



Caterina Scotti and Silvia Baudin in *Valse*. Photo: Danny Twang

GROUP TERRITORY

The end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s were years of social change. In theatre this was marked by the birth of many theatre groups all over the world. Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo is one of them. Unlike most groups that have disappeared in the course of the years, they still live and work in the north of Italy. They have persisted, becoming an example of collective independent work, autonomous research and original productions. Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo is especially known for their street performances and for their thoroughness in learning and executing classical Indian dance.

For the first time The Open Page has asked several women belonging to the same theatre group to write. When new members join, the variety of ages and generations inspire a different understanding of the group's turning points. Responsibilities for production, organisation, technical matters and creation are shared, creating a close link between the private and professional lives of the group's members. This theme is reflected, amongst other things, with the change determined by the arrival of children.

What follows are the articles of six women of the Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo, including one who decided to leave, placed in the chronological order in which they joined the group.

Luigia Calcaterra

1973

Most of the doctorate dissertations written by students on the work of Teatro Tascabile sooner or later talk of the long life of our group as an extraordinary phenomenon. As a representative example, I quote a fragment of Alessandra Proietti's dissertation, *The Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo: a story made of several voices*. It says: "[in the Tascabile] some people have shared and continue to share a work ethic (consistency, faith, primacy of the art...). This is one of the fundamental historical components that permits an abnormal union for such a duration. These people have reached a distillation of knowledge and a professional solidarity which is rarely found in other artistic organisations, which in addition to being a cementing element for the members, is also a kind of work that 'informs' all the performances of the Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo."

This is how things go in theatre groups. But behind this and other façades, the life of a group is often traversed by currents and inner turbulences connected to tensions among its members, to an actor leaving the group, or, as in my case, to periods of crisis.

My most significant crisis was in



Luigia Calcaterra in *E d'ammuri t'arricordi*.
Photo: Alessandro Brasile

1990. That year I decided I would have a family. My fiancé, struck by an incurable Africa twinge, after two years of coming and going on my part, was inflexible: he wanted to settle in Kenya and I would have to emigrate there with him.

I left lacerated. Two very important things were on the weighing scales for me: theatre on one side and a family on the other. At that time of my life (I was thirty-eight years old) I could no longer procrastinate: it was then or never. I chose family. I would never have imagined what followed. After staying for four months in Africa I understood with extreme lucidity that I could not live without theatre, without *my* theatre - the Tascabile. I left husband and everything else (including conspicuous finance) and I went back!

It was a decision taken in a very strange way that I still don't know how to explain. With no premonition, one morning, in front of a deep blue ocean, on a blindingly white immaculate beach, I found myself exclaiming out loud: "No! Here in Africa I die!" It was a kind of enlightenment, a sort

of clear perception of what my future in Kenya would be. Three days later I was on an aeroplane returning to Italy. I didn't shed even one tear and this, still now, if I think of it, seems inexplicable and unbelievable. It had taken two years of thought, considerations, quarrels with my partner, and lacerations, before the great choice of Africa and then...

I should describe my environment in Kenya. While in Africa, I lived as a pasha. My partner had opened a commercial enterprise, and he was very rich. I lived in a villa by the sea surrounded by the Kenyan ocean, coral reef, coconut palms, mango trees in the garden, and the customary servants (even a bodyguard!). Everything had its price and... its ethics. When I saw how the majority of Italians put together their wealth in Africa, and how my future husband wanted to build my/his family, I said: "No, thanks! Better to be poor and have my theatre work." Never more than then was I able to see how that theatre work was clean and bright, and how it was a place where I could take deep full breaths.

I had understood the value of my work and above all the value of group theatre - the group as a micro society in which to try concretely to have and realise on a small scale what outside in the macro society is often utopian. I went back with an incredible enthusiasm, thinking: "Enough! Nothing else exists!"

Africa had given me the tools to make a mature and conscious choice of my path as an artist. Still today I believe that my true decision to make theatre was taken after being in Africa. When I had joined the Tascabile I was twenty years old; I didn't understand anything, I didn't

even know why I had decided to make theatre. I simply worked. It might seem absurd (or maybe it is an absolutely obvious mechanism), but only when I found myself "outside" did I fully realise what was "inside". For the first time I appreciated that, with the mountain of bricks that I had put one on top of the other, day after day, for almost seventeen years, with my colleagues, without really knowing why, I had built a house, or rather a splendid building. Africa had also given me the awareness that I had a sense of belonging to what I had constructed over so many years.

