

OPEN NEWS

WOMEN AND WAR, SANTARCANGELO FESTIVAL (Italy)

On June 2nd 1999, when the Kosovo war was still ferociously on and nobody could predict its further developments, several Italian women received a letter from Laura Mariani, founder of the Casa delle attrici of Santarcangelo. "Dearest", was the heading of this one page long letter, "The Casa delle attrici of Santarcangelo will celebrate this year its 6th anniversary. How could we have predicted that this celebration would have happened in a climate so similar to the climate in which another Casa delle attrici, our original model, was born: the house Eleonora Duse strongly yearned for and was able to create in Rome in 1914, at the dawn of World War One." The letter went on to propose that we attend the celebration carrying to Santarcangelo a "gift of peace" - a text, a song, a dance, a gesture, whatever we thought could be useful to confront the logic of war without reproducing it. "Antigone again", stated Laura Mariani in her vibrating and loving letter. And, in those days, her invitation sounded like a relief, a break: Laura was proposing to us that we give voice to our feelings in a way which was private and collective at the same time. Each one of us could make an "offer", a "gift of peace" in front of an audience, re-staging at its best the liturgy of theatre, that is its basic function. On July 11, in a downtown garden, approximately eighty women and a few men gathered from all over Italy. The sky, after days of rainy gloom, was miraculously clear, and the silence absolute. Under Laura's quiet direction, several women - actresses, singers, dancers, writers, directors - went, one after the other, to the little stage. And each one "gave her gift" to the others. Among the many names, let me mention at least: Isabella Carloni, Angela Marchionni (Beatrix V.T), Judith Malina (Living Theater), Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Letizia Buoso, Chiara Bazzoli, Roberta Biagiarelli (Moby Dick Teatri), Claudia Palombi and Monica Tenaglia (Fa Teatro), Lorenza Zambon (Casa degli Alfieri, Asti), Teresa Ludovico (Teatro Kismet OperA), Bruna Gambarelli (Laminarie), Ermanna Montanari (Ravenna Teatro), Leonore Ivy Colbert (a wonderful singer who has worked with Moni Ovadia), Eleonora Fumagalli and the gypsy Kosovara Jusvidana Bejkaku (both from Rompere gli Argini), Marion d'Amburgo (Magazzini), Isabella Bordoni (Giardini pensili), Franca Graziano (Delitti in biblioteca). The afternoon was symbolically closed by Mariangela Gualtieri (Teatro Valdoca), who offered an excerpt from her recent *Parsifal*, an intense monologue listing her (our?) many "I don't know". Where the culture of war affirms only a stolid and arrogant "We do know", Mariangela's modest and singular voice underlined the beauty of doubting, and the necessity of questioning.

Maria Nadotti



MELHOUN SINGING

(Morocco)

I did not learn the Melhoun singing style to save it, but I took in hand this patrimony to save myself, as a resistance against ugliness, against everything, which is not beauty.

My master was very, very old. He was about eighty-five years old. At the beginning he was not sure that I would continue, as I was not touched by that repertoire, I was singing other things. He tested me various times; he wanted to verify the degree of my passion before giving me what he had to give. I was thirsty and if I am put to trial I continue, if something is refused me I don't give up, quite the contrary. I had some problems because I was known as an intellectual and journalist who defended certain causes. The fact that I defended the female cause and modernism for example, and that I went against tradition, made me controversial. I had problems at that level with musicians, with certain traditionalists, because they do not want to accept the fact that I am a woman and that I sing a style belonging to men, putting the accent on this. So I had problems with conservative people, while the public appreciated my experience.

The Melhoun went through very difficult times and after I started singing it everyone was speaking of it. There are now many more radio programmes and recordings of Melhoun. The only opposition comes from conservative milieus not only within music, but for example also in television, because I am a journalist as well.

