest used, after the necessary repairs, its Studio hall in Piața Amzei and, for the bigger shows, it was making use of the inappropriate festivities hall of the St. Sava Highschool. Private companies appeared and disappeared like one-day flies because of inflation and of the fluidity of legislation; in other cases, they just optimistically and stubbornly picked up where they had left off because of political reasons, or because they had left into refuge. The audience, freshly emerged from the horrors of war and plunged into the nightmare of Russian occupation, speculation in goods and material deprivation, merely wanted to relax: so, paradoxically, the cinema and theatre halls were almost always full.

The Association for Romanian-Soviet Friendship (ARLUS) got set up, under the management of “the red prince”, Scarlat Callimachi², an old-time left-wing activist - just like his wife, the excellent Jewish actress Dida Solomon. Within the framework of ARLUS, a variety of circles and literary groups for young artists started blooming and famous writers and artists like Camil Petrescu³, Ion Sava⁴, Ion Aurel Maican⁵, Tudor Vianu⁶ and many others were being invited to hold lectures and workshops. ARLUS published the *Lumea*

2. Scarlat Callimachi (1896-1975) writer and journalist, communist activist, called by the artistic environment “the red prince”. He had an aristocratic genealogy, one of his ancestors being even the prince governor of Wallachia between 1806-1807 and 1812-1819.

3. Camil Petrescu (1894-1957) was a writer, literary theory author and playwright. He was the Manager of the National Theatre of Bucharest between 1938-1939 and a member of Romanian Academy from 1947.

4. Ion Sava (1900-1947) was a famous and influential theatre director, journalist and theatre theory author.

5. Ion Aurel Maican (1893-1952) theatre director.

6. Tudor Vianu (1898-1965) Literary critic, scholar and aesthetics specialist. He was also manager of the National Theatre in 1945.

magazine (which would disappear by the end of the decade): this is where theatre director Ion Sava published a part of his vibrant and hopeful articles and essays - including the project for an Arts Palace, featuring a Round Theatre, to be built on the old spot of the National Theatre. At the end of 1945, I.A. Maican was asked to be the director of the Performance Arts Directorate in the Arts Ministry, where he started work on the new Theatre Law, and even on a law intending to reform the Arts Conservatory. However, his time as a director was to be quite short, as the Soviet agents soon arrested him under the false accusation of having stolen the stage sets of the Odessa Opera House, the director of which he had been for a few months during the Romanian occupation. He was released within days of his arrest, but his political collaboration with the new regime ended there.

As we can see, times were as complicated as they were filled with energy. In such a historic context, aesthetic innovation in theatre is rather limited and difficult, due to political instability, economic hardship, rampant inflation and general confusion. Private companies mostly wished to make money quickly in order to stay alive, so they were taking on the lightest and least problematic of repertoires, or performed reruns with assured box-office revenue. National Theatres timidly tried out plays that would both satisfy the more pretentious audiences and keep the authorities off their back. For instance, in 1945, Ion Şahighian⁷ directed *So it will be* by Simonov, and in 1947, the same „hard-working” director staged Davidoglu’s debut *The man from Ceatal* and one more Soviet fill-up production, *The Peace Island* by Evgheni Petrov; it seems obvious that he wished to be seen to adjust to the new rules. Young directors with a history of communist activism were brought in, like Dinu Negreanu, Moni Ghelerter or Mihail Raicu, staging *The Russian Question* by Simonov, or *The Young Guard*, a dramatization of Fadeev’s novel etc. However, in 1947, Ion Sava’s most daring – and last - experiment was to take place in the St Sava festivity hall: *Macbeth* performed with masks. Despite the public’s curiosity, however, the reviews were quite ambiguous, and Sava would die within half a year, broken hearted by the apparent flop⁸.

7. Ion Şahighian (1897-1965) was one of the most famous and prolific theatre directors of the National Theatre in Bucharest, in constant competition with his colleague, director and writer Ion Sava. Şahighian even managed to direct, before the Second World War, some Romanian film productions, mainly comedies and melodramas.

8. Virgil Petrovici, “End notes” for Ion Sava, *Teatralitatea Teatrului [The Theatricality of Theatre]* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1981), 427.

In the context of general unrest and anxiety, the nationalization, a long time object of rumor and hearsay, was met by a rather prepared theatre community. Some of the artists had already spread out throughout the country, attracted by the privileged conditions offered for professionals in the bigger cultural centers, which were aiming to merge with the newly set up (starting with 1946) popular or state theatres, in most of the cities where a theatre building existed. Some others were caught on the wrong foot, like the young Liviu Ciulei⁹, whose father had only recently, in 1946, started exploiting the cubist style block of flats on Magheru Boulevard, featuring the two halls of the Odeon Theatre (today Nottara). In the same way, the news was shaking for actors Mircea Şeptilici and N. Stroe, who owned a prosperous cabaret theatre operating in the basement hall of the Atlantic Bar, in the Romarta building.

Other theatre owners were at ease, the future seemed bright: using the trump card of having had rough fights with the legionary government, which had led to the shutting down of her legendary company in 1941, actress Lucia Sturdza Bulandra¹⁰ poisedly came in to discuss matters with the “leadership” (apparently with Gh. Gheorhiu-Dej, head of the communist party himself); she obtained, as of the end of even 1947, the post of director/manager of the Municipal Theatre, next to Izvor Bridge. Later on, the famous actress managed to also round up as a Studio the performance hall of the Central School, near Icoanei Garden (after 1948, the high school was renamed Zoia Kosmodemianskaia).

9. Liviu Ciulei (1923-2011) was the most influential theatre and film directors in the communist era. Trained both as architect and actor, he studied theatre directing with Ion Sava and film directing as assistant director of Victor Iliu, the mid 50s. He had also a reach and exceptional carrier as actor and stage designer, and was the manager of Bucharest Bulandra Theatre between 1963-1987. After being removed from that position, he followed a brilliant theatre carrier in Europe and the United States, where he was also the artistic director of Guthrie Theatre of Mineapolis. In 1965, he was awarded at Cannes for the direction of the *Forest of the Hanged*.

10. Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra (1914-1996) famous theatre and film actress, born into the aristocratic old family Sturdza, who had a consistent education and had an academic degree in literature and philosophy. For choosing an artistic carrier, she was rejected by her family. She married Tony Bulandra, also a well-known actor and, in association with other important colleagues from their generation, they took over the independent Davilla Company in 1914, and transformed it in the most famous private theatre in Romania. Even if all the partners were related in an administration council, Lucia Sturdza-Bulandra was the real executive manager all along.