That was in 1990. I have sometimes tried to ask myself since if I would make the same choices again now. Yes, with this difference: returning to Italy I would do everything I could to have a child. In the meantime, my concept of partner has changed a lot...

LUIGIA CALCATERRA (Italy) has been an actor in Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo since 1973, the year the group was founded, and has taken part in most of its performances since then. For twenty-six years, with a colleague in the group, she has developed research on Indian dance and theatre specialising in the style of Odissi. Luigia also teaches actor's work in the context of workshops and courses arranged by Teatro Tascabile.

Vanna Kärfors

1973

Imo Wo Niru
Nabe No Naka Made
Tsukiyo Kana

Even around the saucepan
Boiling with potatoes
The moon shines

Kyoriku

In 1969 I was a sociology student at Trento University. Hanging on a board at the entrance of the faculty was a leaflet announcing that some students wanted to form a theatre group and that they were looking for new collaborators. I answered. This is how I entered the world of theatre. Before this, theatre had only been a game at summer camps and in church oratories.

The small group that came together around the university debated political theatre and alternative avant-garde theatre forms, represented for us at the time by the Living Theatre and Bread and Puppet Theatre. We had a craving to make something interesting happen and to bring about a change in the stagnant situation of the university student movement, so we created "happenings" - performances in which we interpreted and told the history of that time. This even permitted us to submit the shows as part of our exams. One performance - on the death of Pinelli, an anarchist who died in 1969, apparently having committed suicide - was presented in the square behind the university with an open window representing the police office. It gave us validation for the exam in Modern Political Science.

The next year some of the group went to Milan to see *Ferai*, a performance by Odin Teatret. Unfortunately I was not able to go for financial reasons and I was to be very sorry about this. The performance was for sixty paying spectators, but Eugenio Barba allowed my companions to enter for

nothing. This made a big impression on us. We spoke a lot about the performance and our artistic aims became more concrete.

In 1971 my mother suddenly died. It was a tragedy for me in many ways. I had to leave my university life and return home to look after my younger brothers and sisters. I had to give up everything. I returned to Bergamo where my family lived, and I could not avoid making contact with other theatres. I went to the theatre school that Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo had started in order to find new actors. The courses were held in the evening in Milan.

For me it was a time of throwing myself in head-over-heels between family, theatre and school, but it was not tiring. I was ready to undertake all kinds of sacrifice as long as I did not have to give up theatre.

In 1972 I went to Venice with some fellow university students to see another Odin Teatret performance, *Min Fars Hus*. The performance was presented in an unusual room for theatre and had a striking effect on me. At the end, I remained silent and paralysed for endless minutes, sitting on the bench with my eyes fixed on some coins thrown on the ground by the actors. This episode closed inside me like a lotus flower.

In Milan I continued in the evenings with the Tascabile. I was allowed (I was not amongst the most talented!) to continue the work in more professional terms with the small group that had formed under the artistic direction of Renzo Vescovi. We

worked intensively on medieval love poems. Meeting and getting to know Renzo Vescovi was for me one of the most remarkable experiences. A dialogue of reciprocal trust opened up with him that gave me strength and security. My creative development and my actor's work began to become established and take on new forms. The work environment was from the beginning serious and disciplined, devoted to research, but also full of contrasts and contradictions as is typical of a group of people with different personalities.

Renzo and the actors of Teatro Tascabile were for me the travel and work companions for whom I had and have great esteem. The commitment to the text, the physical dance and acrobatic work started to bring results, which became *L'Amor Comenza* (1973), my first real professional performance, which also marked the start of my love for theatre work. Later came *Intermezzo* (1975) which was performed 155 times, *Franco apprendista pagliaccio* and *Albatri*.

These experiences created new dimensions in me. I learned to master an uncommon energy that I could recreate and reanimate almost automatically. The new, by now vital, experience was an inner path (in symbiosis with my body) that could be compared metaphorically to turning on a switch... Click! The light came on. I became someone else, whilst still remaining my true self. This experience matured especially in *Intermezzo* where the incarnation of dreams, feelings and drama was sprinkled with colours, music and acrobatic dances of absolute precision.

The performances alternated with workshops and meetings with other groups and directors. These were intense and rich years. In Venice, in 1975, I saw Grotowski's Teaterlaboratorium's *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, on the island of San Giacomo, and I participated in a voice workshop with Grotowski himself, where I discovered that

voice could come from within.