Touria Hadraoui

**THE BR/LEEDING GROUND
(Wales)**

The event was called the Br/leeding Ground. It took place between October 25th and 31st 1999 in Chapter Arts Centre, in Cardiff. It spent the very last of the Magdalena Project revenue funding from the Arts Council of Wales

It brought together a team of international artists for whom I held respect and (offering only a small fee, good dinners cooked by the renowned Pete Brooks, lodging and a space to work) demanded from them a time of work that confronted the "efficacy of art in a time of war". The match-mated artists had never worked together before and in two cases had never met before day one of the project. They formed three groups; they were: 1. Geddy Aniksdal and Mike Brookes, 2. Jolanta Krukowska and Sioned Hughes, 3. Madeline McNamarra and Gerald Tyler. Three "Magdalena artists" and three Wales based artists who had been rejected by the Arts Council for funding in '99 formed another group, and a fourth group was led by Dijana Milosevic and comprised of those self selected to attend her workshop. Each group had Silent Witness/es who followed the work. All four groups showed pieces on day six as part of a Day of Debate. And the Silent Witness/es spoke together with others invited to share their words.

The results were varied, fascinating, strong, primarily honest and brave. But the superlatives sound hollow. My respect grew hugely for the artists who worked - who accepted the challenge. I know it gave, at least me, a stepping stone to a new way of thinking and working. An analysis, at this stage - what two months after the event - eludes me. A voice says: "Stay quiet, think inside, don't share what you have not yet understood". Why does this always happen to me? These days I listen to this voice without denial. Only questions that are newer arise - always. And a strong idea for a new performance.

I carry the words of Fintan O'Toole from his essay *Cultures, Art and Conflict*:

That the cultured person and the ignorant killer have often been one and the same. Intellectuals and artists have sometimes taken the lead in violent conflicts. Their brilliance has been used to create

hateful propaganda. Their rhetoric has fuelled destructive passions. Their exaggerated attachment to their own culture has fed a sense of superiority that can only be assuaged by domination.

And yesterday, walking on the beach with the children, we found a dead porpoise; large, beautiful, perfectly formed and still. I thought it was a dolphin. I reported it as is requested by common law. I was informed some days later, by the authorities that deal with such matters, that the post-mortem would be in the post and that more than likely the porpoise had been killed by a bottle-nose dolphin. Apparently they play with the porpoises, their smaller brethren, by teasing and slashing them about in the waters so violently and repeatedly that all their insides are destroyed and they die from internal bleeding, left alone. They are not even food. I have always romanticised the dolphin - they are after all the second most intelligent beings on our planet. So, I am told.

Jill Greenhalgh

LABIOS QUE BEIJEI (Brazil)

Lábios que Beije (The lips I kissed) written and directed by Paulo Henrique Alcântara,

with Nilda Spencer and Wilson Mello, has been performed for a whole year now with great success in Salvador, Bahia. Nilda is a seventy-six year old actress and Wilson is sixty-seven. The performance presents an old married couple remembering how they met. When Nilda started her career as an actress in the '40s she had to register in the same department as prostitutes did.

In the programme for the performance Laila Garin, a local twenty year old actress, writes:

How can the burning flame, the sparkling eyes, the thirst for discovery, the intensity be maintained? Can theatre be made without all this? Will it always be so? Will the heart always thump in the thighs? Will the hands always shake, and shake even more from realising they are shaking? Will we continue to make up the right eye before the left out of fear of the performance not going well if we prepare differently from on the other days? Will we never again break down? Never again go on stage?

Nilda Spencer and Wilson Mello in their twenties.
From the programme of *Lábios que Beije*.



Never again be surprised? Will it be that the director won't grasp that we understand what he says but we cannot do it "right now"? Will we be able to do it "right now" later? Will this wish to kill the director pass? Will we manage to withstand until the end of the season?

Will we ever stop having the nightmare of not entering the stage on time? Will we stop dreaming? Will we stop questioning ourselves? What curse drives us to like so many questions? Why don't we just run away?

This profession needs - still today - to prove that it is a profession like others... Is it really like others?

