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**TWO APPROACHES TO RESTORING HISTORICAL BUILDINGS  
AND ENVIRONMENTS FOR THE THEATRE FUNCTION  
(based on the architectural reconstruction  
and technical refurbishing of the new facility  
of Ryerson school of performance, Toronto,  
2015–2016, and theatre on the Podil, Kyiv, Ukraine, opened in 2017)**

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**Abstract.** The architectural reconstruction and technical refurbishing of the new facility of the School of Performance were concerned with accommodating the needs of teaching, production, and performance in a found space, the basement of Ryerson University's Student Learning Centre with utilizing of the state-of-the-art technologies. Kyiv Academician Theatre of the Podil, one of the leading drama theatre companies in Ukraine, has finally got the permanent home with the state-of-the-art performing facility. However, the fact that construction of the building was sponsored by the Roshen Company owned by Petro Poroshenko, former President of Ukraine, as well as the appearance of the theatre's exterior caused a lot of public controversies. The experience of these reconstructions was reflected in two documentary films presented at the Our Theatre of the World section of Prague Quadrennial in 2019.

**Key words:** theatre, architecture, production, performance, teaching.

### **Problem statement**

Both in Canada and in Ukraine, depending on the current requirements, the tendency of adaptation of historic environments, premises, and buildings for their new functional requirements, as well as the modernization and expansion of the pre-existing ones, are gaining ground.

Therefore, two approaches of Toronto and Ukrainian specialists to the problems encountered when designing historical buildings and environments may be of great interest..

### **Analysis of recent research and publications**

The authors of the article are well-known figures of theatrical art, so the materials of the publication were based solely on their own experience and approaches to architecture, functional and aesthetic organization aimed at restoring historical buildings and the environment during the renovation and expansion of theatre functions.

## Objective of the article

The objective of the article is to compare the methods of buildings and environmental restoration of the new facility, Ryerson School of Performance, Toronto, 2015–2016, and the Podil Theater in Kyiv, which was opened in 2017.

## Results and discussions

**Ryerson School of Performance, the New Facility on the Premises of Ryerson University's Student Learning Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Canada 2015–2016. Designed by Zeidler Partnership Architects + Snøhetta. Consulted by Sholem Dolgoy.**

For 45 years, the home of Ryerson School of Performance was a termite-infested 19th-century building. In 2015, the University announced that it wanted the building for another purpose.

The solution was to create a new home in space originally designed as a retail food court, in the then one-year-old Student Learning Centre (Fig. 1).

The program challenge was that there was not enough volume and area for all requirements. A solution needed to be found for performance spaces, performer and production teaching studios, offices, and other support (Fig. 2).

Part of the solution was a mezzanine that extended the street level entrance over two-thirds of the existing volume to create a total area of 1250 square meters.

Offices and meeting spaces were developed and in leased space in an adjacent office tower. The unfortunate consequence was that along with existing satellite spaces throughout the campus, the School became more fragmented. This is an ongoing challenge for the students to learn how to work collaboratively.

The success of the new facility was due to the diligent work by the team of architects, consultants, project management, contractors, the University, and the School. This ensured the best coordination of base building, particularly heating and air-conditioning, with the complex requirements of a performing arts teaching facility. No detail was too small for vigorous discussion, detailing, and realization.

As a result of this activity, it was possible to design a school which could provide a variety of premises, a dance studio that could simultaneously be a space for performances (Fig. 3, 4), a dressing room (Fig. 5), a laboratory of light and sound (Fig. 6, 7), and a major theatrical studio (Fig. 8, 9), the space of which, through minimal transformations, could become a theatrical space with a three-sided stage with a horizon-screen in the rear similar to performance stages of medieval farces); space with a staging arena, or a simultaneous stage (Fig. 10, 11, 12).

Such construction of the theater studio allows creating various scenographic solutions for performances: employing light, light-shadow, kinetic projections, as well as by traditional means, using costume design, scenographic painting, and color of curtains, stages, pallets, etc.