1977 was the year that marked a new era in my life. I was expecting a baby: in love, pregnant and exhausted. Energy became precarious and at the fifth month I decided to abandon the work at the Tascabile, giving priority to the life that was moving inside me, something natural of which I didn't want to lose a minute. I confronted this new situation like a woman and mother, but still with the spirit of a curious little girl. To face my new life I had to move to another country and culture, as the man I loved was Swedish and did not have the possibility of work in Italy.

I moved to Sweden in 1978. It was like starting from zero, aware of the solitude of exile and the connected problems. The reputation I had built for myself in Italy was not known in this new country where I was only an immigrant. My strength lay in my innocence about this new situation and in my curiosity for a new life.

Years passed with the intention that I would continue to work with theatre as soon as finance, family stability and the new language permitted it. But at that time our situation only allowed for one thing: cultivation. It meant returning to a peasant life: flowers, children, recipes, cooking courses, schools, vegetables, plants, sacrifices, work, new meetings and once more work and labour. I do not deny, though, that my inner vision of life dilated and deepened, and my awareness extended on many other levels.

As soon as I could, which meant as soon as the children had grown and I had mastered the language, I made contact with a local amateur group. I tried turning on the switch I had left behind, the magic click! The years and events succeeded one another like stones that roll downhill. With an artist colleague I started the Circus of Dreams, to make games for children and performances for the community. It was not difficult to

retrace the marks of the clown and juggler sculpted on my body, and the joy of creating, even if in less professional conditions.

In 1996 the amateur group trusted my debut as a director. A performance called *Intermissions* was presented in a castle in the town. In 1998 we created *Fanta*, which I also directed, and then *Pizzaiolo*, an amusing parody of the Latin-lover and of the fashion for cookery courses, in which I performed.

It has been like rediscovering the road I had lost, apparently similar to the old one, but with new obstacles. I realised this especially on returning to Bergamo to take part in a workshop on Odissi dance and then at a workshop at Odin Teatret in 2003. I returned home to a job at the State Theatre of Stockholm, as an extra in a traditional theatre performance. For me it was an experiment. I was on stage in such an unusual way

compared with my previous experiences. But to my surprise, each time I came on stage there was always the same mechanism that turned on the switch. It has become a dimension of energy, I dare say nearly pure, like a real act of love - to be a little sentimental.

VANNA KÄRFORS (Italy/Sweden) studied at Trento University and joined Teatro Tascabile in 1973 first as a pupil and later as an actor. She moved to Sweden in 1978, to build a family. Since then she has maintained the activity of community theatre as actor and director.

Tiziana Barbiero 1978

I close my eyes and I focus on only one word: India. The image of a beautiful old man immediately appears to me, of a great master, my master, Pandit Amarnath.

In 1989, during one of my trips to India, I decided to take singing lessons because I needed new material for the performance *Experiments with Truth* that we were preparing during that period. I asked a friend, Urmi Dè, if she could give me lessons. I became fascinated and I firmly wished to continue the study the following year. It has



Tiziana Barbiero in *E d'ammuri t'arricordi*.
Photo: Alessandro Brasile

always been our tradition to show the work and the new discoveries to our colleagues when we return from our trips. The classical Hindi singing was very successful and it

became our shared vocal warm-up for the new show.

In November 1990 I was again in Delhi. It was this year I met Pandit Amarnath. Urmi had to leave for Bangladesh, she could not work with me and suggested I ask her guru. She told me that it would be very difficult to be accepted as his student as his aversion for westerners was notorious. I had still not understood about whom she was speaking.

On the morning of the interview, I dressed very well, like a true western lady, and I went with Urmi to the master's home. Urmi talked for a long time to Amarnath in Hindi. At the end, in English, he answered that he was too old, that it was meaningless to study singing for one month, and that he didn't want to waste his time. Meanwhile, I had already fallen in love. Before me was the living example of what I had only read about in books and I had no doubt: Amarnath was "the Master".

