

**HUNGARIAN
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INTRODUCTION

In today's global society, it is important to build a bridge between theatre professionals in order to exchange ideas and experiences. From these meetings, projects, translations and collaborations can grow and develop. There are several ways to build bridges. One of the most important ways is through publication. Within the area of publication there are various possibilities. The Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute (HTMI) has published many books in foreign languages about theatre history, important theatrical figures and plays from the Visegrádi countries over the years. HTMI and the Hungarian Center of the International Theatre Institute both have a focus on contemporary theatre and drama. The results of this focus are seen in numerous publications, created together and separately.

This booklet is born from the cooperation of ITI Hungary and HTMI. It is a small publication that uses essays to introduce the theatrical efforts, ambitions and tendencies of the recent past. We cannot introduce the entire field of contemporary theatre in Hungary but, with personal interviews, we hope to show that there is something new happening within the theatrical structure. In addition to our English newsletter, we are intent on publishing issues regularly, which will be similar to this and will contain up-to-date information.

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TODAY'S QUESTIONS

MY SEASONS

by Judit Csáki

The National Theatre festival in Pécs (POSZT) happens every year in June. The Theatre Society chooses one person to select the best performances from the past season for the festival. In opposition to this, the editors of Jelenkor asked Judit Csáki, a leading theatre critic who formulates her opinions with humour, irony, and love of the theatre, to write a one-sided, personal evaluation of the past two theatre seasons. The texts below are the edited versions of her articles that were previously published in this periodical.

2005/2006

I will begin with something that I am not an expert of: I spent a wonderful Sunday with the Mozart interpretations of Balázs Kovalik. The *Marriage of Figaro*, the *Cosí fan tutte* and the *Don Giovanni* embraced each other in the Millenáris Theatre. We spent the whole day enjoying ourselves in a real theatre. The plays were comic, resigned, tragic, melancholy, and every quality and mood was playful and intensely theatrical from the first line. Also the orchestra – I was lucky enough to sit near to one of the musicians; they accompanied the players down on the stage. From the *Marriage of Figaro* I carried with me to the break the sad realization that this

"partnership-thing" just doesn't function – we can vary, finesse, cheat and be led to cheat in many ways and we will fail incessantly. *Cosí fan tutte* imbued me with some feminine self-satisfaction; that's what happens to men who experiment with women... they only can win if they loose. (I remember of an old *Midsummer Night's Dream* in Kaposvár, directed by János Ács. As the four young ones wake up, they take some time to think about which partner-combination is better – the one they dreamed about or the one they woke up to. There is no answer, just like in *Cosí fan tutte*.) Not too much reached me from the tragic depths of *Don Giovanni*. I pre-

served some really beautiful pictures from the show, particularly the desperation surrounding the death stumbling gallop. And now I see that I did not get the "usual" from any of these productions. And so I "pushed in" Balázs Kovalik to the theatrical magicians category, into a "room" just like Bluebeard's. By the way, no piece of this "trilogy" will be seen by the audience of the POSZT.

They will see *Peer Gynt* – the performance of Krétakör directed by Sándor Zsótér. I remember that I felt so tired after the premiere, as if I had just run for an hour around the neighborhood. It's true, I galloped through a whole life with József Gyabronka's Peer – I felt I was sitting in his armchair with him on the stage; he made the stage turn into a tiny, little revolving space. Zsótér didn't fitter it away: he was searching directly for the sense of life in the play, more exactly, for the search of sense itself. And while Peer banged here and there between suffering and happiness he only covered, but didn't miss, the end station: the spoon of the Button-foundryman. Krétakör's company sparkled the insane lifedream of Peer with breakless metamorphoses. Some pictures from each character will burn into the theatre's memory: Zsolt Nagy's

father Dove, Annamária Láng's Anitra and, for me, especially the immortal, beautifully dying Aasé played by Eszter Csákányi. From now on I will also remember the translation of the script by László Kúnos and Zsuzsa Rakovszky.

Talking about Zsótér once again, the best play of the Vígszínház in this season is certainly the tale of Maeterlinck, *The Blue Bird*, from which every sweet thing of the play was condensed by the director. This performance can be considered the following part or the sequel of *Peer Gynt*: it is the same life and death, same resignation and the same intense theatre full of emotions. But this performance is in a wider space: Mária Ambrus' curtains, which now fall on each other, create the border of the space and also serve as a filter for the background scenes behind the action. These are the components of maybe the best set of the season. They create symbolical life stations where the two dried out, grown-up-children (Tilti played by Enikő Börösök and the Mitil of Vera Venczel) are rambling in front of and behind the curtains. Among the badly drawn world of the tale's stereotypes is also the Fattest Happiness (a great performance by Géza D. Hegedűs), who

is sad phenomenon. Death grows from the cemetery, which is "composed" of the audience – after all, the characters think of old age, resignation and the unattainable reality of dreams and desires with love. This play is also about the fundamental idea: the blue bird means happiness for us until we catch it.

