

***Jedermann*. Medieval Mystery, Towards a Timeless-Contemporary Stage Directing**

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Abstract: The both starting point and impetus from the content of Salzburg Festival which maintains the medieval-baroque identity of this artistic area, is *Jedermann*, a play without author, reformulated by the dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and initially put on stage by the director Max Reinhardt. The preservation of medieval mystery's authentic character and street theatre's efficacy from central european perimeter, becomes the connecting thread between a time defined by spirituality, devotion and specifically persuasion, through the artistic resources of popular theatre. These reasons tie without altering the ritual's genuine coordinates which form the basis of this type of theatre's consistency, defined by the sacred energy of Domplatz. The route, fixed by the first director Max Reinhardt and his *Regiebuch*, symbolically impose the stable requirement of performance, which will accompany its chronological evolution until the most recent version, the mise-en-scene created by Robert Carsen, stability challenged by the expansiveness of theatricality during the 20th century.

Keywords: ritual, catholicism, efficacy, performance, popular theatre, stage directing, festival.

Based on the question which refers to the effectiveness of a „less exting” ritual for the contemporary theatricallity - the european *mystery play* situated in a context saturated by avantgardes and the need for „uniqueness” by all costs - the answer could only revolve around the solution of maintaining the theatrical stability, which could egually be a risk and an incentive. Aiming for theatrical codes, different from the complicated contemporary resourses, by avoiding its folding on the expansionary demands of the galloping shiftes of performance, the mystery's theatrical value claims the conservation of its both universal and perennial character, but especially the indispensable link with an historical time and ideological context, depicted by a particular

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relationship between performance and audience. These reasons which concern the mystery consolidate and support the aspirations of Salzburg Festival, by simultaneously engaging the ritual, devotion, warranting the performance's state of *communitas* on which depends its effectiveness. The indicated landmarks trace the course of the mise-en-scene *Jedermann* in Domplatz, from Max Reinhardt to Robert Carsen, while stressing the image of the managerial objective, focused on both preservation and expansiveness of the „theatricality of theatre”.

Concerning the performative texture of the *Jedermann* from Salzburg, chronologically coherent, the underlying performance comprehension, philosophical grounds, theatrical symbolism, are conditioned by the process of restoring of an immense amount of references, that binds together its complicated narrative and substantial architecture. Built on Hugo von Hofmannsthal's text, on the both poetic density of Romanticism and medieval Christian meaning, the theatrical efficacy of the *mystery* is tributary to the author's aspirations connected to the specific time from the end of the 19th century, but especially to those of Max Reinhardt, whose direction is defined by the amplitude of the wagnerian fusion, by the reactivation of ritualistic pulse, by the festive effervescence of both popular and baroque theatre in Austria. Its apparition as performance is defining for Salzburg, in a moment which purifies, in a both intellectual and elitist way, the popular theatrical forms, concentrated as part of the artistic austrian identity with resources anchored in an epoch considerably Catholic, shaped by Max Reinhardt through a laborious updating process. The attitude is justified by the time of the early 20ties, decade which evoke reformatory claims through stage directing and its new tendencies stimulated by the artistic european reforms. *Jedermann* enhances the spiritual symbol of the space, concentrates the sacred essence of Salzburg Festival turned into a vital event, launched every year from the early 20ties to the present day. It is iconic for the first reformatory experiences of stage direction which combine the tradition dependent on recycling attempts of the authentic performative forms, uncontaminated by the exacerbated expressiveness of Romanticism, valuing the feverish generosity which belong to theatre for the masses. The visual documentation, Reinhardt's indispensable *Regiebuch*, offer the main resources of comprehension of the early stagings, characterized by the transient nature of performance. Evidently, the validity of the real event is the state of *communitas*, the mind and spiritual

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mergence between performance and audience¹, which must equalize the impact created by the wagnerian stage from Bayreuth.