His whole noble person expressed the awareness of the ancient Indian culture, and a great knowledge of life and art, without any conceit. He had no need to present himself because his figure aroused immediate respect from everybody. He concluded his speech by saying he would not give me any kind of lesson. I didn't move from my chair. The atmosphere was very embarrassing: Urmi, who in the meantime had got up to leave, silently sat down again. We stayed there, in silence, for fifteen minutes exactly. I held my lowered eyes on my watch because I had decided not to speak at all, but not to leave until he had changed his mind. He would have had to throw me out. At the close of that endless time, Amarnath called his daughter, Bindu, and asked her if she had the time and desire to give me lessons. It was not what I wanted, but it was something.

When I came to the Master's house

the next morning, I was asked to go upstairs. I entered the room expecting to find Bindu there, but Amarnath was sitting on the carpet, behind the tampura, the string instrument used to give the tone to the singing. I started working with him like this, wordlessly.

In Delhi that year I got typhus: I was alone and I felt as if I was dying, but my greatest desperation was missing a lesson with Amarnath. After three days of delirium and two in absolute immobility (I had terrible pains in my whole body and could not move my hands anymore), I got up, took a taxi and went to the master's house. During the lesson I poured with sweat and could not concentrate. Amarnath, who had been informed of my illness by Aloka Panikar, my dance teacher, didn't say anything and made me work hard even if he was a little more patient than usual.

With Tascabile, I returned to Delhi in November the year after. A few days before leaving, I fell from a ladder and broke my right wrist while cleaning the windows. I left anyway. I had waited a whole year to return to Amarnath and I would have gone whatever my condition. For one month, in Delhi, I only studied singing. I worked a lot, almost to the point of exhausting my voice, because I wanted to show him that even westerners are able to understand.

One day he said to me: "West is darkness". I wanted my teacher to love me. I spent the days singing and studying theory because Amarnath was a very demanding teacher totally without patience. When I did an exercise wrongly, he made me repeat it only once, at the second mistake he abandoned me. It was really an arduous enterprise to work and follow him. He would sing, improvising for some minutes and then say: "Repeat". I would look at him like an idiot; I hardly knew the notes of the Indian scale, I didn't understand and I felt like crying. One

day he said: "You will never learn". I engaged myself even more, I secretly asked a pupil of his to explain some things and little by little I conquered him and also a little bit of singing. I knew very well that I could not have gone through the same process with singing as I had with dance. It would have been meaningless. At times I felt guilty because I thought I was cheating my master who in the meantime was getting fond of me. At times I dreamt of being free and of devoting myself only to singing, of staying in India and becoming a singer.

Finally one day the master told me: "Stay here for two years and I will make a singer of you". I went into a true depression. I stopped working for the pure pleasure of working. At the same time I got up every morning at five o'clock because Amarnath believed it was better to sing early in the morning; I had ginger and honey for breakfast because my teacher did so for the voice; I broke the whole neighbourhood's eardrums; I sang in the streets, in the kitchen, on the rickshaws, while having a bath, I had also started to sing while dancing. I was unbearable.

I had been told that Amarnath wanted his students to ask him intelligent questions. I spent the evenings with books marking intelligent questions and then listened to him answering things that I already knew. He started taking me with him and he made me play the *tampura* during one of his concerts in Delhi. He didn't let anybody see his four-thirty morning warm-up, but I had insisted so much that in the end I was allowed to. To reach his house I got up at four o'clock and I walked for twenty minutes when it was still dark. I never arrived late. Some mornings I was so sleepy, I could hardly keep my eyes open, but I never fell asleep, and observing his training has been very useful for me because this is how music was handed down in India from

teacher to teacher. There is nothing written, there are strict rules, but they change according to the school, and every teacher creates a music which is transmitted orally to the student. It is no longer like this, because recording makes everything faster.

The first year I studied with Amarnath I asked to record the lessons, but he refused saying that in that way I would learn the lesson more quickly, but I would forget it just as quickly. I was desperate because every time I left his house I couldn't remember anything at all and I didn't know how to practise. One day I decided to record secretly, but the click of the recorder betrayed me. Bindu, who was also present at the lesson, was furious because she understood that I had hidden a tape-recorder in my bag. Red as a pepper with shame and terror, I denied it. Bindu insisted that her father should make me open my bag. But he, even though he knew that I was lying, saved me from my shame and didn't make me open the bag.

