

UNDER POLITICAL AND MARKET PRESSURES: THE STAGING OF OPERETTA IN INTERWAR BELGRADE*

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ПОД ПРИТИСКОМ ПОЛИТИКЕ И ТРЖИШТА:
ИЗВОЂЕЊЕ ОПЕРЕТЕ У МЕЂУРАТНОМ БЕОГРАДУ

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АБСТРАКТ

In this paper, I will focus on the reconstruction of the history of operetta companies established in interwar Belgrade. I gave priority to those ensembles that held regular performances for a longer period of time in the late 1920s and late 1930s. Aside from making a detailed overview of several more stable operetta theatres in Belgrade at the time, including their repertoire and leading artists, the attention will also be paid to uncovering the broader context of their work. The issues of state cultural policy and the rise of competitiveness inside the local spheres of culture and entertainment will also be discussed.

KEYWORDS: operetta, operetta companies, repertoire, artists, Belgrade, interwar period, cultural policy, popular culture.

АПСТРАКТ

У овом раду фокусираћу се на реконструисање историје оперетских трупа које су формиране у међуратном Београду. Предност је дата оним ансамблима који су функционисали у дужем временском распону током касних 20-их и 30-их година прошлог века. Поред детаљног увида у рад неколико оперетских позоришта у Београду у том периоду, укључујући и

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њихов репертоар и водеће уметнике, пажња ће бити усмерена и на шири контекст њиховог делања. С тим у вези, биће такође дискутовано о питањима државне културне политике и порасту компетитивности у оквиру локалних сфера забаве и културе.

Кључне речи: оперета, оперетске трупе, репертоар, уметници, Београд, међуратни период, културна политика, популарна култура.

The end of the Great War brought many novelties to the cultural life of Belgrade. As the capital city of a much larger, multinational, multi-confessional and culturally diverse state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, established in 1918 (since 1929 renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), Belgrade had to compete for its primacy in different spheres with many other prosperous urban centers from the country's western and northern regions for the first time in its modern history. In many of these spheres, the process of fighting for prestige coupled with regional (intranational) and international exchange and collaboration has sometimes led to fruitful results, but in other cases, the idea of following and maintaining the pre-war traditions and the "state-of-affairs" prevailed. This was noticeable in certain segments of the cultural sphere where new political and social circumstances did not bring about a need to redefine or modify previous practices and policies. Typical in this context was the functioning of the National Theatre in Belgrade, the most renowned and influential cultural institution of the Kingdom of Serbia, whose managements were decisive not to substantially contradict the pre-war approach to repertoire-making – in particular, to the staging of operetta (Cf. Turlakov 2005). The idea that this genre is incompatible with the mission and objectives of the Serbian National Theatre, that it is characterised by questionable aesthetical values and a potential to put at risk national musical heritage as well as to corrupt audience's taste, which was loudly advocated by the most acclaimed musicians, literary critics and the Theatre's officials in the early 1900s (see more in Vesić forthcoming; Milanović 2019; Marković 2021), served as a starting point for the post-WWI Theatre's managements and, since 1920, strongly affected the repertoire policy (Marković 2021; Vesić 2022, 216–217). Despite certain exceptions, the decision not to open Belgrade's biggest and most heavily subsidised theatre to the "light", entertaining and popular works such as operettas was consistently upheld throughout the interwar period and, undoubtedly, it strongly determined the fate of operetta performances in the Yugoslav capital.

As will be discussed in the following sections, it was not until the Ministry of Education with its specialised bodies came to the conclusion that it was necessary to cut the budget for regional theatres and to dissolve their operetta ensembles, that Belgrade was given a chance to host a relatively permanent operetta company with regular performances and respectable repertoire. Owing to the misfortune of operetta artists primarily from Osijek's Theatre, and to a lesser extent to the National Theatre of Novi Sad, which all became redundant by 1 April 1927, an unexpected opportunity suddenly appeared for the Belgrade inhabitants – to have their own op-

eretta company after a two-decades-long break.² The fateful series of events during the spring of 1927 marked the beginning of a new era for operetta staging in this part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS) with numerous challenges as well as the more-or-less favourable periods. In general, it is possible to discern three phases in the history of operetta staging in Belgrade before World War Two. The most prosperous were the first few years of a newly established company, followed in 1929 by a gathering of similar ensembles, and, after 1930, with marked instability. Between 1931 and 1935 the original ensemble and its “derivatives” were no longer active, but several other groups of operetta artists held occasional performances. Finally, from 1936 to late 1937 the revival of this segment of the cultural sphere was quite noticeable, owing to the appearance of some very ambitious and diligent companies. From 1938 until the outbreak of WWII in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, operetta performances in Belgrade were not taking place regularly and were the result of the work of smaller ensembles.

The staging of the operetta in interwar Belgrade will be presented taking into consideration not only the aforementioned phases, but also other important factors that influenced this process. In the first place, it is necessary to point to the cultural policy of the Ministry of Education which was under great influence of the management of Belgrade National Theatre and its financial, artistic and social objectives at the time. Another important phenomenon was the development of entertainment and mass media spheres in the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia that offered the Yugoslav audience new possibilities to enjoy operetta pieces and operetta music. The reconstruction of the presence of this genre in interwar Belgrade and the numerous obstacles that it faced is based on the data collected from archival material and press and periodicals published in Belgrade, Zagreb and Novi Sad.

THE (RE)BIRTH OF OPERETTA PERFORMANCES IN BELGRADE AFTER THE GREAT WAR: FROM OCCASSIONAL EXPERIMENTS TO STEADIER EFFORTS

As the horror and traumas of the Great War that had struck a large part of the population of the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes slowly evaporated from both the individual and collective consciousness, a strong desire to redeem the unimaginable personal, physical, emotional, material and national losses became manifest, particularly in the swift rise of the sphere of entertainment. Just a few years after the truce was signed between the Kingdom of SCS and its neighbouring countries, there was a sudden upsurge of places where popular music, dance and silent movies could be enjoyed, particularly in urban areas. This was most characteristic of the biggest Yugoslav urban centers including Belgrade, which was the only one among them that was strongly affected by wartime horrors. The rapid growth

2 This topic will be discussed in detail in the following section. On staging of operetta before WWI in Belgrade National Theatre see Vesić forthcoming; Milanović 2019; Marković 2021.

of its entertainment sector can be traced through press reports, announcements and advertisements, but also via occasionally published statistical records. According to one of the earliest records, dating from 1923, the visiting of cinemas, concerts and variety bars and cabarets doubled in comparison to 1922; furthermore, the most favoured pastime of Belgraders was watching silent movies and going to the variety bars and cabarets, whereas theatrical performances were less popular (Anonymous 1923b). Football matches were also widely popular. Similar trends could be observed throughout the 1920s, including the primacy of cinemas, but also the popularity of various other venues that offered dancing and live music – from traditional folk music to modern dance and schlager tunes.³

Despite favourable circumstances in Belgrade's entertainment sphere in the early 1920s and onwards, more continuous performances of operettas appeared for the first time in 1925. Owing to the efforts of Vojislav Turinski, a longstanding actor and lyric tenor of the Belgrade National Theatre, who was approaching his retirement, the private theatre *Slobodno pozorište* [Free Theatre] was founded in January that year and officially opened in February with a repertoire consisting mostly of "comedies and light music" (Anonymous 1925a). Turinski thought that it was necessary to complement the programming of state-supported theatres, which was "too strictly defined", and to introduce the audience to different, more entertaining types of theatre plays. Turinski's theatre revived *Mam'zelle Nitouche*, a vaudeville-operetta, that had previously been staged in Belgrade's National Theatre during the season 1908/1909, and prepared Emmerich Kálmán's *Ein Herbstmanöver* (1909) (Anonymous 1925b; 1925c). After many repeated performances of these works from February to April 1925, the theatre was suddenly closed and another operetta company, led by operetta artists Vera Burago Balaban and Ivan Dinulović, tried to follow in their footsteps. The new Belgrade Operetta company (*Beogradska Opereta*) gave its first performances in June 1925 in the same location as Turinski's company – the hall of cinema Uranija. The repertoire that was prepared encompassed six operettas,⁴ but only one was performed in front of the Belgrade audience. Probably the dispute between the owner of the building in which Uranija cinema hall was placed and its unnamed tenant that culminated at the time Burago Balaban's and Dinulović's company started their work resulted in the cancelling of performances.⁵

It was not before early 1927 that the lovers of popular musical Theatre were given the opportunity to regularly enjoy operetta plays once again. This time, it was owing to the guest performance of the operetta company of Osijek National Theatre in early February, as well as in late March and early April 1927. The first and second encounters of the Osijek company with the Belgrade audience were very successful, as comments from the press suggested. Notwithstanding the very modest fi-

3 This topic is partially discussed in Babović 2018 and Vesić 2022.

4 The list of works that were planned to be staged was made known to the authorities of the Arts Department of the Ministry of Education in the plea of Belgrade Operetta proprietors. See AY, 66-599-995, 6 June 1925.

