

New Theatrical Buildings in the Moscow of the 21st Century (about Hidden Theatres)

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The number of theatre troupes has increased several-fold over the last three decades, if compared with the Soviet era. Back in the past, all theatres were state-run; they were broken down into All-Soviet Union, republic-wide, Moscow-based and industry-sponsored establishments. Nowadays theatres get born and die; nonetheless, they multiply, and their number is difficult to identify, it reaches as many as two hundred. This theatrical boom is accompanied by the search for the new forms of performing art that need advanced auditoriums having undreamed-of stage equipment. Prosperous theatres seek to own new free-standing buildings featuring original architectural solutions and most sophisticated technologies. Few of them succeed at it. The problem of funding is universal, and many theatres experience difficulties in finding acceptable sites in the capital. Many talented troupes have to look for unusual funding instruments to pay for the construction work, or, at least, to have their premises refurbished and to buy the stage equipment. Cooperation with sponsors and investors is the rescue. Theatre partners construct theatrical buildings as part of their major construction facilities subject to certain conditions set by the urban authorities in exchange for the provision of suitable land sites.

The author analyzes three new theatrical buildings constructed in Moscow over the last decade. Two of them (drama theatres) were constructed as part of major mixed-use complexes. They are located on a major arterial road, the Garden Ring (in Malaya Sukharevskaya Square), opposite one another. The third one is an opera house, Gelikon Opera, located in the very centre of the capital. It occupies the restored premises of an old urban mansion, and it boasts a new auditorium built in the yard with some older architectural features preserved. All three theatres have original interiors and advanced items of theatre equipment installed; their stages and auditoriums are transformable to different extents. Original structural solutions, applied to the principal theatrical premises, are of particular interest. Famous Moscow architects made their contributions into the design of the theatrical buildings analyzed in this article.

It is characteristic that these theatrical buildings follow the general trend: each has several auditoriums and tends to develop its inner space in the vertical direction.

Keywords: theatre, auditorium, stage, technology, façade, mixed-use complex, transformation, drama theatre, opera house.

An unbelievable surge in theatrical activities has boosted the number of theatrical troupes over the recent three decades,

if compared with the Soviet era, when theatres were state-run and broken down into All-Soviet Union, republic-wide, Moscow-based and industry-sponsored establishments. Nowadays their number is difficult to calculate, there are about two hundred of them. They get born and die; nonetheless, they multiply, although it didn't happen this way in the seventies, when the country had about forty theatres. This is not a mere theatrical boom; it is accompanied by the active search for the new forms of performing art that need advanced auditoriums having undreamed-of stage equipment. Prosperous theatres seek to own new free-standing buildings featuring original architectural solutions and most sophisticated technologies. Few of them succeed at it. The problem of funding is universal, and many theatres experience difficulties in finding acceptable sites. Many talented troupes have to look for unusual funding instruments to pay for the construction work, or, at least, to have their premises refurbished and to buy the stage equipment. Cooperation with sponsors and investors is the rescue. Theatre partners construct theatrical buildings as part of their major construction facilities subject to certain conditions, set by the urban authorities.

It seems that the buildings of the School of Scenic Art in Sretenka street (2001), the Galina Vishnevskaya Opera Centre featuring a chamber hall (2002), the New Stage of the Bolshoi Theatre (2002), and the Pyotr Fomenko Workshop Theatre (2008) were opened a little while ago. And the Moscow International Performing Arts Centre, including the auditorium, was constructed in 2001. At the same time the restructuring of some theatrical buildings was completed: the Bolshoi Theatre, being the main Russian playhouse, was reopened after the most complex overhaul, and now it has six underground floors; back in 1997, the Mirror Theatre of the Hermitage was converted into the New Opera House, while the Drama Theatre named after K.S. Stanislavsky turned into Electric Theatre Stanislavsky in 2014. Minor refurbishment and adaptation works are hard to list. Former cinemas and clubs, backyard buildings and basements were converted into theatres and fleapits delivering performances in different genres.

I'd like to mention several new theatrical establishments. The methodology of their implementation is particularly indicative and didactic. I am referring to the three remarkable theatres that cannot be seen from the street. They kind of lack any exteriors; however, their interiors are original and interesting.

The Cherry Orchard Moscow Theatre Centre under the Direction of People’s Artist Alexander Vil’kin

Two new theatrical establishments appeared in Malaya Sukharevskaya Square unexpectedly for Muscovites. Both theatres, located opposite one another, are kind of hidden behind the facades of mixed-use complexes. The building located at 10 Malaya Sukharevskaya street (see Fig. 1) accommodates a restaurant, bank offices, and a theatrical establishment that occupies 40% of the floor area of this eight-story building, whose façade has the inscription denoting the presence of the theatre named after Chekhov’s Cherry Orchard. Original and modest though conspicuous wallscape ads are also there.

