

HUNGARIAN THEATRE NEWSLETTER

2015/1

International Theatre Institute Hungarian Centre
Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute

Budapest

edited by Anna Lakos
English translation by Attila Szabó





dunaPart3 – Hungarian Showcase of Contemporary Performing Arts

Registration is already open at www.dunapart.net.

Three devoted Hungarian organisations, Trafó House of Contemporary Arts, the Independent Performing Arts Association and the Hungarian Theatre Critics' Association have joined forces to organise dunaPart3 – Hungarian Showcase of Contemporary Performing Arts, a merge of the previous dunaPart platforms and of the Hungarian Showcase of 2013. The event will take place from the 2nd to the 8th of March 2015.

The programme was curated by a board of theatre experts and critics (Beáta Barda, Livia Fuchs, Tamás Jászay, Noémi Herczog, Csaba Králl and Andrea Tompa) and features both theatre and dance performances in the programme with equal emphasis. Guests will have the opportunity to see the performances in their original environments with English subtitles or simultaneous translation.

Our objective is to present the outstanding representatives of the independent Hungarian performing arts scene, to help them and the whole field in their further integration in the international professional network. With the narrowing



opportunities for artistic development to be observed especially in the independent arts scene and especially in Hungary, it is our explicit ambition to offer international and more diverse contexts to the artists and the other stakeholders in order to find new ways of development. We would like to help in maintaining and further deepening the established and diverse international relations, professional cooperations and long-term partnerships between Hungarian independent artists and professionals and the rest of the world.

There are two types of 'rides' you can take during the showcase: an extensive one from 2nd to the 8th of March 2015 and an intensive one from the 5th to the 8th of March 2015. The extensive programme features an additional three days of theatre for overseas guests and those who would like to stay for the whole week. In these three days we will present two productions from the independent field and four from the offering of public theatres, as well as site visits to professional organisations and thematic discussions. We will also be focusing on female theatre makers and their role in making theatre. The intensive programme is designed for guests who are only able to participate at the event from Thursday to Sunday. This selection includes productions solely from the independent scene and will offer dance and theatre shows running parallel in the afternoons and evenings. In the mornings the guests will have the chance to meet the artists and to get more familiar with the Hungarian independent arts and culture.

The daily programme and a detailed description of the performances will be published on our website in mid January 2015, after which you will also be able to book your tickets to the performances. Please note that in the meantime we are

continuously working to raise funds to be able to offer as many programmes and services free of charge as possible. We will keep you informed about any news in this respect. Registration is already open at www.dunapart.net. A list of hotels close to the venues and other sights of interest with special rates will also be available in the beginning of January 2015.

Please make sure to follow our page on Facebook

https://www.facebook.com/pages/dunaPart/142870445739425?fref=t_s

where you can get all the fresh information about the programme and practicalities.

The shows of the extensive programme are:

Katona József Theatre: PETRA VON KANT, directed by Kriszta Székely

Sputnik Shipping Company – Vígszínház: INSPECTOR, directed by Viktor Bodó

Secret Company – Golem Theatre – FÜGE: FOURTH GATE, directed by Péter Kárpáti

Örkény Theatre: MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS, directed by Ildikó Gáspár

The Symptoms: APROPO 2.0, directed by Réka Szabó

Studio K Theatre: W.S. OTHELLO, directed by Sándor Zsótér

The intensive programme will have a separate dance and a theatre programme running parallel.



Theatre programme:

Proton Theatre: DEMENTIA, directed by Kornél Mundruczó

Sputnik Shipping Company: SOCIOPOLY, directed by Gábor Fábán

dollardaddy's: HOME, directed by Tamás Ördög

Béla Pintér and Company: OUR SECRETS, directed by Béla Pintér

STEREO Akt – Artus: PROMENADE, directed by Martin Boross

Kompánia Theatre Company: FORGOTTEN SONG, directed by Gábor Goda

Forte Company – Szkéné Theatre: THE NOTEBOOK, directed by Csaba Horváth

GroundFloor Theatre: PARALLEL, directed by Ferenc Sinkó and Leta Popescu

Krétakör: LOSER, directed by Árpád Schilling

**Dance programme:**

Hodworks: CONDITIONS OF BEING MORTAL choreographer: Adrienn Hód

Dányi – Molnár – Vadas: SKIN ME – choreographers: Viktória Dányi, Csaba Molnár, Tamra Zsófia Vadas

Bodylotion co-dance: STEPINTIME – choreographers: Júlia Hadi, Virág Arany

IT COMES IT GOES – Imre Vass

OLD POND – choreographer: Zsuzsa Rózsavölgyi, visual concept: Tóbiás Terebessy

EGO TRIP – choreographers: Anna Réti – Ido Batash

HINOKI – choreographer: Máté Mészáros

AUCTION – choreographer: Krisztián Gergye

Company Klári Pataky: ME HAIKU – choreographer: Klári Pataky

radioballet: FROM MAMBO TO WALTZ – choreographer: Milán Ujvári

EMESE AND EMIL – choreographer: László Fülöp



HUNGARIAN THEATRE MUSEUM AND INSTITUTE ACTOR SOLDIERS, PRISONER PRIMA DONNAS

Travelling Exhibition

In 2006 the Gizi Bajor Actors' Museum organized a highly successful temporary exhibition titled Actor Soldiers, Prisoner Prima Donnas, presenting the theatre life on the World War I frontline and in the prisoner of war camps. In the framework of the WWI centenary our institute decided to renew this exhibition. The thematic framework of the earlier exhibit was preserved, yet the material was renewed in form and transformed into a travelling exhibition, which can be brought easily to different venues around the world, presenting this special and little-known theatre form to the theatre lovers. The backbone of the exhibition consists of 12 posters (in Hungarian and English).



First Hungarian Warfront Theatre

In World War One the blitzkrieg strategy of the Central Powers proved to be a complete failure. The lengthy war brought the need of ‘domesticating’ the trenches, and for this end, in order to improve the mental state of the soldiers by creating the illusion of the prevalence of the value system left behind at home, the military leaders organized warfront theatres. The First Hungarian Camp Theatre was established in March 1917 by the National Association of Actors initiated by the German Armee Oberkommando. The theatre had its debut on the Eastern front in Lemberg, on April 3, 1917, managed by János Komjáthy. In July Ferenc Pázmán took over his position and the theatre was renamed the First Hungarian Warfront Theatre. In the summer of 1918 the company was again restructured, and the Hungarian Warfront Theatre was directed towards the Italian front.

The biggest part of the posters consists of photographs which were taken by the members of the company on the front, in the trenches, during their leisure time, and which illustrate very successfully the life of the First Hungarian Warfront Theatre.