In 1991 I wondered about bringing Amarnath to Italy but I didn't dare ask him because he still didn't know me well and he was old and afraid of the unknown. At the end of our stay, our director Renzo Vescovi joined us in Delhi and I took him to visit Amarnath. They were very impressed with each other. On that occasion, Amarnath showed us a record he had made in France many years before: *The Deep Song of India*. Greatly surprised and moved, I discovered that it was the same recording as a tape that Beppe (Giuseppe Chierichetti, an actor of Teatro Tascabile) and I had listened to endlessly in 1978 without knowing who the singer was! Renzo followed some lessons and when we proposed to Amaranth that we should make an Italian tour, he promised us he would think about it.

In January 1994 we returned to Delhi, and I organised Amaranth's tour. He

arrived in Italy in February of 1994 with his daughter Bindu and two musicians, Om Prakash and Faiyaz Khan. He stayed at my home during his whole time in Italy. It was an unbelievable experience. He turned seventy while in Italy. When he left, I thought I would see him a few months later in Delhi, but life went otherwise and I have never seen my Master again. Amarnath died in New Delhi on the 9th of March 1995.

After his death, I stopped singing for almost three years. I could not do it without crying. I had also to stop listening to his music because the memory was too painful. A few months ago the students of the theatre asked me to teach them some Hindi singing and I accepted full of anguish.

I had not forgotten anything.

TIZIANA BARBIERO (Italy) joined Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo in 1978 and has worked as an actor in most of the productions since then. She has specialised in classical Indian Odissi dance, and in particular she is responsible for vocal work within the group.

Caterina Scotti 1983

Perhaps it is because of the August heat or because of the indolence and idleness that an eight months pregnant body produces, or perhaps it is because of a sort of modesty in speaking of things that I have only shared with very few people until now, that I almost refrained from keeping the promise to write I gave more than two months ago.

During the twenty years I have worked with the Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo, my private life has always been tied to my professional life with a double thread. Despite my efforts to keep them as separate as possible, one has influenced the other in an exchange that has often proved itself to be hazardous and unmanageable.

At least until a year ago, the men in

my life have always coincided with my partners in work, but I have almost always been the one to stay and continue working with the theatre while the men moved on and did not return. Yet they were important and dramatic relationships, the kind that should last forever or not at all. When finally having to choose, none of them was ever stronger than my work. Only on looking back, do I understand that I have done the right thing. I would not be the same if I could not nourish myself with the essential and vital food that theatre is for me.

I write this now lucidly, but I have not always been so clear. The moments of uncertainty and doubt have been devastating, especially when the work became

opaque and no longer seemed to have a meaning.

At the birth of my daughter Marta, ten years ago, and during the whole pregnancy, I lived in a kind of hypnotic state during which I tried to convince myself that nothing would change and that my new life would damage the theatre as little as possible. I remember a friend's severe look when, during a festival in 1993, he greatly disapproved of me still going on stilts despite my advanced pregnancy. But my enormous desire not to lose even a moment of the whole creative ferment around me, made me irresponsible towards the tiny being who was meanwhile working hard at growing inside me, without ever giving me nausea, fainting fits or any kind of indisposition, as if aware that with such a mother she had to learn to cope alone as soon as possible.

Twenty days after giving birth, I was performing again, my breasts hurting from an excess of milk, but happy to be able to put my stilts on again. Still today my colleagues can hardly remember Marta's first years of life because I had organised everything so that she would give as little trouble as possible.

My mother was essential in helping me to bring up my daughter. I went to her with Marta every morning and I returned in the evening at the end of work. I had recorded a video-cassette with some extracts from the theatre's performances, where I appeared in street shows, Indian dance and flamenco, and Marta wanted to watch it all the time. She started to imitate my movements and one day I realised, when putting on a particular flamenco music, that she repeated gestures and expressions with an impressive similarity, which had an almost comic effect on her two-year-old face.

When, at the beginning of January this year, I received confirmation that I was expecting another baby, nearly all my

colleagues had left for the usual vacation-study in India. Only Simona was at the theatre with me. She recommended that I should not talk immediately to our director, Renzo Vescovi, because he was already weighed down with problems on top of those of the forthcoming tour in India and he would not have succeeded in enjoying his well-deserved holidays.

After ten days in London, to look over our Bharata Natyam repertoire with our teacher Usha Raghavan, we also left for India. Before starting the Ahmedabad tour, Renzo joined us to see how our training was going and to equip himself with new and heavy manuals on Indian dance. One evening at supper, during the dessert, in the cold air conditioning of the Woodlands Hotel, I finally found the courage to speak to him. At the time he did not seem particularly troubled, he only asked me if I was happy, but in the following days I understood that his mind was already in a vortex of worry, further increased by my news.