My God! Nilda has a premiere, she is being born again, starting a new life... Who knows how many times she has already done this... Many times in more difficult days than these... She is mad... Are all actresses mad? Is she nervous? Is her heart thumping in her thighs? Are her hands shaking, and shaking even more from realising they are shaking? Has she made up her right eye before her left out of...

WOMEN OF THE WORLD (Denmark)

The 6th International Women's Culture Festival directed by Maria Lexa and organised by Foreningen Freja took place in Aarhus, Denmark in June 1999 with the theme *Culture and Society*. The Festival and Forum not only presented art and culture, but also looked at how art and culture are related to a larger social and political context. As an inspiration for the Festival and Forum a "six word theme" was used: women, culture, politics, democracy, relations between the First and Third World, leadership. What happens when the relationship between these things is disharmonious or when one of the parts is isolated from the others? Amongst the workshops Ebba Strange examined the interplay between political activity on a grassroots

level and the formal political system, and Tu Nokwe focused on storytelling in relation to rhythm and music. Ebba Strange was a member of the Danish Parliament for twenty-one years and is now retired. Tu Nokwe is a singer, actress and dancer from South Africa and is inspired by her own cultural traditions and roots in her storytelling technique.

UHAN SHII (Taiwan)

Peng Ya-Ling has created one of the few performing troupes featuring old people presenting the stories of Taiwan as experienced by the actors themselves. Starting in 1995 Uhan Shii (from the Taiwanese word for happy) has made four dramatic productions, *Echoes of Taiwan I-IV* illustrating life in Taiwan.

Peng invited some traditional folk art performers like the seventy year old Taiwanese opera singer and actress Cloudy Black Cat (real name Hsu Yuan) to take part in the first production. Cloudy was convinced that incorporating the traditional form of art into today's modern style would help revive Taiwanese Opera's popularity. On tour in London Cloudy Black Cat amazed everyone by standing up in her wheelchair and instead of singing only the few lines required she sang the whole part which lasted for several minutes.

The main focus of Uhan Shii is old people who do *not* have a background as actors. Nearly one hundred people signed up after the first ads in local Chinese newspapers. Most of the old people came without a single day of acting experience and were unable to read. So instead of a written script Peng drew the script for the actors but soon found out that she mainly had to work with verbal exchange.

Peng Ya-Ling has learnt to appreciate the mature body language and inner strength

of the elderly which they have accumulated through extended and often difficult life experiences - things that one cannot possibly expect to see in younger actors. She says: "... when working on drama with old people, content and expression of feelings carry much more weight." Rather than demanding certain styles of acting Peng capitalises on the person's body language and mental state to "make acting less like acting". She expects Uhan Shii's actors to speak their lines on the stage in the same manner as they would in real life; an old person should look and act like an old person.

Some Uhan Shii actors say that performing the plays bring back memories they thought they had forgotten, or which they would prefer to forget. "I wanted to cry out all the sorrows I had been holding inside for so many years." The old people also seem to have found new self-confidence and a refuge from the stress of their life today.

NICOLETTA ROBELLO (Italy)

In the past four years Nicoletta Robello has collaborated with a group of ten older people, eight women and two men, aged between sixty and eighty-five, who decided to get involved in theatre. They started rehearsals with director Roberto Bacci as a special project of the Third Age University of Pontedera, Italy. Later Nicoletta directed them and they worked assisted by the dramatist Luigi Arpini to transform their memories and experiences into material suitable for performance. The challenge for Nicoletta was to accommodate the lack of physical and technical skill and focus instead on their need to communicate, which had its own power. Nicoletta was amazed by the way these actors overcame their fear and ignorance of the theatre process to undertake a journey of discovery. Along the way they learned that a performance can be built from

something tiny which emerges during improvisation and that the interaction between the characters begins not from the words, but from the spaces in between. These experiences have impacted on their personal lives, making a connection between theatre and real life, and this has helped them to define themselves as social beings. The production *Leone, un'innocenza umanamente nuova* toured in Italy and abroad with success. Many of the actors took an aeroplane and crossed the Alps for the first time in their lives, to perform in Denmark and Germany.

