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KAMAL THEATRE: MILESTONES IN HIS- TORY AND A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE



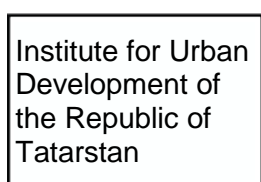




Government of
the Republic of
Tatarstan



Ministry of Culture
of the Republic of
Tatarstan



KAMAL THEATRE: MILESTONES IN HISTORY AND A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

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At the turn of the 19th-20th centuries colossal shifts have taken place in traditional Tatar society. A reformist Muslim group saw their calling as work for progress. The Jadids acted through education and enlightenment, trying to show the mullahs and all believers the advantages of a modern (secular) way of life. They emphasized the need to open the "gates of ijtihad" (theology) in order to solve the problems that European civilization posed to Muslims. In a broader sense, Jadidism was a movement for the spread of enlightenment, the development of the native language, literature and arts, the study of secular disciplines, the use of the achievements of science, and for the equality of women.

At the peak of the reforms - December 22, 1906 - Kazan, thanks to the efforts of amateur actors from among the democratic-minded youth, held the first publicly available performance in the Tatar language. Despite the fact that the first Tatar plays were written and performed by amateurs and madrasah shakirds in "home" theatres at the end of the 19th century, it was this day that went down in history as the date of the birth of the Tatar theatre.

1906

Date of birth of the Tatar theatre

In the spring of 1907, in Orenburg, a graduate of the Kazan Teachers' School, a talented musician and singer, an outstanding personality - Ilyas Kudashev-Ashkazarsky organized the first professional drama group with only young men at first. Later, in Nizhny Novgorod, the first actress of the Tatar and Muslim world, Sahibjamal Gizzatullina-Volzhs kaya, and Gabdulla Kariev, who was called by his contemporaries the "father of the Tatar theatre" during his lifetime and who in 1908 headed the drama group "Sayyar" ("Traveling"), joined the group in Nizhny Novgorod. The drama group owes its name to the founder of modern Tatar poetry, the great Gabdulla Tuqay, and to the nature of their activity - an incessant tour around the cities and villages of the empire. And at the dawn of their existence, in Soviet times, and today the theatre remains in continuous motion. Areas of compact residence of Tatars in Russia and the CIS, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Baku, Ufa, the Volga region, the Urals, Siberia, Kazakhstan, Central Asia and the Baltic, London and Helsinki, Bogota and Ausburg, Istanbul and Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai, Budapest and Delhi - this is far from the complete geography of the theatre in recent years.

During the first two decades, the theatre made a colossal leap forward and reached a qualitatively new artistic level. In 1926, it was the first among the national theatres of the USSR to receive Academic status. In 1939, the theatre got the name of the classic of Tatar drama Galiasgar Kamal. During this period, despite the Stalinist repressions that hit the Tatar culture, an original national drama emerged, represented by the names of K. Tinchurin, T. Gizzat, N. Isanbet; specific aesthetics and theatre school were formed, and dozens of actors received honorary titles. In 1957 the theatre was awarded the Order of Lenin, the highest award of the USSR.

The period from 1966 to 2002 went down in the history of the theatre as the "era of Marcel Salimzhanov" - the irreplaceable chief director and leader, People's Artist of the USSR, laureate of the State Prizes of Russia and Tatarstan, winner of the highest theatrical prize "Golden Mask". Currently, the theatre is headed by a graduate of RATI-GITIS, Honored Art Worker of Russia and Tatarstan, laureate of the State Prize of the Republic of Tatarstan and the International Prize named after Stanislavsky, Professor Farid Bikchantaev. The theatre's repertory includes over 20 titles based on world and Tatar classics, modern drama. The drama group is regularly replenished with talented young actors who graduate from Kazan theatre schools. Tatar State Academic Theatre named after G. Kamal, a participant in many prestigious festivals in Russia and abroad, is constantly on the way in the search for artistic excellence. In recent years, the theatre's performances have been repeatedly included in the competitive program and in the long-list of the National Theatre Award and the Golden Mask festival. The theatre is the organizer of the Nauruz International Theatre Festival and Educational Forum, the Remeslo All-Russian Festival of Young Directing, and the New Tatar Play competition.

The architectural appearance of the theatre, inscribed in the panorama of Lake Kaban in the historical center of the city, has long been included in the number of Kazan attractions and has become a place of pilgrimage for tourists and guests of the capital of Tatarstan.