**Fig. 1.** Student Learning Centre on Yonge Street, Toronto. (Photo by Pavlo Bosyy)



**Fig. 2.** School of Performance, main staircase. (Photo by Pavlo Bosyy)



**Fig. 3.** School of Performance, dance studio. (Photo by Pavlo Bosyy)

Undoubtedly, the created studio and stage space is suitable for the installation of necessary structures for spatial scenographic solutions.

The University had severely underestimated the complexity of the project and the \$7mill budget approximately doubled. The final cost was about \$11,000 per square meter.

A portion of that cost included the installation of XXI century entertainment infrastructure and technology. For example, there are about 400 data lines, and the stage lighting is 60 % LED and 40 % halogen.

Our former found-space column-plagued black box theatre became our new found-space, gleaming spaceship Battlestar Galactica.

Sholem Dolgoy



**Fig. 4.** School of Performance, dance studio/performance space. (Photo by Pavlo Bosyy)



**Fig. 5.** Costume Shop. (Photo by Sooji Kim)



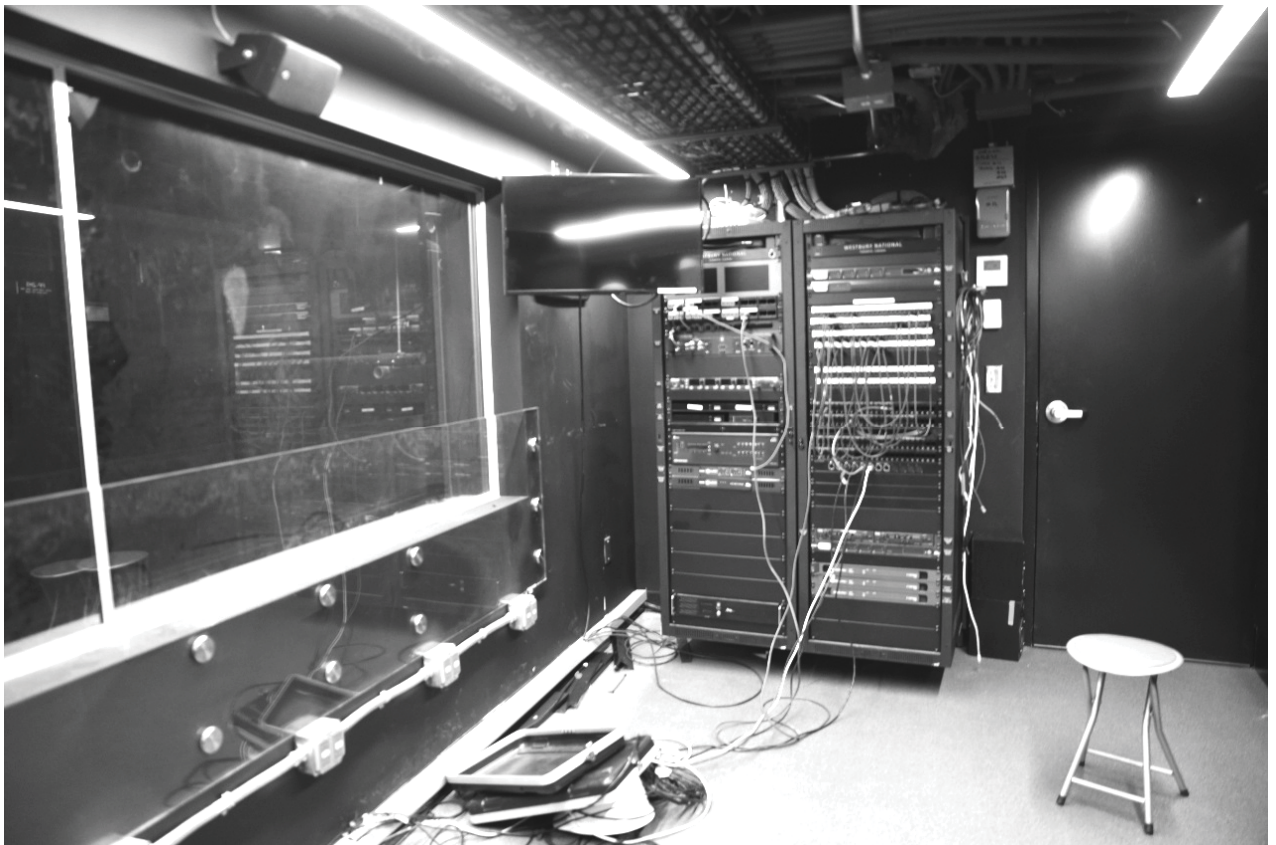
**Fig. 6.** Sound Lab. (Photo by Sooji Kim)



