

3. GEORGIA – A TRUE LESSON IN THEATRE AND LIFE

(International Theatre Festival – Signaghi
Showcase – International Theatre Festival, Tbilisi, 2024)

Antonella Cornici¹⁴⁷

Abstract: Russian actor, director, and educator Michael Chekhov is renowned for his significant contributions to the art of acting. The system he developed promotes a creative, expressive, and internal approach to acting, assisting actors in creating authentic and memorable characters. Photo credit: Antonella Cornici (images are from the workshop led by Natalie Yalon on the topic of the Michael Chekhov System in Nancy, France, Erasmus program, November 2022).

Key words: actor, Michael Chekhov, character, theater

1. Introduction

The Theater Festival in Signaghi, initiated in 2023 by the Municipality of Signaghi and supported by Georgia's Ministry of Culture and Sports, quickly became a landmark event. The second edition, held in 2024 and marked its debut as an international festival, with the participation of theater troupes from outside Georgia. Organized with enthusiasm by a young team and judged by remarkable figures from Georgian theater, alongside international guests, the festival stood out for the diversity of performances presented, each unique in its perspective. Signaghi, known as the "City of Love," passionately hosts this event with dedication to art, transforming theater into a bridge of emotion and connection. For me, this experience in Signaghi had a profound impact. The emotions I felt here changed my perspective and opened new horizons for me. I believe my encounter with Georgia was not a coincidence but part of a deeper, meaningful journey.



2. Discussions

The festival's logo has a wonderful story; it is far from just a simple drawing: "The inspiration comes from Berikaoba (a traditional Georgian masked theater) and combines the traditional masks of the Matchmaker, Kekela, the King, and the

¹⁴⁷ Associate Professor PhD. hab., "George Enescu" National University from Iași, România, email: antonellacornici@yahoo.com

Fox.”¹⁴⁸ Lasha Chkhartishvili, a jury member, professor, and theater critic, shared with us insights about the festival team and its creation: ”The Signaghi Theater Festival was established by the Ministry of Culture of Georgia together with the Signaghi Municipality. This is another new festival in Georgia that achieved international status as early as its second year.

The Ministry of Culture aims to give young people the opportunity to explore all their resources, passions, and ideas, so this festival was entrusted to them. Saba Aslamazishvili, the artistic director, is one of the most popular directors among young people. Giorgi Klein is also a director by profession, with extensive experience in organizing international festivals. Nino (Nutsa) Kobaidze is the most active young theater critic, having already gained considerable experience in press relations, festivals, and theater organization. She actively writes articles and reviews about Georgian theater, draws, creates caricatures, and has many talents. Together, these three young people created this festival, shaping its character, aura, and atmosphere, leaving a significant mark on it. I have more admiration for them.”¹⁴⁹

The Signaghi Theater Festival operates on two main pillars: the masterclass section and the performance section. Its diverse and engaging program captured the attention of both the Georgian audience and international guests. Each day of the festival featured a masterclass, followed by two or three performances, providing an intense and memorable artistic experience. An innovative aspect of the festival was its itinerant nature, transforming the event into a true theatrical journey. Participants had the opportunity to explore different towns and performance spaces, ranging from classic theater stages to outdoor locations or creatively repurposed abandoned buildings.

For me, this experience felt like a theatrical *work and travel*, demonstrating that a festival can come to life even in a town with only 1,000 residents and evolve to include established stages in cities with rich theatrical traditions. In a place known as the "City of Love," it was only fitting to bring together souls devoted to theater and storytelling, and this unique energy made every moment unforgettable.