This theatre troupe was set up in 1995 by People’s Artist Alexander Vil’kin, a former dramatic artist and ex-director of the Taganka Theatre, whom I frequently met in the days of construction of the Taganka Theatre building. For twenty years the troupe delivered its performances inside randomly selected leased auditoriums. However, in the late 1990ies,

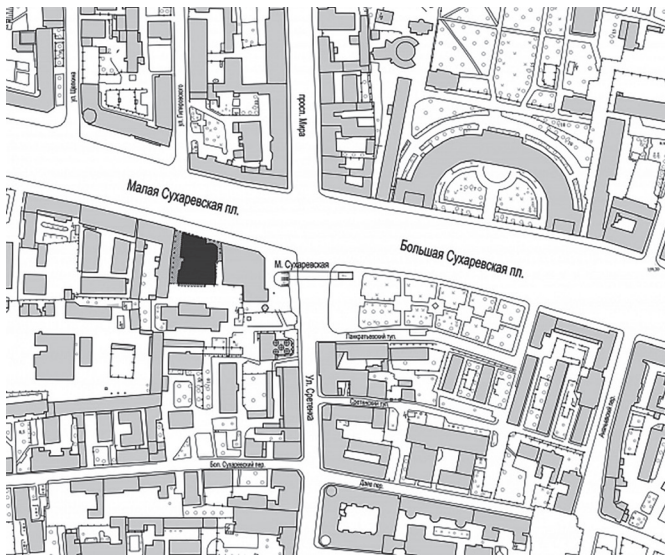


Figure 1. A master plan showing the Cherry Orchard Moscow Theatre Centre and Oleg Tabakov Workshop Theatre



Fig. 2. The façade of the mixed-use complex featuring flying window glasses. The building accommodates the Cherry Orchard Moscow Theatre Centre

the designing of the mixed-use building to be constructed in Malaya Sukharevskaya square was initiated under the guidance of Dmitry Solopov, academician of the Russian Academy of Architecture and Construction Sciences. The building was to accommodate the Cherry Orchard Moscow Theatre Centre. Its



Figure 3. The entrance into the building of the Cherry Orchard Moscow Theatre Centre

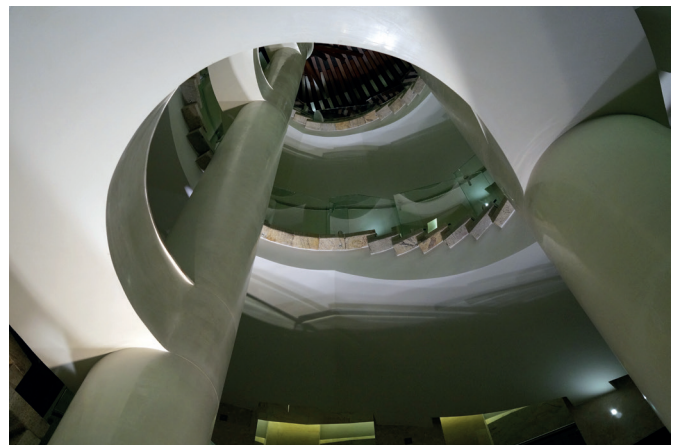


Figure 4. The grand circular staircase of the Cherry Orchard Moscow Theatre Centre



Figure 5. The upper landing featuring heel posts

construction took seventeen years. It happens this way when cultural facilities are built. Finally, the theatre troupe found a sponsor and obtained new original premises in this multi-story mixed-use building located in the centre of the city. The design project was successfully completed by Egor Solopov, the son of Dmitry Solopov, together with his assistants. The theatre was opened in 2015.

The theatre's grand entrance is located in Malaya Sukharevskaya square, and the same about the entrances leading to the restaurant and bank. To make it clear, this place can hardly be called a square, but we'd prefer it to be the one... Indeed, this location is a busy sidewalk of the Garden Ring, a major Moscow artery road. Long ago, it accidentally accommodated a number of entertainment institutions, including the Satire Theatre, the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall, the Obraztsov Central Puppet Theatre, the Taganka Theatre, the Commonwealth of Taganka Artists Theatre, the Chamber Hall of the Russian Drama Theatre under the Direction of M. Schepenko, and the Sovremennik Theatre, let alone a number of old cinemas. Their locations are easy to access by transport; however, they are too busy.

The Cherry Orchard Moscow Theatre Centre occupies four stories of the new building, starting from the ground floor and up. The entrance hall, the cloak room, cashboxes, the cafeteria, the staff entrance hall occupy one third of the ground floor

area. The grand (big) auditorium accommodates 345 seats, and it occupies the first floor and parts of the third and fourth floors, where the balcony and service areas are located and where the top of the stage structure is conspicuously built into the edifice. The small auditorium, accommodating 75 seats, is on the third floor. The theatre also has a chamber hall; it accommodates 50 seats, and it serves as a rehearsal hall. Hence, this new theatre has three halls, and it is located inside a seven story building that boasts a modern-style glass façade (see Fig. 2). The building is hemmed in by newly built structures. There is a multi-story office building on the left and older two-storey buildings, designed in the eclectic style, on the right. A similar multi-use complex that accommodates the Oleg Tabakov Workshop Theatre is located opposite the Cherry Orchard Moscow Theatre Centre. All these buildings are of approximately the same size; hence the urban planning balance remains undisrupted neither for the worse, nor for the better. Their exteriors have not disrupted the urban planning proportionality, and the theatres that they accommodate represent a contribution into Moscow's theatrical network.