The Kamal Theatre is a beacon of the culture of the Tatar people, a keeper of traditions and a springboard for creative daring, a synthesis of the nation's spiritual wealth accumulated over centuries, modern technologies and current meanings, an area of effective dialogue with the audience.



1926

The theatre received the Academic status - the first among the national theatres of the USSR

1939

The theatre was named after the classic of Tatar drama - Galiasgar Kamal

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Performances based on world and Tatar classics, modern drama in the repertory of the theatre

Aktanyshsky - received state municipal status. All these drama groups, to one degree or another, are

the heirs of the Kamal Theatre and are united by common traditions and national specifics of the performing arts. In close cooperation with professional theatres from different regions of the Republic of Tatarstan and the Russian Federation, amateur and folk Tatar theatre groups are developing and gaining strength. Independent Tatar theatre projects "Kaleb" and "Mon" also experienced the influence of the Kamal Theatre. The story and creativity of all Tatar theatres are closely intertwined, and in the center of this genealogy there is the Kamal Theatre - the direct heir of the first Tatar drama groups "Sayyar", "Nur", "Shirkat" and "An".

In the context of globalization, active urbanization, a multilingual urban environment, thanks to migration and demographic processes, the Republic of Tatarstan is in dire need of theatre services that take into account not only purely aesthetic, but also various socio-cultural needs of the population. The working days of today's repertory theatre are associated not only with the performances, but also with the awareness of the theatre building and its locations as a multifunctional cultural center that solves the most important communication tasks.



Theatre is where the crowd turns to the people, and the people to the nation



Thomas Mann

German writer, essayist, Nobel
Prize winner in Literature

It is no secret that modern Russian society is extremely polarized. The main divide between social strata continues to be the level of income: along with the super-rich Russians, there are almost 18 million people living below the poverty line in the country. But these are only extreme poles, between which there are many other groups, separated in turn by less tangible, but quite obvious boundaries. In Tatarstan, due to the well-thought-out economic strategy of the republic's leadership, these tendencies are less noticeable, but still quite tangible. And although the concepts of "wealth" and "poverty" are quite relative, no one questions the existence of social inequality in terms of the level of income of the population. In everyday life, this is expressed in the fact that conventionally rich and conventionally poor people practically do not intersect. Some drive rich cars, others use public transport, some live in country cottages and luxury houses in the center, others in Khrushchev houses and apartment blocks in the outskirts. Some go to the best hospitals, others sit for hours in district polyclinics in queues to get an appointment to specialists, some children study in elite schools, others stay at their place of residence. Some spend their vacations at their private dachas, others travel to foreign islands. The entire service sector: hairdressers, cafes and restaurants, beauty salons, public baths, etc. are tightly segmented. There is no point in denying the obvious: only in cultural institutions - museums, libraries, and concert halls - you can meet people from various social strata. The theatre occupies a special place in this area.

Thomas Mann's words "Theatre is where the crowd turns to the people, and the people to the nation" are becoming today not just a well-aimed aphorism, but one of the main tenets of the organization of theatrical business. Let us ask ourselves the question: "Why is this statement true

and what does it mean in practice?" In the theatre, the audience experiences collective emotions based on empathy for the Other in the role model of the world in a work of art. In other words, they learn sympathy, empathy, the ability to see oneself in the Other, develop imagination, and spirituality. The unification of people of different ages, gender, social status in a single burst of collective emotion awakens in the audience not only a sense of belonging to what is happening on the stage, but also to each other. Of course, this is the perfect picture. Not all performances carry a charge of true spirituality and sensuality, not to mention the purely entertaining aspect of theatrical activity, although in the broadest sense, light-hearted comedies serve the same purposes as works on important social issues. It is a paradox, but the feeling of coexistence in theatrical emotions and empathy for the ups and downs of the heroes is equally inherent in the audience of outstanding performances and mediocre ones. Deep performances give rise to strong emotions, up to numbness and catharsis, and frivolous performances provide some light emotional experiences. But both are an integral part of the spiritual world of a person. It is at least reckless to believe that a person consists entirely of pure spirituality. Therefore, according to the wise thought of the outstanding Russian researcher Rimma Krechetova, theatre is not always art, or not only art, and sometimes not art at all, but always a powerful socio-cultural factor that unites atomized individuals into a people and a nation. There are other practical considerations as well. French scientists have found a positive correlation between theatrical performances viewed by wealthy people and the size of their social donations. And research carried out in Hamburg in the 1990s proved a negative relationship between the number of theatre visits and incidents of street vandalism per year. Naturally, all these influences are indirect. That is, a rich man can visit the Comédie-Française weekly and be extremely stingy with charity. Or a resident of Hamburg can leave a moving performance of *The Lion King* at the Das Theatre im Hafen Hamburg and, say, smash a poster board. The awakening of the best feelings in a person by the theatre is not a rule, but in a statistically reliable sense, these regularities work. That is why modern theatre is not only and not so much an art form - one can argue endlessly about the artistic merits of specific performances - but a powerful socio-cultural institution, designed (simply due to its structure) to unite individuals and their communities, peoples and countries.