Photo credit: Antonella Cornici

The festival brought together a diverse array of performances: from one-man shows and animation to productions from both professional and amateur theater. Independent troupes as well as state theater companies participated, all sharing a common goal – to unite artists from different corners of the world in a space for artistic creation and dialogue. ”The main objective of the festival, among others, is to integrate amateur theater troupes and Georgian theater groups without

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.behance.net/gallery/175374525/SIGNAGHI-THEATRE-FESTIVAL-Logo-Visual-Identity>

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Lasha Chkhartishvili, Festival Jury Member, Professor, and Theater Critic

independent legal status, to promote and unite theater artists from all the countries participating in this edition, and, of course, to establish Signaghi as a cultural and creative center.”¹⁵⁰



Foto credit: Antonella Cornici

3. Results

The invitation to participate in this festival was a wonderful surprise, especially since I had never visited this country before, even though I had heard about it countless times. The proposal to be part of the festival jury and to lead a masterclass was an unexpected joy, one that I embraced with enthusiasm. Upon arriving in this corner of the world, I had the strange yet familiar feeling that I had been here in another life. Everything seemed so familiar that I knew from the very first moment I would return. And I did: in September, I had the privilege of attending the Tbilisi International Theater Festival – Show Case, an equally memorable experience.

The Georgian Show Case is one of the most important theater platforms dedicated to international cultural exchange, offering Georgian companies and artists valuable opportunities to establish cultural connections, develop co-productions, engage in artistic exchanges, and embark on international tours. The 2024 edition featured two distinct sections: the main section and the off section, blending classical, modern, and experimental theater, physical theater, as well as new forms and theatrical experiences.

The selected performances were either part of the 2023-2024 season or First Night Shows, specially created for this event. Each performance was accompanied by English subtitles and brief introductions by theater critics, thus facilitating access for an international audience. "We have given much thought to how to launch this festival and transform it into a cornerstone of Tbilisi's cultural life, as well as a landmark event on the international festival map," the organizers stated "In a constantly changing world, some festivals fade away while others grow and become cultural benchmarks.

The mission of the Tbilisi International Theater Festival is to position Georgia on the international cultural map and enrich the local cultural scene with the most

¹⁵⁰ <https://georgiaonline.ge/theater-festival-of-sighnaghi-begins-with-a-play-by-nikoloz-luarsabishvili/>

interesting, challenging, and relevant performances.”¹⁵¹ Over its 14 years of existence, the Georgian Showcase has hosted more than 700 international guests from over 30 countries, presenting 385 performances and thus contributing to the promotion of Georgian theater on the international theater stage.



Tbilisi Vaso Abashidze State Professional “New Theatre”, photo credit Antonella Cornici

A performance that will stay with me for a long time is *Blue Beard*, directed by Andriy Zholdak and presented by the Tbilisi Vaso Abashidze State Professional “New Theatre.”

Blue Beard is a visceral story of survival under unbearable conditions, a myth more real than life itself. It is an intense exploration of gender dynamics and conflict-laden relationships, reflecting the never-ending battle between the sexes.



Photo source: <https://yolo.ge/en/poster/lurjtsvera5678>

”*The Phantasmagoria* created by Zholdak in *Blue Beard* draws its essence from the poetry of Nobel laureate Louise Glück and the passionate tragedy of *Blood Wedding* by Federico García Lorca. In the director's vision, *Blue Beard* is no longer just the murderous husband from legend; he becomes an archetype of toxic masculinity and emotional manipulation, a symbol of the abusive dynamics that continue to shape relationships between men and women. Shako Mirianashvili's portrayal brings this character to life with an intensity that freezes, transforming him into a complex figure, more a fractured soul than a conventional villain. The women surrounding him – played with captivating force by Nino Kasradze, Nana Butkhuzi, Mariam Balakhadze, and Elena Tavartkiladze – are caught in a repetitive cycle of love, submission, and self-destruction, a spiral evoking the nightmares of unfulfilled love.

¹⁵¹ <https://www.europeantheatre.eu/news/georgian-showcase>, tr,n

The poetry of despair, as found in Glück's writings, becomes the emotional fabric of the performance. In *Blue Beard*, violence is not just physical; it seeps deeply into the emotional realm, revealing the loss and alienation that infiltrate human relationships. Zholdak delicately conveys the contrast between the lyrical beauty of love and the violence of its dissolution, creating agonizing scenes where the inner lives of the female characters break under the weight of a tenderness desired but never attained.”¹⁵²

The Valerian Gunia Professional State Theater was represented in this *Show Case* with two remarkable productions directed by young theater creators, one of whom also holds the position of artistic director of the theater - Saba Aslamazishvili. The presence of this theater highlighted not only the quality of its performances but also its innovative vision and commitment to developing the new generation of artists.