The inner space of the theatre and the concept of its stage are of utmost interest. The theatre has an original wind lobby that features a glass lentil in plan; it is hardly visible from the outside because it's kind of hidden inside the building, and therefore, it's invisible from the pedestrian area outside

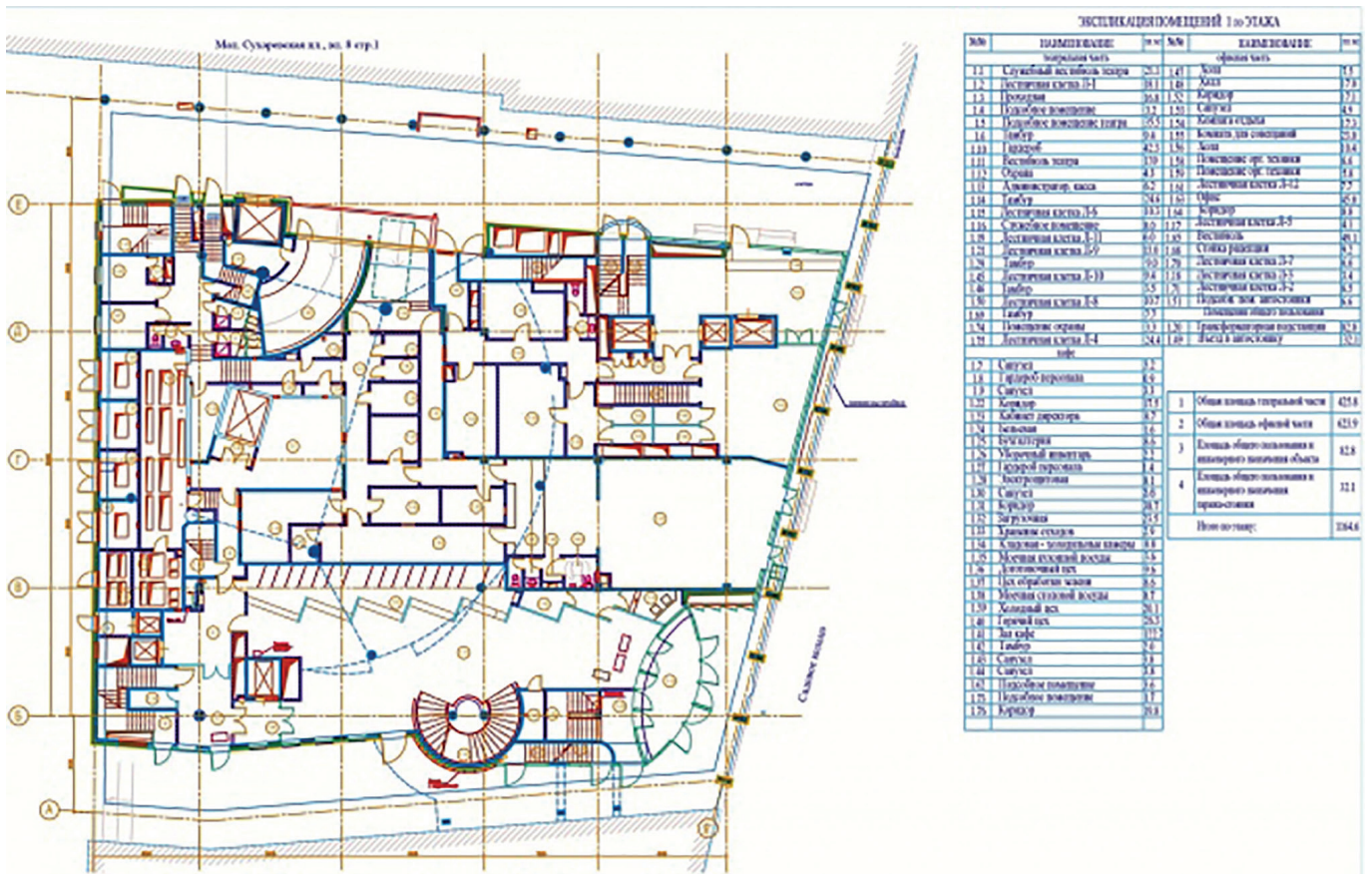


Figure 6. Ground floor plan, including the entrance hall

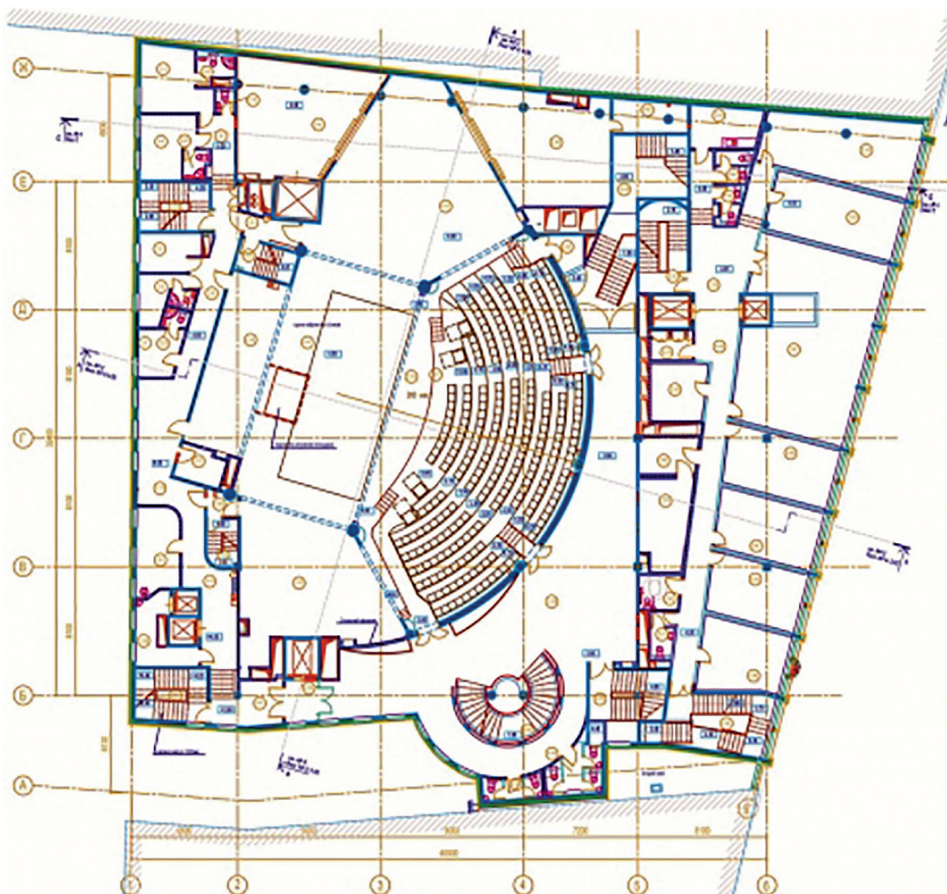
the building. Hence, it has a small pedestrian site that can accumulate future spectators. Spectators pass through the wind lobby into the entrance hall, one for both auditoriums. It has an elevator and staircases. Everything is sufficiently convenient, logical and occupies a small space. There is an elegant grand staircase facing a long cloak room. The staircase is of particular interest (see Fig. 4, 5). A staircase inside a theatre building represents an utterly important element. It's the starting point of any show, in which spectators appear as stage actors. It happens this way in major theatres of the world, starting from Opera Garnier in Paris and the Vienna State Opera. For this building, architects designed an original circular staircase, resting on the two vertical pillars, whose tops forklike tree twigs. Its diameter is small, although it runs through each of the four stories occupied by the theatre, thus, it has turned into the most essential element of the area accessible to spectators.

The performance area (consisting of the grand auditorium and the main stage) is positioned diagonally inside this nearly rectangular building, and it provides a picturesque environment for the interiors (see Fig. 7, 8). The walls and the ceiling of the foyer are covered in vibrant reddish-brown oak blocks (see Fig. 8). The auditorium is amphitheatrical; it envelops the proscenium. It has nine rows that ensure excellent visibility and acoustics. The distance between spectators and the stage does not exceed 12 meters (see Fig. 9, 10).

The original stage has three portals: the central portal is the main one, it's the widest portal, it forms a three-portal stage together with the two side portals. The side portals hide side surfaces that have peculiar shapes; they can serve as supplementary side stages. The stage is not deep although its depth is sufficient for a drama theatre.