Finally, after a few months of confusion, the overwhelming majority of Romanian actresses, actors, directors and scenographers, with or without complete artistic studies, joined by a host of amateurs who had found their vocation in the hosts of art courses for workers that had been started everywhere, became state employees, in a theatre either smaller or bigger, either central or provincial. As private companies were not paying their employees over the summer unless they were on tour or playing in summer gardens, the nationalization actually represented an unexpected blessing for theatre artists: the opportunity of a life out of precarity. Little did it matter that one would play Nila the Drummer instead of Juliet, and that one would stage Pogodin's propaganda plays instead of Strindberg. The theatre worker had bread on the table. Taste issues, aesthetic directions and personal aspirations were all matters that could be postponed – their discussion would only start again after about a decade.

Enter the "People's Artist": a pre-history

Sică Alexandrescu, like many of his peers in the same generation and in the ones following, was a "self-made artist". He had never followed the courses of the Arts Conservatory (nor had V.I. Popa or Ion Sava done so, the former had read Letters and Philosophy, the latter was a lawyer), but he also had not been enrolled into any kind of university. Despite the fact that, throughout his career, he publicly claimed to be a follower of the great director Paul Gusty¹¹, the truth is that he had worked at the National Theatre in Bucharest, after finishing high-school, as a backstage director assistant, for less than one season, just before leaving to the front in the First World War¹². Before that, starting even at 17, he had been an apprentice in the operetta company run by George Carussy, and he had managed to even help around in the Bulandra-Maximilian-Storin company. After the war, in 1920, Alexandrescu left for the newly set up National Theatre in Cluj, following actor and writer Zaharia Bârsan¹³, whom he had met during a tour. He was

11. Paul Gusty (1859-1944) was a well-known and respected theatre director at the National Theatre in Bucharest.

12. Margareta Andreescu, "An Introductory Study" in Sică Alexandrescu, *Un Drum În Teatru [A Way in Theatre]* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1980), 7.

13. Zaharia Bârsan (1879-1948) writer, actor, theatre director, the first artistic manager of the National Theatre at Cluj.

hired here, as well, as backstage director; but as he was a hands-on, charismatic person, he was soon promoted by the tragedian-playwright (who spent years running – albeit confusedly and inconsistently – the Cluj theatre) to the position of stage director.

This success, based on putting on a light repertoire, mostly consisting of bubbly comedies and vaudevilles, gave him a boost: Sică Alexandrescu came back to Bucharest in 1926 and set up, together with a few friends, a private company: Teatrul Nostru (Our Theatre), aiming to fill in the summer entertainment gaps, in the season of theatre holidays. The company rented the hall of the Marconi cinema on Calea Griviței and it offered, in the garden or inside the hall, a variety of comedies and music-hall performances, some translated by Alexandrescu, others translated and locally “adapted” (so-called “localizări” in Romanian argotic language).

The practice of “localizări” was still very widespread: one would translate a music hall text extracted from the French, English or German tradition, then change the names of the characters to Romanian names, adjust the situations slightly to the local dramatic space/context and “pouf!” – a new play appeared. As enforcement of intellectual property rights was almost inexistent in Romania in the beginning of the XXth century, adaptation of this kind were excellent sources for easy money, if one was at least mildly talented. In this sense, Sică Alexandrescu, on his own or in association, later, with Tudor Mușatescu, Al. Kirițescu, Mircea Ștefănescu or other fashionable playwrights (during the war, Alexandrescu also offered adaptation and translation work to Mihail Sebastian¹⁴, who was not allowed to publish at the time because of his Jewish descent) – created, up to 1946, a fully-fledged industry of local adaptations, with zero investment in the rights of the original authors.

The success registered by Teatrul Nostru – where Sică Alexandrescu admittedly put on a Caragiale play for the first time – spurred him on to expand the business. According to his own confessions¹⁵, within just one season he adventurously started managing several companies at a time. Between 1927 and 1928 he took on the management of (and partially owned) three theatres (Teatrul Nostru, Teatrul Mic and Alhambra). In 1928 he filed for bankruptcy and withdrew from the public eye for almost a year, translating and

14. Mihail Sebastian (1907-1945) writer, theatre critic, playwright.

15. Sică Alexandrescu, *General La Patru Ani [A General at Four Years Old]* (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1969), 140–41.

making adaptations for future shows. Starting in 1929, his enterprising efforts in music hall and commercial theatre restarted with a passion, encompassing the summer season as well, at cinema garden Marconi in Bucharest and Modern cinema in Ploiești.

His big breakthrough would only come in 1936 though, after Maria Ventura¹⁶ gave up her own theatre, which had spent six years under the elegant roof of the Majestic theatre hall, just across the National Theatre. Paying the debts, Sică took over the hall on Calea Victoriei and a large part of Ventura's cast and crew, establishing the 'Comedia' theatre. In the meantime, next to the reborn Teatrul Nostru and Teatrul Mic, he was already, together with actor Vasile Toneanu or with playwright Tudor Mușatescu, the manager of Teatrul Vesel (taken over from actor Ion Iancovescu) and also of Teatrul Liber: no less than five private companies. In 1937 he decided to associate all of them, in cartel fashion, similarly to the Paris model, setting up a Cooperative Society of Theatre and Art Enterprises (SCITA); he even managed to lure within the association the famous Regina Maria Theatre, owned by the Bulandra-Maximilian-Storin group.

The advantage of working in a cartel set-up was that commonly administrated projects could be created and actors of one theatre could play (with quite some difficulty in scheduling the shows) as stars in all the associated theatres. Despite the well-praised hit that Sică Alexandrescu ensured the company, by staging, together with Soare Z. Soare, in only two weeks (!) *The Karamazov Brothers* at Regina Maria, Mrs. Bulandra was not content with the cooperative management. Or perhaps she was simply not used to not controlling everything personally. Teatrul Regina Maria had always intended to present a repertoire and aesthetic alternative to the National Theatre, and therefore being associated in name with theatrical enterprises that played for commercial success, like those run by Alexandrescu, may have appeared for some as a lowering of standards and prestige earned in decades. In any case, the actress-princess withdrew her company from this association in 1939 and, after her departure, SCITA fell apart¹⁷. The entrepreneur-director maintained,

16. Maria (Marioara, Marie) Ventura (1886-1954) famous theatre and film actress of Romanian origins, who studied in Paris and played there for several decades at the Comédie Française. She also founded and run in Bucharest a theatre company on her name (between 1929-1936).