The Hungarian Language Prisoner of War Theatres in Siberia

On the other side of the frontline, a very special form of theatre was born, for the soldiers taken prisoners, a newly emerging phenomena in theatre history: prisoner of war theatre. The officers and soldiers fallen into captivity tried to evoke the memories of everyday life from home by organizing associations, sports clubs, literary and self-training circles: balls, concerts, artistic soirees. The amateur theatre shows were mostly born from the need to preserve national identity, and were not primarily concerned with attaining high artistic standards, yet some of the companies reached such artistic level which could have competed with many of the professional troupes of the time.





The need for theatre appeared in almost all of the prison camps. In some cases these remained unique events, which took place after the furniture of the barracks had been pushed aside: cabaret evenings, poetry and song recitals. In the camps, however, fully functional theatre venues were also established, where the need of permanent theatre life emerged: with an auditorium, a stage, dressing rooms and storage facilities.

The organizers and managers of these companies were often professional actors. Lacking actresses, a new 'role type' was born, the male actor playing a female character, which gave a very specific flavour to these performances. The 'male prima donnas' were enjoying a privileged position in these POW camps, and were receiving the same sort of respect as their fellow 'actresses' at home.

In the exhibition we present the life of some Hungarian companies – mostly from Siberia – and through their history we also uncover the cultural life of these POW camps. Next to the photographs we show reproductions of the surviving relics – posters, playbills, drawings, theatre magazines, giving a rich image of these companies and their members.

A publication was issued to accompany the exhibition, titled *Színészkatonák, fogolyprimadonnák – Frontszínházak, hadifogolyszínházak az első világháborúban* (Actor Soldiers, Prisoner Prima Donnas – Warfront theatres, prisoner of war theatres during World War I.), with texts in Hungarian, English and German. The book features a detailed study by Mirella Csiszár and Mariann Sipőcz on the topic of the exhibition, translated to English and German.



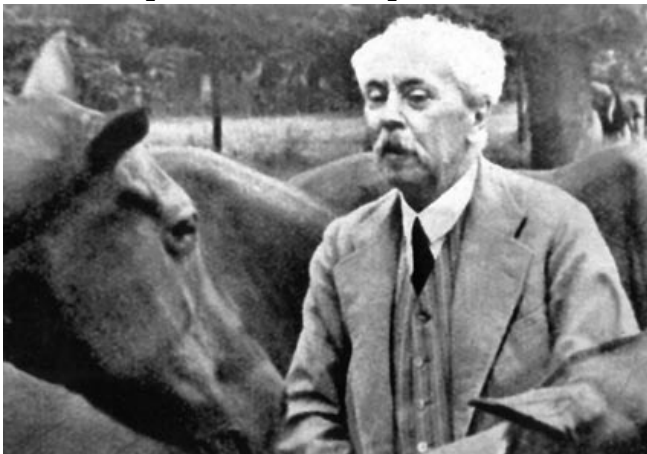
MIKLÓS BÁNFFY – A TRAVELLING EXHIBITION AND THEATRE SHOWS

The Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute produced in 2010 a travelling exhibition to commemorate the life of the unjustly forgotten artist-politician, novelist, painter, graphic artist, book illustrator, caricaturist, set designer, opera house manager, diplomat and horse farmer, Miklós Bánffy (b. Cluj Napoca 1873 – d. Budapest 1950).

‘Count Miklós Bánffy is an artist of a special kind: he can write a play, direct the show and manage the theatre at the same time, yet set design is the artistic branch which he performs on the highest European level. If we look for artists of his kind we must mention Leon Bakst or Stanislas Wyspianski, the renowned Polish artist, playwright and stained glass designer.... Or, in the context of his costume designs for Mozart’s Magic Flute we can also refer to the influence of the great Parisian predecessor, designer and graphic artist Alfred Grévin.’ – writes Zsuzsa Szebeni, the curator of the exhibition, who wanted to present first and foremost Miklós Bánffy’s works for the theatre, also offering the audiences the results of some new research.

This first exhibition launched a genuine Bánffy renaissance. The ever-broadening travelling exhibit was shown since then in several cities in Hungary and abroad, each version attempting to relate to the given city in some ways. Just to list a few stops of the exhibit: Szeged, Sopron, Chisinau, Bucharest, Sfântu-Gheorghe, The Hague, Rabat.

In the framework of the Miklós Bánffy Memorial Year in 2014 the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute organized numerous important events. A peak point of the festivities were the Miklós Bánffy Memorial Days in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, organized between 18-20 November. Here, at the Hungarian Opera of Cluj Béla Bartók's Bluebeard's Castle was put on, directed by Miklós Szinetár. A curiosity of the performance were the stage design and costumes, reconstructed by Zsuzsa Szebeni and Gyula Lőrincy based on the original plans of Miklós Bánffy made for the world premiere of the opera.



The exhibition presenting the complex personality, theatrical and literary activity of Miklós Bánffy, which also features the glass work of the count's granddaughter, gives an engaging cross-section of the colourful artistic life of Hungary at the turn of the century. The material of the travelling exhibition is available in several languages.





Latinovits Színház – Budaörs

Harold Pinter: The Homecoming

Translation: Kornél Hamvai

Premiere: 27 November 2014

Directed by Ádám Bellaagh Berzsenyi

There is a family, or rather two, or none. The first family: the father and his three sons, and the unmarried uncle. The mother is nowhere: there must have been one, but she had disappeared, and we can only hope that she died a natural death. The other family: three sons, the eldest of which, who managed to break free of the barren working class life of East London, went to America, where he made himself a scientist's career, as well as three kids (all boys), just to return home now, with his young wife, wishing to take a peek into his past. The kids were left at home. The family gathering, naturally, takes an unexpected turn (nothing ever happens as expected), moreover, everything here turns into a splendid chaos. Unless (and here look a Pinter blinking from behind his lines) it was this chaos which they had been looking for all along, with their hearts beating in hope and minds burning with fear: or vice versa.

Enough of the story: it is worthwhile mentioning that *The Homecoming*, which is usually labelled as an absurdist play is absurd in a way that, actually, it is not absurd at all. And with this it strongly, and painfully, reminds us of our lives. All these seem to point toward a tragedy, and for this reason it is refreshing to find that *The Homecoming* is no tragedy at all, but rather a comedy, yet one which belongs more to the kind of grand-guignol, where the laughter stems from the fact that these people have the nerve to do a series of unbelievable things (mostly verbally, but where words fail, also in act) against the other people, but more against themselves. Our heroes are dreaming – but, as they well know that their dreams are unfulfillable, they only dream half-heartedly, always able to tell what their dreams are worth, to the dime. They deceive and lie, but – as they know of each other and themselves that they are lying and



deceiving, they do it in a less convincing manner. The suitable and snappy answer for a stolen wife is eating up all of the cheese buns. Love begets money – which later might make love affordable. Until then: the present is hell, the past hurts, and the future is cancelled, due to lack of interest. The women are whores, the men pimps, and the money is lacking. Two escape routes offer themselves, however, but one of them leads to crime, the other is insupportable because it's boring, superficial and deceptive. There is a third way, too: the shiny path of the spirit, of which we know one thing for sure – that it leads into nowhere. Unless (as Pinter is trying to crawl out from the rubble of his lines) this, the loneliness of contemplation, is where we can find our homeland.



