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## The Research Centre of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava



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Today, the Research Centre of the Music and Dance Faculty is an independent research department that links research and teaching through professional projects in cooperation with local experts and foreign institutions. This article also shows the struggle for equality of dance.

### **A Glimpse into the Past**

The current activities of the Research Centre reflect the needs of the study programmes of the Music and Dance Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, both in music and in dance arts. But it wasn't always like this. A look into the department's recent past reveals a progressive equalisation of dance art in the context of the department and its activities. The transformation process is reminiscent of previous efforts to establish dance on an equal footing with other art forms, which the Slovak National Theatre Ballet had to go through. The company had long been only the “younger brother of the Opera”. This was also the case with the dance department, which today is among the largest in the Music and Dance Faculty, with about 120 students. I think that this impressive progress wouldn't have been possible without Prof. Irina Čierniková, who was the first representative of dance art to become the Dean of the Music and Dance Faculty, and who contributed in no small measure to the current status of the Research Centre.

The predecessor of the Research Centre was the Methodological Centre of the Music and Dance Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts, established in 2000. The main objectives of the department under the direction of Prof. Miloslav Starosta were the development and establishment of a study programme in piano performance with a pedagogical focus.<sup>1</sup> The one-sided focus of the department changed at least partially in 2003 when the Methodological Centre was transformed into a Research Centre, which also resulted in an expansion of the staff, especially in the field of music. Among the employees on the music side was Eva Gajdošová, a dance theoretician and the current dramaturge of the Slovak National Theatre Ballet. Her time at the Research Centre was very short.

<sup>1</sup> “Centrum výskumu [The Research Centre]”, in *VŠMU 1949–2009* (Bratislava: Slovart, 2009), 89.

The goals of the newly established department are outlined in the annual publication of the Academy of Performing Arts from 2009: "The members of the Research Centre focus on exploring specific areas of music and dance historiography and pedagogy, as well as didactic and methodological issues and theories of music performance." The written text looks good, but was it possible to fulfil these goals without staff members focused on dance art?

In the following period, Markéta Štefková (2008–2010) and Lucia Papanetzová (2011) initiated research activities in the fields of music historiography, theory of interpretation and didactics in particular. In the field of dance, the progress only began with the arrival of Ivica Liszkayová in 2011, who then became the head of the Research Centre in 2012. She was responsible for nine part-time members<sup>2</sup> of the department, who covered various projects in music and dance arts. In this context, we should note that of the nine employees, only two were dance arts staff. The dance projects were implemented on theoretical and creative interpretation levels. Creative interpretation projects supervised by Marta Poláková include *Transformations of Dance* (2011), *SKIN* (2012), *Dance... Under My Skin* (2013), *Axiomatic Attraction* (2014) and *Creative Thinking in Dance – New Approaches in the Education of the Students of the Department of Dance Creation* (2015). Ivica Liszkayová developed Theoretical Analyses in Dance Art and Dance Congress Tanec.SK.

The head of the Research Centre, Ivica Liszkayová, managed to reform the department both in terms of staff and substance. With great support from the Dean, Prof. Irina Čierniková, employees with 0.2 and 0.3 positions were transferred to their respective departments. There were separate recruitment calls for the Research Centre for vacant half-time or full-time positions. For that reason, the projects and research activities can be coordinated with the individual departments of the Music and Dance Faculty. Many of the projects are designed as training and research projects that enhance the standard educational process. In addition to Ivica Liszkayová, the staff includes part-time employees Miroslava Kovářová and Kristián Kohút in the field of dance and Zuzana Buchová Holičková in the field of music at the Research Centre. The four staff members collectively fill a staffing pool of two-and-a-quarter positions.

Twenty years of gradual transformation from a Methodological Centre to a Research Centre, from a department oriented mainly towards music to a department equally devoted to dance, documents the determination and perseverance of individuals thinking in terms of dance.

<sup>2</sup> Lukáš Borzík, Lucia Papanetzová, Tomáš Surý, Peter Zajíček, Jana Kubandová, Juraj Jartim, Katarína Hašková, Zuzana Flamová, Marta Poláková.

### **Project and Research Activity**

The Research Centre of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, directed by Ivica Liszkayová, has started and successfully implemented several research and educational project activities, which are repeated periodically. Dance art is represented by the projects Theoretical Analyses in Dance Art (since 2011) and Dance Congress Tanec.SK (since 2014), while in the period before the pandemic there was also a project on Presentations of Academic Dance Art Abroad (2016, 2018).

Music art is represented by the project From Analysis to Interpretation.

So far, all project activities of the Research Centre have been implemented based on grants with partial co-financing from the Academy of Performing Arts. This used to be at the rate of 5% to 10% of the total project amount. The Slovak Arts Council grant scheme was changed in 2022 and the projects supported by this state organisation should be fully funded without the need for the university to participate financially.

The head of the Research Centre recalls the beginnings of the project activities: “My idea was to get some grants on behalf of the school, which I could use to invite well-known experts from renowned dance universities abroad.”<sup>3</sup> That determination was rewarded with success, and in 2011 she was awarded a grant that enabled her to bring experts from the London Contemporary Dance School, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance (London) and the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance (New York) to lecture at the Academy of Performing Arts as part of Theoretical Analyses in Dance Art. In the following years, the list of lecturers grew to include experts from New York (The Juilliard School, Limón Dance Company, Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance, Merce Cunningham Trust, New York City Ballet), Prague (Music and Dance Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts), Paris (Centre national de la danse) and Moscow (School of Classical Dance). The project Theoretical Analyses in Dance Art aims not only to connect students with top experts and personalities representing different dance styles but also to develop their empirical, critical and comparative abilities based on these encounters. These are necessary to acquire the ability to formulate one’s own opinion at a professional level. The project thus directly motivates students towards critical or theoretical activity.

The second critical project of the Research Centre, which encourages the expert community to conduct research in the field of dance, is the Dance Congress Tanec.SK. This is a platform supported by academics that has mobilised the professional dance community in Slovakia in the past years and has opened up many important topics. So far, the Research Centre has organised seven annual congresses, with an eighth currently in the preparation phase. All papers presented over the preceding years have

<sup>3</sup> Kristián Kohút and Ivica Liszkayová, “Prospešná spolupráca [A Beneficial Cooperation]”, in *Múza* (2022), 50–51.

been edited and are available in the form of electronic and printed collection volumes. Since 2014, a database of specialised texts related to the local and international dance context has been in development.

The cooperation between the dance department and the Research Centre, united on both sides by the desire to work and make dance art more visible, as well as by the ambition to continue innovation and progress, is undoubtedly beneficial for both research and professional education.