17. Simion Alterescu et al., eds., *Istoria Teatrului În România - Vol. 3 [A History of Theatre in Romania - Third Volume]* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1973), 62–82; Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul Românesc. Vol. 5: Teatrul Românesc În Perioada 1913-1925* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1974).

however, property and management rights for some of the mentioned companies, centering, obviously, on Comedia, the fancy theatre on Calea Victoriei.

As we can see, between the wars and in the war period, Sică Alexandrescu rather walked the path of wide administrative-commercial success than that of artistic-modernist achievement. He was seen, above all, as a manager and as an enterprising producer. He launched on the stage, with excellent intuition and a good understanding of the works, actors that would become stars and, sometimes, even playwrights; but at no time was he seen as an important director - more as a correct and demanding interpreter of easy melodrama and comedy (even to the point of asking military precision of his teams). He carefully stayed away from all the aesthetic debates of the interbellum, stating on a regular basis (with a conviction that only feigned modesty) that the only aesthetic trend he was interested in was the one that "fills the hall". A man of a humorous disposition, he often sarcastically declared that his peers' (rather tame, in fact) "avangarde" aesthetic experiments are simply nonsense.

It is only in 1937 that he went through some sort of aesthetic ego crisis: he reworked, in order to commemorate a quarter of a century since the author died, Caragiale's *O noapte furtunoasă* (A Stormy Night), back to back with *Conu Leonida*, at Comedia. The advertising campaign boldly stated that the staging is a move to "recover" the texts: the director was thus trying to answer the "worried" points put forward by V.I. Popa in 1931, in an article published in *Vremea*, titled „Caragiale the director”. V.I. Popa had proposed the hypothesis that, in fact, the best way of directing Caragiale texts was the very manner the playwright had used in directing the premieres of his plays. Later, under the communist regime, Sică Alexandrescu would turn this hypothesis of "the directing tradition of Caragiale" into the core of his normative theories - never mentioning V.I. Popa again.

Perhaps the most relevant indicator regarding the artistic fate of Sică Alexandrescu before 1945 is that, except for his debut in Cluj and for two productions in one season at the Cernăuți National Theatre, he was never invited to direct at any of the national theatres – however rich and multifaceted his artistic activity may have been.

Considering everything, when the regime changed, the owner of Comedia and of so many smaller companies would have qualified perfectly for the label of „bourgeois exploiter”, in letter and in spirit, and ought to have been, as such, condemned to at least a few years out of the spotlight, if not worse. Nevertheless...

From a "bourgeois exploiter" to an "accompanying comrade" and then to a "People's Artist"

Between 1945 and 1948, the Comedia repertoire went through a radical "renewal". Next to classic plays and, again, Caragiale, staged with a cast of the most representative actors brought together from all the different companies owned by Sică Alexandrescu, during each season plays of either classic Russian heritage or, already, of Soviet propaganda origin were added to the repertoire. Ostrovski is a big hit, thanks to the addition to the team of a Russian director turned Romanian national, Ivan N. Dubrovin, who seemed to have materialized from nowhere and who, based on the little information we have from that time¹⁸, may have been at some point a student of Stanislavski. Despite repairs being made to the building, that Alexandrescu payed for from his own pocket (the hall was rented from its owner, Eforia Spitalelor), a lot of new titles are put on, in a mix of "quality" repertoire, commercial theatre, but also new discoveries: in 1946 the theatre witnessed, under the stage direction of Sică, the debut of Aurel Baranga¹⁹, later one of the flagship authors of communist propaganda in theatre and, for years on end, a writer holding different leadership functions in the political apparatus. His debut play, a comedy that people have long forgotten featuring peasants, was called *A ball in Făgădău* and would turn out to be the first step into a long-term friendship/collaboration among Sică Alexandrescu, Aurel Baranga and the new star of theatre/political life, actor Radu Beligan²⁰.

It is more than probable that, in the enthusiastic years up to the nationalization, Sică Alexandrescu invested quite a bit of connective imagination for quietly establishing useful alliances with the new favorites of the communist regime. It is just as true that fate was, in a tragic way, extremely favorable for him. After the demise by illness of writer and theatre director G. M. Zamfirescu²¹ in

18 Ioan Massof, *Teatrul Românesc [The Romanian Theatre]* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1981), 257–58.

19. Aurel Baranga (1913-1969) journalist and playwright. After his debut, as avant-garde poet in 1931, he joins in 1945 the communist apparatus. He is a member of the Central Comity of the Communist party from 1969 to 1974.

20. Radu Beligan (1918-2016) theatre and film actor, theatre director, artistic manager of Comedy Theatre in Bucharest (1961-1969) and of the National Theatre in Bucharest (1969-1989). President of the International Institute of Theatre from 1971, and from 1977 appointed honorary president for life. He was also an important political figure during the communist regime, awarded the title of "People's Artist" in 1962, member of The Central Comity of the Communist Party (1969-1989) and a representative in the National Assembly (1961-1975).

21. George Mihail Zamfirescu (1898-1939)

1939, at only 41, between 1944 and 1947, three of the masters of modern theatre directing disappeared by accident – all both theorists and innovating artists: Soare Z. Soare²² died on the very day of August 23 1944, in the fire exchange at Băneasa, while he was coming back from Bucharest, in a taxi, to the village where he was staying in refuge. Victor Ion Popa and Ion Sava would die just one year apart, the first in 1946 and the other in 1947, prey to incurable diseases. This series of misfortunes is completed by the departure of the Italian director Fernando de Cruciatti²³, who had been hired in 1938 at the National Theatre, had enjoyed for years a well-deserved level of appreciation and had even taken over the Romanian citizenship; in the beginning of 1949 the artist was forced by the authorities to go back to his native country. In other words, the field of modernist stage direction that had blossomed between the wars was now drastically diminished, and the National Theatre would be the first to feel the consequences of this disaster.

In this context, the nationalization entails an almost full absorption of the Comedia theatre into the staff of the National Theatre, starting with Sică Alexandrescu. Given that he had first set a play at the National Theatre only in 1946, the public and professional presence of the entrepreneur-director would gain, almost overnight, an impressive weight.

First of all, the overgrowth of staff in the National Theatre, in times of material hardship, did not seem to generate any sustainability worries for the new authorities, even under precarious administration/repertoire organization. For mysterious reasons, the authorities decided not to repair/rebuild the traditional National building but, strangely, to use Majestic/Comedia building, as main headquarters, and the studio in Piața Amzei was kept; the old National theatre ended up being demolished. Even though it seems speculative, it is even possible that a mutually beneficial deal had been arranged between the entrepreneur Alexandrescu and the communist regime: he lost the halls (which were all rented, so he only lost the restauration money that were already invested) and won the status of first stage director of the National.