5 Cf. Anonymous 1925d.

nances, equipment and scenery, this company showed great discipline and “taught a lesson to our disheveled and disorderly opera community” (S[tanislav].V[inaver]. 1927). Its performances of Oscar Nedbal’s *Polenblut* (1913), Offenbach’s *La belle Hélène* (1864) and Oscar Strauss’ *Die Teresina* (1925), as well as Granichstaedten’s *Der Orlow* (1925), Kálmán’s *Gräfin Mariza* (1924), Ralph Benatzky’s *Adieu Mimi* (1926) and others were warmly welcomed and applauded by the thrilled audience of the crowded Manjež and Luksor halls. Probably none of the present spectators could have predicted that this ensemble, or at least its larger part, would soon be transformed into a permanent, Belgrade-based operetta company. But, as soon as the news of the dissolution of all operetta companies of the regional state-subsidised Theatres in the Kingdom of SCS reached the Yugoslav capital,⁶ the management of the former Osijek operetta ensemble decided to ask for permission to create a private operetta theatre in Belgrade. The decision of the Arts Department of the Ministry of Education was positive, and a company from Osijek was able to perform throughout May and June 1927 at the Kleridž [Claridges] terrace. At first it seemed that two important problems were finally solved – to create a stable operetta ensemble in Belgrade, and to alleviate the socioeconomic burden of the dismissed Osijek artists; but after only two weeks, an unforeseen difficulty emerged. The management of the National Theatre in Belgrade filed a complaint to the Ministry of Education expressing worries about the negative effects of operetta performances on the profits and cultural mission of the National Theatre. As Ranko Mladenović, a secretary of the National Theatre in Belgrade, disclosed to the journalist of the daily *Pravda*, the officials of the state theatre felt the need to point to the possible “lowering of the quality of repertoire” and their duty to “save the audience from the frivolous music” (M. R. 1927). The managers of the Belgrade operetta company were appalled by such a move, stating that their company “cannot represent a threat of any kind to the National Theatre, since even if the owner of Claridges decided to screen the films, the same audience would come – without great artistic expectations, who loves to sit by their tables and have a dinner, either in the hall or at the terrace, just as it did with Brana’s Theatre [Brana Cvetković’s popular Theatre, I. V.] whose work was not banned despite larger attendance” (Ibid). They also reminded of the possibility to open both private and state theatres in the towns with more than 100,000 inhabitants, which was granted by Article 144 of the Regulation on the National Theatre.

The reasonable request of the operetta officials not to leave more than fifty artists unemployed and to offer a repertoire that is not performed in any other Belgrade theatre was opposed by the set of very unpersuasive arguments, deeply grounded in

6 The problem of supporting regional theatres was discussed by the Ministry of Education for several years. It started in 1923 when several solutions for reforming these theatres were presented to the public. This topic was revived again in 1926, but this time the focus was on the necessity to suppress operetta performances in regional theatres as they were aesthetically inadequate, particularly those of composers from Vienna and Budapest. Finally, in 1927 a decision was made to dissolve all operetta companies in regional theatres, and it was to be put into effect on 1 April 1927. See Anonymous 1923a; AY, 66-619-1029.

the two-decades-long anti-operetta narrative.⁷ Finding himself “between the hammer and the anvil”, Milan Dimović, Minister of Education, in cooperation with the Arts Department, opted for a compromise – to let the operetta company perform a month less than it was originally permitted (by 1 June 1927), and to return to Belgrade in July after a tour in the provinces (Anonymous 1927a).

It seems that the operetta company continued to perform on Belgrade’s Claridges terrace throughout June, but also in July and August 1927, presenting a number of mostly modern operetta works.⁸ Before the opening of a new season 1927/1928, the management of the company announced many novelties in the Belgrade press. First of all, the performances were to be held in the Luksor Hall with a reconstructed stage and improved electric installations; the ensemble and choir were enlarged and singers, actors and actresses for diverse leading roles were hired (Anonymous 1927b; 1927c). Moreover, Radoslav Vesnić, the former director of Osijek operetta took over the position of the manager instead of Vladimir Majhenić, a very talented tenor, who decided to leave the company. For the first time it was announced under the title *Beogradska Opereta* [Belgrade Operetta] in the magazine *Ilustrovani list* and it seemed that a new era in the history of operetta performing in Belgrade was about to begin.⁹

THE “GOLDEN AGE” OF OPERETTA IN INTERWAR BELGRADE (1927–1931)

Despite the fact that since the autumn of 1927 Belgrade audiences had regular operetta performances after a long break and that Yugoslav capital hosted a permanent professional operetta ensemble for the first time in its theatrical and cultural life, there were many challenges ahead of the newly established private company. From the very beginning there was a problem with finding a proper venue with the adequate number of seats for winter and summer performances that could bring sufficient profits. Apart from that, the ensemble was often burdened with internal conflicts and frequent changes of personnel and there was a need for occasional large investments in the renewal of scenery and costumes. Although it was not discussed in the Belgrade press, two important members of the ensemble – Evka Mikulić (one

7 This narrative started to develop in the beginning of the 20th century and was revived after the Great War. See more in Vesnić 2018, 202–206, 244–259, 280–289; Vesnić forthcoming.

8 The list of performed works can be found in Appendix, Table 1.

9 Among the leading artists of this ensemble were: Evka Mikulić, Matilda Kralj, Paulina Jesić (sopranos), Ivka Berković, Elza Radomska, Ms. Ostojić (soubrettes), Đuka Trbuhović (tenor and director), Ivan Gorski, Franjo Klokočki (tenors), Klemens Klemenčić (comedian dancer, director and ballet choreographer), Mr. Radomski (comedian dancer), Stevan Dobrić (comedian and director), Milan Odžić (comedian), Mr. Sedlaček (conductor), Radoslav Vesnić (director). See Anonymous 1927c. See also Figure 1. On the biographies of aforementioned artists and others that will be mentioned in the following sections see the electronic database *Teatroslov* of the Museum of Theatrical Arts of Serbia: <http://teatroslov.mpus.org.rs/teatroslov.php>.



Figure 1. The photographs of members of Belgrade Operetta, *Ilustrovani list* 29 (1927): 8. Source: Digitalna NBS, https://digitalna.nb.rs/view/URN:NB:RS:SD_77A524AED6CE4DEFD5566E639C-CA40C7-1927-B029.

of the leading sopranos) and Stevan Dobrić (one of the leading actors) – became engaged in Skopje National Theatre early in the season 1927/1928 and this, according to their claims, led to a “decline of quality and revenues of the Belgrade Operetta” (AY, 66-617-1023, March 5, 1928). To prevent its further deterioration, Mikulić decided to return to Belgrade as a guest performer in December and January 1927 (Cf. Anonymous 1927e). At the same time, in order to try to provide more elaborate costumes for the ensemble, its manager Radoslav Vesnić asked the Arts Department of the Ministry of Education to allow him to buy part of the inventory of former Osijek operetta with a 25 percent discount, but it is not known whether authorities agreed or not.

That the atmosphere inside the operetta ensemble was far from harmonic was proved at the beginning of the next year. In February 1928 information appeared in *Pravda* about the initiative to open a new operetta theatre in Belgrade by several former members of Osijek operetta which was declined by the Arts Department of the Ministry of Education, and in March that year Stevan Dobrić and Evka Mikulić sent another plea to this governing body. Soon after, Dobrić acquired permission to open *Veselo pozorište* [The Jolly Theatre] in the hall of the Hotel Slavija, with the repertoire based on comedies and popular plays (Cf. Anonymous 1928a), while Mikulić decided to leave Belgrade Operetta.¹⁰

Despite numerous difficulties, in the period between September 1927 and September 1928, the Belgrade Operetta ensemble presented 26 operettas, including 7 works by Franz Lehár, 5 works of Emmerich Kálmán, 3 works of Leo Fall and Jean Gilbert, and 2 works of Oscar Strauss, as well as 4 plays from the genres of comedy, vaudeville or farce. The repertoire also encompassed 19th-century classical operettas: Johann Strauss’ *Die Fledermaus* (1874) and Sidney Jones’ *The Geisha* (1896), as well as one domestic operetta – Josif Rajhenić Raha’s *Verenica njegovog veličanstva* (1925). Except in February and June 1928, the operetta ensemble performed ten to sixteen operetta works per month, usually every day, and often in afternoon and evening slots. Aside from the quantity and diversity of its repertoire, Belgrade operetta was slowly but steadily gaining a good reputation among a number of Belgrade theatregoers, along with the press and mass media. It was manifested in frequent reporting on its activities, and particularly the short tour that took place in April 1928. In Zagreb-based *Kulisa* magazine, it was emphasized that there was “an unusually great interest” in the performances of this company in Zemun and Novi Sad and that it “achieved outstanding success” (Anonymous 1928b). Even the very critically intoned observations on the work of Belgrade Operetta such as those of the influential Serbian composer and musicologist Miloje Milojević, who belonged to the group of intellectuals and artists that bitterly opposed operetta, indicated its “anchoring”

10 The news appeared in the magazine *Kulisa* with the following remarks: “The Belgrade Operetta is undergoing a terrible blow. Ms. Evka Mikulić, its leading lady, left the ensemble due to certain misunderstandings with the management. The Belgrade Operetta lost one of its irreplaceable members, with great musical and acting capabilities, who was highly esteemed by the audience” (Anonymous 1928c).

in the local cultural and theatrical life and the entertainment sphere. Discussing the half-empty hall of the Belgrade National Theatre during the performances, Milojević, among other things, noted that: “it is kept silent that in the recent past there were neither Operetta in Belgrade, nor Brana’s Theatre, two very popular institutions among the young and inexperienced audience. Brana’s Theatre is a creation of its own, it has its supporters and a right to exist. But that does not refer to Operetta because it is taking away the musical audience and intoxicating them.” (Anonymous 1927d).