Photo: Dániel Borovi



Centrál Színház – Budapest

Heaven Above Broadway (Broadway felett az ég)

by Ferenc Darvas, György Baráth and Márton Kiss
Premiere: 7 November 2014



Central Színház is openly committed to providing the audiences quality theatre entertainment. Next to our successful large-stage shows we have been trying to promote more experimental works on our small 180-seat hall, which are artistically more progressive yet none the less entertaining, to follow the profile of our theatre. This is why we decided to put on the musical piece by Darvas-Baráth-Kiss, titled *Heaven Above Broadway* in the theatrical season of 2014/15. The play was commissioned by the theatre last year, to be cast especially on our six company members. The text was written by Márton Kiss, one of the young Hungarian playwrights with the most unique voice. The lyrics were written by György Baráth, the dramaturg of our theatre, while the score was composed by the most prominent representative of the Hungarian

theatre music, Ferenc Darvas. *Heaven Above Broadway* is set in a Hungarian theatre. The most acclaimed success of this theatre is a play titled *Róza and Mór*, elaborating on the life and love of the famous actress of the 19th century, Róza Laborfalvi and the great Hungarian novelist, Mór Jókai. The fake vision of history, coupled with flatulent melodies and a kitschy plot is a great success. The director of the play is Andor Lónyai Wéber, Order of Vitéz, the tyrant manager, who keeps everyone around him in a constant state of terror, sexually abusing all the women around. The errands of the theatre are run by the director's wife, the aged-out soubrette Spotty Spotted, while the role of the bon viveur is played by their son, Raymond, clumsy and narcissistic. In the evening the leading actress, Wondrous Wanda, shines in the role of Róza Laborfalvi, who plays the naïve on the stage, but in private life she is just an alcoholic, burned-out worker of the musical industry. During the past couple of months theatre critics have been dying continuously, yet only those who had written critically about the members of the company. The traces of evidence lead towards the theatre where Wondrous Wanda realizes that the killer is no other than her biggest fan, Ditta Flipper. Ditta, a twenty-year-old orphan who had grown up in an institution, is a very naïve and innocent-



looking girl,...but also a serial killer. She simply cannot tolerate if someone hurts her beloved idol, Wanda. Then the pressure becomes insupportable, so much so that she needs to kill. As Wondrous Wanda finds this out she is ready to call the police, yet something happens. Some people have been making Wanda's life miserable: the annoying wife of her lover or the diva in constant rivalry with her. Wanda wonders whether she could take use of such a devoted fan, who is willing to kill for her. Andor Lónyai Wéber, Order of Vitéz finds out what the demonic duo is up to, yet Wanda also has the director killed. Spotty Spotted becomes the new director of the theatre, who writes a grand musical of the

death of his husband, titled *Me the Legend*, which flops right on the first night. After the flop Spotty is about to fire Wanda, Wanda is about to summon Ditta to kill the madam manager, yet Ditta doesn't answer to Wanda anymore, since in the meanwhile she had fallen in love with the inspector Sándor Sármy, and now she only kills the people who dare to hurt the famous investigator. When Spotty starts insulting Sármy, Ditta kills the woman. The investigator believes Wanda to be the murderer. She has to flee. Sármy and Ditta find each other in the hustle.

Raymond becomes the new director, who flops as the protagonist of Hamlet, the new Hungarian musical. On the night of the premiere Sándor Sármy finds a half-insane Wanda in the stage tower, admitting to him that she had given birth to Sármy's child when she was eighteen, whom

she had left at the hospital. Sármy realizes that this girl is no other than his girlfriend Ditta, and shoots himself in the heart. Wanda, gone mad, would give a motherly embrace to Ditta, but she kills her mother, unaware of who her parents were. This is when Raymond arrives, who realizes the hidden potential in Ditta, seduces the girl, just to have her execute the whole audience.

Heaven Above Broadway is a social allegory, a black comedy and a morbid tragedy with plenty of music. Music is the essential component of the show: the old Hungarian couplets, which evoke the style of Broadway musicals, merge with the world of the Hungarian quality cabaret, to give birth to an original theatre music. The visual layer of the performance is kept clean and simple, as we want to convey the impression to the spectators that they are watching the stage of a large musical theatre – with all its components: the stage tower, the lighting, with the elaborate costumes of the musicals and smoke machines. We try to convey this with the simplest, minimalist signs, but with strong gestures.

Our aim was to bring to life a performance which can reach at the same time both the audiences open to the grotesque and absurd but also those who prefer lighter entertainment and quality musical theatre.

Katona József Színház – Kecskemét
Eugene O'Neill:

A Long Day Sets Out on a Journey Into the Night

(A Long Day's Journey Into the Night)

Director: Sándor Zsótér

Premiere: 24 February 2014



One of the best known and most personal plays by Eugene O'Neill could seem to have a narrow plot at first sight: it presents one day from the life of an apparently average American family – of which it soon turns out to be the dawn of the family. Yet this day also begins like any other: with a seemingly idyllic family breakfast. Problems and the demons within the characters soon start to surface and there comes a moment when they can no longer be repressed... The fights turn into blaming, the rows turn into an endless, wild war: the son, the mother and the two children become alone with themselves.

The author demanded in his will for the play only to be staged 25 years after his death. Even though his will was not observed by posterity, if one knows the author's biography one can easily understand his decision: the *Long Day's Journey Into the Night* is one of the most confessional, most strongly autobiographical play in the history of literature. The characters give an exact replica of O'Neill's family, starting from the father as a failed actor, to the drunkard brother to the sick child (the writer's alter ego), to arrive, finally, to the morphine addict mother, who gradually loses her mind.

The name of director Sándor Zsóter, holder of the famous Kossuth Prize, is not unknown to the theatre goers of Kecskemét. 'I believe that the life of any individual is interesting. There is no family which did not have to face up with illness, sadness, poverty or good luck. If people started talking of their lives with disarming honesty there would be not one uninteresting family story. Life is made up of very simple things... and of course poetry, love and a lot of other stuff. But simple things are also part of our lives and are able to cause a lot of friction. Even if the family members, just as in this performance, love each other very much.' (Sándor Zsótér about the performance)





Sándor Zsótér is a true theatre artist. He finds interest in each nook and cranny of theatre. He devotes all his pores to the theatre. He is an engaged artist, who wishes to convey the thoughts of a given author with the utmost precision, in the most elaborate form. Each of his performances are a world in themselves, through which he hands us over his opinion about the reality around us. Each of his shows are different, he cannot be labelled, since all his performances start out from the written play, which dictates the space and form of the show. In a classical realist play he also interprets realism in a particular way, not in the sense of focusing on the historical accuracy of the setting.