Reinhardt's direction for *Jedermann*, linked with a „naive” and dark era, coagulate the theatricality from visual references, symbolism and a minimalist constructivist logic. From the beginning it is built on the persuasive discourse of the allegorical characters, emblematic for the matter of free will. The theatricality is materialized before an audience who maturely purify the ancient border between sacred and profane, the memory of the eternal damnation and the existence in the obscurity of the constant fear as real, material, visual experience, motivated by both menace and the image of death and agony. These topics become the basis of the mystery, readjusted by Reinhardt according to the philosophical demands filtered by the end of the 19th century and the aspirations for a new performance in the beginning of the 20th century. Equally justified by the author's fascination for ancient themes, amplified by the baroque theatre's exacerbated drama, sublimated through the romantic ethos which leads the interpretations toward metaphysical meanings, *Jedermann* is invigorated by the enthusiastic interest for religion, for the austrian catholicism, encouraged by the young viennese artists (the literary trend Jung-Wien), by the bustle aroused by texts which irreversibly overturn both performance and literature's way of approaching (*The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche). These ideas are extended through modernist coordinates, through the consequences created by the texts written by Georg Fuchs, *The Theatre of Future* (1905) and *Revolution in Theatre* (1909), by the increasing tension of european avantgards which encourage combinations of theatricality with concepts extracted from the evolution of sciences and psychology, initiated by the impact of William James's research, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902². The interest of Salzburg for the theatre for masses and for the preservation of topics which concern the national identity culminate in a challenging moment which sustain Hugo von Hofmannsthal's ideas which coincide with the medieval themes subservient to ritualism and *communitas*,

1 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual, Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, 2005, pag. 46.

2 William, James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, The Modern Library, New York, 2000.

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which found a common ground in Salzburg. The major concern for the austrian intellectuals in the 19th century is underlined by an evolved form and stage of late Romanticism, which go beyond the individualism of the early period of the movement. The metaphor is the priority, the spiritual prevalence and emotional density of the *mystery play*, the religious *coloratura* from baroque performance.

The unavoidable starting point of *Jedermann* in Salzburg is established by the version put on stage at Berlin in 1911, a moment when Max Reinhardt demonstrates the expressive power of masses performance. Later, in Salzburg, he extends the theatrical amplitude of the “total” state of performance, by consolidating the audience’s real experience, energized by the festival conduct approached as a combination between the archaic impulse and religious piety, by orienting them toward *catharsis* with dyonisian-catholic features.

The *mise-en-scene* amplify a relevant example of the theatre motivated by the Austrian Renaissance from the beginning of the 20th century, supported by texts and reformatory poetics which guide the cultural values toward spiritual authenticity. It insists on the idea of collective, inspired by the above-mentioned *communitas*, linked with concerns regarding spiritual dimensions, transcendence, “in favour of huge mythical or cosmic perspectives that clearly aspired to the gradeur and totality of Wagner’s vision”³.

Jedermann consolidate the recourse to the instruments of austrian popular theatre invigorated as ritual where the catholic didacticism is „exploited” directed to the ideas conveyed by literature. In this motivating entourage, both dramatist and stage director superimpose the mystery with ancient values (proved by their interest for Oedip), combining them with english and german resourses united by means of time and transience. Likewise, the texts which emphasize Hofmannstal’s *Das Kleine Welttheater* (1897) and *Das GroSe Welttheater* (1922) are sanguine linked with the year 1912 and *Das alte Spiel von Jedermann*. In favour of these views, the staging establish a space and a peculiar physignomy adopting the Salzburg architecture’s traits from Domplatz, where the cooperation between

3 Judith Beniston, *Welttheater, Hofmannsthal, Richard Von Kralik, and the Revival of Catholic Drama in Austria, 1890-1934*, W.S Maney&Son LTD, London, 1998, pag. 63.

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Hofmannsthal and Max Reinhardt is materialized as a “cultic spectacle to be brought before a mass audience”⁴ scattered in the popular culture from the Flemish perimeter which keeps the complicated imaginary, particular to this artistic area, inspired by macabre (*Elckerlijc*). The fascination for a middle age crossed with the new trends is concentrated upon the triad: death-erotism-hedonism, oscillating from the obsession for the body in transi which leads to the carnal transformation (Schnitzler, Reigen, Danse of Death) to the philosophical encounter between death and individual. The anthropological interest for ritual is simultaneously carried out with the pursuits of stage directing, contouring in this way the physiognomy of performance which regards the “new man”⁵ included in the first decades theatre’s general tendency, which is headed towards “non-individual”⁶. The phenomenon determine interesting attempts of recovery not only of the festival effervescence of community but also of the individual, by following the models of antiquity, middle age, and baroque era⁷, encouraging Reinhardt’s vision who surpasses the moment characterized by the 19th century “mania for theatre”⁸, centered on the idealization of actor and his scenic personality, reanimating through text the social role of theatre. The collective state of *communitas* (a term used according to Victor Turner approach) become compatible with the model *Welttheater*, adapted by Reinhardt through an architecture „often drawing on the medieval and Baroque heritage in order to set the aesthete’s stylisation of life and refusal to take it more seriously than he would a stage-play against the inescapable realities of mortality and death”⁹, by assembling them in a metaphoric corpus with monumental

4 *Idem, ibidem*, pag. 137.

