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# Helena Spurná's *Oldřich Stibor (1901–1943)* *Theatre Director and Man*

Andrea Jochmanová

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Helena Spurná. *Divadelní režisér a člověk Oldřich Stibor (1901–1943)* [Oldřich Stibor (1901–1943) Theatre Director and Man]. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2016. 476pp.

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[ reviews ]

Helena Spurná has devoted her book monograph to an outstanding and important Czech theatre personality. Her book brings about much more than just a detailed reflection on Oldřich Stibor and his work. She has extensively used almost all of the available relevant materials to be found in Czech archives, library depositories, and other institutions. It is necessary to point out that considering its content and extent, Spurná's book is the first of this kind on Stibor. This is an important work for theatre studies; the field required someone to research the archival material and paint the picture of Oldřich Stibor in all its complexities. Only then can any possible writing on Stibor and his theatrical works develop.

Outstanding academic skills are required to complete such a huge study without Oldřich Stibor's personal inheritance existing. Spurná's book attests to her research based on intensive work with all the archival materials, profound knowledge of the subject, erudite interpretation, and a skilled commentary. Her study shows all her abilities as a researcher and author. Moreover, the book offers a sort of model and interpretational key for all students and new theatre researchers; it documents that the study of archival materials, unpopular as of late, may enliven, enlarge and even change our opinion of the subject in question.

The study titled *Divadelní režisér a člověk Oldřich Stibor (1901–1943)* (Oldřich Stibor [1901–1943] Theatre Director and Man) brings about an erudite, sophisticated, evidence based account of Oldřich Stibor's life and work. According to historians, this director has so far been represented as a man connected to local theatre houses in Moravian Ostrava and Olomouc, respectively. Even Czech theatre academics have portrayed Stibor as a rather unimportant local theatre director. Spurná offers a different perspective, and thus a sort of rediscovery of Stibor as a director; like many other important directors, Stibor did not work in Prague theatres (for long) and not deserve a neglecting representation.

The monograph includes a number of extensive notes and a large bibliography. Therefore, it should undoubtedly give a lead to other researchers whose aim would be to introduce other lesser known personalities, both in directing and in theatre generally, who devoted their lives to bring up their audiences with first-rate theatre productions. This monograph shows that such a study should not limit itself to describing the life and works of a certain personality. Moreover, it should primarily include and depict the political, social, and cultural context of the era in question – as these aspects of life are always linked to events, both on and off the

stage. Helena Spurná proves to be interested in historical facts, their circumstances and their connection to Stibor's personal and professional life. The reader follows the historical issues in Český Těšín and its region, portrayed through Stibor's life there. We follow Stibor to Prague where he studied; and again, the reader is provided with valuable information about the development of Prague theatres. We also learn about paradoxical moments in Stibor's life as he became an office worker and censor. Spurná also writes about the Communist party in Northern Moravia and the effect it had on Stibor's life.

Stibor's stay in Ostrava with The National Moravian-Silesian, and Prague with Umělecké divadlo (Arts Theatre) and Studio při Intimním divadle (The Intimate Studio Theatre) then led him to Czech Theatre in Olomouc (drama theatre, opera, literary evenings, etc.). The reader becomes acquainted with his open-air productions in Olomouc as well as his relation to organized religion. His collaboration with amateur ensembles clearly shows how diverse Stibor's theatrical activities were. The last part of the book is then devoted to Stibor's activities as a resistance fighter and is of great historical relevance. All facts are evidenced through documentation.

One has to point out that this monograph is not only a theatre-oriented piece of work. The monograph defines changing

development of Czech theatre productions and thought on theatre, as well as varying artistic impulses and impacts; it describes dramaturgical lines and offers analysis of Stibor's directing (as far as materials allow). It also includes contemporary reflections, personal disputes, and debates both published and found in personal correspondence etc. Moreover, this book is a historical study which demonstrates the relation between Czech theatre and the broader socio-political context, which has always had a huge impact on theatre productions and individual personalities.

I believe Spurná's monograph to be an outstanding contribution to understanding the relationship of Stibor's personal life as a human being and the professional one as director). The author has decided to cover many unpopular topics and allows them to be further interpreted and/or judged. The book thus has the ability to point out the method of numerous historians who tend to reduce controversial historical facts without admitting the highly personal perspectives (or political preference) of the personality in question. Spurná decided to explain all aspects of Stibor's works; she speaks about the contexts and events that have had a personal impact on Stibor. Mainly due to these facts, Spurná's monograph gains objective qualities. Her monograph should definitely be read and discussed further.