Secondly, the absorption of the Comedia actors (but also of others from theatres run by Sică Alexandrescu) radically changed the elitist composition of the actor corps of the first stage in the country. The society partners, but also the regular actors in National Theatres had enjoyed, for almost a century, certain privileges (summer salary being only one of them) that actors in private companies had not had access to. The most renowned actors would also hold

22. Soare Z. Soare (1894-1944)

23. Fernando de Cruciatti (1889-?) was an Italian theatre and film actor, theatre director.

positions as teachers at the Conservatorium. The payment grids of National Theatres were significantly higher than whatever a private company was able to pay, no matter how successful its shows. It is, therefore, understandable that the takeover of the Comedia actors, which practically doubled the cast of the National Theatre, would mean an overthrowing of decade-old hierarchies and would change the internal chemistry of the team, favoring the recognition of Sică Alexandrescu as an essential power and decision factor, even without any official confirmation.

We must also take into account, in this context, both the new ideological rhetoric and the new "routines" of "collective management", with meetings for political persuasion, for establishing the aesthetic norms according to the Stalinist views etc. as they had been imposed by the pro-Soviet regime. On the basis of a well-developed elasticity, acquired during the decades of commercial success, in which he had had to become an expert in networking, Sică Alexandrescu was to become, overnight, not just one of the pillars of stage direction in the National Theatre, but also one of the „trustworthy" mouthpiece of the system.

Sică Alexandrescu never presumed to become a theorist. And yet, without throwing around his weight, yet authoritatively, he instated his own «norm code», that mostly came forth of his practical experience, carefully and patiently distilled and compared to that of his peers.²⁴

It is precisely his perfect indifference to the aesthetic debates on modernist theatre directing of the interbellum, his ironical views on "decadent" avant-garde trends, experiments or to any search for new kinds of theatre expression that would offer him, at the time of Stalinist propaganda, some kind of *carte blanche* for building the new directorial academism, disguised in the confused uniform of "socialist realism". Socialist realism²⁵ did have, in theatre, its own methodologic norm, dictated by Stalin himself: the Stanislavski system and

24. Margareta Anghelescu, "Introductory study" in Sică Alexandrescu, *Un Drum În Teatru [A Way in Theatre]* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1980), 55.

25. The term of socialist realism, as normative, was first used by Maxim Gorki in 1932 and later attributed to Stalin himself. The All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 defined Socialist Realism as the only true art, effectively out-lawing all "dissident" artwork. After the Second World War, the socialist realism became the artistic dogma for all the communist countries for at least one decade, fading (with local particularities) after Stalin's death and Khrushchev's denunciation of the 'cult of personality'. See on that subject Andrew Ellis, ed., *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting 1920–1970* (Milano: Skira, 2012).

method²⁶. In other words, just like Molière's Mr Jourdain, Sică Alexandrescu would declare himself a *sui generis* Stanislavskian, "sans le savoir" – and this move holds the key to his reception as an absolute classic, which is finally due to his good maneuvering of the historic context.

As a matter of fact, the correct platitude of his staging went hand in hand with his demonstrative choice of directing texts that were pure political orders, the kind of texts that would flood all the country's stages at the time. Besides Soviet playwrights that had become the standard (Kataev, Kanin with *I was born yesterday*, 1948, Serghei Mihalkov with *Ilia Golovin*, 1950, Stein with *A personal issue*, 1955 and 1957) or Russian classics (Gogol, *The Reviser*, 1952 and 1956, Ostrovski with *The girl without a dowry*, 1954), `master` Sică was a true performer of the new proletcultist playwriting, staging it almost every season, up to 1960: five titles by Baranga, two of Mircea Ștefănescu, one by Lucia Demetrius and, of course, the (painfully failed) dramatic debut of "Academy member" Mihai Beniuc, called *În valea Cucului* (In the Cuckoo's Valley) – a peasant drama about the collectivization, set in Transylvania. This last play would be the object of his own unembarrassed, thick praise, with a clear addressee, in *Teatrul* magazine:

However, the card he would play starting in 1950 remained that of declared "Stanislavskian", self-evident classicality, together with "authentically staying in the service of the dramatic author" and using simply appropriate casts, whose artistic contributions to the making of the shows would nonetheless be overstated in declarations. Tickling the (natural, after all, in all ages) egos of his actors became, paradoxically, a weapon with theoretical value.

The Caragiale umbrella

1952 was witness to the celebration of 100 years since Caragiale's birth. The regime could not afford to fail taking on board the memory of the national "comedy genius". For Sică Alexandrescu, the Caragiale centennial represented the main stake for enhancing his official imago: a new facade, on the one hand, meant to erase from the public memory the old image of expert in commercial theatre and; on the other hand, he could prove himself capable of giving his artistic abilities a theoretical backing and an air of "seriousness" with an academic scent.

26. Lynn Mally, "Autonomous Theater and the Origins of Socialist Realism: The 1932 Olympiad of Autonomous Art," *Russian Review* 52, no. 2 (April 1993): 198, <https://doi.org/10.2307/131343>.

The truth is that, even starting with his first contribution as a director-on-hire at the National in 1948, Sică went back to *O scrisoare pierdută* (*A Lost Letter*). He chose a composite cast, with old theatre society members and several newcomers from Comedia, some of whom would, for decades, will act as a sort of backbone for the successive "reinvigorations" of this production: Marcel Anghelescu as Pristanda, Costache Antoniu as "the drunk citizen", Niki Atanasiu as Cațavencu, Ion Finteșteanu as Farfuridi, Radu Beligan as Agamemnon Dandanache. The less inspired Ion Ulmeni would be replaced from 1952 and in 1956 versions, by the unmistakable Alexandru Giugaru, the stage-filling Nicolae Brancomir would be exchanged in the same remake with the mimic and attitude comedian Grigore Vasiliu-Birlic; and the younger and more charming Constantin Bărbulescu would replace Alexandru Critico as Tipătescu. As for the central position, that of Zoe, Sică Alexandrescu was less... decided: in 1948, Zoe would be interpreted by the commercial theatre comedian Eugenia Zaharia, ex-owner of ephemeral companies and someone of an apparently too „light” talent for the importance of the part. In 1952 and in the 1956 version, the part was to be taken over and shared by two great actresses with an undeniable prestige on the main stage of the country: Cella Dima and the gorgeous Elvira Godeanu (rumor had it at the time that she was in an "intimate" relationship with the very leader of the country). No surprise in the fact that, in all the versions cases, the scenography was signed by Walter Siegfried. We are talking about, and this would be the case in many situations, the very same stage set that had just been dusted clean.

