

LUZIA MARIA MARTINS

(Lisbon, 27/05/1927 – Lisbon, 13/09/2000)

Luzia Maria Martins was one of the first Portuguese women to forge a career in theatre as a director and playwright and to have her merit recognised, not only for her artistic achievements, but on an intellectual and political level as well.

She spent a part of her life living in London, where she studied and mixed with a cultural milieu very different to that in Portugal at the time. It inspired her to set up her own theatre group and in 1964, together with Helena Félix, she founded TEL – Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa. She was one of the figures of the resistance movement against the *Estado Novo*, Salazar's dictatorship, and through her determination, exposed the Portuguese public to writers and texts central to European dramaturgy, including in her repertoire, writers and texts banned by the censors.

Her adventure into theatre began in her childhood, through her father, the scenographer Reinaldo Martins (active from 1915), who introduced her to the backstage and front stage of some of the theatres. She performed on stage for the first time when she was only six, in a *revista* (Portuguese revue theatre) by Lina Demoel at the Teatro Politeama. She studied at the Liceu Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho in Lisbon, and in the early 1950s worked in radio and journalism. Her greatest interest was, however, studying theatre, but because the Conservatory in Lisbon didn't offer the theoretical studies in dramaturgy that interested her, she left the country in 1953 for London, with little more than 10 pounds in her pocket, and went to live with her sister. Because of her experience as a radio announcer, she managed to find work at the BBC, at the same time as writing for the literary section of the newspaper *Diário Popular*. And it was in the British capital that she followed the fanciful impulses of her youth and determined to find out everything she could, she attended a number of courses that opened the doors to many different areas: theatre and ballet direction, cinema, philosophy and lighting design. It was also there that she came across new tendencies in theatre, such as narrative and epic theatre, and met new writers, directors and artists. Amongst them, on one of the courses she took, was Helena Félix, with whom she founded the Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa on her return to Portugal in 1964. Their artistic project was to bring the work of new authors to Portugal, work with actors to develop more contained gestures and greater voice precision, as well as present more dynamic theatre committed to social action.

Her interest in epic theatre led her to write and direct her own plays, which were based on Portuguese authors and examined the concept of the intellectual and their often problematic relationship with the times in which they lived: *Bocage – alma sem mundo* (1967), *O homem que se julgava Camões* (1981) and *Cesário quê?* (1986). These were followed by texts of narrative theatre *Anatomia de uma história de amor* (1969), an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and applying careful analysis and social empathy, she created scenes from everyday life in *Lisboa 72-74* (1974), *Trapos e rendas* (1975), *Quando a banda tocar – cenas da vida lisboeta* (1979).

She directed, and in some cases also translated, texts by Maxwell Anderson, Anton Tchekov, Terence Rattigan, Robert Bolt, Peter Shaffer, Thornton Wilder, Ted Willis, August Strindberg, David Storey, John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Edward Bond, Jean Giraudoux, Roger Vitrac, Marguerite Duras, Rafael Alberti and Vaclav Havel. In an interview with the *Público* newspaper (Ramos 1998: 30), she acknowledged that it was through sheer persistence that she managed to occasionally present texts prior to the Revolution of 25 April 1974 that were viewed with suspicion by the fascist censorship, such as *Joana da Lorena* (*Joan of Lorraine*) by Maxwell Anderson (1964), as well as rescue plays that were initially banned and then approved with cuts, as was the case with *As mãos de Abraão Zacut* (authorised in 1968).

However, her opposition to the fascist regime also led to some improbable situations: in 1967, at an amateur theatre festival in Setúbal, at the time of the presentation of her play *Bocage – alma sem mundo* (a constant target of cuts and banned performances), Luzia Maria Martins received a medal commemorating the bicentenary of the poet Bocage in a completely silent ceremony, since it was prohibited to publicly express thanks for the tribute. On another occasion in 1968, the reading of a message by Helene Weigel for the occasion of World Theatre Day, banned by the censors, led to her being summoned to court. Her political prominence was also the reason she was invited, in 1973, by the international magazine *Index* to comment on political repression in the arts in Portugal, and in 1975, a Danish television station and the BBC interviewed her, showing excerpts from her shows *Trapos e rendas*, for reports on the Portuguese Carnation Revolution, as it was known as. And most appropriately, the song from her play *Lisboa 72-74* – with words and music by the actress Ermelinda Duarte, who graduated in romance philology from the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa and joined TEL in 1969 – became one of the Revolution's most powerful anthems: “Uma gaivota voava voava”.

In the various texts that Luzia Maria Martins wrote for the programs of her plays, she confessed her affiliation to epic theatre, mentioning Brecht, Piscator and Artaud as the directors and theoreticians who were her points of reference. Her staging was always an exercise in modernity, combining the careful integration of other art forms, such as cinema, dance and radio.

She received several awards for her work at TEL: in 1969 she received the António Pinheiro prize for Best Director of the Year for the play *Vítor ou as crianças no poder*; in 1970, the Prémio da Crítica (Critic's Award) for the direction of *Lar (Home)*; in 1986 she was given the Special Theatre Award: Lifetime Achievement in Theatre; in 1987 she was awarded the Dramaturgy Award by the 3º Ciclo de Teatro de Autores Portugueses da Amadora (3rd Cycle of Portuguese Authors' Theatre of Amadora). Public recognition of her work was also expressed in 1981, when she was invited by RTP, the Portuguese national television broadcaster, to direct five plays, and in 1987 the Almada International Theatre Festival named her Personality of the Year.

In spite of all this, Luzia Maria Martins complained about decreasing audiences and the public's lack of interest in less commercial theatre, blaming it on the absence of a theatregoing culture in Portuguese society. And although, together with Helena Félix, she remained faithful to her principles, the struggle due to the constant lack of funding, the difficulties in maintaining a stable cast or being able to invest in publicity wore her down and her plays began to lose energy. In 1991 after TEL had closed down and Helena Félix had died, Luzia Maria Martins, already very disillusioned, decided to abandon theatre altogether, turning down several proposals as a director and even stopped going to see theatre altogether. She returned only in 1998, on the invitation of Carlos Avilez and Luísa Ortigoso, to direct the monologue *Frida e a casa azul*, by José Jorge Letria, at the Teatro Nacional D. Maria II.

She died on 13 September 2000, at the age of 73, and four years later the Lisbon City Council named a square in the parish of S. Domingos de Benfica after her.

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