After the very productive and dynamic 1927/1928 season, Belgrade Operetta’s manager Radoslav Vesnić announced a lot of innovations and fresh ideas for the next season, particularly regarding the repertoire. They planned to stage the latest operettas of Fall, Kálmán and Lehár – *Die spanische Nachtigall* (1920), *Der Zarewitsch* (1927), *Die Herzogin von Chicago* (1928) – as well as the works of French and Yugoslav composers (see K. T. 1928). Moreover, the choir and ballet ensemble was expanded and a new soloist, Marica Lubejeva, a former Maribor Operetta company member “with exceptional vocal qualities” was hired (Ibid). As the performances of part of the repertoire took place in September and early October there were signs of problems “behind the scenes”, but after the farewell concert of Belgrade Operetta’s longstanding soloists, Matilda Kralj and Ivan Gorski, on 12 October 1928 (Anonymous 1928d), the crisis in this institution became quite pronounced. Suddenly, there were no announcements of performances in the Belgrade press, and after 25 October 1928, names of new operetta companies started to appear without any specific references to the Belgrade Operetta, nor the explanation on its possible restructuring. Only several months later, in an article published in daily *Vreme*, there was a passing remark on the unexpected dismissal of Radoslav Vesnić’s Operetta after his “two years of honorable struggle with numerous difficulties” and the subdivision of former ensemble into two competing companies (see N. 1929). It seems that part of the original company led by Evka Mikulić that rejoined Belgrade Operetta ensemble in the summer of 1928, continued with performances between late October and late November 1928 under the name “Operetta at Luksor Palace”. This company also staged short operettas, sketches and varieties at the Claridges Hall (Anonymous 1928e; 1928f). By 19 November 1928, Belgrade Operetta (Operetta at Luksor Palace) was finally dissolved.

In the meantime, Mikulić, together with Stevan Dobrić and Aleksej Orlov asked for permission to open Vodvilj-opereta [Vaudeville-operetta] (AY, 66-617-1023, November 3, 1928), and, according to published announcements in *Pravda*, this company started to perform in late November in the Claridges Hall naming itself Operetta at Claridges.¹¹ Shortly after, a former conductor of the National Theatre in Belgrade, Jovan Srbulj, took the position of its musical director, and, later, a manager (Anonymous 1928j; N. 1929). At the same time, the other group of artists from the former Belgrade Operetta including Đuka Trbuhović, Marica Lubejeva, Elza Radomska and others led by conductor and composer Josif Rajhenić Raha started

11 It became advertised as Belgrade Operetta at Claridges since January 1929.

to work on establishing a new company at the Luksor Hall. In early December they published a call for children interested to take part in the performing of Kálmán's *Die Herzogin von Chicago* (1928) as well as ballet ensemble (Anonymous 1928g, 1928h). Only a few days later, a large and elegant advertisement appeared in the most widely distributed daily in Belgrade – *Politika*, inviting the audience to attend the opening of a new Modern Operetta at the Luksor Palace and enjoy the premiere of the mentioned Kálmán's work (Anonymous 1928i). On the basis of press reports, the foundation of Modern Operetta was ambitiously planned and realised owing to the efforts of Mika Ristić, a former member of the National Theatre in Belgrade, who decided to resign from his position in this state-subsidised institution and to focus thoroughly on creating a stable and respectable private operetta company in the capital city of Yugoslavia (Anonymous 1928k). Ristić believed that Belgrade deserved a serious private theatre, in particular an operetta theatre which would respect the audience's taste and serve as a basis for cultivating a domestic operetta production – something he did not observe in the work of previous Belgrade Operetta. Relying on the guidance of Branislav Nušić and Stanislav Binički and the gathering of a group of artists from the former Belgrade Operetta, the manager of Modern Operetta was confident that this theatre would transform Belgrade's entertainment and theatre spheres.¹²

Only two months after the crisis inside Belgrade Operetta started to manifest itself and its long-term manager Radoslav Vesnić resigned from his post, the Belgrade audience was given a chance to attend operetta productions by two permanent companies, and to contribute to their effort to attract mass support and gain public respect. Both companies were trying to offer lavish premieres of popular operetta works, classical or modern, and to introduce the works of Yugoslav composers. Between late December 1928 and late January 1930, six new works were prepared.¹³

The competition between the two companies ended abruptly by the end of January 1929 as Modern Operetta ceased to offer programmes after 22 January. Their rival company, the Belgrade Operetta at Claridges, continued with performances until the end of the winter and summer seasons (May and August 1929). Aside from presenting some of the most popular works from the repertoire of its predecessor¹⁴ – the Belgrade Operetta – as well as its newly introduced pieces, this company also prepared several premieres.¹⁵ It is noticeable that post-WWI operetta production

12 Cf. AY, 66-617-1023, 26 November 1928.

13 Among them were Walter Pollo's *Olly-Polly* (1925) (Modern Operetta, 24 December 1928), Oscar Strauss' *Ein Walzertraum* (1907) (Belgrade Operetta at Claridges, 27 December 1928), Hervé's [Louis-August Florimond Ronger] *Mam'zelle Nitouche* (1883) (Modern Operetta, 4 January 1929), Radoslav Kosmajac's *Igumanov greh* (1928) (Belgrade Operetta at Claridges, early January 1929), *Haremska noć* (Modern Operetta, 12 January 1929), and Leo Fall's *Die Dollarprinzessin* (1907) (Belgrade Operetta at Claridges, 25 January 1929).

14 Among the performed operettas were *Gräfin Mariza*, *Die Teresina*, *Die Bajadere*, *Die Csárdásfürstin*, *Der Orlow*, *Ein Herbstmanöver*, *Die Frau im Hermelin* and *Adieu Mimi*.

15 These were Srećko Albini's *Baron Trenck* (1908) (27 February 1929), Maurice Yvaine's *Pas sur la bouche* (1925) (26 March 1929), Johann Strauss' *Der Zigeunerbaron* (1885) (24 April 1929), Albert

dominated the repertoire, but important steps were made to introduce more works from the classical, 19th-century era, as well as the works of Yugoslav composers (although very occasionally).

Considering a large number of performed operettas from the end of 1928 until the beginning of the next 1929/1930 season, together with the representation of newly-introduced works, often staged in Belgrade less than a year apart from their world premieres, the Belgrade Operetta at Claridges was showing the signs of vitality, ambition and determination to surpass the results of its predecessor. One of the important novelties that was to contribute to the rise of public appreciation of this company was the appearance of the first operetta reviews published in the daily *Vreme*.¹⁶ Although written more in the fashion of advertisements than standard reviews, full of praise for both the composers of premiered operettas and the whole ensemble of the Belgrade Operetta at Claridges, these texts opened the door for a more elaborate and less-prejudiced understanding of this genre.

The functioning of Belgrade Operetta at Claridges between September 1929 and September 1930 continued on the dynamic established in the previous period: new works, either classical or latest hits, were appearing every month together with those that were already performed by this company or its predecessor.¹⁷ At first, only operetta works were being premiered,¹⁸ but since July 1930, when the company settled at the terrace of Hotel Slavija, many comedies by German and Yugoslav authors were also included in the repertoire.¹⁹ The ensemble was “refreshed” with another female actress and singer, a Russian émigré Iraida Komarevska,²⁰ in August 1929 and during September there were guest performances of Vladimir Majhenić and Vienna-based singer Marina Obetkova (Anonymous 1929a). A very important moment in the history of this company, and the Belgrade operetta ensembles in general, was the first large-scale tour that encompassed part of the “Serbian south” and the Adriatic Coast. The tour started in October 1929 and lasted one month. It included performances in Leskovac, Niš, Dubrovnik, Šibenik and Sušak with the support of King’s Guard Orchestra. Press report published in *Vreme* emphasized the

Szirmai’s *Alexandra* (1925) (9 May 1929), Oscar Strauss’ *Hochzeit in Hollywood* (1928) (4 June 1929), Carl Zoeller’s *Der Vogelhändler* (21 June 1929), Paul Abraham et al. *Zenebona* (1928) (10 July 1929), Edmond Audran’s *La mascotte* (1880) (18 July 1929) and Henri Christiné’s *Phi-Phi* (1918) (2 August 1929).

16 The reviews were written by certain “Macready” and the first text of that kind appeared after the premiere of *Alexandra* (see Macready 1929).

