

**THE DIRECTING SCHOOL OF THE SYRDARYA THEATRE  
(1978–1991): ISSUES OF PRESERVING AND DIGITISING  
THEATRE HISTORY**

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**Abstract.** This article analyses the period of creative maturity of the Syrdarya Regional Musical Drama Theatre between 1978 and 1991. It examines the directing school formed under Makhkam Muhammedov (1978–1982) and Jura Mahmudov (1983–1994), the distinctive stage solutions of *Richard III* (1980) and *King Lear* (1990), and the creative partnership with Mashrab Boboyev. The article also addresses the theatre's bilingual repertoire policy. Theatre documents — programmes, newspaper reviews, actors' memoirs — are currently preserved mainly on paper, and many have been lost. The article proposes practical approaches to digitising these materials in order to preserve them for future generations and bring them into scholarly circulation.

**Keywords:** *Syrdarya Theatre, directing school, Makhkam Muhammedov, Jura Mahmudov, Mashrab Boboyev, Shakespeare on stage, theatre archive, digitisation, cultural heritage.*

The history of Uzbek theatre remains largely understudied in many respects. In particular, the developmental periods of regional theatres have frequently been overlooked. Yet during 1978–1991, the Syrdarya Regional Musical Drama Theatre became not merely a regional centre but a creative force recognised across the republic's theatrical landscape.

During this period, two major directors — Makhkam Muhammedov (1978–1982) and Jura Mahmudov (1983–1994) — established their own distinctive schools at the theatre. Under their leadership, a total of 61 productions were staged. Among these, two

Shakespearean tragedies — Richard III (1980) and King Lear (1990) — occupy a place of particular significance.

However, documents from this period — production programmes, newspaper reviews, photographs, and actors' memoirs — have until now been preserved only in paper form in the theatre archive, and much has already been lost. The purpose of this article is therefore to examine these materials and indicate ways to preserve them for future generations.

### **1. Makhkam Muhammedov and the Stanislavski Tradition**

When Makhkam Muhammedov arrived at the Syrdarya Theatre (1978–1982), the company was still a young ensemble without a clearly defined artistic direction.

In his stage work, Muhammedov drew upon the Stanislavski method, yet adapted it to the unique spiritual temperament of the Uzbek theatre. His famous principle was: "The stage is real life. The actor must not know he is acting — he must be living."

In Richard III (1980), the title role was performed by Adham Yusufaliyev. Theatre scholars M. Boboyev and M. Hazratqulov wrote of this production: "With their staging of Richard III, the artists of Syrdarya opened a new page in the history of Shakespeare on the Uzbek Soviet stage." This assessment was no accident — for a regional theatre, mounting Shakespeare at that time demanded considerable courage.

### **2. Jura Mahmudov and Experimental Stage Solutions**

Jura Mahmudov pursued a bolder path in his stage experiments. His most courageous decisions were manifested in the 1990 production of King Lear. Rather than presenting the performance on a conventional stage, the director chose to stage it in the theatre's artists' workshop — in the round, with the audience seated around the actors. This approach, employed for the first time at the Syrdarya Theatre, lent the tragedy of Lear an extraordinary immediacy for the spectator.

The difference in stage solutions between these two Shakespeare productions reveals a decade of creative growth: while *Richard III* (1980) was presented on a traditional stage, *King Lear* (1990) was offered to the audience in an entirely new space, in the round. This evolution testifies to the Syrdarya Theatre's readiness for artistic innovation.

### **3. Categories of Archival Materials (1978–1991)**

Materials relating to the Syrdarya Theatre during 1978–1991 survive in four principal categories.

#### **3.1. Repertoire Chronicle**

This document covers 210 productions staged between 1975 and 2024. It records for each production the premiere date, creative team (director, designer, conductor, choreographer), and genre. It is a fundamental source for researchers.

#### **3.2. Theatrical Tashkent Journal**

Issue No. 9 of 1981 was devoted entirely to the Syrdarya Theatre. This rare 32-page publication contains repertoire analysis, festival results, stage photographs, and creative portraits of the actors. It has not yet been catalogued in library holdings.

#### **3.3. Periodical Press Archive**

Reviews and interviews published in *Sirdaryo haqiqati*, *O'zbekiston madaniyati*, *Pravda Vostoka*, and *Sovet O'zbekistoni* reflect public response to the theatre's activities. Many of these are preserved in folders in the theatre archive; some have yellowed to the point of illegibility.

#### **3.4. Actors' Memoirs**

The manuscript memoirs of People's Artist of Uzbekistan Shafolat Rahmatullayeva concerning *Richard III* and *King Lear* contain information about directorial methodology found in no other document. Such living testimony is irreplaceable and will be lost forever with the passage of time.

### **4. A Three-Stage Digitisation Strategy**

By digitisation we do not mean a technically complex process, but rather simple and precise tasks. This can be accomplished in three stages.

### **Stage 1: Scanning and Storage**

Paper materials — production programmes, photographs, newspaper reviews — are converted to digital form using a standard scanner. Each file should be properly named (e.g., "1980\_Richard\_III\_programme.pdf") to facilitate retrieval. Actors' memoirs may be preserved as audio recordings.

### **Stage 2: Integration into Library Holdings**

Digitised materials are deposited in the electronic holdings of the library of the Uzbekistan State Institute of Arts and Culture. A brief catalogue card should be prepared for each document: what it is, when it was created, by whom, and which production it relates to. This makes the materials openly accessible and convenient for researchers, students, and all those interested in the theatre.

### **Stage 3: Comparative Documentation of the Two Shakespeare Productions**

Richard III (1980) and King Lear (1990) stand ten years apart. All available documents demonstrating how the theatre changed and how directorial style evolved during that decade should be assembled into a single collection. Such a compilation would become an invaluable source for future theatre scholarship.

### **5. Significance of the Work**

The importance of this undertaking may be viewed from three perspectives. First, the directing school of the Syrdarya Theatre will be documented as a coherent whole and made available to researchers as an open source; at present, no separate monograph on this subject exists. Second, a comparative study of Richard III and King Lear will yield new conclusions regarding the history of Shakespeare on the Uzbek stage. Third, digitised materials may serve directly as teaching resources in the fields of theatre studies and cultural history. For students, this is living history.

## 6. Conclusion

The directing school of the Syrdarya Theatre during 1978–1991 represents a bright but still insufficiently studied chapter in the history of Uzbek theatre. The most reliable and modern means of preserving these materials is their digitisation and incorporation into library holdings. This is not a complex technical project — it is a simple and precise expression of responsible stewardship towards our cultural heritage.

## References

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