The main female role of *A Long Day Sets Out on a Journey Into the Night* was cast on an energetic woman, almost the same age as her sons: Nóra Trokán can make palpable the youth of the spirit, the essence of a character trapped in her youth. The play, the performance will stay true (traditionally realist) even if it is not realist in each respect. Lung disease can be represented with just a few coughs just as in the rendering of drunkenness or drug addiction the physical truthfulness is not primordial – the acting, the main style and working method of the director tends to focus rather on the soul, on the processes which unfold within. While the ‘elevatedness’ of the set and the costumes brings unusually close to the spectator the story which takes place in front of their eyes, while the new translation makes one uncertain about where we are and when. Could this also be my life?

‘This performance is not interested in physical decay, even if this is what usually gets acted out. Here the sick person does not cough, the drunk does not wobble, the morphine addict does not rave. As if this reserved tone – this muted expressivity – would be a reminder of the fact that on the surface all’s well. And hell today is much less recognisable.’ (critic Andrea Tompa)

‘This exceptional performance, next to its ruthless objectivity is also endlessly and graspingly intimate and sensitive, full of heart and soul. Because, behind these sentences there is a full life, and behind each world there is its own reason.’ (critic István Ugrai)


‘From the boring and lengthy biographical play of the American writer a performance was made, which is exciting, harsh and not shy of humour and lyricism, either. (...) Since by today it has

become rare for theatres to have their own directors, thinking in a company has also become less of a priority. What we are mostly experiencing is that the guest directors chose to cast on the basis of body type and stature and don't consider – well, based on their position, cannot consider – the importance of a certain role for the career progress of a given actor. For this I find it truly important that directors are recalled to Kecskemét, thus enabling the birth of a longer-standing cooperation between actors and directors. It would be nice if Zsótér and the company could meet and work together in the future (critic István Nánay).

The performance of the Katona József Színház in Kecskemét is an unparalleled success: for the extent of three hours the theatre artists and spectators meet and fully merge. The art reaches its aim, is able to convey, to hand over and educate, not having to worry about what could get in its way.



Photo: Péter Walter, Béla Ilovsky

A photograph of three women sitting on a light blue sofa against a blue background. The woman on the left has short reddish-brown hair, wears a black long-sleeved top, and large gold earrings. The woman in the middle has blonde hair, wears a black spaghetti-strap top, and large blue earrings. The woman on the right has short grey hair, wears a black long-sleeved top, and a wide bracelet. All three are looking towards the camera.

Katona József Színház – Budapest
Joël Pommerat:

The Reunification of the Two Koreas

Director: Gábor Máté
Premiere: 17 November 2014



The theatre, which welcomes about one hundred thousand spectators a year, is one of the best known theatres of the country, and, as such, is trying to use innovative and modern methods of theatrical creation, to present and analyse the most topical issues and worrying problems of our society, in a way that can be grasped by many.

The starting point of the Katona József Színház is a central fact of the art in the 20th century, that theatre art is no longer a subordinate interpreting art, a sort of accessory to dramatic literature, but an autonomous art on itself, like the other established arts until the 19th century: literature, music and fine arts. This does not mean, however, that we think that the literary value is secondary, nor that the programme is of second importance to the work of the actor.

The Katona usually tries to avoid falling prey to such dichotomies and conflicts as: literature versus theatre, play versus performance, trying to use maximal literary exigence in programming, starting from the selection of plays, a consequent refusal of staging commercial plays, to the commissioning of translations, often re-translations and a close cooperation with the translators.

Reality is in the limelight of our interest, this is also how we see the relationship between tradition and modernity. In our belief the Hungarian theatre – and world theatre, too – is linked to the most noble theatre traditions, is able to tread on its best tracks, if it is considered as a primordial aim to constantly exist in the most intense state of spiritual freshness and sensitivity. Besides these, it desires to assist societal change by drawing attention to the largest personal and existential problems of the individual and the community.

The credo of the theatre is not a reclusion but an active dialogue with the community. This does not mean, however, that each and every performance of the Katona József Színház targets a similarly broad audience. A differentiated and complex relationship between the theatre and the audience has to come to life through a careful choice of the programme, and the theatre's activity as a whole, where the most successful and fulfilling productions for both the theatre and the audience are those which find a neat balance between the depth and seriousness of the problems displayed, and the expectations of a broader consensus.

One of the most important elements of this dialogue is a conscious turn toward the younger generations of audiences. Attracting the youth to the theatre is a mission, which can be fulfilled not only through shows targeted at them but also with specific theatre training which corresponds to the needs of each age group (Youth Programme, workshops which accompany the performances, Theatre in Education activities).

The Reunification of the Two Koreas is not about politics. Not about Korea, nor about Hungary. It is valid everywhere and for everyone, showing situations at the same time tragic and comic. A French paper has called the play 'a bitter kaleidoscope of human relations'. '*The Reunification of the Two Koreas* is a series of snapshots independent from each other. These ironical-humorous story fragments are more akin to short stories written on a theme' – writes the author about the play.



'The great paradoxes and small annoyances of the feeling of love enfold in a clever and – from the second third onwards –

swiftly running performance. The translation of Dorottya Timkovics seems to bear the fingerprints of both the director and the troupe. No laxity, no loose puns in or out. Just a punctual and rich choreography (one composed by Johanna Bodor, a choreography neatly tailored to the beat, an economy of movement, which places everyone at all times in the most practical position on the stage.) The acting is not particularly novel but of a prime quality. The blending of images, the swift character changes enabled by the quick dressing aided by the contributors to the beat given by Gábor Máté, help the performance glide through even the less engaging parts. All this charade could give to most spectators a sense of 'aha'-revelation of the real, yet not without a slight surreal stich, at times on the level of action, at times on the level of diction (and, to support the latter, as a final resource, they can fall back on the gross curse bursting out from the lips: back to reality!) Or maybe this is not the shadow of a world beyond reality: some are looney because they are in love, some, because they aren't? What is love, after all?! (critic Tamás Tarján)





Örkény István Színház – Budapest

Shakespeare: Hamlet

Director: László Bagossy

Premiere: 21 March 2014

The performance has stirred a great professional and public interest, partly due to the fact that in Hungary the discourse on the relationship of theatre and politics has been given a lot of attention lately. The staging makes the history of the Danish royal court an allegory of the power fights fought in today`s Hungary, though a strong theatrical gesture referring to the present. At the same time, it also questions the performing tradition of the play from many sides. ‘Not only cultural life but our society as a whole is impregnated with politics’ (László Bagossy)