5 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of the European Drama and Theatre*, Routledge, Taylor&Francis Group, London and New York, 2002, pag. 297.

6 *Idem, ibidem*, pag 297

7 *Idem, ibidem*, pag. 297.

8 Judith Beniston, *Welttheater, Hofmannsthal, Richard Von Kralik, and the Revival of Catholic Drama in Austria, 1890-1934*, W.S Maney&Son LTD, London, 1998, pag 14.

9 *Idem, ibidem*, pag. 14.

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dimensions configured through the metaphysical post-wagnerian interpretations.

The allegorical consistency of both text and performance consolidates the theatricality through the combination between the medieval symbolic discourse with the author's interest for the pre-raphaelite area¹⁰, by changing and perfecting the efficacy and the aspirations of the audience, either medieval, or contemporary. The solutions of jesuite education are emphasized through the physiognomy, aesthetic and religion of wagnerian lineage, filled with nuances from the german theatre's entourage, *Freie Bühne*, the naturalism and post-naturalism with *Fin de siècle* allure, vitalized through Richard Wagner's philosophical texts. In Reinhardt's *mise-en-scene* the intentions of reconstitution of english Renaissance with the characteristics of 1400-1000 period, of early humanism with its spiritual themes which accompany the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, consolidate the tensions aroused by the matter of *free will* and *Gratia efficax*. These aspects expand the value of a „sermon”, explaining it in a theatrical mode, by using medieval and baroque persuading strategies, shown through the power of symbols and concise reasons. Underlining – through these instruments – the individual drama, subject to the repercussions caused by the choice between paradise and inferno, his options are justified through interconnected elements, death and *free will*. In the midst is the individual, marked by his desires, aspirations and vulnerability, grounds which consolidate the mystery timelessness, from the middle age until contemporaneity.

Egually following a liniar but also a complicated route, by maintaining the image of popular theatre of the old Salzburg through Max Reinhardt's vision (1937-1945 is the only interval of intreruption), *Jedermann* consolidates is own direction, separately from avantgards, continuously defining itself as a moral universal lesson, which connect the begining of the 20th century with Robert Carsen's variant of the *mystery play*, put on stage in 2024. It always envisages as common point „to speak at once to multiple audiences, highbrow as well as middlebrow, and to argue to those audiences

10 *Idem, ibidem*, pag. 38.

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for a mode of civic identity that includes rather than excludes, that creates rather than denies community”¹¹.

Reinhardt’s concept, focused on the populist quality of theatre, simultaneously brings on stage the reality and allegory, the individual and universal through the simplicity of the medieval-hofmannsthalian characters: Gott, Glaube, Tod, Mammon, etc. A masses “activator”¹², Reinhardt combines opposing objectives such as “intimacy versus spectacle, the whisper versus the shout, elitism versus populism”¹³, by establishing the early model of stage directing for the complex festival of Salzburg, in which the theatre blend monumental expressions with parodic elements, stressing the problem of the moralizing role of both sacred and popular performance, oscillating between sobriety and grotesque. The priority is established by the relationship of mind and emotional meld between spectacle and audience, the essential component in the theatrical architecture. Moreover, the above mentioned *efficacy*, ramified through directing process, is determined by the necessary amplitude of expression, enhanced by a neglected element in performance analysis, but „scientifically” valued from a sensory point of view following the post-wagnerian consequences. Inevitably brought into question the musical background for *Jedermann*, carried out on Salzburg stage, substantiate the medieval mystery’s popular vigour inspired – at the beginning of the 20th century – through the instruments of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. These requirements will become the basis of the selection of musical scores which will amplify the emotional identity of the mise-en-scene. Music is another vital element of this type of theatre, but its ephemeral quality creates difficulties in the process of restauring its authenticity. From the start, for the first performance in 22 august 1920, Max Reinhardt chooses Einar Nilson, decision followed by his son, Gottfried Reinhardt who chooses Ernst Krenek in 1961. Leaving aside the assessments related to the attributes of musical theatricality which does not concern the elitist interests of musicology, it appears as an altered form of

11 Halina Filipowicz, Michael Cherlin, Richard L. Rudolph, *The Great Tradition and its Legacy, The Evolution of Dramatic and Musical Theater in Austria and Central Europe*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, 2003, pag. 10.

12 *Idem, ibidem*, pag.72.

13 *Idem, ibidem*, pag.72.