In 1949 Alexandrescu remade and expanded his coupé *O seară la Union. O noapte furtunoasă* (*A Night at Union and & A Stormy Night*) from 1937, in which he had sharply combined pieces of *Momente și Schițe*²⁷, but also bits of *Cânticelele comice* (*Comic songs*) by Alecsandri.

He would come back to Caragiale in 1951 though, with *D'ale Carnavalului*, which he had put on at least four times by then in his various companies. The production only ran for a month; the scenography was again made by Siegfried. The cast was based on his constant actors – one could call them „the Sică team” within the National Theatre: Radu Beligan, Alexandru Giugaru, Niki Atanasiu, Grigore Vasiliu Birlic, Cella Dima, with the addition of Maria Voluntaru and the much younger Carmen Stănescu, who would later become the last and unforgotten Zoe that the maestro chose for *Scrisoarea pierdută*.

27. *Momente și schițe* (Moments and Sketches) is a famous collection of I.L. Caragiale's short stories.

Looking back, it becomes clear that the director was preparing, in fact, to programmatically restage all of Caragiale's comedies for the centennial season, on the – virtually prestigious, but not completely fulfilled - model that he had used in 1937. This personal ambition may have silently influenced the torturing process of censorship and rewriting “on demand” that Academy member Camil Petrescu was submitted to, while writing *Caragiale in his time*²⁸, a play he dedicated to the same event. The Alexandrescu's “auctorial” project had to come first. Plus, Camil Petrescu, the former manager of the theatre (1938-1939), had to learn his place, under the new communist regime.

In February 1952, he would redo *Noaptea furtunoasă*, this time in a collage with *Conu' Leonida față cu reacțiunea* (*Leonida and the revolution*). For the first, he kept the cast and set of 1949 production, for *Conu Leonida* he invited the venerable actors Sonia Cluceru and George Timică. In March 1952, he would produce a new combination: a coupé between *Momente* and *D'ale Carnavalului* in which, of course, the second part was simply a recycling of the performance the year before. If we also count the festive performances, throughout the season, of *Scrisoarea pierdută*, it is clear that we already have an integral succession of all comedies, of which a vast majority are remakes of old performances.

The communist authorities do not seem to have caught on to the trick. Quite the opposite, they were extremely happy, the newspapers, radio and news broadcasts cannot praise enough this consistent and “brilliant” valorization of the great playwright works. And the director earned, in the collective memory, a never contested first place as far as staging Caragiale is concerned, which would last for a few decades.

In April 1952, by National Assembly decree, together with other actors of the theatre (among whom, obviously, Costache Antoniu, the communist party's secretary into the National), Sică Alexandrescu was awarded an *Ordinul Muncii clasa I* (Order for Work Merit, class I) “for the work undertaken during the Caragiale centennial”; in January 1953, by means of a similar decree, he was crowned with the title of *Maestru Emerit al Artei* (*Honour Master of Art*). Seven years later he'll become a “*People's Artist*”.

Sică Alexandrescu would nonetheless back up his remakes spree at the National with stances with more theoretical pretensions that are published in the contemporary press and would be restated not only in several articles, but also in later books. His basic tenet was, of course, that of “recovering”

28. See Ion Vartic, ed., *Caragiale În Vremea Lui. Procesul Tovarășului Camil* [*Caragiale in His Time, The Case against Comrade Camil*] (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Camil Petrescu / Teatrul Azi, 2014).

the work of the great comedy author in the "original" form, that in which Caragiale had directed his own opening performances. He claimed that this pursuit of directorial archaeology had been informed by very old actors, like Nicolae Soreanu, who had been a part of the original casts – as he stressed in the introduction of *Stage direction notebook for A Lost Letter*, first published in 1953. While in this edition Radu Beligan was mentioned as a `working party`, in the bundle of *Notebooks* on 1956, in which *O noapte furtunoasă* and *D'ale Carnavalului* are added, Belgian's name magically disappeared.

Publishing *stage direction notebooks*, on Stanislavski's model, was meant to add to the classic-academic-leaning foundation of the `maestro's life work. Of course, however, the language used to justify the need for recovering the `authentic` Caragiale vision of the comedies was the typical jargon for the hard-core cultural propaganda of the beginning of the 50's:

The bourgeois-landowners' oligarchy, which Caragiale unmasks and condemns in his comedies, being unable to attack his vigorous body of work in brutal ways (like the organized gangs of troublemakers and fighters, the chauvinist attack by Sturdza in front of the Academy, the Caion affair) chose a subversive, much subtler manner of diminishing its corrosive virulence. Instead of members of the exploiting classes, Caragiale's characters were first interpreted by bourgeois theatre criticism, and later transformed by the stage performances, by means of scenography and costume, as being small provincial slum-dwellers.²⁹

As all ideological interpretation of the situations and characters in Caragiale was blooming in this age, it is obvious that the thesis of a progressive „alteration” of the performances, however absurd (and finally hypocritical, if we take a look at a few of the first „summer” shows by Sică Alexandrescu, with some actors coming straight from music-hall or variety theatre) fit like a glove on the dogmatic, mechanistic and self-important discourse of the new theatre critique. The falseness of the hypothesis is proved, paradoxically, precisely by the minute similarity of the way spaces, typological casts and performances were conceived, whether before or right after the war, in Bucharest, Craiova, Iași or wherever else.

29. Sică Alexandrescu, *Caiet de Regie Pentru O Scrisoare Pierdută* [*Directing Notebooks for A Lost Letter*] (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură și artă, 1953), 6.

In fact, the very much praised and used stage direction notebook turns out to be a whip-up of transparently superfluous stage direction indications, accompanied by movement concepts for the – rather static – scenes of every act. More than that, in the notebook, the director himself refers to so-called „traditional” lines: these being lines that Caragiale’s actors introduced during the rehearsals and that the writer approved on site, but never introduced in the printed editions. However, these remained intact, being passed on from generation to generation: the best example is the last line uttered by Cetățeanul turmentat, “*Nu mai pupa mâna, că se-nchide urna!*” (“Stop kissing the hand, the poll might end!”). Alexandrescu didn’t even feel the contradiction between this respect borne by the teams of artists to the performance memory of the author and the thesis of `alteration`: a thesis that, today, as in its time, preserves its ridiculousness and toxicity:

After his death, “ministers, MPs, senators, higher or lower officials and political partisans of more or less influence” have done everything in their power to make sure that “the Caragiale style” remained only an ever-fading memory...³⁰

While emphatically remembering, in an article written ten years later, his so-called process of “restoration” of the Caragiale performances in 1952, that he had been so generously rewarded for by the authorities (in the meantime, in 1960, he had also become a *People’s Artist*), a process to which he had already devoted so many other articles, all saying the same thing, the stage director did not miss the opportunity to self-importantly conclude:

Caragiale’s theatre, returned today to its author, has resurged from the very spirit that created it, returned to the mind and soul that created it, renewed its old garments on the patterns of the original cut and now appears as the most authentic page of critical realism expressed through domestic playwriting.³¹

30. Ibid., 7.

31. “Caragiale și montările sale”(Caragiale and his set-ups), *Contemporanul*, 8 iunie 1962, in Alexandrescu, *Un Drum În Teatru [A Way in Theatre]*, 132.