The director and his permanent designer, Levente Bagossy, place Hamlet in the tiers of a football stadium, thus making the masses the principal character, which follows the tragedy of the royal family as the Danish football fan club, reacting with shouts and blowing horns, wearing Viking headgears. This mass, whose acceptance and refusal can be immediately felt (just like on a football match), forces those in power to constantly reflect on their position of power, and with the possibility of the quick loss or violent preservation of this position. While the set design is a direct reference to the recent wave of stadium constructions in Hungary, initiated by the ruling party, carried out from public money and severely criticised by the opposition, the performance does not wish to convey a political message, but rather it reflects on the present political and societal state of Hungary. The reviews, even those published in the pro-government dailies, noted that the set design grows to be an overarching metaphor of the performance. In Bagossy’s view the tragedy of the Danish royal family does not remain contained within the family, the mistaken acts of the leaders, their lies and weaknesses lead to a national catastrophe. At the end of the performance skeletons take over the places of the spectators on the tiers, Fortinbras and his suit flood the stage as tourists taking selfies with the corpses. The death of the nation is a logical and necessary conclusion of the story, where the closing sentences spoken in Norwegian are taken as the eulogy over the grave of a nation. ‘He is not a hero who is always right’ (László Bagossy)



The reviews unanimously highlight the complexity and unusualness of Csaba Polgár's Hamlet. Polgár, who had directed several performances himself both in Germany and in HoppArt, a prime independent group of Budapest, has grown to be one of the most talented actor of his generation. In his rendering, Hamlet is a passionate young man, who constantly analyses himself, sometimes hysterically, at times with humour and wisdom, walking through the stations of revenge. In his read sneakers, sometimes wearing a clown's nose, he declaims, questions, muses wantonly, delves into philosophy. Polgár's Hamlet is tense and restless, like the young people of his generation strolling the streets of Budapest. He is no hero, and often – as the performance itself – is a tragicomic. The subtle merging of tragedy and comedy is a regular feature of Bagossy's art: in Hamlet he is constantly trying to superpose conflicting styles, details. Even with the gesture of putting up a 'mass scene' with fifty actors on such a small stage, he is reflecting playfully on the position of the Örkény Theatre in the theatre landscape of Budapest, and treats with irony the tradition pertaining to this venue.

The performance is using Ádám Nádasdy's sharp and precise contemporary translation, yet in some of the key places they incorporate lines from the 150-year-old classical translation of János Arany, and does not shy away from using (even vulgar) guest texts. Árpád Kákonyi, the musical director of the show, based on the same spirit of eclecticism, mixes in the score of Hamlet elements of sacral and popular music. Three generations of actors meet on the stage of Hamlet, the acting style of whom presents very subtle but clearly visible differences. (Next to the elder and mid-age generation the roles of Ophelia and Laertes, and other smaller parts, are played by the students of the University of Theatre, who are in their twenties).

'The performance gradually transitions into a requiem-like endgame with musical accompaniment, in which Fortinbras, an easy-going, Norwegian-speaking man from the West has an interpreter to translate the events of the recently ended bloodbath to him, while we, the spectators are given account of the war in a pantomime performed sitting. The dead

with the skeletons are buried in a mass grave: while the foreign catastrophe tourists are taken aback by the sight of this grotesque country branding event.’ (critic Tamás Koltai)

‘Hamlet at the Örkény Theatre is a topical, albeit not actualized theatre play.’ (critic Tamás Tarján).

‘We see an outstandingly important and good-quality performance. One of resignation, one in which a sense of melancholy over the defencelessness of theatre seeps into the scene about theatre, which traditionally is a scene of apotheosis.’ (critic Judit Csáki)

In 2014 László Bagossy received the prize for the best directing awarded by the Theatre Critics.





Radnóti Színház – Budapest

Orestes

by Euripides

Director: Csaba Horváth

Premiere: 5 October 2014



The person of the director was in itself a guarantee that something new was being prepared in the theatre: Csaba Horváth, the choreographer become director, who is today the prime representative of physical theatre in Hungary, leader of his own company, present mostly in the independent theatre. It was a challenge also for him to work for the Radnóti Theatre, which is mostly specialized in a realist type of acting. Horváth was curious to see how he could carry over his working style there, so that something new would be born at the crossroads of the two theatre types. The production unites several acting styles. We cannot talk about a pure physical theatre, yet movement has received a strong focus. There are no meaningless or empty body postures and gestures. Each and every movement is conscious and well composed. Those members of the company who are in a great physical shape and the guest artists from the company of the director perform elements of acrobatic difficulty, yet acrobatics never becomes an end in itself. Such a moment is the desperate escape of Orestes, chased by the invisible gods of vengeance, the appearances of Apollo, gliding through the stage, helped by the machinery, or the barbarian Phrygian, who, also because of his nervousness, speaks an entirely different language as the people from Argos.

The performance is visually very stimulating. The set, designed by Zsolt Khell is a story in itself, an indictment. The set, made of sheets of metal, portrays an unwelcoming royal palace, without any decoration, pillars or antique lustre. Rust covers up the zigzagging walls and the floor, which is tilting in all directions, as if a fire had recently eaten up the place. Iron bars are sticking out from the walls everywhere – spears, if you will. At the beginning of the performance we find Orestes lying motionlessly, threatened by the gods and the people of Argos, while a deadly tired Electra is crouched in one of the alcoves, watching over Orestes. The actors use all the possibilities of the space: they are walking on the walls, hiding in the cracks, hanging, flying and jumping around.



The costumes are also symbolic. All the clothes are simple and from our times. The aristocrats are wearing black and white garments. Electra, troubled by her own femininity, having always worn the nickname 'the virgin', and Phylades, her husband to be, are clad in almost the same, simple and masculine costume: black pants and white T-shirts. Hermione, left by her parents as a child, seems to be dressed for a school celebration. The clothes of Orestes seem to have been entirely worn off as a consequence of his suffering, he is fleeing his own demons with a pair of shorts. Menelaos and Helene are, on the other hand, cool and elegant, they are the 'lucky ones', as it is mentioned several times in the play. Helene's tight, black lace dress underlines the femininity of her character, her beauty and eroticism, while the cunning and opportunistic Menelaos is wearing a bespoke suit, implying a politician. The members of the choir are wearing a sort of next-door-neighbour clothes. These are the women we meet every day in malls, on the metro, or at the farmers' market. The messenger – to the great amusement of the spectator – enters on the stage as a bike delivery man. His costume, beyond the humorous note, also emphasizes the character's mundane nature.