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incidental music, oriented rather to the german *Vorwärts*, defining the energy of popular theatre. The original score is evolving, absorbs at a time the impressive sound strategies of contemporaneity, electronic sonorities, *sound-design*, reaching its peak in Wolfgang Mitterer's version for the *mise-en-scene* created by Michael Sturminger and Renate Martin, continuously adapting the acoustic sensitivity to the mystery's actual demands. The details which concern the musical writing for performance, the practicality of melodic discourse conceived in the favour of theatricality which has another direction separate from programatism, aspire only to the relationship of sound identity with austrian specificity. The enthusiastic attitudes, "worldly", determine the theatrical and emotional consistency of the scores, which appear successively alongside the *mise-en-scene*, as the case of the performance put on stage by Christian Stuckl and Markus Zwink, or later by Martin Lowe for the scenic vision created by the artists Brian Mertes and Julian Crouch.

From the beginning Max Reinhardt confesses his interest for music already obvious in the staging of *Mirakel* from 1912, where the director offers an essential role for the music. The theatrical sound dimension - stimulated by the debut of the Salzburg cathedral bells, of the choir with the resonances of medieval gregorian chant, the organ's sacred effect and its solemn musical features, and on the other side the intervention of fanfara - descends the sacred towards the mundane, humane, by imprinting it with the musical dramaturgy which consolidates the theatricality. Music accentuates the textual function of allegories, the thematic conflict through which is underlined the essence of the mystery play, the choice between good and evil. Inspired by these reasons, the space in front of Salzburg Cathedral and the character's interpretation through medieval-contemporary ideas, *Jedermann* is carried out along with the character's psychological investigations, by both delianeting and cumulationg the inner universe, melancholy, the leitmotifs of the relationships, the encounters.

Concerning the consequences of *Jedermann* by Max Reinhardt on Salzburg festival stage, the main objective of director's concept, the performance evolution through stability, is obviously maintained for the next decades. Involved as director starting with 1946, during a both conflicted and dezoriented context caused by the Second World War, but stimulated on the other hand by the regenerating austrian spiritual forces, the artistic values as theatre and opera, Helene Thiming (who performed the role of Faith in 1927

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under the direction of Max Reinhardt) continue with this vision in the following years. As well, in 1959, Ernst Lothar maintains the same landmarks, by taking over the direction of the mystery play, keeping its “linearity” and previous requirements imposed by the original concept, bringing as scenographer Caspar Neher. He balances his activity as stage designer, between Brecht, Salzburg opera and Jedermann. In the same line are continued the versions put on stage by William Dieterle and Gottfried Reinhardt which are still protected by comparisons with the entourage excessively preoccupied with the research of ritual in theatre and performance during the median period of the 20th century.

The restrained attitude for the new performance direction, oriented toward the postmodernisation of the ritual, tendency vitalized by the theatrical and visual reforms developed in central Europe, intensify the objective of Jedermann in Salzburg, which is focused as before on maintaining its austrian identity and accuracy. Through its popular theatre, Salzburg continue the protective ideal of tradition which characterize the stage, keeping it away from the influence of avantgards. The search for genuine passion and devotion, of orgiastical trance are challenges raised by emotional intensity both sacred and profane, by the mystery digression through the agony which is overlaid with orgy (having as environment the performances created by Hermann Nisch and the austrian actionists). Similarly, during the 70ties, Jedermann furthermore neglects the theatrical expectations provoked by the german theatre of director and avantgards which succeed each other in a galloping way in the german and austrian artistic area. Its point of strenght continuously attracts the audience pilgrimage who expect the mystery play’s corectness, the genuine experience and the popular catharsis.

Nevertheless the need for a prudent enhancement of spectacular component becomes compelling, generating the adjustment of the mise-en-scene to new theatrical requirements. It comes to the concept demanded by the year 1972 and the vision of Leopold Lindtberg, who insists on introducing carnivalesque coordinates and the interpretation of Hofmannsthal’s text as a political satire. In the same manner, the next version put on stage starting with 1989, created by Ernst Hausserman *and* Gernot Friedel (present on this stage during the 90ties and partially after 2000) reorients the medieval meaning toward a theatrical orchestration with contemporary-parodic resonances. The

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characters *giulari*, a Jedermann as romantic libertin make their appearance, with the interpretation of the discourse and monologue in a brechtian manner. The scenical situation are imprinted with burlesque detachment, striving as well to the traditional theatricality, accesible, popular, open and full of processions.