An unexpected and noteworthy aspect of this state institution is its policy of actively supporting theater students' studies. By funding the education of talented young people, the theater ensures its artistic continuity and maintains a balance between generations of actors. This strategy is considered essential by the theater's leadership for constantly renewing the ensemble and managing the generational gap, thus ensuring the relevance and freshness of their productions. ”In this way, we have the opportunity to change actors and control the generational gap in our theater,”¹⁵³ the theater representatives emphasize, highlighting how investing in education contributes to the institution's long-term success and the promotion of artistic values.

This progressive approach offers not only an example of best practices but also a source of inspiration for other theaters, demonstrating that investment in youth is the key to a vibrant, dynamic, and present-connected art. *Anna's Moment* is a play about the brutal war crimes committed by the Russians against Georgia, about the heroine of a small country who will do everything to ensure those criminals are held accountable for the atrocities they committed. It is a play about God, who seems to have abandoned the world but said that power lies within man, and God is in every person. We have the power to make the world a better place – after that, God thought for a long time and could not take His eyes off humanity.



Anna's Moment, director Saba Aslamazishvili, photo credit: Beka Tsirekidze

¹⁵² <https://georgiatoday.ge/bluebeard-andriy-zholdaks-phantasmagoric-triumph-unleashes-raw-poetic-chaos-at-vaso-abashidze-stage/>

¹⁵³ <https://www.tbilisiinternational.com/en/performances/anas-momenti>

Jako's Khiznebi / Jako'Mingrants, directed by Nika Chikvaidze, is inspired by the classic novel by Mikheil Javakhishvili and transcends the boundaries of a personal story, becoming a reflection of an entire country. As Jako's house transforms into an improvised hotel where everyone does as they please, the protagonist remains passive, closing his eyes and refusing to take action. Through his inaction, Jako becomes a guest in his own house, symbolizing the collective indifference to the chaos unfolding around him. The performance conveys a powerful and direct message: the absence of attitude in the face of corruption, lies, and demagoguery has devastating consequences. The subtext evokes the struggle of a small country for independence and freedom, a people who, despite all hardships, continue to hope for a brighter future.

Javakhishvili's 1924 novel *The Ghosts of Jako* occupies a special place in Georgian literary and theatrical heritage, remaining disturbingly relevant. Director Nika Chikvaidze brings this masterpiece into the present, adapting its themes to contemporary reality and giving it a fresh, captivating artistic expression. The performance is built in an almost cinematic style, a complex puzzle of images and sequences with filmic cutaways, creating an intense visual and emotional experience. In this innovative vision, the story becomes not only a social critique but also a profound meditation on hope and resistance.



Jako's Khiznebi / Jako'Mingrants, director Nika Chikvaidze, photo credit: Beka Tsirekidze

The offer of this *Show Case* was extraordinarily diverse, bringing together performances with a wide variety of styles, from intimate and profound to experimental and contrasting. Among all of them, however, the ones I mentioned left the strongest impressions on me – vivid emotions, unexpected surprises, and moments that continue to accompany me.

4. Conclusions

For me, Georgia was more than just a theater experience. It was a lesson in theater, but also in life. I discovered here a theater that spoke directly to my soul, challenging me to feel, reflect, lose myself, and find myself again. Equally, I met people with overwhelming passion, people full of life, courage, and hope.

The performances took me through a kaleidoscope of emotions – I laughed wholeheartedly and cried sincerely, I let myself be carried away by the energy of vibrant moments, and I felt a deep, authentic joy for having had the chance to be there. It was an experience that made me feel lucky and happy. Georgia is a place that flows through me, resonating deeply with who I am. I know I will return here,

drawn by the desire to discover more, to relive what I felt, and to understand better why this place generously offered me an encounter with STORY.



photo credit Antonella Cornici

References

Web resources

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