The rehearsal hall has a simple design (see Fig. 11). It represents a quadrangular area that accommodates seats plus a slightly and inconspicuously transformable performance venue. The hall has 8 rows, 9 seats each; the first row is a little bigger, while the back row is a little smaller. The hall also has an attic storey that accommodates service premises, including the control board, the sound area, the light control room, etc. This hall has a peculiar movable partition made of high blocks, which are triangular in plan. The partition is installed to the right of the spectators, and its blocks serve to swiftly replace the background setting and to change the width of the opening, which should be different for varied scenes and curtain calls. The stage has an electronic screen that can display scenery images as well as paintings or photos. All facilities are simple, convenient and inconspicuous.

Let's get back to the façade. Its design is conspicuous: it has window glasses flying past it like birds or autumn leaves (see Fig. 2), and this design pattern makes the glass façade kind of poetic. This is an undoubtedly original and poetic detail, typical for a theatre.



КЛАССИФИКАЦИЯ ПОМЕЩЕНИЙ 2 ПО ЭТАЖА					
камерная часть 120,8			камерная часть		
№/№	НАИМЕНОВАНИЕ	площадь	№/№	НАИМЕНОВАНИЕ	площадь
2.1	Гридерия	15,7	2.22	Служба душ	1,8
2.2	Гридерия	12,4	2.23	Служба душ	1,8
2.3	Лабир	4,9	2.24	Техническое помещение обуви	30
2.4	Коридор	7,1	2.25	Испытания клада B-9	11
2.5	Восстановля	8,5	2.26	Фойе с открытой лестницей	182,4
2.6	Гридерия	6,5	2.27	Функциональный зал	205,1
2.7	Гридерия	7,5	2.28	Испытания клада B-8	43,3
2.8	Гридерия-вспомогательный холл	14,8	2.29	Испытания клада B-6	18,2
2.9	Коридор	34,6	2.40	Харит	35,6
2.10	Холл ожидания клада на сцену	15,6	2.51	Испытания клада B-1	14,5
2.11	Помещение инженерно-технических служб	5,9	2.52	Испытания клада B-11	5,5
2.12	Служба	1,7	2.53	Испытания клада B-14	6,7
2.13	Коридор	18,5	2.54	Коридор	28,3
2.14	Мастерская по ремонту декораций	11,7	2.55	Лабир	2,4
2.15	Служба душ	4,1	2.56	Анти-сцена	48,5
2.16	Архив-спон	42,8	2.58	Служба	9,7
2.17	Сцена	254,3	2.59	Служба	4,7
2.18	Харит	69,1	2.60	Лабир	5,4
2.19	Харит	112,9	2.62	Испытания клада B-4	26,6
2.20	Служба душ	2,7	2.63	Лабир	4,6
2.21	Техническое помещение	4,3	2.33	Диспетчерское помещение	8,9
офисная часть I 404,5					
№/№	НАИМЕНОВАНИЕ	площадь	№/№	НАИМЕНОВАНИЕ	площадь
2.10	Испытания клада B-5	24,5	2.40	Помещение орг. управления	12,0
2.11	Служба	4,2	2.41	Офис	9,0
2.12	Испытания клада B-7	16,7	2.42	Тех. отделение при серверной	8,1
2.14	Помещение для приема гостей	18,3	2.43	Служба	5,4
2.15	Офис	39,5	2.44	Коридор	3,5
2.16	Служба	3,8	2.46	Офис	26,4
2.17	Служба	3,3	2.47	Офис	24,8
2.18	Офис	31,6	2.48	Офис	22,6
2.19	Холл, релаксация	34,6	2.50	Офис	22,8
			2.57	Серверная банка	18,7