The fight for re-theatricalization

What we, today, call "the fight for re-theatricalization" is, in fact, a large debate, with strong polemic accents, about stage directing, which had originally been started by the *Contemporanul* magazine in the spring of 1956; its echoes were still to be heard, especially in the new *Teatrul* magazine, up until the end of 1957. The debate took place in the context of the short ideological 'spring' that all communist countries enjoyed after Nikita Khrushchev's speech in February 1956, in which the secretary general of the CPUS condemned the crimes and personality cult of the Stalinist age. Khrushchev had thus given a sign to re-evaluate the ideological and cultural limitations imposed by hard-core Stalinism. Similar re-evaluations took place all throughout the European East, particularly as far as cultural practices were concerned. In Romania, under the discrete supervision of party representatives, this trend would somewhat shake the film-making industry and the literary circles. However, it was only in theatre that the ball rolled and became more substantial; this was especially because of the accumulated tensions between the 'old guard' of privileged artists, in alliance with 'party' playwrights, and a new generation of stage directors that called for a real professionalization of the whole of the artistic process, but also for a much more dynamic modernisation of performing arts.

The young directors (Mihai Raicu³², who also had political responsibilities), Lucian Giurchescu³³, Horea Popescu³⁴, Sorana Coroamă Stanca³⁵, Dan Nasta³⁶, Liviu Ciulei, George Rafael³⁷, Radu Stanca³⁸, Crin Teodorescu³⁹, Vlad Mugur⁴⁰, joined, even if more discretely, by Ion Cojar⁴¹ and Miron Niculescu⁴², from

32. Mihai Raicu (born 1922) theatre director, artistic manager of several theatres between 1952 and 1978, like the Satu Mare State Theatre, The National Theatre of Cluj, The National Theatre of Targu Mures etc.

33. Lucian Giurchescu (born 1930) theatre director, former artistic manager of Comedy Theatre Bucharest (1969-1979, 1990-1993).

34. Horea Popescu (1925-2010) theatre and film director.

35. Sorana Coroama Stanca (1921-2007) theatre and television director, playwright.

36. Dan Nasta (1919-2015) poet, actor, theatre director and art collector.

37. GeorgeRafael (1920-1984) theatre director.

38. Radu Stanca (1920-1962) poet, playwright, theatre director, theatre theorist.

39. Crin Teodorescu (1925-1970) theatre director.

40. Vlad Mugur (1927-2001) theatre director, theatre professor, artistic manager of National Theatre in Cluj (1965-1971).

41. Ion Cojar (1931-2009) theatre director, theatre professor, artistic manager of National Theatre in Bucharest (1997-2001).

42. Miron Niculescu (born 1930) theatre director.

the Bucharest National Theatre), informally organised as “The V. I. Popa circle of young directors”, and took frequent and acid positions in *Contemporanul*. At the same time, they wrote well-founded essays of theatre aesthetics, but also critical articles of the daily theatre life in Bucharest and in the country, or reviews dedicated to the theatre education; most of the essays were published in *Teatrul* magazine⁴³.

The concept of *re-theatricalisation* was introduced by Radu Stanca, in his two essays dedicated to theatre aesthetics, and was taken over by Liviu Ciulei in a famous study about scenography; the term was, in fact, a bridge towards the large-scale movement of theatricalisation (aesthetic modernist marking of the artistic autonomy of stage direction, in relation to literature and film) that had taken shape between the wars; it was theoretically founded by the Russian avant-garde and discussed in a Romanian context especially by the famous theatre directors Ion Sava, Ion Aurel Maican and Victor Ion Popa.

This artistic and generational conflict was sustained from the shadows by the very authorities responsible with theatre at the time: the young literature professor Paul Cornea⁴⁴ had recently been nominated as a director of the Performance Arts Directorate in the Ministry of Culture. He was the one to draw the seemingly peace-making conclusions of the debate in *Contemporanul*, from September 1956, and at the same time the person allowing the young directors of the ‘circle’ to present a separate report from the one drawn by his own Directorate, called ‘Referat’, in the framework of the history-making *Forum of theatre makers* in December 1956. The forum often fell prey to angry exchanges of opinions and accusations; but, to the surprise of ‘the old guard’, in the closing argument, Paul Cornea congratulated the young group and programmatically took over some of their remarks.

How did Sică Alexandrescu feature in this small turmoil? His artistic path seemed to go through a paradoxical phenomenon. On the one hand, some of the young directors that had launched the polemic waves started attacking him indirectly, or even by name, as early as March-April 1956. On

43. Miruna Runcan, *Teatralizarea și Reteatralizarea În România. 1920-1960 [The Theatricalisation and Re-Theatricalisation in Romania]*, Second ed. (Bucharest: Editura Liternet, 2012).

44. Paul Cornea (born 1923) comparative literature academic, author of numerous research volumes in literary aesthetics and literary sociology. In his youth, he was a communist activist, and was the director Performance Arts Directorate in the Ministry of Culture (1956-1958) and the director of the Cinema Directorate of the same Ministry (1958-1968).

the other hand, the regime rewarded him with the very first international tour that a Romanian theatre, the National, would be allowed since the end of the Second World War.⁴⁵

The attacks started, for instance, with an article by Mihail Raicu, who indirectly referred to the press and public failure of Sică's (one and only) attempt at staging a Shakespeare play, *King Lear* to be exact, in the summer of 1955:

No doubt that it is also the diplomatic tone of the Theatre Directorate whenever an Honour or People's Artist ought to be criticised that contributes to the lukewarm hushing of any difference in opinions. At the same time, theatre directors seldom notice new insights when they appear in their theatres, so as to be able to promote or harness them.⁴⁶

Yet it was George Rafael, the excellent stage director at Teatrul Tineretului (The Youth Theatre and later Nottara), who had the huge courage of passing straight to concrete examples. The young directors, he claimed, were held in a sort of reserve pool in the big theatres, or even boycotted by the actor crews with resounding names, something that took place with the direct support of the older stage directors - who were neither interested in teaching anybody anything, nor capable of accepting that other visions than their own were possible. The theatre institutions, such as they were organised and functioning at the time, not only did not encourage young talent, but were suspicious of newcomers and held them back, whenever they were not working them out plain and simple:

Because, paradoxically, Teatrul Tineretului has not trained, since it was established, any young stage director. Similarly, Teatrul Municipal has not trained so far any young director, with the exception of Dan Nasta,

45. "To whom do we owe this happy, unexpected result? (A.N.: the success of the Paris tour in 1956) First of all, we owe it to Caragiale and to the people taking charge today of the destiny of our country, whom we will never be able to thank enough for helping us reach this summit for Romanian theatre: we owe it to the party, which so lovingly fosters art and its servants, to our wise and generous government, who put their faith in us and sent us to Paris with dear sacrifices." Sică Alexandrescu, *Caragiale în timpul nostru (Caragiale in our times)*, Editura pentru literatură, Bucharest, 1962, p. 135.