17 The works that were revived from the period of Belgrade Operetta were the following: *Die spanische Nachtigall*, *Frasquita*, *Die Zirkusprinzessin*, *Das Hollandweibchen*, *Der Graf von Luxemburg* and *Die keusche Susanne*.

18 The most important was the introducing of Maurice Yvain’s *Bouche à Bouche* (1925) (10 September 1929), Robert Stolz’s *Prinzessin Ti-Ti-Pa* (1928) (27 September 1929), Franz Lehár’s *Paganini* (1925) (15 January 1930) and *Der Zarewitsch* (1927) (4 February 1930).

19 Between July and September 1930 several comedies and revues were prepared: Vojislav Turinski’s *Soni boj* (1930?), Franz Arnold and Ernst Bach’s *Die spanische Fliege* (1913), Kurt Getz’s *Hokus Pokus*, etc.

20 The artist’s surname was sometimes written as Komarovska both in the local press at the time and in the Museum of Theatrical Arts database.

compliments that were given to conductors Jovan Srbulj and Jaroslav Pleciti as well as to leading singers, actors and actresses: Evka Mikulić, Iraida Komarevska, Paulina Jesić, Ivka Berković, Đuka Trbuhović, Stevan Dobrić, Milan Odžić, Ivan Gorski, and, above all, to a dancer Lola Dragnjević. As the journalist of *Vreme* stated: “Operetta did not have much success inside the borders of Serbia because people were not informed about its guest performing. By contrast, success was immense in the south, in Dubrovnik, Split, Šibenik and Sušak, where artists decided to stay longer than it was originally planned.” (Anonymous 1929b)

After this first larger tour and following months of diligent work in the renovated and adapted Claridges Hall, the ensemble of Belgrade Operetta was preparing for another series of performances outside Belgrade – this time in the towns of Vojvodina and Slavonija (Anonymous 1930a). Unlike the previous undertaking, there were no reports on the reception of this ensemble in “northern” urban centers that were, similarly to Dalmatian towns, familiar with operetta repertoire and had a long history of hosting operetta companies. Also, no explanations were given regarding the sudden relocation of the Belgrade Operetta – first, from Claridges to Luksor Hall, and then to the Hotel Slavija’s terrace. Despite the relatively smooth unfolding of the summer season and some reinforcement of the ensemble,²¹ a plea that Jovan Srbulj wrote to the Minister of Education in August 1930 pointed to serious material problems that burdened the performances of Belgrade Operetta and prevented its development. As he stated:

I was obsessed with the idea to preserve and develop this type of entertaining art, necessary in every town, in order not to allow our Belgrade, the capital of the great Yugoslavia, to lag behind other urban centres. I went even further by supporting our domestic artists, writers and composers and giving them a chance to present their original work on my stage.

Mr. Minister, the personal finances that I used to cover the expenses of Operetta are not available anymore, and the revenues from performances are only sufficient to make up for the salaries of artists and other costs. As a private company, the Belgrade Operetta does not enjoy any privileges of the subsidised theatres, and, consequently, I am obliged to pay all the levies such as taxes on tickets, communal, district and regional fees, state tax, police etc. I have invested all my capital into the scenery, costumes and musical scores. Therefore, I feel free to ask you Mr. Minister to give me the possibility to continue with my work by awarding [my Operetta] a subsidy that is available to many our theatres in the province. After you consider all the details, I would kindly request a monthly subsidy in order to let me keep my operetta company in the future. Otherwise, its further functioning will be put at risk. (AY, 66-359-599, 13 August 1930)

21 Among the new artists that were engaged in Belgrade Operetta in the summer of 1930 important place belonged to the young and talented conductor Alfred Pordes as well as the young ballet dancer Kaća Dej. See Anonymous 1930b.

Without a positive response from the Minister, the Belgrade Operetta was slowly dissolving and was finally closed in the second half of January 1931. There were attempts to postpone this process and to give this company a financial impetus to continue to perform primarily via a long tour across towns of Vojvodina that lasted from October to December 1930 (Anonymous 1930c; 1930d), but, obviously, without success. After a short-term establishment of a permanent operetta ensemble in October 1931,²² the Belgrade audience had to wait for another four years to be able to attend regular operetta performances again.

OCCASIONAL STAGINGS OF OPERETTAS IN BELGRADE (1931–1935)

Although no permanent operetta company was established for years in Yugoslav capital, its inhabitants were given the possibility to enjoy quality operetta shows and to witness the staging of some of the most recent operetta works mainly through guest performances of Yugoslav and foreign companies. Among them, the most prestigious were the ensembles of the famous Austrian Theater an der Wien, as well as the Operetta of the National Theatre in Zagreb (Zagreb Operetta) that visited Belgrade several times between 1930 and 1933, mostly during the summer season (July and August). Theater an der Wien first encounter with the Belgrade audience took place in July and August 1930 (24 July – 1 August), when the Belgrade Operetta was still actively participating in the local cultural life. This was a chance to present some less-known operetta works such as Egon Neumann's *Viermal Ehe* (1930), Franz Lehár's *Frühlingsmädel* (1928) and Willy Engel-Berg's *Die dumme Liebe* (1920) as well as to display stage skills of Theater an der Wien ensemble, in particular its leading lady Margarete Slezak. Under the impression of this visit, Slezak, together with the composer and conductor Egon Neumann and part of this theatre's company decided to return to Belgrade in the summer of 1931 (Anonymous 1931b). This time they prepared a special surprise for the audience – an operetta work that contained tunes by a Yugoslav composer (Stanislav Binički) and whose action takes place in Dalmatia²³ – and they were giving performances between 15 and 23 August.

Part of the Zagreb operetta ensemble decided to spend their summer vacation by presenting operettas, comedies and variety programmes in Belgrade in August 1931

22 The announcement of the re-establishment of the permanent operetta theatre appeared in October 1931 on the basis of the initiative of Stevan Dobrić, a former member of Belgrade Operetta ensembles, who was also a founder of operetta company *Miniatura* [The Miniature] that gave performances during February and March 1931. Dobrić gathered a group of artists including Ivka Berković, Irena Astrova, Ms. Ačkova, Franjo Klokočki and Klemens Klemenčić and started with preparations for Ralf Erwin's *Ich betrüg' Dich nur aus Liebe* (1929) that was already premiered in Belgrade by a group of artists from Theater an der Wien led by Margarete Slezak. The opening was scheduled for 17 October 1931, at the Claridges Hall. Despite a very affirmative response to the efforts of Stevan Dobrić and his company and a strong belief that the Belgrade audience will finally be able to listen to plays it appreciates the most in nicely staged performances, after two months of regular performances, this operetta theatre was dissolved in December 1931. See Anonymous 1931c; K. J. 1931.

23 *Mondnacht in Dalmatien* (1931).

at the time when this urban center experienced an almost six-months long interruption in operetta performances. Their eleven days stay (1–11 August) was announced in the local press with a lot of enthusiasm and expressions of admiration towards the leading artists – Margareta and Dejan Dubajić – who were called “the best interpreters of modern operetta works and popular schlagers”. Another Zagreb operetta “star”, Vlaho Paljetak was described as “one of those singers that can seduce masses. Songs that he performs spread on the streets immediately and become popular in all categories of consumers” (Anonymous 1931a). Among the various types of plays and evening shows they prepared, there was also Robert Stolz’s operetta. Next year, the same group of artists presented their repertoire at Kolarac terrace (4 – 16 July 1932). The journalist of the magazine *Kulisa* observed that this guest performing came “at the right time, because something new and interesting was necessary. The Belgrade audience is eager to watch operetta performances. They appreciate this type of art that does not have interpreters in their own town. The National Theatre without an operetta ensemble such as the Belgrade Theatre created a great gap in the local artistic life. Zagreb artists were given a warm-hearted welcome. Particularly the well-known Paljetak, Cilić and Dubajić” ([Cvetković] 1932).

Unlike the first two times, the third guest performance of Zagreb Operetta was conceived much more ambitiously and meticulously. As a result, the whole ensemble was engaged in Belgrade from 8 to 17 July 1933, and many operetta pieces from their standard repertoire were planned to be performed. Most of them had never been staged in Belgrade before.²⁴ Because of the great interest of the audience and many pressures on the management of the National Theatre in Belgrade, Zagreb artists were given the opportunity to perform on the main stage of this Theatre,²⁵ and to prolong their stay for another seven days (Anonymous 1933a). One of the most important moments was, irrefutably, the long-awaited premiere of Ivo Tijardović’s popular *Mala Floramye* (1926) on 23 July 1933 with Marica Lubejeva and Milan Šepec in the leading roles. This work whose performance was planned and announced several years earlier by the management of Belgrade Operetta at Claridges/Slavija (July 1930) was received with “much appreciation” in the crowded hall of the National Theatre and some schlagers and ballet numbers “were repeated” (Anonymous 1933b).