We decided to tell the others at the end of the tour in order not to generate further nervousness, but it was not destiny that things should happen that way. Alessandro, one of the actors, had a serious accident before *Valse* in Ahmedabad, Renzo had an infection in New Delhi, there were performances to give at the Carnival in Venice, among a thousand difficulties, all these seemed like obstacles put there on purpose to delay my announcement more and more; almost a warning that it would not be easy.

When I finally managed to talk to everybody, a kind of chain reaction exploded, where bad moods, repressed dissatisfactions and frustrations were thrown at me, in such a way that, given my particular emotional fragility, I felt squashed. Suddenly I realised that some of my colleagues no longer trusted me, they doubted my future decisions

in relation to the work and experienced my new pregnancy as something awkward and annoying. Even my going to Spain to update the flamenco work aroused perplexity. The only thing that seemed important was to replace me in the performances as soon as possible, so that the theatre should not suffer difficulties. I found this appropriate, but what had I done to be confronted with so much hostility...

I spent some months in deep sorrow and the wounds of those days have still not healed entirely. But I have not stopped believing in my work even for a moment nor, at the same time, in the daughter I am carrying in my belly. She concerns the most intimate part of my life as a woman that I do not want to give up: the difficult existential passage that a forty-three year old woman makes from a youth that seemed never ending to a maturity that has appeared with no possibility of return; and a life that, in little more than a year, has completely capsized, passing from moments of strong depression to moments of extreme happiness.

The work of replacing my parts in the performances in repertoire has been very difficult, at times almost painful. I have felt exposed and vulnerable. I had to share my most intimate scores, those that I watched over with most love. But this is the hard law of theatre: the show must go on.

I have tried in all the months since I stopped actively participating in the performances to keep as close as possible to the group, participating in the elaboration of future projects. A famous American jour-

nalist revealed that she had cancelled an interview with Fidel Castro, obtained after many difficulties, in order to accompany her daughter to her first day at school. I have wondered for a long time if I would have done the same.

Some days ago I went to meet the nanny who will look after Eleonora, my second daughter. The house did not seem light enough to me and I have started wondering what kind of repercussion this will have on Eleonora, and whether yet again I was sacrificing the serenity of my daughter to my work. The double roles of actress and mother are not easily compatible. It is surely the greatest gamble I have with myself. Perhaps only Marta and Eleonora will be able to say one day if I have lost or won it.

CATERINA SCOTTI (Italy) was born in Bergamo in 1961. Since 1982 she has worked as an actress with the Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo, participating in most of the productions in repertoire. Beside the Indian dance style of Bharata Natyam, Caterina dances Flamenco. She teaches in the Theatre School that the Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo conducts in its centre.

Simona Zanini 1997

How often I have thought about being a woman doing this work of an actress within a theatre group! A group that is more than thirty years old, where there are more women than men and where the women are so strong!

I had many difficulties at the beginning, but this job has often offered me the possibility of investigating deeply the imperfections, both physical and of personality, that seemed congenital and insuperable to me, until I found a way to include them happily in my artistic life. When I was younger, for example, I had a complex about my feet: they are chubby, wide and flat (television stars don't have such feet!). How embarrassing to work so often bare-footed! But after eight years of Indian dance, what a precious tool my beloved feet have become!

In a more or less similar way I have experienced the fact of being female: males are always stronger, they are more resistant, there are fewer of them, they are really needed, they are hard, they never cry and they are always looked after by the women. "If I had been born a male!" was my subtext during the first few years.

When my child was born, or rather, when I knew that I was going to have a little boy, my subtext changed immediately: it was clear that I was a woman and my little boy needed me so much, that the old thought never came to my mind anymore. The work itself encouraged me to exploit my female characteristics until I rejoice in them, in dance in particular. If then I don't succeed in walking on my hands as the boys do, it doesn't matter, I don't suffer about this



Simona Zanini in *Valse*. Photo: Danny Twang

anymore. I am perfectly conscious of the physiological differences, of the different possibilities and it is important that they exist.