The connection points to the present are also very important. Because what are we to make of a story about antique gods today? The heroes in Euripides are often anti-heroes: weak, complicated and confused. They are trying to escape responsibility, bring irrational and bad decisions, are scornful, cynical and amoral. Yet, at the same time, of course, they find bad solutions to impossible situations, are worthy of love – or at least sympathy. To sum up, they appear to be very contemporary without any forced actualisation. A fresh translation by János Térey and György Karsai contributes to the sense of contemporariness, just as the deadly humour of Euripides.

Photos by Dániel Dömölki





The characters from Orestes do not live in a god-forsaken land. Gods are only 'late, since this is how gods are'. The god, in this case Apollo, is responsible for the flow of events. Without any forced equation he can be identified with any sort of superior power, let that be fate or the political elite. In Euripides Apollo only arrives at the end of the play (deus ex machina), to offer a fast and easy solution to the end of the story. In Csaba Horváth's show he appears several times, we can see him in action, as he seduces Helene, the most beautiful of all earthly women, in a way that Helene does not see him, only feels his presence. By the presence and touch of the god, she becomes gradually more ecstatic, reaches the climax, and looks around ashamed and confused, unable to understand what had just happened to her. Apollo is also present when the events escalate, Orestes and Pylades kill again in the palace, while Electra and the choir are supporting them from outside. She is drumming rhythmically, dictating the tempo of the slaughter. Yet from behind, imperceptibly, he is the one conducting the events. And at the end, as we see the final outcome, we realise that he not only did not offer a solution to anything, but with his authoritative decisions, he only made the bed for newer smaller or bigger tragedies, which the characters need to accept without a frown. It is only good for us mortals until the goods above wish to help us solve our problems.

A photograph of two women sitting at a table, playing dominoes. The woman on the left, wearing a pink shirt and a red beaded bracelet, is leaning forward and looking intently at the dominoes. The woman on the right, wearing a gold sequined top and a silver bracelet, is looking at the dominoes with a slight smile and her hands raised in a gesture of surprise or excitement. The table is covered with a blue and white patterned cloth, and several dominoes are visible in the foreground.

Stúdió 'K' – Budapest

Shakespeare: Othello

Director: Sándor Zsótér

Premiere: 2014.10.25



An old desire of the theatre was fulfilled with this performance, and a great debt, when Sándor Zsótér, a Hungarian director with one of the most individual and authentic voices, joined the theatre for the first time in the theatre's history. The chosen topic is power, and the fight for it, often performed in a quite routinely fashion, manipulation, and the infection of private life by the state. The pretext chosen: Othello.




Shakespeare wrote Othello after Hamlet. Othello, the Moore of Venice, is a black person in the service of a white Venice. A soldier crafted of one piece of marble, who is an experienced and talented military leader yet lacks experience in the other areas of life. He is honest, open hearted and naïve. He thinks everyone is like him. Desdemona, the daughter of Brabantio, falls in love with him, flees from the home of her father and marries the young Moore. Jago, one of Othello's officers, makes sure her father finds out about this. Brabantio tells on Othello at the doge, accusing Othello for having won Desdemona's love by witchcraft, but at the worst of times. Venice needs Othello, he must start out that night against the Turks. Interest sometimes trumps ethics and prejudice. Though Jago's first try is not a success, he doesn't give up. He wants to destroy Othello. Why? What is there for him in this? What is his purpose? Money? No. He blackmails a ton of money from Rodrigo, in love with Desdemona. He refuses to do anything with it. Power? He would never take Othello's position. Jago despises people, he knows them better than they know themselves, and this gives him power over everybody. This is also power. He plays with them. He uses Desdemona, Cassio, who was promoted by Othello instead of him, Rodrigo, his wife Emilia, as tools. He makes them function. He keeps back in the shadow. In the ear of Hamlet's father ear the 'juice of cursed hebenon' was poured. Jago also pours venom in Othello's heart. That Desdemona is cheating on him with Cassio. He is poisoning him with words. The effect is the same. He gets to him with the shabbiest commonplaces. Grabs him and would not let go. He keeps chasing him shamelessly until he completely loses himself, until he fulfils what they think of him. What a malignantly

genial mind can do if it is bored enough and is cowardly enough to live his own life. Jago is usually mentioned together with Richard III, and Edmund from King Lear, but he is a villain of much smaller calibre. Women have some sort of bad presentiment about him, but do not consider him an important character. Jago has great people skills, but only on a superficial level. He despises people, which is a mistake. They can cause surprises at the most unexpected moments.

photo Kata Schiller





Petőfi Színház – Veszprém
Henrik Ibsen:

The Wild Duck

Director: Sándor Guelmino
Premiere: 14 November 2014

The theme of the play is the problem of life lies, which permeate our lives. The characters are all playing self-deceiving roles, the unveiling of which is unavoidable, since reality will sooner or later surface. The only question is how great a price are we willing to pay to delay such unmasking.

Director Sándor Guelmino, who had worked with the company many times during the past years, found it important to present not only the dark and sombre world of Ibsen's classic, but also to sketch the humorous side of the strong and stodgy characters sketched by the author.

The Wild Duck is an extremely exciting play, with many characters, yet most of these can be only seen in the first act, which also makes this work unique. In the set design we strived towards a black and white environment. Colour only appears in a few points, yet here, it becomes of outstanding importance. I am thinking here of the dream world of the attic or the retouched photos in the studio. In the play the Ekdal family is a family of photographers and retouching the photos to colour also represents the retouching of their lives. Ibsen, in this exciting and self-ironic work tries to divert from the habitual message of his former plays. Here he does not only present how big a price we must pay when the



hidden truth comes to the surface, but also that sometimes it could be less harmful to just leave the people lie to themselves instead of trying to force happiness on them.’ (director Sándor Guelmino)

‘Each of the actors had a rewarding task. When Károly Eperjes as Werle appears on stage as a merchant, in a top hat and a tuxedo, lean, with cutting glance we almost feel that here everything depends on him, he radiates power, even the walls, the rough elegance of the furniture, its coldness, could be the extension of his personality. The instinct of power for him is so natural as taking breath. The first scenes, the evening at Werle’s house, with the servants, the waiters, the boot-likers, the beautiful mistress, already signal a central message of the performance: having power equals to live. The instinct of power is the rawest manifestation of a person’s vital instincts. Werle has a spotted past, but he was acquitted by the jury, unlike the old Ekdal, who was sentenced, and thus, ruined. Werle also treated his wife badly, cheating on her, chasing her to death, and he cannot get along with his son either. He only seems to behave fairly with the jocund Mrs. Sörby (played by Zsuzsanna Csarnóy), his most recent lover, preparing to marry her, and with whom they had allegedly discussed everything about their past, thus becoming invulnerable in face of each other. Werle only has a few scenes yet we always feel his presence behind the events. Conversely, the old Ekdal (István Nyirkó) is a born day-dreamer, a loser, just like his son (Máté Haumann), who is never able to finish anything. Father and son don’t seem to realize that they are up to their necks in tragedy, which had long been over, and their fates sealed a long time ago, they have long lost their dignity, and only keep dangling on. Only stupid self-deception is keeping them alive. They don’t see and they don’t want to see anything,





because they need lies in order to stay alive. Máté Haumann is a sensational Hjalmar, the ‘small-town buffoon Hamlet’ as Dezső Kosztolányi calls him, with a small-boy grin on his face giving away that he also does not take himself too seriously. His each and every movement testifies of this uncertainty, of his subservient nature. Sándor Almási as Gregers is his superb partner, who, as a maniac of truth, crashes head-first in the wall of lies, just to break his skull. He is pure vibration, with a touching trust in the good, which is also frightening. As if he were speaking another language as the others, Hedvig also notes to her mother: ‘all this time I had the feeling that what he thinks is different from what he speaks’.