That a two-week long stay of Zagreb Operetta left a deep mark in Belgrade’s cultural life, mesmerizing the audience and infatuating them with many schlagers and tunes they had a chance to hear was evidenced by a Belgrade journalist who gave a witty insight into this guest performance from the perspective of the local history of operetta staging:

The initiative [for regular operetta staging] germinated several times, sometimes in the larger forms that gave hard times to the proponents of the so-called ‘art of the

24 Among them were Bernhard Grün’s *Böhmische Musikanten* (1930), Paul Abraham’s *Viktoria und ihr Husar* (1930), Ralph Benatzky’s *Die drei Musketiere* (1929) and *Im weissen Rössl* (1930), and Lehár’s *Das Land des Lächelns*.

25 Their performances before 17 July were taking place at the Guard’s House in Topčider.

higher rank' – to people who usually did not watch plays of either higher or lower quality (except maybe their own works). Their concerns were groundless. Without the possibility to fully blossom, the operetta flowers faded. But these days they grow pompously in Belgrade owing to the guest performing of the Zagreb Operetta. The Belgrade audience likes operettas, and schlagers are sung incessantly. One comes and leaves the operetta by humming the tunes – if this is not interrupted by the worry about public transportation. And this humming continues in crowded trams and buses after the evening performances in the theatre hall of the Guard's House. 'Once again give me your hand for forgiveness'. This aria from *Viktoria und ihr Husar* is sung so many times [...]. It is pleasant to hum arias that can be easily memorized. Nobody sings anything from Wagner's *Parsifal*. But from *Im weissen Rössl*... Oh, always! (H. 1933).

Another interesting aspect regarding Zagreb Operetta's groundbreaking performances in Belgrade was the fact that the management of National Theatre in Belgrade let the company use its main stage instead of the stage at the "periphery" (Vračar) which cultivated a "lighter" repertoire. This unusual move was not discussed in public, but it was, in a certain way, prompted by certain controversial decisions of this theatre's officials made a year before. Namely, after years of anti-operetta campaigning by its leading personnel, the news of the premiere of Johann Strauss' most popular work, *Die Fledermaus*, on the main stage of the Theatre in December 1932, left Belgrade audiences stupefied.²⁶ The most vocal in expressing their dissatisfaction were the influential music critics and policy-makers that were unable to find any justification for such a broadening of repertoire.²⁷ Breaking with the decades-long tradition of not staging operetta works was heavily criticised even though Strauss' work belonged to the classical period of this genre and stood in sharp contrast with modern, schlager and revue operettas. Explanations of Theatre's officials on this institution's serious financial problems and accumulated debt were not accepted by the offended anti-operetta proponents. Still, it is obvious that the exception that was created with *Die Fledermaus* prepared the ground for the Zagreb company's performances on the main stage of the National Theatre and made them less problematic than they would have looked like just a year before.

26 Before *Die Fledermaus* was premiered and repeated on the National Theatre's main stage, the so-called "stage by the monument", another classical, 19th-century operetta, Hervé's *Mam'zelle Nitouche*, was also performed but only several times (March 1931). Soon after, it was transposed to the Vračar stage.

27 See Vesić 2018, 284. The most important in this respect was a heated debate between composer, music critic, and at that time music referee of the Arts Department, Petar Krstić, with Milan Predić, manager of the National Theatre in Belgrade, via a series of writings published in the daily *Pravda* in December 1932. The debate showed the double standards of the management of the National Theatre when it comes to operetta performances – namely, despite the longstanding harsh criticism of this genre, when the material status of this institution started to deteriorate, aesthetical (and political) reasons suddenly lost their validity. At the same time, it was clear that Petar Krstić, who was among the creators of anti-operetta narrative in the early 20th century, had not changed his views for a millimetre.

While inserting classical operetta on the repertoire of National Theatre could hardly compensate for the lack of permanent theatre company in Yugoslav capital, many new modes of consuming operetta works and their musical parts became available to the audience since 1929 and 1930. Among the most important was the opening of Radio Belgrade which aired a number of shows with “light and operetta” music either via live performances or by reproduction of gramophone records. At first, Radio Quartet was regularly playing instrumental excerpts from popular operettas, but then, in July 1929, Radio Orchestra took over the presenting of numbers from works of Lehár, Millöcker, Suppé, Kálmán, Johann Strauss, Oscar Strauss, Robert Stolz, Bruno Granichstaedten and many others. Radio management also introduced regular live performances of operetta arias that were, by the autumn of 1930, mostly realized by the members of Belgrade Operetta and Belgrade Operetta at Claridges/Slavija such as Paulina Jesić, Evgenije Gabajev, Zlata and Đuka Trbuhović, Iraida Komarevska, Ivan Gorski, Milan Odžić, and Jaroslav Pleciti.²⁸ An interesting novelty was introduced in 1934, 1936, 1937 and 1940 programming with live performances of complete operetta works such as *Die Teresina*, *Das Hollandweibchen*, *Die Bajadere*, *Die Polenblut*, *Der Vogelhändler*, *Baron Trenck* with Jovan Srbulj conducting.

Another fruitful source for apprehending the operetta productions were sound movies which since 1930 became dominant in Belgrade cinemas. Already in the earliest stages of the development of this new type of media, operetta works from the past were a great inspiration and a cornerstone for film creations, which was also characteristic of the silent movie era. Particularly German film companies were very keen on creating adaptations of popular operettas of pre-WWI and post-WWI time and, as a result, dozens of films were released during the 1930s that were grounded on operetta works. Most of them were screened in Belgrade cinema halls with several months or more of delay.²⁹ Given the fact that the majority of these adaptations were released in 1934 and 1935 – when Belgrade was left without regular operetta performances even during the summer season – this could serve as compensation.

ATTEMPTS TO (RE)ESTABLISH A STABLE OPERETTA COMPANY (1936–1938)

After a series of unsuccessful projects aiming at establishing regular operetta performances that took place in 1934³⁰ and 1935,³¹ there was finally a sign of changing

28 These shows appeared under the title “Operetski čas” [Operetta Hour] or “Operetsko veče” [Operetta Evening].

29 See Table 2 in Appendix.

30 For the 1934 summer season, a director Emil Nadvornik, founded an operetta company that gave performances at Kolarac terrace. The company included mostly Slovenian artists such as Ksenija Maja, Sonja Florjančič, Erna Moharjeva, Belizar Sancin, Anton Harastović and others and was active between the end of June and the beginning of September 1934. Their repertoire was based on only one work – Otmar Hofer’s *Ljubavni gas* [The Love’s Energy]. See AY, 66-359-599, 1934.

31 During May 1935 a Russian drama company led by Julija Rakitina with artists such as Ksenija

circumstances in the autumn of 1936. According to archival documents, the former manager and conductor of the Belgrade Operetta at Claridges/Slavija decided to give another try to the idea of creating a permanent operetta company. As early as in August 1935 Srbulj wrote to the Arts Department of the Ministry of Education asking for permission to found an operetta theatre in Belgrade on the basis of the Law on Tax Exemption (AY, 66-359-599, 9 August 1935). He was willing to engage only Yugoslav artists and believed that his own artistic results including his work as an opera conductor in the National Theatre, as well as a conductor at Radio Belgrade and the Obilić Academic Choral Society, could serve as a guarantee of the quality of performances of the future Belgrade Operetta. Although the response from the Ministry was positive together with the opinion of managers of National Theatre who admitted for the first time since the post-WWI years they did not have jurisdiction to approve or disapprove the foundation of other theatres in Yugoslav capital,³² there are no data on the functioning of Srbulj's operetta company in this period. A similar plea was sent to the same institution a year later, in October 1936, this time with a request for acquiring a status of a privileged theatre company (*povlašćeno pozorište*) which was approved (AY, 66-359-599, 1 October 1936). Only several days later an announcement appeared in Belgrade press regarding the ceremonial opening of the Belgrade Operetta with a popular Hervé's work *Mam'zelle Nitouche* on the repertoire and a guest performance of a famous soprano Mimi Balkanska in the hall of the Russian House [Ruski dom] (Anonymous 1936c). Balkanska also participated in the premiere of Kálmán's *Silva* (1915) on 25 October 1936 by the newly-founded ensemble. Aside from the news on premieres and performed works along with company's touring and guest performances, there were occasional overviews of its artistic quality that were mostly not affirmative. Konstantin Atanasijević, a critic of the daily *Vreme* who followed the opening performances of a new company was disappointed with its artistic results, finding the male choir "undisciplined", the female choir "unprepared" and the ballet group so modest "it could not perform on the provincial stage". Atanasijević did not predict a bright future for this company, finding Jovan Srbulj's attempt to be "imbued with dilettantism" and, as such, destined to fail (Atanasijević 1936).

Sibirjakova, Nataša Strahova (compère), Evgenije Marijašec and Nikola Vasiljev's jazz orchestra started with performances of revue-operetta *Koračaj kroz život*. The ensemble continued with their work later that year and during January 1936 they premiered classical Offenbach's *La Périchole* (1868) translated into Serbian with Evka Mikulić in the leading female role at Luksor Hall. See Anonymous 1935; 1936a.

32 The regular practice of the Arts' Department particularly during 1920s and early 1930s was to ask the management of National Theatre in Belgrade for the opinion regarding giving permissions for all types of private theatres. This step was completely unnecessary and was not in compliance with local regulations. The Arts Department was the only body inside the Ministry of Education that was responsible for defining and applying theatrical policies in the country including its capital city and no other intermediaries were required. The involvement of the management of Belgrade National Theatre in the process of granting permissions for private, mostly popular theatres, was significant and often resulted in withholding them a right to work and gain profits.