In the aspect of the above, the following idea is of particular importance. In a modern city, the national theatre, aimed at artistic search, the realization of creative ambitions and staying in the current context, ceases to be just an institution in which performances are mainly given in the evenings. Of course, in such theatres, performances are given in the evenings, and for many other national groups the model of the traditional "Russian repertory theatre" of the Soviet model is still the only acceptable one. But the trend is obvious - it is not enough for a modern theatre to be just a theatre, it is persistently looking for tools that allow it to more actively penetrate into society: to form new trends, expand the audience at the expense of neophytes, develop a persistent habit of visiting the institution, etc. In a word, the theatre is trying to become the Place in the city. The place that is important, fashionable and great to visit.

Yesterday's ideas about the theatre as a lecturing desk from which one can say a lot to the world of good, the temple of the arts, the sower of the rational, kind, eternal, - are becoming obsolete before our eyes. Potential spectators stop responding to them. In practice, moralizing, didactic art turns into half-empty halls, stiff forms, and dilapidated meanings. In Moscow and partly in St. Petersburg, some theatres, including conservative ones, are actively attended by a certain audience category

- the audience going to the theatre not for Ostrovsky and Vampilov, Tuminas or Butusov, Shishkin or Lomakina, but for media faces from their favorite films and TV shows, and even worse - from the media gossip. Therefore, the outflow of the spectator is not that noticeable. The rest of Russia, especially in terms of national theatres, is deprived of such an opportunity. Of course, the process of re-comprehension of their mission by theatres is still at the stage of formation, but it is already obvious that this vector of development of the theatrical business will soon become the main one.

The word "mission" is a key concept for this work. Only a theatre that has clearly understood its mission and is steadily following it can become the Place in the city. We would like to emphasize that the choice of a mission by the theatre, its intelligible articulation and the selection of instruments for its execution is a daunting task which requires a sober look at oneself from the outside and the ability to fit into the local, regional and wider theatrical context. General words about art for the masses, art for the elite, for children, youth, the preservation of traditions and creative search are not yet a mission. What we really can do, what are our capabilities, for whom we work, what are the tactical and strategic tasks, how we imagine the national moral and aesthetic ideal - these are the main questions, without answers to which, one can only utter blissful platitudes. All of the following is relevant only for theatres that have decided on a mission.

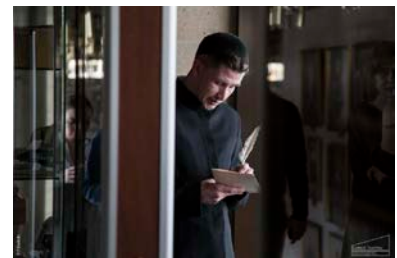
More than ten years ago, The Tatar State Academic Theatre named after Galiasgar Kamal clearly realized their place in history and modernity, determined their development strategy more than ten years ago. The mission of the theatre was formulated in the Concept for the strategic development of the theatre:

"Popularization and promotion of high examples of Tatar culture, an innovative approach to the implementation of creative projects, professional training and advanced training of national specialists, modernization, strengthening of the material and technical base, the development of modern Tatar drama and the exchange of creative experience with leading drama groups in Russia and the overseas."

The concept of strategic development of the Kamal Theatre

Of course, multifaceted activities for the benefit of the native culture were inherent in the Kamal Theatre in the previous decades, but now it has received an official status with a specially developed roadmap. Since the world does not stand still, changes and refinements are constantly being made to this Concept.