итого по этажу: 1074,3

Figure 7. First floor plan, including the grand auditorium and the stage

The New Stage of the Oleg Tabakov Studio Theatre located at 5 Malaya Sukharevskaya Square

Now this workshop theatre occupies a new building at the corner of the Garden Ring and Gilyarovskogo street. The main entrance into the theatre and the box office hall are located in the central part of the building in Gilyarovskogo street (see Fig. 14, 15, 16). It has several stories of office buildings above

it. The workshop theatre was founded in 1978, and it has been delivering performances in the basement of a building located in Chaplygina street, not far from Chistye prudy; this basement used to accommodate a coal bunker and a propaganda centre. The decision to construct a new theatre building was made back in 1997; it was the year of the tenth anniversary since the official recognition of the Oleg Tabakov studio as a state theatre;



Figure 8. Theatre lobbies

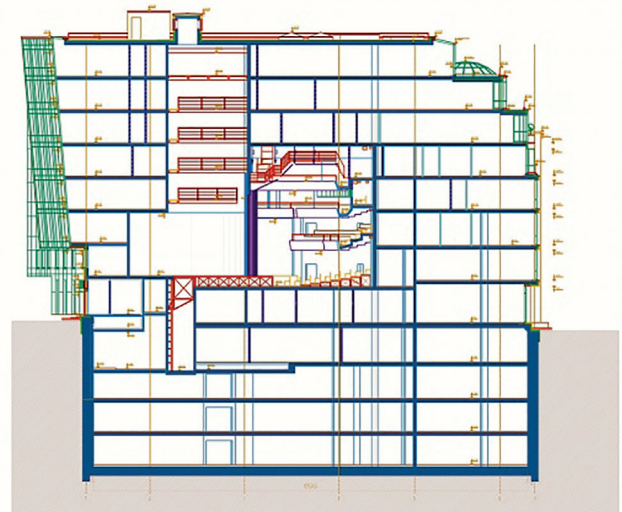


Figure 10. The building section showing the grand auditorium and the stage structure

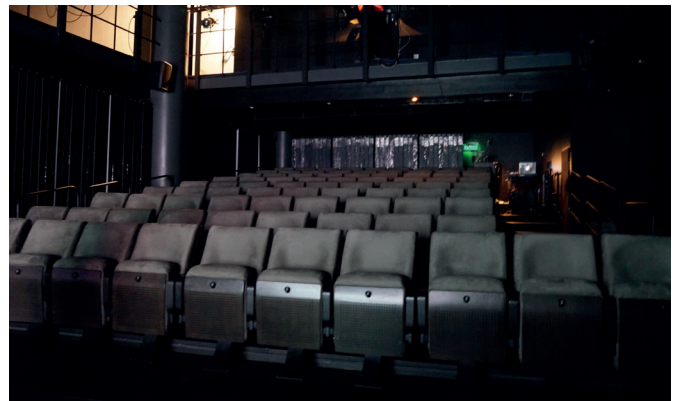


Figure 11. The rehearsal hall



Figure 9. The grand auditorium accommodating 350 seats



Figure 12. A vertically pivoted movable partition on the small stage

however, the idea has just been implemented. This famous theatre occupies the new building of a mixed-use complex that also accommodates banks and other business institutions.

This multi-story complex has peculiarly designed exterior walls that look like multiple vertically oriented window openings. The wall facing the Garden Ring takes advantage of the façade of an old three-storey building next to it. Thus, the theatre building demonstrates its “loyalty to the legacy” (see Fig. 17). The theatre wall has an electronic screen and a wavy piece of stained glass artwork that decorates this bulky composition and hides the spectators’ area behind it. [3]

The auditorium has 400 seats; it represents a steep amphitheatre having aiseways along each side wall (see Fig. 18). Each of the 12 rows has 22 seats that ensure excellent visibility. The proscenium can be turned 4.5 meters wider at the expense of the first rows of the pit, which is an ordinary feature typical for contemporary auditoriums. The transformation is performed by the lifting container used to store the rows.

The stage dimensions are 12m x 6m; the stage depth is 13 m, these dimensions are next to ideal for staging dramas.

The stage technology is complex and extensive (there are doubts whether a workshop theatre needs it). The stage has a turntable with a spinning ring, sinks and stage platforms; its upper stage mechanization facility is equipped with 33 flying bars and lighting hoists, two panorama hoists, and a front curtain mechanism. 24 point hoists service the backstage, the proscenium, and the portal stage.