The most important moments in the first months of the revived Belgrade Operetta included a tour to Subotica (November 1936), a guest performance of the famous Yugoslav film diva Rakel Davido (December 1936, *Der Orlow*) and a premiere of a domestic operetta *Bosanska ljubav* [Bosnian Love] composed by Alfred Pordes and written by Blanka Chudoba (22 December 1936).³³ After a relatively promising start, the company made a break in January and February 1937 and the reason was the problem with the hall of the Russian House that was not available all the time, neither for performances nor for rehearsals (Anonymous 1937a). Srbulj and his company had to wait for the transfer to Luksor Hall that had better conditions for operetta staging. Finally, the season could be continued in March 1937, and for that purpose the management decided to bring more spectacular works on stage and to engage acclaimed Yugoslav artists. The grand re-opening was initiated with the premiere of Paul Abraham's *Ball im Savoy* (1932) (1 March 1937) that included the guest performance of Zagreb Opera member Slobodan Živojinović. This time the critic of *Vreme*, in addition to some minor complaints, concluded that "the evening before, it was evident that Belgrade has an excellent basis, excellent actors and ensemble that someone selected really skillfully".³⁴

The promising start was solidified in the following weeks and months owing to introducing of some of the most important Yugoslav operetta works such as Ivo Tijardović's *Mala Floramye* (10 April 1937), as well as the earlier and latest operetta "breakthroughs".³⁵ Besides, the ensemble was reinforced with a director Ferdo Delak, "one of our best modernist operetta directors" who was also known for his work on documentary films (Anonymous 1937b). In June 1937 the complete re-organisation of Belgrade Operetta took place and as a result one of its leading singers, Iraida Komarevska, became "the first female Theatre manager in our country" (B. F. 1937). Komarevska announced the opening of the summer season on 1 July 1937 at the Claridges terrace, underlying that, although the ensemble could already start giving performances, they decided they should not "present to the audience some mediocre plays" (Ibid). Along with Ferdo Delak who was engaged as a director and Jovan Srbulj who was responsible for the quality of musical performance, there were also artists that entertained the spectators in the previous months.³⁶ The new works were planned to be introduced into the repertoire aside from those that were

33 The artists that took part in the performance of this work were: Ivka Berković, Tatjana Hitrina, Ms. Vuličević, Dino Ljubišić, Dragutin Levak, Josip Bakotić, Milan Odžić, etc. See Anonymous 1936e.

34 Aside from Živojinović, there were also Iraida Komarevska, Tatjana Hitrina, Ivan Đurđević, Josip Bakotić, Milan Odžić, and a step dancer Mr. Moreno. See Atansijević 1937.

35 Among the new operetta works were Lehár's *Die lustige Witwe* (1905) (premiered on 24 March 1937), Michael (Mihály) Eisenmann's *Ein Kuss und sonst gar nichts* (1933) (premiered on 17 April 1937), Oscar Strauss' *Die Teresina* (1925) (9 May 1937; this work was on the repertoire of the first Belgrade Operetta), Nikola Vasiljev's (Russian émigré composer settled in Belgrade) *Pesma Tahitija* [Songs of Tahiti] (1937?) (15 May 1937; see Lj. B. 1937).

36 Among them were Komarevska, Tatjana Hitrina, Dino Ljubišić, Božidar Vranicki, Ivan Đurđević, Josip Bakotić, Milan Odžić, but also Ivka Berković and Rakela Ferari.

regularly performed before June 1937.³⁷ Despite the plans, the company postponed the opening of the season to 31 July 1937 and changed its name to Kooperativna beogradska opereta [Cooperative Belgrade Operetta]. This step was announced in the plea of the theatre's management Iraidia Komarevska, Ivan Đurđević and Božidar Vranicki to the Arts' Department which was approved and, as a result, their theatre was given a status of a privileged theatre (AY, 66-359-599).

The grand opening included the premiere of Jara Beneš' *Der heilige Antonius* (31 July) for which the ensemble took serious preparations. It is not clear whether Jovan Srbulj remained in the ensemble, since only the names of Nikola Vasiljev and Jaroslav Pleciti appeared in the press announcements as resident conductors. The impressions of the performance were positive, particularly regarding the work of Ferdo Delak and a guest dancer – Rod Riffler (Rudolf Ungar) (Anonymous 1937d). It was expected that this company would be “a great entertainment for Belgrade inhabitants” (Ibid). Still, after several weeks of work in the Claridges terrace whose rental was, according to testimonies of the company's leading artists Ivan Đurđević and Tatjana Hitrina (Anonymous 1937e, 1937f), very costly and represented a great burden to the functioning of Cooperative Belgrade Operetta, along with rainy August evenings that discouraged the audience, and after the opening of the winter season in the Russian House, in October 1937, this theatre was dissolved. Although no notices on its closure were published in Belgrade press, it can be assumed that the main reason was the accumulated debt during the summer season, which also resulted in the miserable incomes of artists. As one of them claimed: “everything else ought to be paid, and when it comes to our salaries – only if anything is left. Often it is nothing, but we are cheerful. The only hope is that warm summer nights will make our costly terrace crowded. Aside from all our troubles, it is not rare that the owner complains about the low consumption of coffee during performances. He tells that to us. What can we say. Who should complain to whom. It should be better for us and for him...”. (Anonymous 1937e)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the years preceding the outbreak of the WWII in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (April 1941), there were numerous small-scale undertakings regarding operetta performance, but none of them lasted more than a few months. Therefore, the long-lasting struggle to create a stable operetta theatre in Belgrade actually ended with the dissolution of the Cooperative Belgrade Operetta. Given the available data, there are certain phenomena that ought to be outlined concerning a failure to firmly embed operetta in Belgrade's cultural and entertainment spheres. To begin with, it is evident that the costs of production of operetta works were too high throughout the interwar period and particularly before the mid-1930s due to heavy taxation of

37 The following works were planned to be premiered: Jara Beneš' *Der heilige Antonius* (1934), Paul Abraham's *Die Blume von Hawaii* (1931) and others, while the repertoire would also include *Ball im Savoy*, *Mala Floramyje*, *Pesma Tahitija*, *Die lustige Witwe*, *Silva*, etc. See Anonymous 1937c.

the commercial segment of the cultural sphere. This problem was emphasised many times by Jovan Srbulj in his pleas to the Arts Department and it undoubtedly represented a great obstacle to maintaining a quality ensemble and regularity of performances. Taxation “methodology” was under the considerable influence of the Ministry of Education’s cultural policy and its approach to popular production, including theatrical production. The idea that such products should be suppressed and not given a possibility to thrive was crucial to representatives of the Arts Department, most of whom belonged to the Serbian cultural elite and who openly expressed resistance to “commercial strivings” in cultural life. In this process, their most reliable allies were managers of the National Theatre in Belgrade and its various departments, who used every chance to point to the “low artistic quality” of many popular theatres that emerged every now and then in the Yugoslav capital. Although cultural-policy makers’ hostile attitude towards this part of the cultural sphere did not discourage popular theatre companies to initiate performances, it surely had negative effects on their profits. As a consequence, such companies were under great pressure to find adequate performance space and to satisfy the audience’s expectations not only in terms of repertoire but also regarding engaged artists, scenery, costumes, etc.

Another important factor that indisputably left a deep mark on the whole commercial segment of the cultural sphere including the operetta performing was the rapid rise of silent and then sound film consumption as well as the number of cinemas. According to some of the rare statistics on daily attendance of Belgrade cinemas from 1924, approximately 3,000 people watched movies every day (Anonymous 1924). This number gradually grew despite economic crisis in the early 1930s. For instance, in 1935 almost 2,640,000 cinema tickets were sold in Belgrade – on average 7,232 tickets per day (Anonymous 1936d). At the same time, Belgrade had 7 cinemas in 1925, but a decade later, in 1937, their number doubled (see M. A. N. 1937). Aside from the constant rise of a number of cinemagoers and cinema visits as well as the share of film consumers from the lower classes, other segments of Belgrade entertainment sphere also underwent great expansion in the decade preceding the WWII. This was particularly characteristic for the domain of popular theatre, whose very diverse embodiments were spreading rapidly in Belgrade’s central and peripheral districts.³⁸

The fierce competition in the commercial part of the cultural sphere, especially during the second half of the 1930s, between the large number of small-scale popular theatres with cheap tickets and cinemas that were focused on the reruns of al-

38 A report of the *Vreme* journalist from 1936 illustrates this phenomenon very compellingly: “While press is commenting on the crisis in theatre, meanwhile in the number of Belgrade taverns there are small theatres with their regular audience and rich ‘artistic repertoire’. Many former actors that cannot find engagement, jobless sales assistants, would-be writers and other ‘socially unstable elements’ and coffee-shop owners on the verge of collapse are trying to attract as many spectators as possible and apart from the culinary delicacies and local beverages, offer entertainment in the form of popular theatrical plays, farces, vaudevilles, comic operettas and other ‘artistic numbers’. Such small theatres exist in numerous Belgrade taverns and they give performances every night. You can find them both at the periphery, and at the centre where a more wealthy audience is coming”. (Anonymous 1936b)

ready premiered films at very affordable prices, probably contributed a lot to creating unfavourable conditions for the establishment of permanent operetta theatre in Belgrade. Experiences from Belgrade at the time, as well as the majority of urban centres in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, show that it was not easy to maintain more elaborate theatrical performances, whether commercial or not, without the state support of a different kind – via tax exemptions, regular subsidies or both. Although the rigid approach of the state cultural policy-makers to operetta performance that was typical in the 1920s softened in the next decade, without continual financial or infrastructural support operetta companies could not overcome many challenges in the expanding entertainment sector. This was hardly possible even for the most prestigious state-supported national theatres in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana which would probably end up in bankruptcy had not the so-called “theatre-tax” (1934) been introduced.