As the name of the Concept suggests, popularization, promotion and actualization of national art and culture is a top priority for the Kamal Theatre. One of the main tools for promoting theatrical art is the development of public opinion - Public Relations, PR. Today, the PR service is almost the main structure of the theatre, subordinating to itself the marketing and advertising department, closely interacting with the literary department. The idea that a good theatre does not need advertising should be left in the past. Another thing is that today theatres are forced to compete not with other theatres - the principle of competition operates here, but with a huge range of services provided by the entertainment industry. There is always not enough funds for advertising, and PR partially solves this problem. The strategic task of the PR service is to draw public



attention to the theatre as often as possible, but for significant informational reasons, so as not to deceive public expectations and not overdo it.

By and large, PR is relevant only in cases when the theatre is not limited only to the main activity of producing and distributing performances, organizing tours, holding anniversary evenings and actor benefit performances. **Project initiatives become the basis of the theatre PR strategy as the Place in the City** : organizing and holding festivals, master classes, conferences, readings of plays by contemporary playwrights, theatre laboratories, exhibitions, educational programs, meetings with outstanding creative figures; social projects, projects designed for a children, for people with disabilities; innovative technologies in historical and museum activities; theatre own creative projects - Kazan and republican cultural specialties and much more. No less attractive than the abundance and quality of special programs, for potential and real spectators, is the simplicity and accessibility of the theatre building for visiting in the daytime, evening and at night, a cozy cafe with fast wi-fi and good food, a library or a bookstore, an intelligent environment shaped by the theatre in the style of the best lofts. Unfortunately, so far the Kamal Theatre does not have the opportunity to fully develop their activities in this direction. This is due to the limited nature of theatrical spaces and locations, their adaptation to the needs of the theatre of the Soviet and early post-Soviet model. At the same time, the theatre actively uses the available opportunities and tries to cover all its locations in individual projects, bring the spectators in and expand the audience.

The large-scale project "Waking up the hearts of people...", which involves the most of the drama group, was conceived specifically for the 110th anniversary of the Tatar theatre. The authors of the idea are Farid Bikchantaev and Niyaz Iglamov, the author of the text is Ruzal Mukhametshin, the director is Ilgiz Zainiev. For the first time, the theatre's repertoire was replenished with a piece performed not on stage, but in various theatrical locations, where there hasn't been any spectator footprint yet. In the buffet and the orchestra pit, on the balcony and in the ship's hold, the actors perform scenes from the history of the theatre, funny and sad situations, and the spectators gets acquainted with the long-term journey of the theatre from censorship permission to perform a play in the Tatar language and the first timid steps of the group to the triumphant tour in Moscow and St. Petersburg, festivals in Colombia and China. The presenter takes the audience through the history of the country and the Tatar people, reflected in theatrical legends. However, all the events are genuine, the heroes are real, the coincidences are not accidental. The play is performed in the Tatar language. The libretto of the performance is provided to the Russian-speaking audience. Initially, this project was conceived as an anniversary project and was planned just for several shows, the entrance fee was just symbolic. As a result, due to the high audience activity, the performance has been being played for the fifth year, and ticket prices have risen twice.

Another initiative of the theatre was the Tuesday for Youth project, during which three performances are played with two intermissions, during which the spectators learn about the work of young Tatar musicians, artists, designers, poets; they can also purchase designer merchandise and local culinary specialties. The very annotation of the play contains a call to a specific social group and a desire to focus on the representatives of the youth subculture and young creators from the world of classical arts:

"3 performances with 2 intermissions
This has never happened before. Three texts.
Three young authors or,
as it is fashionable to say now, three female authors.

"Waking up the hearts of people..."
project photo

<https://kamalteatr.ru/tat/about-the-theatre/repertoire/d-rse-gyybr-tter-teatr-budit-serdtsa-lyudey-teatral-noe-p/#gallery1-3>



"Tuesday for Youth" project

Two debutants.

One is already familiar to the audience.

The performance based on her play has traveled half the world.

Three young directors.

One is already experienced.

The other two are taking their first steps in the profession.

Friday Tuesday night...

October 22 and 29, 2019. And then, every month.

Epic premiere of three performances.

Taboo topics. Highly social dialogues.

A reason to argue and think. Express enthusiasm and claims.

Three performances with two intermissions, a prologue and an epilogue.

During intermissions - masterpieces of national cuisine, design market, music and dance, poetry and discussions.