‘This could also be the motto of *The Wild Duck*, since the whole play has a double meaning. Where there are no morals, the pain also ceases to exist. Kitty Kéry plays the former lover of the old Werle, as Gina, the wife of Hjalmar, she is able to present this form of existence beyond tragedy. Where there is nothing anymore, just the body, the objects, the habits. Her characteristic compulsory activity, washing the floor, also reflects on her defenceless existence as a servant. Hedvig, played by Ágnes Bábinszki would deserve a full analysis, as she flies, jumps around, swiftly glides chased by the hyperbolic desire of love. She is not even a real human being, but a bird kept in captivity. She is the wild duck herself.’ (critic Gabriella Bartuc)

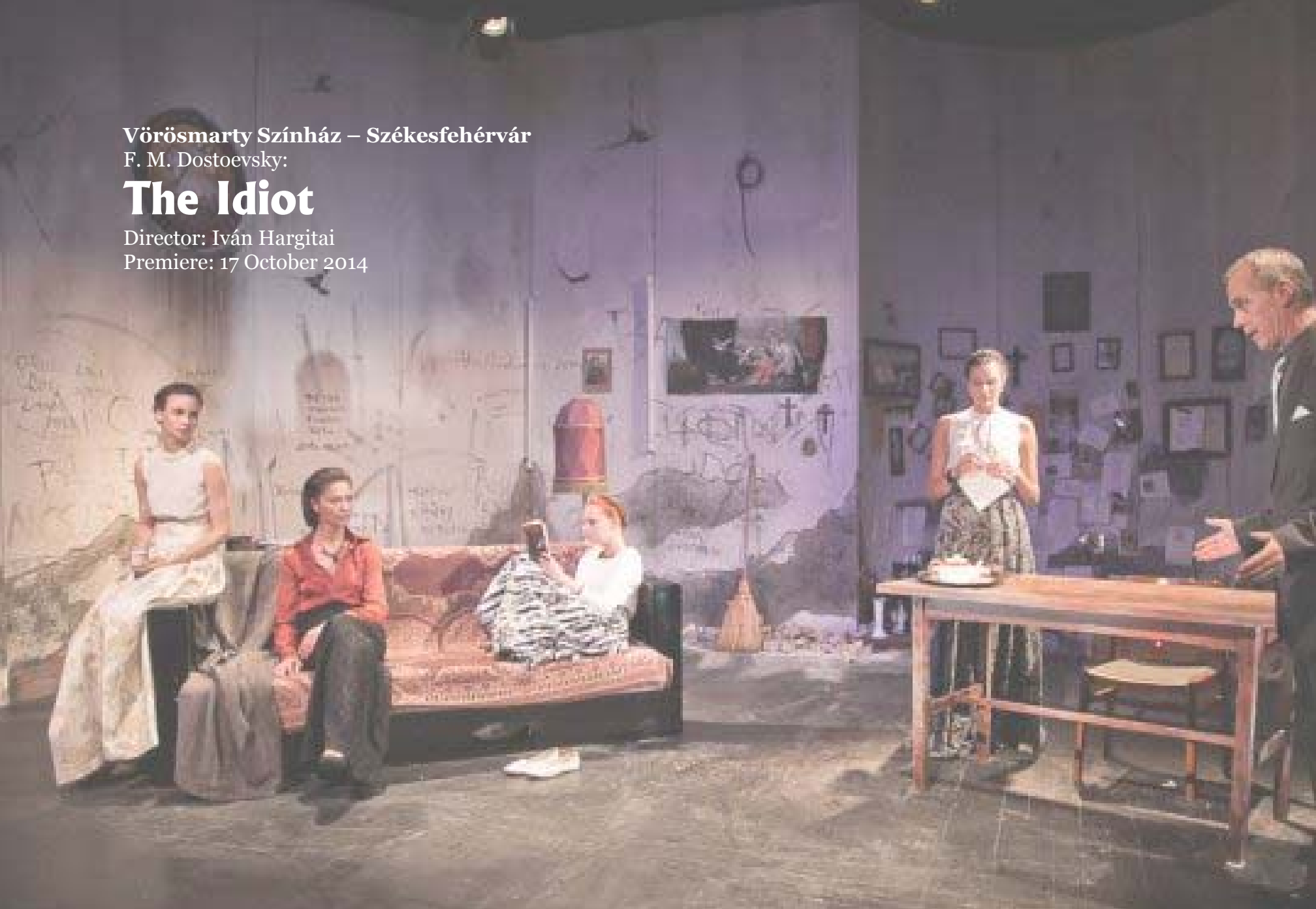
Vörösmarty Színház – Székesfehérvár

F. M. Dostoevsky:

The Idiot

Director: Iván Hargitai

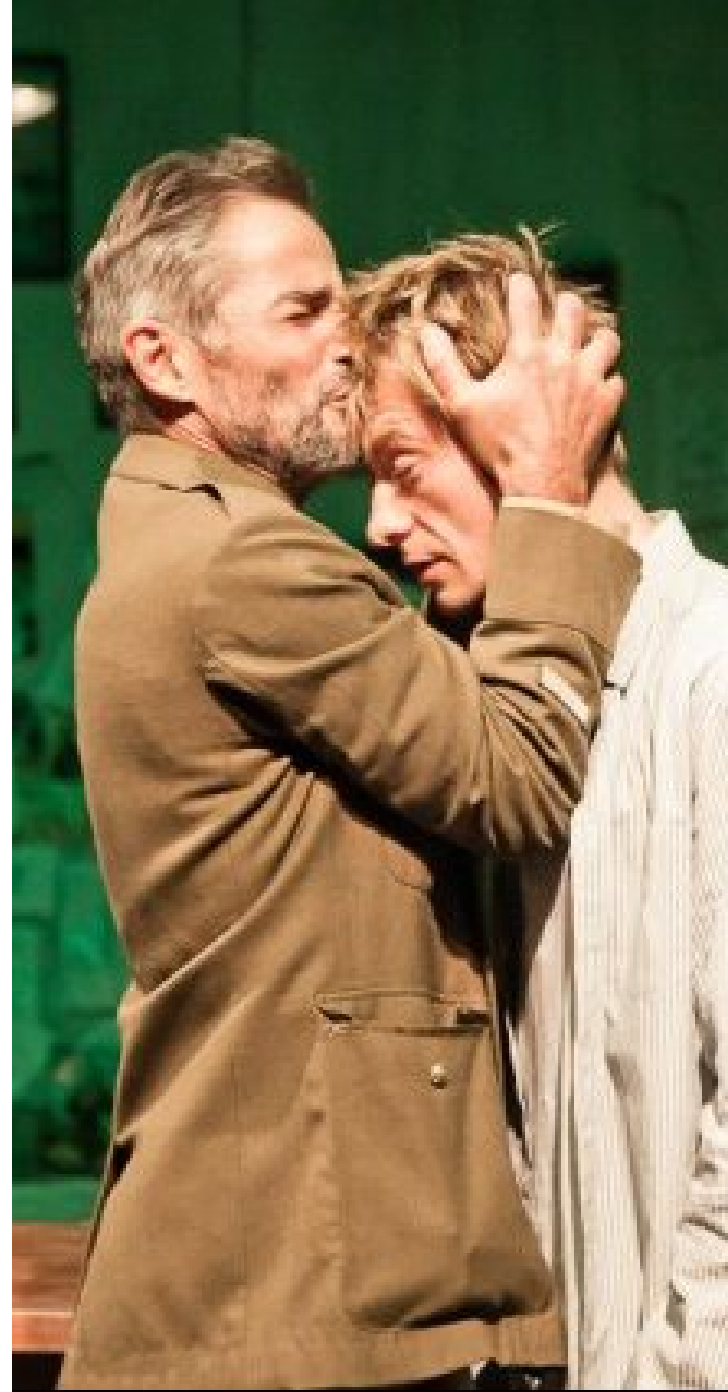
Premiere: 17 October 2014



In the intimate space of the András Kozák Studio Hall grande dame Nastassya Filippovna is walking in high-heels, Rogozhin is sporting a leather jacket, Mishkin staring at us with mild and meek eyes. Open, daring, progressive: these three words can both describe Dostoevsky's novel and the attempts of the Vörösmarty Theatre. Fifty kilometres from Budapest, in the town of Székesfehérvár, a new theatre community has been founded, with a strong team of actors and directors. The drama department of the theatre is led by director Iván Hargitai, who also directed *The Idiot*.

Catharsis can be achieved not through the resolution of problems but by presenting their complexity – claims the director. The performance of Dostoevsky's *Idiot* is a sharp representative of sharp thinking, which proves to be effective not only through a characteristic approach to staging, but also through the presence of a troupe of actors with a remarkable sensitivity and talent.

Prince Mishkin is played by Csaba Krisztik. The young actor is unique to bring the toolkit of physical theatre into a predominantly drama-focused theatre. His outstanding body technique and sense of the body have been awarded with several prizes: he received the Junior Prima prize last year, which is given to the outstanding talents of the future, while this year he also received the prize of the Hungarian Theatre Critics. In *The Idiot* he forms an interesting duo with Zsolt László, who joined the theatre group of Székesfehérvár from the National Theatre in Budapest. He is quite well-known in Hungary due to his numerous prize-winning roles on film and on the stage, yet all these can be summed up in one word: Rogozhin. In a leather jacket.



The costumes were designed by Enikő Kárpáti: the characters are wearing costumes which could also be envied by the shining divas of the hippest clubs, or the fashion icons of the grand-bourgeoisie. Elegant, beautiful people stand, sit and live in a shabby church interior. The set by Éva Magyarósi creates a world which is damp, steamy of desire, shabby of anger. They await redemption in the interior of the worn-down chapel 'populated' by small object of worship.