The fact of becoming a mother has surely helped me to overcome some difficulties in my work, but undoubtedly it has created lots of others. Certainly this kind of management of the artistic and private life, in the role of mother-actress, has been simpler for me, since Emanuele is the third child in the group (and endowed with a super granny!). The biggest difficulties have already been overcome by my female

colleagues who found themselves in the same situation before I did. And as Caterina and Tiziana are precisely among the strong women of the group, I have not had to fight for many of my rights as a mother, because they came automatically based on the preceding models, safeguarded by Luigia. Luigia is perhaps the strongest woman of all, and, like the truly great actresses of myth, has chosen not to have children and has given her life to a strong visionary theatre of which fabulous men are spokesmen.

It weighs on me however to have to abdicate a certain liberty in the management of my working time, which has always been limited because I have a rather busy partner - the director! But on the other hand the child helps me to activate important stimuli for my work, and, above all he often gives me a serenity that is extremely productive. Perhaps the strength of the women in this theatre comes from the support of our men, or perhaps it exists thanks to the fact that in our group the work of the individual is extremely valued and does not obey unpleasant commercial theatre laws. If a woman is combative and assiduous she can receive great satisfaction from this charac-

teristic.

In a society dominated by the image of top models and of television showgirls, I would like in my future work inside the Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo, to enrich my female experience trying to exhume a woman who is at risk of disappearing: the woman of the people, fearful of the devil, who launched her desperate lament in the face of the death of an indispensable husband lost too soon, or of a child broken in the prime of his or her life. To satisfy my search for the archaic, for the original instincts of the human being, why not work with the image of a woman who is dressed in mourning, with the head covered, whose strength contrasts with the female image imposed on us by television, while longing for a balance so arduous to achieve?

SIMONA ZANINI (Italy) was born in 1971. While studying at university, Simona worked with various amateur theatre groups. She joined Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo in 1997, after having followed its school. She is an actor in all the ensemble productions in repertory and has specialised in two classical Indian dance forms, Bharata Natyam and Kuchipudi.

Silvia Baudin

2001

I have a very beautiful and strange leaf on a small table at home, which is surely more a fetish than an ornament. I took it to my biology teacher in high-school to ask him to which tree it belonged, but he was not able to give me an answer. It certainly did not come from one of our native trees, he

assured me. The leaf remained a mystery. To remember where I had found it, I wrote on it: "Settimo Torinese, Odin Teatret, *Talabot*, May 16th 1990." I had picked it up in the room at the end of the performance, at the time when my awareness of wanting to belong to a particular community began.

I have not been a member of the Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo for very long, even though I spent many years with them as an apprentice and collaborated in their performances. I played the Little Girl holding the big white balloon for the first time in 1992. I was twenty-one years old and I was terrified.

In Chivasso we founded the Teatro Tribù, a group of high-school students led by Aldo Pasquero and Simone Capula. Thanks to Corinna Poggi, a friend of Simone's, we met the Teatro Tascabile. Their fame preceded them, but after having seen a week of performances, during which they had succeeded in doing *everything* (and by everything I mean *everything*: lectures, stilt walking, Indian dances, clowning...), our admiration was total.

When Renzo asked Aldo and Simone if I could play the role of the Little Girl, for a special project on Lake Como, I almost fainted. It was surely a fantastic opportunity, but given my personality, which is closer to a grizzly bear than to that of an exuberant and enthusiastic actress, it turned out to be a very difficult four days. During the rehearsals I didn't talk to anybody, although they were all very kind. Renzo Vescovi, the director, said to me gently: "Silvia, do not stay in that dark corner, come here with us." I was terrified of doing everything wrong, even though I have to confess that my part did not present particular technical difficulties: I simply had to walk!

I had a big white balloon tied to my wrist, so it couldn't fly away. With it the Little Girl had to stroll in a marvellous park and simply look at what happened around her. The balloon is the symbol of her innocence, the great eye through which she sees the world. Ten seconds after I had arrived on stage, a sudden strong gust of wind threw the balloon down onto a particularly spiteful stalk of grass. And the balloon burst. I stood

completely still, under the beam of the follow-spot, with hundreds of people looking at me, and a thread tied to my wrist to which a white plastic carcass was attached.

The collaboration with the Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo, even if it did not start in the best of ways, was lasting. After various hassles, Teatro Tribù moved to Bergamo, and Alessandro (Rigoletti) and I performed in two productions of the Teatro Tascabile, *Valse* and *Albatri*. For some years we shared the same working spaces with the Tascabile actors; at times we participated in their training and acrobatic sessions; we followed seminars and met lots of people. After years of living in the same place, I could say that we knew the Tascabile very well, having faced many professional (and other) experiences with them, but also many crises. Having an external, but close eye, at times allowed us to see problems better than they did; and vice-versa.