Kamal Theatre opens a new page in their history.

We were always glad to see the young within our walls.

But this is something special.

In 1968, rebellious youth took over the Avignon Festival.

Drove Jean-Louis Barrot away,

brought Jean Vilar to a heart attack,

disrupted the performance by Maurice Béjart...

We open our doors ourselves.

The Kamal Theatre will become a place for Tatar youth to meet.

Don't miss the evening!

Turn Tuesday into Friday with us!"

Each performance is followed by a discussion with the spectators. The theatre receives instant feedback, recruits new adherents from among the neophytes. The entire space of the foyer is given to the young spectators. One corner is occupied by poetry reading, another one exhibits costumes, and in the third corner, you will find a Tatar rock band playing, etc. The intermissions last for an hour and during them the most important things happen - young people communicate in theatrical locations, get to know each other, musicians get to know designers, artists meet musicians, boys meet girls - and creative and personal relationships emerge. The action runs from six in the evening until midnight and is in demand among young people. At the same time, it should be noted that the theatre facilities do not fully meet the level of the guests and events, the acoustics in the foyer is far from ideal, and there are some logistical problems.

In addition to these projects, the Kamal Theatre regularly holds informal evenings of young Tatar poetry "Yana dulkyn" ("New Wave") and performances by famous poets on "non-childish" occasions, exhibitions of contemporary artists and photo artists, book fairs, musical events, readings of plays by young playwrights and shows of theatrical sketches, lectures, seminars, and video screenings. "Kamal muktube" ("School of theatrical spectator") project is very popular with the spectators, because here the visitors watch archival recordings of performances of past years and discuss them. Kamal Theatre is open to any joint projects and collaborations in every possible way; in fact, there is not a single creative community or organization which hasn't cooperated with the theatre today or in the past.

Today, the Kamal Theatre, in terms of its status and authority, is an undoubted cultural brand of the Republic of Tatarstan and the Place in the city.

However, the possibilities of the theatre building and premises are limited and, in their current form, do not imply any further development of the Kamal Theatre projects that amaze the imagination of all theatrical Russia.

For natural reasons, the activity of consumption of the theatre project initiatives is higher among the youth and children, among older people who have not lost their youthful enthusiasm and desire to comprehend new things in changing conditions. For the most part, people who attend lectures on the latest trends in modern theatre and drama, readings of plays and sketches of performances are young people of different ages. It is not so productive - as sad as it may sound - to strategically target older people. The aesthetic tastes of these people, their worldview and social position were formed during the Soviet era and the early post-Soviet period. We will not go into nuances - at all times there were people who were going against the current, and it was they who shaped and are shaping all living things in art. Each of us has in mind wonderful elderly people who do not miss a single premiere in the city theatres, not a single exhibition, not a single significant event in the cultural life. They are a minority. Theatres are obliged to fulfill their social obligations to all categories of the population, but working with young people is the way to build the future theatre. With a trained audience, for whom the theatre is not just a theatre, but an actual Place in the city, it will be possible to solve the most complex aesthetic problems. There is no paradox that the same spectator will improve financial performance, and most importantly, throughout their life, they will carry love and respect for a particular theatre, where they were and in the future will be comfortable, interested, involved not only looking at the stage but also in the foyer, cafe, rehearsal points, and lecture halls. Ideally, they will instill this love and respect in their own children. Focusing on the youth audience in the project initiatives, the theatre prepares at least two audience generations.

Theatre as the Place in the city is not the opposite to the Theatre Home, it is not a competitor to the repertory theatre, it does not pose any threat to the established relations between the stage and audience, it doesn't break with any traditions. All these are different faces of the Living Theatre by Peter Brook, quite capable of peaceful coexisting within one drama group. Moreover, project initiatives and strategies fail to compensate for the artistic inferiority of the performances. It is not at all strange, however, that it is the theatres-leaders, the theatres of artistic well-being (which is, of course, relative and changeable) that are at the forefront of theatrical innovations and project initiatives. They are the ones who feel the wind of change before others, formulate their own mission more clearly, more sensitively capture the pulse of a modern city and region.



"School of theatrical spectator" project photo

<https://stdtatar.ru/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/mailservice-1320x1066.jpg>

In this regard, there is an urgent need for the creation of a new building of the TGAT named after G. Kamal in accordance with the changing conditions of communication between modern theatre and today's audience.



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