Nicoletta Robello who is thirty-one years old and has been working in theatre for ten years mainly as an actress, has been so affected by the collaboration with this group that she has invited eighty-one year old Ernesto Bimbi to collaborate with her on a new clown performance.

LIVING HISTORY (Germany)

Six years ago I was introduced for the first time to the activity that in Germany we call "senior cultural work". It seemed to me to be something in between social work, therapy and art. At first, I asked myself as an artist why I was doing this kind of work. I searched for the boundaries to protect real professional theatre and myself as a director from the social-workers and their special education.

Later, I worked with old people and I discovered how important it was for them to do artistic work. In 1995, with the Institute of Education and Culture, I organised an exciting international model project for senior culture work. We also published a book called *Grenz-Erfahrungen - Erlebtes Europa, Europa erleben* in English, French and German. I found myself within a network I had no idea existed and through meetings, workshops and discus-

sions I got more and more involved with the theme.

In October 1999 the first Welt Altentheater Festival was organised by Freien Werkstatt Theater Köln, a company that has been working with theatre and old people for twenty years. I contributed in the research and preparation of the festival. Eighteen groups from Europe, Africa, Asia, North and South America were present and the performances, which were all directed professionally, varied from classical text theatre to image, dance and music shows. Amongst the groups I would like to mention Uhan Shii Theatre from Taiwan, Stella Chiweshe from Zimbabwe, Patricia Ariza with Flores de Otoño from Colombia, and Londrina - Zona Paraíso from Brazil directed by Joao Henrique Bernardi and Fernanda Coelho. I could say a lot about each group and each performance, but the most important is to underline that all the groups had worked together for many years, that the performances were of an extraordinary quality, and that the actors aged between fifty-five and ninety played with great passion and warmth, with all their heart and soul.

In dates 5-8 October 2000 Theater der Erfahrungen of Berlin will celebrate twenty years of activity with the festival entitled *Graue Stars über Berlin*. For further information please contact Theater der Erfahrungen tel. +49.(0)30.8554206, fax +49 (0)30.8554378. I hope to invite some of the artists to Wuppertal for a new event of *Unter Wasser Fliegen*.

Kordula Lobeck

MAGDALENA AOTEAROA (New Zealand)

Inspired by the news of Magdalena Second Generation's monthly open performance forums in Buenos Aires, and by the development of the Breeding Ground Project in Cardiff, Magdalena Aotearoa has sought

funding for two programmes of monthly events; one based on the Kapiti Coast and designed specifically for Maori women in performance, the other urban-based and exploring new technologies, new directions, new communities for theatre. The Festival 1999 archive is nearly complete and funding is being raised to post-produce the Festival documentary and CD of Wahine Repezent.

Theatre presented by women in the winter of 1999 included Moira Wairama's play *Questions*, which addresses youth suicide, a moving work about a harrowing subject that has been presented for two seasons with success.

Katarina Kawana, Dale Ferris and Te Itirawa Nepia held a *hui* to discuss their aims and visions for Maori involvement in Magdalena Aotearoa, and how they could best support Maori women artists. The outcome of this *hui* was very exciting and **Magdalena Maori Aotearoa** was conceptualised to define and network with other Maori women artists in all media. The group has taken the *whakatauaiki* (proverb) from the successful Paekakariki event of the International Festival 1999 as their mission statement: *Te Ao Te Tohatoha Mahiotanga* (A world within which to share knowledge). They are now preparing a programme of workshops which will take place over six months.