46. Mihail Raicu, "Meșteșugari Și Artiști [Artisans and Artists]," *Contemporanul*, March 16, 1956.

who trained himself. (...). How come comrades Sică Alexandrescu, W. Siegfried or Mony Ghelerter have not trained at least one youngster each, how come they haven't helped at least one person grow and promoted them as a stage director?⁴⁷

Sică Alexandrescu would only join the debate at a late stage, allowing first the floor to a deliberately dogmatic first line including Academy members Eftimiu⁴⁸ and Călinescu⁴⁹, his colleague and competitor Ion Şahighian⁵⁰ (whose acidity against the younger generation was only matched by the mechanical proletarian jargon he used, typical for the public lynching specific to the political trials of the age), director Marin Iorda⁵¹, actor and professor Ion Finteşteanu and theatre historian and party activist Simion Alterescu⁵². All these voices changed the direction of the discussion, accusing the youngsters of arrogance, impatience in allowing themselves to grow up, contempt for the `fundamental primacy of the text`, but also for the actor's artistic contribution. The sparring between the youngsters, backed up by professor G. Dem Loghin⁵³ and other important voices, among whom even Tudor Arghezi⁵⁴ and the old guard would go on for months on end.

It was only in September that the voice of master Sică was to be heard, after coming back all glorious from the Paris tour, where, in the Festival Théâtre des Nations, the National had presented *O scrisoare pierdută*, but also *Ultima oră* by Mihail Sebastian, directed by Momi Ghelerter. Despite its shortness and the fact that it is written more as a pamphlet than as a response to the complex issues that had been raised by most of his interlocutors, his article, called "Let

47. Rafael George, "Regizorii Tineri, Presa Şi Altele... [Young Directors, Press and Other Matters...]," *Contemporanul*, April 6, 1956.

48. Victor Eftimiu, "Regizorul Şi Textul [The Stage Director and the Text]," *Contemporanul*, April 13, 1956.

49. George Calinescu (1899-1965) was a famous and influential literary critic and historian.

50. Ion Şahighian, "Problema Regiei Într-Un Punct Critic [The Issue of Directing at a Critical Point]," *Contemporanul*, April 20, 1956.

51. Marin Iorda, "Câteva Aspecte Concrete Ale Muncii Regizorului [Some Concrete Aspects of the Stage Director's Work]," *Contemporanul*, May 18, 1956.

52. Simion Alterescu, "Îndrăzneală Şi... Încă Ceva [Daring And... Something Else]," *Contemporanul*, May 4, 1956.

53. Dem G. Loghin, "Arta Regiei Nu a Rămas În Urma Artei Actoriceşti [The Directing Art Has Not Remained behind the Acting Profession]," *Contemporanul*, August 22, 1956.

54. Tudor Arghezi (1880-1967) One of the most prominent Romanian poets, writers and journalists of the XX century.

us be more optimistic!" was one of the most obvious, but also most perverse attacks of the "old guard". Sitting comfortably not only on the Paris tour pedestal (about which he would later, in 1968⁵⁵, publish a book that included more work-related travels), but also on the comfortable position of common sense, Sică Alexandrescu gave the impression that he agreed with and even encouraged the purpose of the "debate". Yet his intervention appeared to be eager to draw conclusions and close the discussion, diluting the concepts and levelling the very conflict at its core.

We can face the future with faith. And we must not forget that there are stage directors who have rightly been awarded the title of Honour Masters, people who have dedicated their lives to this craft since 1944: Finți, Moni Ghelerter, followed by a flock of promising talents in stage directing. I call them «promising», because, however talented and in a hurry these youngsters may be, the profession of stage director remains one that requires some maturity.

As these new elements will reach their maturity, they will fortunately replace the "empirical craftsmen". But until then, let us give praise that Romanian theatre, as good or bad as it is, is capable of representing us honorably in international competitions like the one this year in Paris, and that the National Theatre, with its hybrid crew (as described by a collaborator to the official magazine *Teatrul*) manages to gain a top place among the world's nations.⁵⁶

Despite the ironic tone (which would earn him an irate answer, in *Teatrul* magazine, signed by Ștefan Aug. Doinaș⁵⁷, a temporary editor of the said publication), the motif that Alexandrescu attacked most profoundly was the distinction between craftsman and artist, present in the title of the previous Mihail Raicu article (the one that caused the most annoyed reactions on the side of the "maestros").

55. Sică Alexandrescu, *Cu Teatrul Românesc Peste Hotare [Taking Romanian Theatre Abroad]* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1968).

56. Sică Alexandrescu, "Să Fim Mai Optimiști! [Let Us Be More Optimistic!]," *Contemporanul*, September 7, 1956.

57. Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, "Argumentele Unui Optimist [The Arguments of an Optimist]," *Teatrul*, no. 7 (July 1957): 85–86.

