

Inspiration, Countercultural Aesthetics, and Dissent: the Ilkhom Theatre of Mark Weil.

A dissertation submitted by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the history of the Ilkhom Theatre of Mark Weil during four chronologically continuous but socio-politically distinct phases. The history of Ilkhom represents a rich topic which combines an extraordinary theatrical style, a drama school, and several layers of various cultures and eras superimposed one on another. While the Ilkhom Theatre still exists today, this dissertation explores the Ilkhom of the past. In particular, I focus on four eras of Ilkhom history, all of which are inseparably connected to its artistic leader – director Mark Weil.

In this dissertation I argue that the Ilkhom theatre reinvented itself at every turn of history, following the objective to keep functioning as a counter-cultural artistic community. It firmly positioned itself as the first independent theatre in the Soviet Union, disregarding the Soviet establishment roots of its existence.

The Ilkhom mythology maintains that Ilkhom was conceptualized and founded by director and producer Mark Weil. historically, however, Weil was initially one of the artistic contributors at the Ilkhom. Gradually, he emerged as the core artistic and managerial leader of the company. Within the first decade of Ilkhom's existence, Mark Weil became synonymous with his theatre. His personal and artistic identity became reflected in Ilkhom's productions. As Weil's identity shifted and metamorphosized, his creative vision changed directions, and took the theatre with him.

Created in the midst of declining Soviet economy and spirit in Tashkent, Uzbekistan by a visionary director Mark Weil, Ilkhom drew inspiration from Russian, Western and local Central Asian cultures. Despite its remote location within a non-Russian socio-cultural area and its Uzbek name, productions of Ilkhom were predominantly in Russian language. The first decade of Ilkhom – 1976-1986- Ilkhom emerges out of the studio for youth and culture, originally driven by the soviet agenda. During this time in Tashkent Ilkhom began developing its countercultural voice, under the leadership of a young ambitious director Mark Weil. During the Perestroika in the mid to late 1980s, Ilkhom acquired initial international recognition by showcasing its avant-garde productions in the style of pantomime and physical theatre. Throughout the first post-Soviet decade in the early 1990s in Tashkent, Weil integrated intercultural practices into newly established Ilkhom Drama School and developed pedagogical practices contrarian to the traditional Russian and soviet theatre training culture. During the late 1990s Weil began developing another new direction for Ilkhom, focusing on reexamination of local history through the countercultural queer lens. This subversive exploration of multicultural identity and history of Tashkent and its people attracted intense criticism of the conservative elements of the Uzbek society, culminating in a tragedy when in 2007 Mark Weil was assassinated allegedly in response to the content of his theatre productions of the Tashkent Cycle.

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the Ilkhom Theatre of Mark Weil.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Note on translation.....	vii
Introduction: Uncovering the Ilkhom History	1
I. Building an inspired countercultural community.....	26
II. Clown Diplomacy and Perestroika.....	63
III. Ilkhom and Countercultural Pedagogy.....	129
IV. Theatre of Dissent: Tashkent Cycle.....	178
Conclusion.....	227
Bibliography.....	237

NOTE ON TRANSLATION

Translations from Russian and French are my own unless cited from specific sources.