According to the design engineers, each item of the stage equipment meets the most advanced standards of the stage technology. All systems are software controlled. The machinery design was developed by the engineers employed with Waagner biro, and their design project was implemented by the specialists of LTM company. “The machinery is operated by numerous intelligent microcontrollers; their number exceeds one hundred and translates into kilometers of cables, including the most advanced fibre optic lines (see Fig. 19)...” Here, the designers have implemented the impossible: the machinery operates almost noiselessly; the theatre has specialized sound-absorbing boxes. Therefore, only appropriate sounds can be heard on the stage and in the auditorium. And the audibility is good. Not



Figure 13. A photo showing the backyard driveway with a stage door on the left



Fig. 14. This photo shows the Oleg Tabakov Workshop Theatre. The entrance into the old building in Chaplygina street. The photo shows the bronze sculptures of the playwrights, including Alexander Volodin, Alexander Vampilov, and Viktor Rozov, whose plays are inseparable from the history of the studio theatre. The sculptor: A.S. Charkin; the architect: I.P. Sautov.



Figure 15. The Oleg Tabakov Workshop Theatre. The façade facing Gilyarovskogo street. The Cherry Orchard Theatre can be seen in the distance. 2016. The photo is taken by the author of the article

a single other Russian theatre has a similar system of virtual acoustics installed. 44 loudspeakers are installed around the perimeter of the auditorium. They can easily relocate spectators to any acoustic space.” [5]

The sound equipment comprises wireless and wired microphones made by Sennheiser (Germany), installed and commissioned by the specialists employed with LTM Music.

The Pandoras Box enables synchronization of all sources of video and audio signals. Projections are made by four Panasonic PT-DZ21KE projectors that have all necessary lenses needed for screens and scenery. Three mobile frontal projection screens and one back projection screen (VarioLock® System 64, 16:9 format) comprise the video projection system. Vario® are mobile projection screens that have a modular framing system. [5] Besides, the theatre owns high-quality video recording facilities, including Panasonic video cameras, equipped with built-in pan-tilt mechanisms.

Fixtures made by several foreign manufacturers are used for lighting purposes. Most of them are halogen projectors and LED fixtures. “On top of low power consumption, LED fixtures

produce strong high quality light beams and an incredible combination of shades generated without any colour filters, let alone the white color having different colour temperature values.” [5] The auditorium has mobile lighting bridges, lighting balconies and follow spots. Stage portal towers have four JB Lighting LED projectors installed. Portable light towers have 48 Silicon Pacific profile spots. The lighting of the gallery is performed by twenty lens-free blinders DTS FLASH 4000, having the power consumption of 2600 Wt; four halogen lamps 120V/650W and an aluminum reflector. [5] The stage floor is lit by six Martin ATOMIC stroboscopes, eight Spotlight Black Gun ultraviolet emission units, ten ETC Source Four profile spots, and it is covered in snow or fog by eight Martin Professional effects generators.” [5]

The staircase, featuring an ambiguous design, takes theatre guests from the entrance hall to the auditorium and the foyer. Spectators believe that “it’s very inconvenient, because white steps are hardly discernible and slippery, as the material feels like marble. Even I felt kind of uncomfortable, not to mention senior guests, who may have eye problems; on the whole, the



Figure 16. The Oleg Tabakov Workshop Theatre. The main entrance into the theatre. The photo is taken by the author of the article



Figure 18. The auditorium of the Oleg Tabakov Workshop Theatre. Transformable rows are in the foreground



Figure 17. The general appearance of the mixed-used complex that accommodates the Oleg Tabakov Workshop Theatre. Malaya Sukharevskaya Square of the Garden Ring is on the right

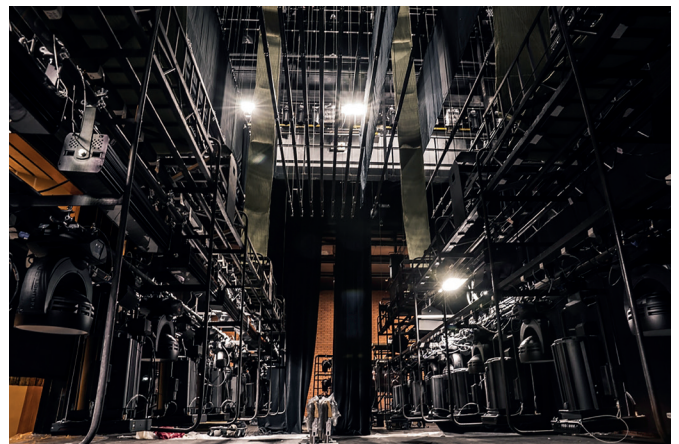


Figure 18. The auditorium of the Oleg Tabakov Workshop Theatre. Transformable rows are in the foreground

staircase is tricky”, wrote one of the spectators. However, there is an elevator on the left that does not reach the top floor. (2)

The building accommodates a rehearsal hall, whose dimensions are the same as those of the stage. The foyer has ceramic porcelain tiles, stainless steel, glass and timber. [3] (see Fig. 20, 21) There is plenty of coloured laser beams reminding of a pop concert hall, which has nothing to do with performances typical for this theatre.