**Fig. 7.** Lighting Lab. (Photo by Sooji Kim)



**Fig. 8.** Studio Theatre. (Photo by Sooji Kim)



**Fig. 9.** Installation of Equipment at the Studio Theatre's Lighting and Sound Booth. (Photo by Sooji Kim)



**Fig. 10.** Various performances and rehearsals in the new flexible Studio Theatre. (Photo by Pavlo Bosyy)



**Fig. 11.** Various performances and rehearsals in the new flexible Studio Theatre. (Photo by Pavlo Bosyy)



Fig. 12. Various performances and rehearsals in the new flexible Studio Theatre. (Photo by Pavlo Bosyy)

### **Theatre on the Podil, Kyiv, Ukraine**

**Architect Oleg Drozdov, 2017**

**Construction sponsored by the Roshen company, owner – Petro Poroshenko, then the President of Ukraine**

For decades, highly acclaimed Kyiv Academician Theatre on the Podil, Ukraine, did not have the permanent performance facility of adequate size and was forced to perform in the rehearsal room or rented spaces. Finally, the reconstruction and technical refurbishing of a XIX Ct. mansion on the Andriyivsky Uzviz street in Kyiv was completed in 2017.

However, the fact that construction of the building was sponsored by the Roshen Company owned by Petro Poroshenko, then the President of Ukraine, as well as the appearance of the theatre's exterior caused a lot of public controversies (Pic. 13). The experience of these reconstructions was reflected in documentary films conceived by Pavlo Bosyy and presented at the Our Theatre of the World section of Prague Quadrennial in 2019. Here are a few quotes presenting the conflicting opinions:

“...Protester 1: I became speechless when I saw this monster...”

...Protester 2: It's Hitler's bunker probably or a sarcophagus – what's a better name for it? A crematorium!

...Protester 3: Now this theatre is nothing more than a tin can!

Alla Serhijko, the Merited Artist of Ukraine: There are phenomenal possibilities here; we will utilize them with great pleasure!..

TV narrator: – The company has been waiting for this moment for 30 years, says Vitaly Malakhov, the theatre's artistic director. He promises that from now, the theatre should become an artistic hub where different companies will have a chance to perform...

...Vitaly Malakhov: I really want that besides [hosting] our shows this [theatre] will become public space...

Protester 4: Actors ALWAYS stand on the side of those who feed them...

...Oleg Drozdov, theatre's architect: This is the architecture of today; we live in our time; mmm... there is... always, the style of the epoch...

...Protesters and supporters shouting: Bravo!!! Shame! Such a "beauty"! Shame! Shame! – Shame on you! What are you doing here?! – They've built it fine, it's beautiful!..

...Supporter: I react very positively since they've finally built a new theatre in Ukraine...

I think that there are some theatres of this kind in Europe, for example, they have the right to exist...

Especially now; we should not be looking into the past only but look forward...

...Protester 5: The appearance of this theatre might have worked OK somewhere in the outskirts of Kyiv...

Thought of Oksana Palanychko, Resident Dramaturge: We are currently in the lobby, which we would like to work all day, from 11 AM till 11 PM.

You see the trusses for the rigging of additional lighting equipment...

Here will be a small gift and book shop...

Here you see the accessible unisex toilets and lifts to all floors including the café and the auditorium.

This is our memento, the doors adorned with the image of the doors of our old building...

We would like our theatre pedagogue to work with the little kids while the parents are enjoying the show; thus, it will be an interesting evening for the entire family..."



**Fig. 13.** Kyiv Academician Theatre of the Podil. (Photo by Oleksandr Riabenko)



**Fig. 14.** Kyiv Academician Theatre of the Podil. (Photo by Oleksandr Riabenko)

Opinion of Oleksandr Riabenko, Theatre Engineer: I'd like to stress out that this theatre is based on the ideas of transformation.

