

Politika daily, April 8, 2009

Interview with Angelina Atlagic by Borka Trebjesanin

Every Show is Like the First

ANGELINA ATLAGIĆ
Set & costume design
www.angelinaatlagic.com

The fact that this is my fourth premiere in Spain and that I, as a foreigner, received the 'Max' award speaks of their openness, says Angelina Atlagic, costume designer

Costume designer Angelina Atlagic has received the Spanish 'Max' award. The prize she received a couple of days ago in Las Palmas was awarded her for costume design in the production of 'Barroco', directed by Tomas Pandur, that had its premiere in September 2007 on the stage of Culture Centre in Madrid. During her prolific career Angelina Atlagic designed over 150 plays, ballets, operas, children's and puppet plays, three feature films and many culture and entertainment TV programmes. She won numerous local and international awards for her work.

You travelled to Russia to receive the 'Chaika' award, you've just returned from Spain with the prestigious 'Max' award?

'Max' Award is a great honour. I have to admit that the nomination itself was like an award for me, because my work has been singled out among the entire yearly production in Spain, which is a great success in itself. Spain is a country in expansion, this is particularly felt in the field of culture, the supply of cultural events is great and investments in culture are ample because they are aware that culture and the arts are the fields through which the image of a country throughout the world is created in the best way. The fact that I'm doing my fourth show in Spain and that I, as a foreigner, have received this important award, speaks of their openness and their desire not to be enclosed within their own geographic borders.

You like working in Moscow, where they expect strong ideas and minute drafts. You work in Greece, Italy, Macedonia, Serbia... What are the similarities and the differences when it comes to your job?

Even though it could be said that theatre and working in theatre are very much alike in all meridians and all continents, there still are some specifics. In Italy, everything that has to do with drama theatre works on the company bases. Actors and entire teams gather around a project and for several months they are all exclusively tied to the show they're

working on. Costume and set designers do not only provide ideas, but are also encouraged to get involved in the realisation of the costumes and set. This is quite an uncommon approach and quite the opposite from the one in Russia, where costume designer is not allowed to touch their costume, let alone sew or paint something on it. I have to admit that such specificities and differences make me happy and that they enrich my work as a costume designer. Taking into account that in our country I learned to do everything related to making of costumes, I never found it hard to adapt to any of these places. Still, the pleasure of painting the entire décor, together with my assistant, I have had only in Italy.

You've dressed army leaders, warriors, queens, peasants, princesses, fairy tale heroes. How do you achieve this authenticity on stage?

I read each play several times. It helps me dive into a story and see it from the inside. Even though the first part of a costume designer's work includes research of the period in question, for historic accuracy, I try not to forget the first impression that I had while reading the play text. Even after substantial research, I often return to initial ideas I'd had at the very beginning. Even though I now have large experience in my work, I try to approach each show as though it were my first. Certain amount of insecurity is normal in this way of working when you're trying to find your way around in a brand new, unfamiliar situation from which something unexpected and different is to emerge. Working abroad constantly puts me in such situations in which I have to find my way in new and unfamiliar territories, constantly starting from zero.

How is theatrical clothing different from that in everyday life?

There is a different kind of reality in theatre and it often happens that what's real and truthful in real life appears phoney on stage, whilst an artificially made prop feels real. This principle of reversed reality can be seen in costume especially. Costumes realistically transferred from real life or historically accurate ones look unconvincing or exaggerated on stage, which is why it is necessary for each costume to undergo a sort of stage transformation and become 'theatrical'. This is a kind of translation into the language of the stage and it might be for this very reason that it is neither easy nor simple to do reconstruction of a historic period on stage, just as it is neither easy nor simple to have a contemporary costume on stage.

Has costume design stepped out of theatre and come closer to fashion design, and if yes, how much so?

These two fields have come to be very entwined recently and they even switch places. On catwalks we increasingly see costumes that belong on stage more, because they are very much inspired by history, very rich in form, colour and details and the very technique of making the

costumes has come closer to the ways in which it is done in theatre. At the same time, on stage, we see dominance of contemporary fashion costume, classics in contemporary costumes are very trendy and it is almost considered dated to do costumes of adequate historic periods. I think this is a matter of moment and that trends are constantly shifting, just like fashion itself. What gets established as a trend one day becomes obsolete the day after. Therefore, through reading the plays and becoming profoundly familiar with the very structure of a piece, I try to discover whether it's better to remain in the realm of history or whether the change of period would enable better interpretation of the play itself. That may be the reason for which some translations of classics into contemporary costume work, and others don't.

How much it is necessary for you to be familiar with history when you do a period costume?

This is the basis for doing a historical costume. Even though we are constantly studying the history of costume, each play involves research in which something new is discovered. This research is extremely important for me, even though I'd already decided to do a stylisation of the period or transfer it into contemporary costume, I always start with researching history in order to find some details that can be transferred from one period to another, or something that would serve merely as a vague hint towards a certain period. This research often serves only to convince me that all that is not necessary to start with and that I should do costumes in a different way altogether.