The Helikon Opera Theatre at 19/16 Bolshaya Nikitskaya Street

The new opera house, operating under the direction of Dmitry Bertman, that opened on April 10, 1990, occupies a special building, or the premises of the former Club of Health Workers located not far from the Nikitskikh Vorot Square in Moscow. Its new auditorium and original stage were constructed in the old yard. The old house boasts a storied history. In the 18th century this group of houses comprised the mansion owned by the Glebovs - Streshnevs. In the late 19th century, theatrical agent George Paradis convinced the mansion owners to build a theatre here and to lease it out. Later this building turned into “an international theatre”, as foreign troupes, namely, the

Vienna Operetta, delivered their performances there. Later the building part facing Maly Kislovsky lane was occupied by the Mayakovsky Theatre. [1]

Back in 1886, the mansion house was substantially rebuilt by princess E.F. Shakhovskaya-Glebova-Streshneva. Its façade and interior were altered. The building was redesigned by Moscow architects K.V. Tersky (the designer of the Solodovnikov Theatre in Bolshaya Dmitrovka street) and A.S. Kaminsky (who had redesigned the Tretyakov Gallery).

The original building dates back to the late 18th century, when the porch entrance was added to the mansion of senator F.I. Glebov. The yard was converted into the embedded theatre auditorium, while the porch was converted into the guest box in the upper section of the amphitheatre (see Fig. 22). Back then, the mansion had a double floor height hall with a choir balcony. The grand staircase led to the double floor height hall (see Fig. 23), which was later converted into the foyer leading to the White Column Hall. Both the façade and the interior changed over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Architect Fyodor Kol'be designed the new façade facing Bolshaya Nikitskaya street; its style can be described as classical eclecticism having modest dimensions. According to

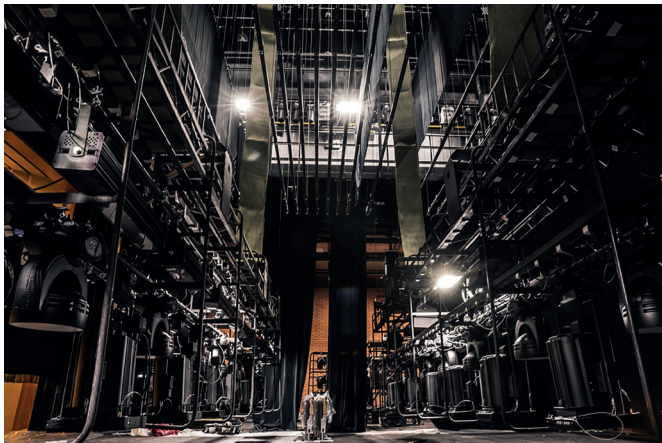


Figure 19. The theatre stage and machinery



Figure 21. The staircase leading from the entrance hall into the foyer and auditorium

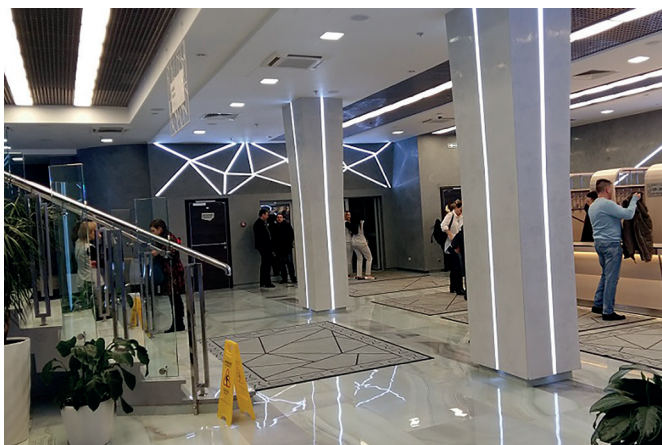


Figure 20. Entrance hall and cloakroom

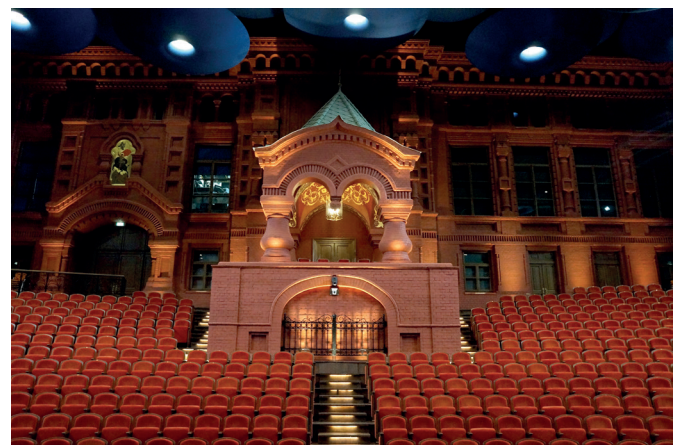


Figure 22. I. The Stravinsky grand auditorium and the old porch converted into the guest box built in the yard

other sources, the façade is designed on the basis of a drawing made by A.I. Rezanov, the second designer of the Christ the Savior Cathedral. A succession of drawing rooms and a grand bedroom were behind the street façade. For over twenty years the Helikon Opera Theatre delivered performances in the White Column Hall (see Fig. 24, 25) added by K. Tersky in 1882 – 1883 behind the drawing rooms and the bedroom. In the late 19th century Kostantin Tersky (assisted by young Fyodor Shekhtel) employed the pseudo-Russian style to design the façade of the theatre building, which is now known as the Mayakovskiy Theatre. Evidently, he employed the same pseudo-Russian style to design the yard which has recently been converted into the opera house. Tersky added the rear façade so that it was stylistically similar to the back houses built in the late 18th century and positioned as a hoof toe. Later, the mansion owners either had residence in Pokrovskoye-Streshnevo, or outside of Russia. [4]

After the revolution, the Chamber Theatre directed by A. Ya. Tairov delivered performances in the White Column Hall. The Chamber Theatre had temporarily lost access to its building in Tverskoy boulevard. This theatre is famous for its outstanding actress Alisa Koonen. [1]

Since 1920ies, this building, located at 19 Bolshaya Nikitskaya street, served as the Central House of the Trade Union of Art Workers.