For instance, the stage without the default trusses for electrics and with the flexible electric supply that serves all line sets is unique [for Ukraine].

As for the stage transformation, there are theatres with permanent revolves and even stage lifts; ...however, the flexibility is [higher] here; there are three variants: the flat stage, the revolve, and the lift...

Arguably, no one other theatre [in Ukraine] has that...

It's a high concentration [of mechanisms] for the theatre that is not large in terms of the size of the stage and capacity of the auditorium... (Fig. 14, 15).

There is an interesting acoustical design here; thanks to the acoustics panels and their configuration human voice sounds very comfortably without any amplification.

There are two holographic materials here, a scrim and a film for holographic projections;

In terms of stage space, it has a wide variety of transformations – from the basic combined type of stage to deeper.

Although a box is built above the stage, the changing painted scenery, the portal, and the pre-portal scenes, which is a proscenium, can be quickly transformed, acquiring features of the front and other types of stages. This is facilitated by both the curtains of the stage, the border lights, and the bridge which reaches out into the auditorium.

Vitaly Yukhymovych [Malakhov's] idea; he is interested in co-productions featuring an actor playing let's say in London and other actors, here. It's technically possible now.

There is a rain machine here that uses real water, which may circulate even for the entire duration of the show.”



**Fig. 15.** Kyiv Academician Theatre of the Podil. (Photo by Oleksandr Riabenko)

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, these two recent projects were both concerned with adapting the existing architectural space for the needs of a theatre company or a theatre school; state-of-the-art technologies had to be incorporated to meet the producing demands of today and assure that the needs of tomorrow could be easily accommodated. Ryerson School of Performance utilized a recently designed and built structure whereas Theatre on the Podil had to rebuild a late XIX mansion. The latter project caused a powerful public controversy; Ryerson School of Performance’s new facility was rather greeted with public enthusiasm and support.

Analysis of the reconstruction leads to the conclusion that in the first case (in Toronto) as well as in the second case (in Kyiv) reconstruction activities received unique environments for theatrical and entertainment activities, with a set of all possible auxiliary premises, technical and technological equipment. But in the case of the Kyiv Theater, the authors of the projects ignored the historical and cultural context of the environment of the Andriyivsky Uzviz St, which resulted in a sharp distinction between the interior and exterior of the theater in this urban environment, causing major public controversy.

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**ДВА ПОГЛЯДИ НА ВІДНОВЛЕННЯ ІСТОРИЧНИХ БУДІВЕЛЬ  
І СЕРЕДОВИЩА ДЛЯ ТЕАТРАЛЬНОЇ ФУНКЦІЇ  
(на прикладі архітектурної реконструкції  
та технічного оновлення нового закладу виконавської школи Райєрсона,  
Торонто, 2015–2016, та театру на Подолі, Київ, Україна, відкритого у 2017 році)**

***Анотація.** У статті висвітлено ідеї архітектурної реконструкції та технічного оновлення нового приміщення Школи виконавських мистецтв для потреб у викладанні, виробництві та виконанні у знайденому просторі-підвалі Студентського навчального центру Університету Райєрсона з використанням сучасних мистецьких технологій та просторів для Київського академічного театру на Подолі, одного з провідних драматичних театрів в Україні, який отримав будинок із найсучаснішим ігровим майданчиком. Однак зовнішній вигляд і фасад театру викликали суттєві публічні суперечки. Досвід цих реконструкцій знайшов своє відображення у двох документальних фільмах, представлених на Празькому квадрінале у 2019 році.*

*Аналіз реконструкції дозволяє зробити висновок, що і в першому (Торонто), і в другому випадку (в Києві) заходи з реконструкції отримали унікальні середовища для театральньо-видовищної діяльності, з набором усіх можливих допоміжних приміщень і техніко-технологічного обладнання. Але у випадку із Київським театром автори проєктів проігнорували історично-культурний контекст середовища вул. Андріївський Узвіз, що породило протиріччя поміж інтер'єром і екстер'єром театру. Як у самому міському середовищі міста, так і в свідомості шанувальників.*

**Ключові слова:** театр, архітектура, виробництво, вистава, навчання.