Although many commentators on Belgrade cultural life pointed to the “bad luck” of Belgrade operetta companies, as they could barely function for a longer time, it was actually the result of generally adverse circumstances. At the time when the first, more stable operetta company appeared in Belgrade in 1927 global spread of “mechanical music” (gramophone records, radio shows), and later sound film, brought profound changes into the spheres of culture and entertainment, and the countries at the periphery such as the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia were not spared. Besides the attractiveness of Belgrade cinemas, another powerful actor in this field became Radio Belgrade. Although in its first years the number of radio subscribers was approximately less than 5% of Belgrade population, this station regularly aired music from operettas in various formats – via live performances of instrumental or vocal numbers, of whole operetta works and via excerpts from gramophone records. Adding to all of that the lack of even “moral” support of state cultural policy-makers, moreover, their anti-operetta stance throughout 1920s, the expectations of enthusiasts such as Radoslav Vesnić, Jovan Srbulj or Iraida Komarevska turned out to be too optimistic and unrealistic. Still, their efforts were not insignificant. As the historical reconstruction of work of several operetta companies in interwar Belgrade shows the operetta scene was occasionally very dynamic, refreshing and it enriched local entertainment and cultural spheres to a certain degree. It also contributed to the artistic development of groups of singers, actors and dancers that played important role in the spread of popular theatre throughout Yugoslavia before and after WWII.³⁹

39 On the Yugoslav interwar operetta scene see more in Weiss (ed.) 2021; on the development of interwar operetta production and performing in various parts of the world see Belina and Scott (eds.) 2020.

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APPENDIX. Table 1. Repertoire of Belgrade Operetta theatre, May 1927 – September 1928.⁴¹

1927	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i> [<i>Grofica Marica</i>] (1924)	* F. Lehár: <i>Der Rastelbinder</i> [<i>Drotar</i>] (1902)	* L. Fall: <i>Die Rose von Stambul</i> [<i>Stambulska ruža</i>] (1916)	M. Lengyel: <i>Antonia</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>	L. Fall: <i>Madame Pompadour</i>	L. Fall: <i>Die Rose von Stambul</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>
E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i> [<i>Grofica Marica</i>] (1924)	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>	R. Benatzky: <i>Adieu Mimi</i> (1926)	F. Lehár: <i>Der Rastelbinder</i>	J. Gilbert: <i>Die keusche Susanne</i>	O. Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>
O. Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i> [<i>Poljačka krv</i>] (1913)	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i>	B. Granichstaedten: <i>Der Orlov</i> [<i>Orlov</i>] (1925)	F. Lehár: <i>Der Rastelbinder</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i>	* F. Lehár: <i>Zigeunerliebe</i> [<i>Ciganska ljubav</i>] (1910)	F. Lehár: <i>Die blaue Mazur</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Das Hollandweibchen</i>
* A. Szirmai: <i>Mágnás Miska</i> [<i>Kavaljer Miško</i>] (1916)	* E. Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i> [<i>Jeserji manevar</i>] (1909)	E. Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i> [<i>Jeserji manevar</i>] (1909)	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i>	J. Offenbach: <i>La belle Héloène</i>	R. Benatzky: <i>Adieu Mimi</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i>
* E. Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i> [<i>Bajadera</i>] (1921)	O. Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>	O. Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Das Hollandweibchen</i>	B. Granichstaedten: <i>Der Orlov</i>	R. Benatzky: <i>Adieu Mimi</i>	* F. Lehár: <i>Der Graf von Luxemburg</i> [<i>Grof Luksenburg</i>] (1909)	J. Gilbert: <i>Die keusche Susanne</i>
	O. Strauss: <i>Die Teresina</i> [<i>Terezina</i>] (1925)	O. Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>	* L. Fall: <i>Madame Pompadour</i> [<i>Madam Pompadur</i>] (1922)	E. Kálmán: <i>Das Hollandweibchen</i>	B. Granichstaedten: <i>Der Orlov</i>	Luxemburg [<i>Grof Luksenburg</i>] (1909)	J. Gilbert: <i>Katja, die Tänzerin</i>
		* M. Lengyel: <i>Antonia</i> (comedy) (1925)	L. Fall: <i>Die Rose von Stambul</i>	L. Fall: <i>Madame Pompadour</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i>	F. Lehár: <i>Der Graf von Luxemburg</i>

41 The works that were performed for the first time after settling of Belgrade Operetta in Yugoslav capital are marked with asterisk.

E. Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i> [Кнегинја џардаша] (1915)				F. Lehár: <i>Die blaue Mazur</i> [Poslednja mazurka] (1920)	E. Lehár: <i>Die blaue Mazur</i> [Poslednja mazurka] (1920)	* J. Gilbert: <i>Die keusche Susanne</i> [Čedna Suzana] (1910)	E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>	H. Berté: <i>Das Dreimäderlhaus</i> [Tri devojčice] (1916)
* E. Kálmán: <i>Das Hollandweibchen</i> [Hollandska ženica] (1920)				E. Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i>	L. Fall: <i>Die Rose von Stambul</i>	* J. Rajhenić Raha: <i>Verenica njegovog veličanstva</i> (1925)	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i>
				J. Offenbach: <i>La belle Hélène</i> [Lepa Jelena] (1864)	F. Lehár: <i>Die blaue Mazur</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i>	O. Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i>
				O. Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i>	* J. Gilbert: <i>Katja, die Tänzerin</i> [Igračica Kaća] (1923)	B. Granichstaeden: <i>Der Orlov</i>
							R. Benatzky: <i>Adieu Mirni</i>	O. Strauss: <i>Die Teresina</i>
							* L. Fall: <i>Die geschiedene Frau</i> [Razvedena žena] (1908)	M. Lengyel: <i>Antonia</i>

IVANA VESIĆ

UNDER POLITICAL AND MARKET PRESSURES: THE STAGING OF OPERETTA IN INTERWAR BELGRADE

1928	February	March	April	May	June	July	August
O. Strauss: <i>Die Teresina</i>	* E. Kálmán: <i>Die Zirkusprinzessin</i> [<i>Cirkuska princeza</i>] (1926)	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Zirkusprinzessin</i>	S. Jones: <i>The Geisha</i>	No press records of held performances	* N. Arsenović: <i>Leskovčani u Parizu</i> (revue)	M. Hennequin, P. Veber: <i>Madame la Présidente</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i> *
F. Lehár: <i>Der Graf von Luxemburg</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>The Geisha</i> [<i>Gejša</i>] (1896)	* S. Jones: <i>The Geisha</i> [<i>Gejša</i>] (1896)	F. Lehár: <i>Frasquita</i> [<i>Frasquita</i>] (1922)		* M. Hennequin, P. Veber: <i>Madame la Présidente</i> [<i>Predsednikovica</i>] (farce) (1912)	* F. Lehár: <i>Wo die Lerche singt</i> [<i>Ševa</i>] (1918)	J. Offenbach: <i>La belle Hélène</i>
B. Granichstaedten: <i>Der Orlow</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i>		A. Cana: <i>Der Werwolf</i>	F. Lehár: <i>Frasquita</i>	F. Lehár: <i>Frasquita</i>
L. Fall: <i>Die geschiedene Frau</i>	J. Gilbert: <i>Kafja, die Tänzerin</i>	J. Gilbert: <i>Die keusche Susanne</i>	B.		F. Lehár: <i>Frasquita</i>	O. Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>	O. Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>
F. Lehár: <i>Die blaue Mazur</i>	F. Lehár: <i>Der Rastelbinder</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i>	R. Benatzky: <i>Adieu Mimi</i>		E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>
J. Gilbert: <i>Die keusche Susanne</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i>	B.	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Zirkusprinzessin</i>		L. Fall: <i>Die Rose von Stambul</i>	B.	J. Strauss: <i>Die Fledermaus</i>
J. Gilbert: <i>Kafja, die Tänzerin</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i>	Granichstaedten: <i>Der Orlow</i>	J. Gilbert: <i>Die keusche Susanne</i>		* A. Cana: <i>Der Werwolf</i> [<i>Vukodlak</i>] (farce)	Granichstaedten: <i>Der Orlow</i>	J. Strauss: <i>Die Fledermaus</i>
E. Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i>	B. Granichstaedten: <i>Der Orlow</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Das Hollandweibchen</i>		M. Lengyel: <i>Antonia</i>	O. Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>	F. Lehár: <i>Wo die Lerche singt</i>
R. Benatzky: <i>Adieu Mimi</i>	R. Benatzky: <i>Adieu Mimi</i>	F. Lehár: <i>Der Graf von Luxemburg</i>	* O. Strauss: <i>Der letzte Walzer</i> [<i>Poslednji valcer</i>] (1920)		E. Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i>	* J. Strauss: <i>Die Fledermaus</i> [<i>Slepi miš</i>] (1874)	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Zirkusprinzessin</i>
						E. Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i>	N. Arsenović: <i>Leskovčani u Parizu</i>