EL BALDIO TEATRO (Argentina)

Cartas de palabras sin eco (Letters with words without echo) is a recent production of El Baidío Teatro performed by three actresses of the group, Karina Costantini, Laura Torres and Laura Martín. In the performance two women write letters that never reach their destination, they build texts that are shipwrecked in absence. If the text is a woven cloth, then the women are like modern

Penelopes, confronting the con-temporary version of their Ulysses who does not come back. Deprived of the body, they have even lost the consolation of becoming local Antigones. They envy her certainty that allows the burial to placate the anguish of uncertainty. They envy her because she still enjoys the presence of her sister. The performance reminds us of the days when the group members asked themselves how they could assume as artists the heavy historical burden of the live presence of the missing people in Argentina. Many years have gone by, but Daniel, Mario and Valeria continue to exist and to have their place in the world and in theatre.

A WOMAN I KNOW (Canada/Italy)

Laura Astwood and Alessandra di Castri started working together on the production *A Woman I Know* while they were apprentices at Primus Theatre in Winnipeg, Canada, and finished it in Nocelle, Italy in February 1999. During their apprenticeship Laura and Alessandra shared some aspects of their physical and vocal training and they exchanged ideas that brought them to write and collect stories and poetical images. The stories of the performance tell about the lives of different women and are inspired by the family background of the two actresses. The two women are foreigners to each other and live abroad. The production is presented in two languages, English and Italian, and it is a performance of memories taken from family albums. Laura and Alessandra are busy trying to tour the production.

TEATRO LA MASCARA (Colombia)

Lucy Bolaños, actress and director of Teatro

La Mascara, is presenting the performance *Los Perfiles de la Espera* directed by Wilson Pico, a dancer and choreographer. It is a theatre act made against persecution, torture, despair and fear. The performance talks about the women - mothers, sisters, daughters, lovers - who wait for a loved one who is either imprisoned or missing. They accuse, reclaim, protest, cry, demand, ask, but most of all they work because there is no way they can remain passive or see themselves as victims of patriarchy's disastrous management of life. They maintain hope and happiness alive day by day to break through the isolation, violence and fear that surrounds them. The performance moves the audience because of its theme, the scenic representation and Lucy's intense, serene and deep stage presence.

Pilar Restrepo

WOMEN'S VOICES (Belgium)

The 5th International Festival of Women's Voices directed by Brigitte Kaquet will take place from the 6th to the 15th of April 2000 in the context of 2000 Brussels European Cultural City. It will be a festival of music, theatre and dance with ten evenings of concerts and performances.

The festival is artistic and pedagogical and focuses on the diversity of living cultures. For ten days actresses, dancers and choreographers of different cultures are invited to direct workshops and masterclasses, to participate in meetings, exhibitions and an intercultural gathering on the theme of cultures in resistance. The presence of artists and pedagogues who concentrate on the voice, which has universal, cultural and intimate dimensions, is extremely stimulating and provoking. The richness, rarity and privilege of the Festival are given by the meeting of cultures and

micro-cultures brought by the women present. The representatives of each culture share roots, histories, traditions and ways of transmitting knowledge confirming the need to develop actions of multicultural reevaluation.

With the *Intercultural Meeting of Cultures in Resistance and the Mothers*, the Festival aims to generate a dynamic of reflection on the theme of identity, culture and freedom. How do the different minority cultures resist, escape or survive in face of the unique thinking and globalisation of the only culture? The evolution of what are called democracies cannot be achieved without work on the ways of thinking that confirm the multiplicity of identities, give value to the complexity of cultures and rethink the concept of freedom.

Brigitte Kaquet

DREAM STATION (Norway)

In December 1999 Geddy Aniksdal and Anne-Sophie Erichsen from Grenland Friteater gathered in Porsgrunn more than thirty actors, most of them women. The workshop culminated in a big outdoor performance presented to 3,500 spectators in the main square of Porsgrunn as a part of the city's official New Year's Eve celebration. The actors came from Argentina, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Yugoslavia, New Zealand and Wales. The performance was based on material from *Øyeblikkets Evighet* (Moment of Eternity) that Grenland Friteater performed in 1994 at the Magdalena Festival in Cardiff and in 1995 at Porsgrunn International Theatre Festival. *Dream Station* was a collaboration between Grenland Friteater (Norway), Odin Teatret (Denmark), Armar (Argentina), Dah Teatar (Yugoslavia), Institutet för Scenkonst (Sweden) and the Magdalena Project (Wales).