The trasition of *Jedermann* to the first decade of the new millennium maintains the idea of linearity through Martin Kušej who prolongs the version of Christian Stuckl. A new generation of directors follows, coming from the american performative area, descendands of experimental trends of the 80ties on one hand, and on the other hand searching for the efficacy and authenticity of spatial-spiritual european codes. The mixture of resourses created by Brian Mertes and Julian Crouch rely once more on carnivalesque processions, the medieval mystery being traced through an ensorian-expressionist entourage which gathers the performance theatrical forces toward the central point of the mise-en-scene, the theme of feast and death. The comic-sinister quality of the skeleton, conductor and stage director of the production and audience, bears the cynical mark of the expressionist clown, by coordinating masks, marionetts, people, emphasizing and transfering in the realm of the puerile street theatre the value of performance, which aims toward a conquettish dyonism, where the distorsions of the human form is accumulated in a leitmotivic center, the festive meal and death. The carnivalized presences stresses the central idea of theatricality, *sacra blasfemia*, where the procession and dyonisian-ritualic vigour are completed by acrobatic elements which amplify the state of *performance* and *communitas*.

Maintaing the previous indispensable coordinates, the shift of responsibility of stage directing for *Jedermann* after 2017 goes to Michael Sturminger and Renate Martin. They adapt the topic to the contemporary philosophy and give an eulogy to Max Reinhardt. The medieval allegory turns into a metaphor of actual existence, through the jump into quotidian, by renewing the situations through the everyday normality. The placement of the new frame means the corporate universe, the reasons of both everyday existence and life values, which are dependent on mercantile judgements, by capital, information which relaunch the logic and the rational vitality of theatricality. The medieval allegories are interpreted through inedite codes, death becomes a hybrid character masculine-feminine, entirely provocative.

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The flamboyance in the manner of austrian operetta, the light allure but also charged with theatrical density is designed by the stage directing in order reformulate the old mystery. The mise-en-scene concentrates the efforts on one hand on preserving the timeless spiritual essence, a twist which avoids being adversely affected by the aesthetic changes, and on the other hand to the effects of the theatre of director. The objective is the conservation of theatricality hereditary identity, subject to a time set by popular theatre, by architecture, by bas-relief, by Salzburg and Max Reinhardt.

The contemporary theatrical strategies uninterruptedly underpin the new stage directing, dependent on the fusion between tradition and present-day coordinates, by the technical elements and technological interference. Inevitably, they bring their contribution to the effectiveness of performance and to its central idea in the new context, and are increasingly stimulated by the shift of interest toward the cultural aspect. The spiritual valences of medieval mystery demonstrate, through the recent stage directing, controlled methods, even scientific, in order to produce the needed *catharsis*, through a laborious usage of the wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It leads to the densification of performance references through theatrical textures which homogenise the contemporary fragmentarism. The multicultural resonances, the identity and genre cleavage make their appearance, as well as the ascension of hybridisation and performative impurity which define the present demands of theatrical efficacy.

The most recent version of *Jedermann* takes place in 2024 through the vision of Robert Carsen (accustomed with the opera stage from Salzburg due to the production of Richard Strauss's *Die Rosenkavalier* in 2006). The symbolic image is focused on the visual logic of the existing space, Domplatz, the theatrical composition being directed toward the cosmopolite density of masses scenes, to the explosive hedonistic moments, followed by the intervention of medieval macabre, treated in a detached brechtian-burlesque manner. The version appears in Markus Hinderhauser's programme, the manager of Salzburg festival, keeping simultaneously the amplitude of street theatre, its accessibility, equally maneuvering the theme of inner conflict, humane, political, underlined by a stage directing inspired by the contemporary materialism and by immediate quality of the leitmotif *carpe diem*.

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The durability of this *medieval mystery*, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's text, can be viewed from two perspectives, its connection with Salzburg festival and the balance between the authentic form of medieval theatre and the diplomacy of preventing the direction changes, propelled by the excesses of theatricality in the course of 20th century.

The staging brings reformatory directors, from Max Reinhardt until Robert Carsen, artists who substantiate the theatrical value as cultural document and reinforce the relationship between ideology and performance. They underline the durability by unchanging the medieval meaning, through archaeological correctness which concerns a spiritual climate, the *catharsis* generated by popular theatre through the unaltered vigour of its genuine resources. With these solutions *Jedermann* continuously coagulate the ideology of Salzburg festival supported by its initial concept of „national redefinition”¹⁴, which will remain as primary motivation of durability of theatrical past in contemporaneity

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14 Michael P. Steinberg, *Austria as Theatre and Ideology, The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2000. pag 38.

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