E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Das Hollandweibchen</i>				E. Kálmán: <i>Die Zirkusprinzessin</i>	* J. Gilbert: <i>Die Frau im Hermelin</i> [<i>Dama u hermelini</i>] (1919)
H. Berté: <i>Das Dreimäderlhaus</i>	* F. Lehár: <i>Frasquita</i> [<i>Fraskita</i>] (1922)				F. Lehár: <i>Frasquita</i>	
F. Lehár: <i>Der Rastelbinder</i>	R. Benatzky: <i>Adieu Mimi</i>				E. Kálmán: <i>Gräfin Mariza</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Die Bajadere</i>
E. Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i>					J. Offenbach: <i>La belle Hélène</i>	M. Hennequin, P. Véber: <i>Madame la Présidente</i>
M. Lengyel: <i>Antonia</i>					H. Berté: <i>Das Dreimäderlhaus</i>	E. Kálmán: <i>Ein Herbstmanöver</i>
E. Kálmán: <i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i>						R. Benatzky: <i>Adieu Mimi</i>
O. Nedbal: <i>Polenblut</i>						* F. Lehár: <i>Clo-Clo</i> [<i>Klo-Klo</i>] (1924)

Table 2. List of operetta works adapted to sound film in the 1930s (selection).

1930	<i>The Rogue Song</i> (based on Franz Lehár's <i>Die Zigeunerliebe</i> ; director: Lionel Barrymore; screened in Belgrade in the same year under the title <i>Hajdučka pesma</i>)	1930	<i>Das Land des Lächelns</i> (based on Franz Lehár's work of the same title; director: Max Reichmann; screened in Belgrade in late 1930 and early 1931 under the title <i>Zemlja sunca</i>)	1931	<i>Viktoria und ihr Husar</i> (based on Paul Abraham's work of the same title; director: Richard Oswald; screened in Belgrade in the same year under the title <i>Viktorija i njen husar</i>)	1931	<i>Die Faschingsfee</i> (based on Franz Lehár's work of the same title; director: Hans Steinhoff; screened in Belgrade in the same year under the title <i>Pokladna vila</i>)	1932	<i>Friederike</i> (based on Franz Lehár's work of the same title; director: Fritz Friedmann-Frederich; this film was not screened in Belgrade)	<i>Die Blume von Hawaii</i> (based on Paul Abraham's work of the same title; director: Hans Oswald; screened in Belgrade in 1933 under the title <i>Havajska ruža</i>)	1933	<i>Der Zarewitsch</i> (based on Franz Lehár's work of the same title; director: Victor Janson; screened in Belgrade in 1934 under the title <i>Carević</i>)	1934	<i>Die Csárdásfürstin</i> (based on Emmerich Kálmán's work of the same title; director: Georg Jacoby; screened in Belgrade in 1935 under the title <i>Silva</i>)	<i>Der letzte Walzer</i> (based on Oscar Strauss' work of the same title; director: Georg Jacoby; screened in Belgrade in the same year under the title <i>Poslednji valcer</i>)	1935	<i>Im weissen Rössl</i> (based on Ralph Benatzky's work of the same title; director: Carl Lamac; screened in Belgrade in 1936 under the title <i>Kod belog konja</i>)	1936	<i>La vie Parisienne</i> (based on Offenbach's music; director: Robert Siodemak; screened in Belgrade in the late 1936 and early 1937 under the title <i>Pariski život</i>)	<i>Wo die Lerche singt</i> (based on Franz Lehár's work of the same title; director: Carl Lamac; screened in Belgrade in the same year under the title <i>Ševa</i>)	1937	<i>Die Fledermaus</i> (based on Johann Strauss' work of the same title; directors: Paul Verhoeven and Hans H. Zerlett; screened in Belgrade in the late 1937 and early 1938 under the title <i>San i java</i>)
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<p><i>Der Bettelstudent</i> (based on Carl Millöcker's work of the same title; director: Victor Janson; this film was not screened in Belgrade, but it appeared on cinema repertoires of other Yugoslav towns)</p>	<p><i>Mam'zelle Nitouche</i> (based on Hervé's work of the same title; director: Marc Allégret; this version was not screened in Belgrade)</p> <p><i>Mam'zelle Nitouche</i> (based on Hervé's work of the same title; director: Carl Lamac [Karel Lamač]; screened in Belgrade under the title <i>Mamizel Nituš</i>)</p>	<p><i>Der Diamant des Zaren</i> (based on Bruno Granichstaedten's <i>Der Orlov</i>; director: Max Neufeld; screened in Belgrade in 1933 under the title <i>Orlov</i>)</p>		<p><i>Polenblut</i> (adaptation of Jara Benés on the basis of Oscar Nedbal's work; director: Carl Lamac; this film was not screened in Belgrade)</p>		<p><i>Der Bettelstudent</i> (based on Carl Millöcker's work of the same title; director: Georg Jacoby; screened in Belgrade in the same year under the title <i>Đak prosjak</i>)</p> <p><i>The Last Waltz</i> (based on Oscar Strauss' <i>Der letzte Wälzer</i>; director: Leo Mittler; this film was not screened in Belgrade)</p>	
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ИВАНА ВЕСИЋ

ПОД ПРИТИСКОМ ПОЛИТИКЕ И ТРЖИШТА:
ИЗВОЂЕЊЕ ОПЕРЕТЕ У МЕЂУРАТНОМ БЕОГРАДУ

(РЕЗИМЕ)

Историјат поставки оперета у Београду није везан за институцију Народног позоришта, тада једног од трију централних позоришта са значајном државном субвенцијом. Негативни ставови које су према овом жанру јасно изражавали позоришни званичници, али и већина музичара и музичких стручњака још почетком 20. века у београдској средини, одржали су се и након Великог рата, стога су кључни носиоци његове популаризације биле приватне позоришне трупе и позоришта. Најважнији догађај који је иницирао формирање трајније оперетске институције у Београду била је одлука Министарства просвете Краљевине СХС о расформирању оперетских трупа у обласним позориштима, спроведена током 1927. године. Захваљујући таквим околностима, велики део уметника из некадашњих народних позоришта у Осијеку и Новом Саду пронашао је уточиште у престоници Краљевине и донео одлуку да ту настави да наступа од маја 1927. године. Из тог језгра настала је Београдска оперета, прва од неколико трупа које су биле активне у међуратном периоду. Од јесени 1927. па све до јесени 1930. године у Београду су, захваљујући раду овог позоришта и касније из њега произашлих нових трупа (Београдска оперета код Клерица/Славије, Модерна оперета), редовно извођена дела махом савремених аустријских и мађарских оперетских композитора уз повремени додатак старијих, класичних оперета, те комедија, ревија и фарси. Ипак, упркос тежњи да одржавају континуираност представа, да често уводе нова, неизвођена дела, а евентуално и да ангажују популарне уметнике из региона, наведена оперетска позоришта нису успевала да се изборе с великим материјалним трошковима који су, осим за изнајмљивање простора, набавку нотног материјала, израду костима и сценографије и надокнаде уметницима, проистицали и из многобројних потраживања државе и разних државних инстанци (општина, срез, полицијска управа, итд.). Иако се ситуација у вези с државним таксама значајно поправила током 30-их година прошлог века увођењем олакшица, ипак ни то није било довољно да се новостворене оперетске трупе у другој половини ове деценије одрже у дужем временском периоду. Томе је, претпостављамо, значајно допринела висока конкуретност која се развила унутар сфера културе и забаве услед експанзије биоскопа, те бројних барова и кафана, који су нудили и разноврстан музичко-сценски програм. Додатну неповољност чинило је и оснивање Радио Београда у марту 1929. године, чија је управа у годинама пред Други светски рат значајну пажњу поклањала управо популаризовању музике из оперета. Имајући у виду богат избор културно-забавних садржаја, особито током

30-их година прошлог века, њихову просторну и материјалну приступачност, али и постојање различитих могућности за уживање у оперетској музици, не само у позоришним условима, већ и код куће (радијски програм) или у биоскопу (адаптације популарних оперета), јасно је да је без неке врсте државне потпоре у виду субвенција или обезбеђене сале за извођење, стварање сталног оперетског позоришта у Београду било осуђено на неуспех. Свакако, нека врста антиоперетског наратива, која је доминирала међу носиоцима културне политике земље, као и њене престонице, додатно је компликовала иначе тешку ситуацију.