There is a most remarkable duality in the novels of Dostoevsky. We should somehow tread beyond ourselves and be more sympathetic, instead of looking for mistakes in the other person. This idea appears most clearly in *The Idiot*, where prince Mishkin appears almost as a Christ-like figure. He wishes to convey, if not the mutual love of each other, at least the need of understanding each other. Yet even a thought of this strength can be demolished to the ground by passion. Here lies (among other things) the immortal grandness of Dostoevsky and his complex sensitivity. The human being is not only thought and spirit, a heap of very different desires and selfish thoughts, but also a sentimental being. And this is capable of overwriting everything. Love sometimes resembles addiction and can chase a person to the extreme of becoming a murderer. Mishkin wishes to save Nastassya Filippovna of himself and Rogozhin's love (while he also falls in love with her). He fails, collapsing into himself.

Together with Dostoevsky and *The Idiot* I claim that a life worthy of man is to at least try to find a solution for the emotional conflicts. If we don't even try, we can call ourselves a coward. This duality brings about a weighty dramatic pressure: to what extent can passion shake ideals and principles? To me the novel is about these matters, and also the performance.'

(director Iván Hargitai)



‘The conclusion, where we only find Mishkin, Nastassya and Rogozhin, is outstandingly complete. Csilla Radnai’s tastefully presented stripping is of the same type of quality acting as the intimate playing of Zsolt László and Csaba Krisztik. In the end Nastassya dies, thus the woman who belonged to everyone, becomes of no one. The two men are crouching over her body enclosed in a glass coffin as two naughty children, while a moment before they were enemies. Then the door is shut and the performance ends. We must admit: the theatre makers have confronted us with eternal truths.’ (critic Márton Mészáros)

Here the little prince is truly expected as the Messiah, or, if he was now awaited, just dropped in accidentally, then they still hope for the answer, for redemption from him. The endless purity of Mishkin, his naivety brings destruction to this world, to which sin and secrecy is more adequate than a purifying innocence. (...) The performance is outstanding due to the quality of the acting, or more precisely, how the actors work together. I have mentioned already in the past season, and now I feel it 3-in-1 in *The Idiot* and Bulgakov’s *The Life of Monsieur de Moliere*, that the actors are gradually polished into a whole, the acting becomes more and more consistent. And an acting of quality. If this is called company building, then we can justly claim that they have achieved it on a remarkable level.’ (critic Zoltán Szabó)



HUNGARIAN THEATRE NEWSLETTER

2015/1

International Theatre Institute Hungarian Centre
Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute
1013 Budapest, Krisztina körút 57.
+3613751184
oszmi@szinhaziintezet.hu

For further information on the performances and exhibitions featured here please contact Anna Lakos, ITI Hungarian Center, lakoshanna@gmail.com

The performances presented in this newsletter were offered by the ITI Hungary member theatres, who wanted to take use of this opportunity of international presentation.