I am aware that this definition is quite common, but we were a family with all that this implies: strong bonds of respect and love with some people, edginess with others. We experienced moments of forced cohabitation, for instance on tour, when one would have preferred to be somewhere else, as happens at times staying with relatives for Christmas. The experience of a young group living closely with an older one, even when both groups maintain their individuality, is very interesting even if difficult to manage. Teatro Tribù did not know how to do this and the group split up. Once alone, Alessandro determinedly joined the Tascabile. I was very sad and didn't want to have anything to do with theatre anymore.

I changed city and job. After some months I began to think that perhaps I could start making theatre again. I lived near to two groups who interested me a lot, one of which had worked often with the Tascabile and could be said to belong to the same

genealogical tree. I wrote down the two telephone numbers and put them in my purse. I think they stayed there for four or five months, without me ever really having the intention of calling. In some way, I felt that it would have been a betrayal of the Tascabile. I could not even tolerate the idea of approaching another group, until finally I had to admit to myself - and this was not easy - that the only thing I wanted was to return to Bergamo. I threw away the pieces

of paper in my purse and asked Renzo if I could be accepted as a pupil.

I had never practised the discipline of Indian dance before. Tiziana and Luigia, alternately, gave me one or two lessons of Odissi Dance a week, and I had begun to learn the first steps. As every year, in December the actors began organising their study vacation in India. I imagined that it would be a good experience, but thought of it as something for the future. I was only at



From the left Silvia, Caterina, Simona, Luigia and Tiziana. Photo: Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo

the beginning. I hardly knew the basic positions, despite the great job done by my teachers, and the trip cost a lot. The twinkle in the eyes of the others who were about to leave certainly made me curious. I felt I envied them something important, of which however I knew nothing and above all that did not belong to me.

One day Tiziana said to me: "You should come." And that conditional sounded more like an imperative. "But I don't have the money." "If it is only a problem of money, the Tascabile can advance it for you," she answered. At that moment something changed in my head, not concerning dance or India, which continued to be obscure to me, but in respect to the Tascabile. The group was prepared to lend me a good deal of money to allow me to come into direct contact with something I had heard so much about. To smell Indian air was an integral part of the apprenticeship, even if not obligatory, and the Tascabile would help me. At the time, a boundless feeling of gratitude would have made me reach India even on foot.

Aloka taught me the steps that I still didn't know and the first dance that is learned by pupils. My enthusiasm for the work was huge. I wrote: "On Monday Aloka will begin to teach me the Mangalacharan. I am very happy. Even if I don't know what it is." She taught me the dance in a little less than a month. One day Tiziana wanted to see a lesson, to look at what the results were. I started trembling two hours before the lesson, sure that I would have forgotten everything, that I was much too tall, that the *choks* would be a disaster. I didn't want to disappoint Tiziana. Naturally Aloka was aware of my state and she said in surprise to Tiziana: "How strange, she is not afraid of

me, but she is of you!"

Aloka is for me a figure of extraordinary importance. I know that she has been the teacher for Tiziana and Luigia. But for me Tiziana and Luigia are the teachers, each in a different but equally effective way. My relationship with India was born thanks to Tiziana, with whom I have been there to study three times.

It is difficult to explain what is passed on through the work, something that goes beyond technique, a twenty-five-year-old experience and discipline. It is difficult to explain what pushes them to transmit the dance in that particular way. It has happened to me that after lessons when I have not been particularly brilliant, I look at them furtively and think, "What makes them do all this..."

Even if Renzo will perhaps have doubts about what I am about to write, because according to him I continue to hide in dark corners, I don't believe that I would be able to make this kind of work in any other group in the world. They are my family with all that this implies.

To end, I am still curious: to which tree do the leaves of *Talabot* belong?

SILVIA BAUDIN (Italy) was born in Turin in 1971. In 1992 she was among the founders of the Teatro Tribù of Chivasso, Turin. In 2001 she joined Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo as a pupil and in April 2004 she became an actress with the group.

All Teatro Tascabile's articles have been translated from Italian by Julia Varley

Editors' note: Renzo Vescovi, the director of Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo, died suddenly of meningitis in April 2005 as *The Open Page* n.10 was going to print. We share the inexpressible pain of the group for their loss.