“On February 8, 1924, the first organizational meeting of the Association of Revolutionary Cinematography (ARC) was held there. The action group was composed of the following film makers and writers: A.D. Anischenko, M.E. Koltsov, L.V. Kuleshov, N.I. Lebedev, S.M. Eisenstein, V.I. Pudovkin. The group issued a declaration by virtue of which it encouraged all film makers, who believed that filmmaking was the strongest instrument of the Communist culture, to join ARC. In the politically charged state, this slogan was the sole opportunity to get professional film makers together, to strive for the improvement of the film quality and to organize film production.” (N.S. Datieva, Internet). ARC occupied the building through 1927. Individual performances and informal shows were staged there at the initiative of famous actors (including V.V. Barsov, I.M. Moskvina, V.I. Kachalov, A.Ya. Tairov, A.V. Nezhdanova).

Besides, in 1932 – 36, this building was occupied by several other clubs, including the Club of Foreign Workers that invited Kolonne Links, a German theatre. This theatre was founded in 1932 by Gustav von Wangenheim, an immigrant and a German director, playwright and actor, who delivered his political performances in this building.

In 1934, clubs of theatre workers, musicians, film industry workers, and visual art workers were united into the Central Club of Art Workers that moved to a different building, and in 1939, this club was relocated into the former German club in Pushechnaya street. The club shared the building with the Theatre College of the Revolution Theatre that was initially a theatre of young actors. It had 83 students in 1935. In the late 1930ies, playwright Viktor Rozov finished this college.

In 1937, the main building and some of the adjacent buildings were occupied by the Club of health care workers; Dmitry Bertman, a student of the State Institute of Theatre Arts and the future director, headed the opera workshop there in 1984.

In 1993, Helikon Opera was awarded the status of a state theatre and obtained some of the mansion premises. Since then,



Figure 23. The grand staircase leading to the White Column Hall and a succession of drawing rooms



Figure 24. The Princess Shekhovskaya White Column Hall. Restored



Figure 25. The White Column Hall. The transformable stage

Helikon Opera has been delivering performances in the White Column Hall. Its directors have taken advantage of the grand hall and found enough space for spectators, the orchestra and the likelihood of a performance venue there. This is the way the directors, headed by D. Bertman, demonstrate their individuality and ingenuity.

At the onset of the new century Moscow government decided to build a new auditorium and stage for this theatre in the adjacent yard. Its design was developed by A. Bokoв, D. Bush, T. Kirdina, E. Ivanova, and I. Afonina employed with Mosproekt 4 Institute. As the buildings that comprise this item of real property represent part of the monument of history and culture of Federal significance, the mission of the project was to integrate several buildings that needed restoration, to build two underground parking lots and to restructure and replan the building's

superstructure. As a result, the building has two auditoriums (500 and 227 seats). The bigger auditorium represents a long span structure built in the courtyard. The stage and the amphitheatreshaped auditorium are 4.2 meters below the ground surface. The architects have retained the brick wall of the yard that dates back to the late 19th century. The stage has small sides and the back stage, the understage and the platform. Both the auditorium and the stage are transformable to a reasonable extent, as they are equipped with an upper stage mechanization facility. The engineering technology is similar to the one of a well-equipped contemporary opera house. Acoustical improvements are performed by special acoustic reflectors installed above the transformable orchestra pit. The architects have successfully designed an opera house that can boast original interiors in the most complex urban planning environment.



Figure 26. A succession of drawing rooms converted into halls (first floor). The Chamber Hall named after Director Boris Pokrovsky is in the foreground



Figure 28. Hallways with a portrait of Princess E.F. Shakhovskaya-Glebova-Streshneva, the last owner of the mansion



Figure 27. The Hall named after Elena Obraztsova. The portrait of Elena Obraztsova as Countess in the "Queen of Spades" is on the wall



Figure 29. The lobby facing public toilets on the ground floor

The small auditorium remains in the White Column Hall which is now called the Princess Shakhovskaya Hall. The grand hall has the name of the Russian-born composer Igor Stravinsky. The designers have preserved a succession of drawing rooms stretching along the exterior wall that faces Bolshaya Nikitskaya street. Now the drawing rooms have new names: Chamber Hall named after Director Boris Pokrovsky (Fig. 26), a small drawing room was converted into the Hall named after Elena Obraztsova (Fig. 27).

All areas designated for spectators feature a natural combination of authentic fragments and their classical details, refurbished halls with overhead lights and an advanced stage technology. It is interesting to walk around these cozy premises boasting a storied history of reconstructions and refurbishments.

Neither of the three theatres, analyzed in the article, has a facade of its own. Such is their peculiarity. The Oleg Tabakov Workshop Theatre is represented by an inscription on the wall of a huge business centre facing Gilyarovskogo street; the Cherry Orchard Moscow Theatre Centre is hidden somewhere behind the glass façade; it has modest sticklike posters and an embedded entrance. The most significant theatre, Helikon Opera, represents a restored façade of the mansion owned by Princess E.F. Shakhovskaya-Glebova-Streshneva and modest inscriptions on the entrance doors. However, its appearance turns all the more original in the cash box lobby.

Theatres may be different... And that's what makes them lovely.

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