M A G D A L E N A 2nd GENERATION (Argentina)

Magdalena Segunda Generación is a Latin American network of women working in contemporary arts. It was founded in Argentina in 1997 by Ana Woolf and Florencia Coppola. In October 1999 it held its 4th gathering in the locality of Magdalena, in the province of La Plata and their First International Festival at the Teatro del Sur in Buenos Aires, without any subsidies except for the help of the Red de Productores de Latinoamérica, a network of Latin American producers. The memory of the meeting is still so close and alive that reactions do not yet go beyond feelings and uncertain personal analysis. The network is a space for relationships built by, for and amongst women. There are no exclusions and men are present, but the network belongs to the women. Magdalena Segunda Generación together with other projects of women working in theatre that exist in Argentina (Encuentro Mujer y Teatro, Armar) are concrete actions for strengthening each other in the chosen fields of action. In an article about their activities in Argentina, Ana Woolf remembers the words of Patricia Ariza, from Colombia: "As women there is no need or pain in breaking up with 'the father'; the necessity, the pain, if it is there, is perhaps to break up within ourselves, to recuperate one of the missions of the next millennium, the feminisation of the world".

TRANSIT 3 (Denmark)

The 3rd Transit Festival with the theme *Theatre-Women-Generations* will take place in Holstebro, Denmark from the 14th to the 28th of January 2001.

The generation of women who today

embody experience and can reflect on the early years when they knew clearly what they wanted, but lacked the tools to achieve their aims, is confronted with a younger generation of women whose perceptions and expectations are different. Transit 3 would like to explore what and how we can learn from each other, how these women communicate through their craft and what are the different strategies proposed for the learning and teaching process in theatre. Transit 3 will involve women practitioners, artists, intellectuals and scholars of different ages and from diverse cultural backgrounds to present performances, demonstrations and lectures, give workshops and participate in discussions.

The programme will include vocal and physical training, presentations of masters and pupils, an exercise shared by practitioners from different theatrical ages, concerts and performances. Invited artists are from Argentina, Bali, Canada, Chile, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Puerto Rico, Singapore, Switzerland, Wales and Aotearoa-New Zealand.

During Transit 3 Dorthe Kærgaard will exhibit her paintings at Odin Teatret.

TRA UN ATTO E L'ALTRO (Italy)

Angela Malfitano, Francesca Mazza, Franca Silvestri and Anna Bianco are presenting a project for an active view entitled *Tra un atto e l'altro* (Between the acts), in Bologna from January to May 2000 with performances, workshops and days of study. Amongst the performances is *Scolpita dal tempo* (Sculpted by time), an itinerary through four ages with and by Francesca

Mazza. Two workshops are directed to young actresses and grown-up women respectively. This theatre project aims to look at community work and the relationship between generations by focusing on female creativity.

PRINCESSES OR BEGGARS? (Argentina)

The attempt to systematise the practice of women theatre practitioners in Tucumán Argentina, has revealed that women have been mostly actresses, and to a lesser degree assistant directors, producers and administrators. Only between the 1950s and 1980s did women start to direct, either in institutions, or in groups when a male director was missing. When women directed, it was mostly children's plays. From the 1990s six women appear as directors, but mostly in relation to university plays. Many women are teachers in theatre and I wonder if this has to do with the female maternal function, especially as male teachers always continue their activity as directors and are rarely contractually tied to schools. As a result of looking at the historical development in the region of Tucumán, I see the possibility of building a new feminine vision for the creative process that does not imprison women in mask-characters like *Doña Rosita la soltera* (Doña Rosita the spinster) and *Mi bella dama* (My beautiful lady).

Gladys Mottes