In our environment, most youngsters, if they have had the chance to run a show once, wish for nothing less than to run the show by themselves for good. (...) It is on purpose that I call it a craft. One of the articles is called «Artisans or artists?». This is a dangerous choice. And I think this is the very core of the problem. All of us who do this work – or, if you do not like the word, this profession – must be, as much as possible, masters of our craft. We must be good craftsmen and, those who have it in them, artists (...) Whoever tries to jump over the first step without treading on it solidly is wrong to think that they will be able to balance on the top step of the art of directing.⁵⁸

Underneath the thinly spread layer of false modesty, the director positioned as patriarch ended the intervention with normative definitions that, in hindsight, are deliciously empty, proving once more a lack of interest for any authentic theatrical culture and a complete mismatch with the very essence of the debate that had already gone on for half a year:

Stage direction is not, nor should it ever be, as some claim “an art in itself”. It should remain a subordinate art, an interpretative art. One can have a “personal style”, one can become a “personality”, one can dare all sorts of things, but the limit of daring is betraying the text. One can be Yehudi Menuhin or Lipatti – in their art – yet the job is to strictly follow what the inspiration of Beethoven laid down on the staves. And that does not mean superficially “holding to the letter”⁵⁹ of the author’s indications, but trying to understand and render their deeper meaning.⁶⁰

The fact that the debate slowly faded out in 1957, leaving a significant imprint on the series of ever more brilliant performances of the years 1956-1960, signed by the new directors caught up in the re-theatricalization fight, but also by others who had just finished the university did not seem to put Sică Alexandrescu’s mind at ease. This is possibly why he came back, sarcastically, in the winter of 1958 (a rough year, with new arrests and

58. Alexandrescu, “Să Fim Mai Optimişti! [Let Us Be More Optimistic!].”

59. Sică Alexandrescu refers here to a previous article of G. Dem. Loghin.

60. Alexandrescu, “Să Fim Mai Optimişti! [Let Us Be More Optimistic!].”

persecutions, a time when the young editors at *Teatrul*, dedicated to the re-theatricalization trend, Șt. Aug. Doinaș, Ioan Negoitescu and I. D. Sârbu, were all in prison!), by planting a new attack:

If a stage director has been successful, it is because, while present in the performance, he was not visible to the public (...). We state this because, again, I can see writers in the press agitating now, in the sixth decade of this century, rediscoveries of issues that were being discussed in 1922, regarding the «theatricalization» of theatre. I feel as if I can see, at the core of this pompous problem stating, a huge and ridiculous soap bubble. Theatre is theatre of it is nothing at all. (...) We will continue also in the future to stay away from such traps, even if some highly refined theatre scholars might consider us out of fashion.⁶¹

Being contemporary with the first performances of Brecht's plays, staged by Lucian Giurchescu and Horea Popescu, which were accompanied by debates on "the theory of distancing effect" and enjoyed enormous audience and critical success, the vitriolic intentions of the statements above are drowned, up to this day, in an involuntary ridiculousness.

Ending and apotheosis

After many performances and master classes abroad, granted to him by the authorities over time (Finland, Germany, Belgium, Poland), Sică Alexandrescu was, almost inexplicably, sent into retirement from the National Theatre in 1967. However, he would not withdraw without having been organised the exit of a big aristocrat: he would emphatically stage *Apus de soare* (*Sunset*) by Delavrancea – in the same set design signed by Mircea Marosin, with the same costumes and with over 60% of the cast (including George Calboreanu in the leading role) of the same text directed in 1956 by... Marietta Sadova and Mihai Zirra! Not only did "no one remember" the performance put on 11 years before, but the echoes of the 1967 one would become a legend, especially due to the show's filming and repeatedly broadcasted, for decades, on television. At the end of his last season,

61. Sică Alexandrescu, "Drumul Teatrului Nostru E Bun [Our Theatre Is on a Good Path]," *Teatrul*, no. 11 (1958).

Alexandrescu staged the classic *Răzvan și Vidra* by B. P. Hasdeu, taking advantage of the anniversary of the writer, and the official press applauded with gusto:

The making of this performance has been awarded – a tout seigneur, tout honneur – to Sică Alexandrescu, certainly the most adapt among our directors to faithfully translate the spirit and the flesh of such a masterpiece, through the spirit of the National Theatre and the sense of a commemoration of wide historic and cultural resonance.⁶²

It would, however, not be a real retirement: starting in September, he would be the director-manager of the State Theatre in Brașov (that he would rename Teatrul Dramatic and would end up, today, bearing the name... Sică Alexandrescu). The local authorities would afford him a personal car with a chauffeur and even a superb nationalized villa in the old town, with a garden going up to the mountain Tâmpa promenade. He would programmatically introduce a full-year schedule, as in SCITA, taking out the summer holidays. For his own work, he generally reset old stuff (including the recent *Apus de soare*, with the same set and bringing in the leading actors of the Bucharest national, who were paid a fortune). The truth is that even since the 50's he had put on the same Bucharest shows, for good money, throughout the country, taking advantage of a permissive system.

The repertoire of the six Brașov seasons reminds one, to some degree, of the repertoires at Teatrul Nostru or at Comedia: a mix of classic, Romanian and foreign titles (Labiche, Scribe, Alecsandri, Caragiale, Zaharia Bârsan, V.I. Popa) and more or less commercial comedies written by friends (Mircea Ștefănescu, Baranga, Gheorghe Vlad) or even adaptations that he claimed as his own [see *Băiețașul tatii sau Napoleon era fată* (*Daddy's boy or Napoleon was a girl*), with a billboard stating "an adaptation by Sică Alexandrescu of an American farce"! – the real author is called Margaret Mayo]. Of course, by the standards of the time, Soviet authors were well represented.

Alexandrescu invited a majority of directors from the older generations, among which, gallantly, Marietta Sadova, whose *Apus de soare* he had subtly taken over, and who found a collaborative refuge in Brașov for years after that. The dusty repertoire and the distance between the top young actors and the old invited directors generated a small press revolution: in January 1969, some of the young crew (Maria Velcescu, Ștefan Dedu Farca,

62. Radu Popescu, "Răzvan și Vidra de B. P. Hașdeu," *România Liberă*, February 25, 1967.

Dan Săndulescu, Mihai Bălaș, Mircea Andreescu, Costache Babii, Luminița Blănaru) organised in the *Astra* magazine a round table, moderated by the just as young critic Ermil Rădulescu. They asked for new directors to be invited, people with wider visions and more aware of the theatrical realities of their time (the names of Radu Penciulescu and David Esrig were mentioned); they strongly claimed a renewal of the repertoire and the setting up of an experimental studio⁶³. The heated atmosphere would soon be calmed, without the director giving up the "permanent season": Alexandrescu would hire Eugen Mercus, a stage director who had recently enjoyed great success in Târgu Mureș and invite, next to people in his generation, a few younger directors who staged texts that had more to do with the spirit of the times [*Acești îngeri triști* (These sad angels) and *Pisica în noaptea anului nou* (The cat on New year's eve) by D.R. Popescu, *The Price* and *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller etc.]. In the years to come, a relative peace was to follow.

People's Artist Sică Alexandrescu would die of a stroke, while on holidays in Cannes, on the 6th of August 1973. He is still considered, to this day, a "classic" figure of Romanian stage direction.

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63. Ermil Rădulescu, "Masă Rotundă Cu Actorii Tineri [A Round Table with the Young Actors]," *Astra*, February 1969.

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