The "blue bird" of Jolán Sárbogárdi exists in the foamy, lovely world of the operettas – where Mihály Kleiser-mann is the ticket-inspector (whose name is very similar to the "king" of Hungarian operettas: Mihály Eise-mann). A woman in the main role of Lajos Parti Nagy's *Ibusár* monodrama dreams about patriotic emotions, about life long love and about the everyday methods of rising above her life in the loudspeaker's room at the railway station of Ibusár... The studio performance of the Gárdonyi Géza Theatre in Eger, directed by Menyhért Szegvári, belongs to the group of solid performances: it works, above all, because of its intensity. The breakless busy antics and operettavision of Erika Nádasz verifies the endlessness of Jolán's fantasy: a lot of everyday life things transform themselves in strained circumstances and into precious operetta props. Nádasz sings, dances, plays – and folds

incompatible things of two worlds together: it is a solid interpretation. It would be worthy of seeing in Pécs.

The *Troilus and Cressida* of the Katona József Theatre Budapest can be seen at the POSZT, and it is also worth seeing. Although I suspect that the set (carrying a lot of meaning, the work of Helmut Stürmer) in this production (directed by Silviu Purcărete) is the most effective "at home": the row of washbasins splits the stage of Katona while filling it at the same time. Two halves appear and will later serve as the areas of the two armies, where war as lifestyle immediately begins. How tiny, how jovial, how cynical, how apathetic – and I could go on with the enumeration about how "everything" it is, that lives pass by without real life. Actually the love of Troilus and Cressida is nothing else but a small feeling among the action on the stage – thus the infidelity of Cressida is not shocking at all.

Until the point where something happens. In fact it is unexpected how the war – turned into a daily routine long ago – suddenly fills itself with life, more exactly with death, when the almost playful everyday battles turn into a massacre. And this bloody and senseless killing opens everything that has happened on the stage so far

to another dimension: the format of a real tragedy. Every "translation" would deprive this performance of its grandiosity, of the extreme and final emphasis – although it is not difficult to find a parallel to Shakespeare's play.

And if we talk about Shakespeare, we also have to mention a really cheeky and fine *Hamlet* performance (it wasn't invited to Pécs either). The play is directed by Tim Carrol of The Bárka Theatre. The concept of the play is not new, but its "methods of finding" are: it has a framework built on improvisation and on the audience's initiation into the play. This initiation is made by the actors (every night the cast changes) to create a full, different picture night after night. The audience contributes to the heightening of the play at different items – the wilder the better. There is a hockey stick, a pumpkin, an umbrella, a telescope, and also different musical instruments and CDs. The actors pick out something from the audience's hands by walking among them. Sometimes they surprise themselves or even each other by using these occasional accessories.

Hamlet, namely the drama, happens of course. And there is a playmaster as well. *Hamlet* is played in every performance by Zoltán Balázs, whose

sudden ideas are born because of the accessories. The audience enjoys the "live" theatre play – and they are right to. But the audience in Pécs won't have the opportunity to decide how they feel about it.

And they even won't be able to decide how ordinary balance tips over between the truth of Maria Stuart and Elizabeth in Schiller's drama, directed by Róbert Alföldi and played at the Pesti Theatre. Róbert Menczel has created a basically dark set – with a huge, multi-functioning metal item in the centre, which serves as almost everything in the play: a prison, Elizabeth's throne hall and Maria's dungeon. The bitter struggle for the authority, namely who will send whom into the prison, is not decided in one act. Maria doesn't give up and Elizabeth hesitates. Authority means the same thing for both women: obtaining domination over the other. But they will defeat each other. Two great actresses utilize the expressive and exciting dresses of Andrea Bartha to propel their characters during the course of the play. The soft material almost melts on the Maria Stuart played by Enikő Eszenyi, while Enikő Börcsök's Elizabeth is held by her rigid cloth almost like she is in real stocks, but her sensitive frailty still shows through.

And if we speak about actors – Zsolt Trill would also deserve an invitation to Pécs for his acting in János Háty's new play *The Son of Father Pityu* at the Tália Theatre. And if we take a close look at Trill's role, we see how well he plays this character in his 40s who is coming from the countryside to the town and consequently leaves everything behind. This is a colorful ending-in-failure man who does not illustrate the moral we normally think of in László Bérczes' fine and wrought direction. Then we also have to take a look at the sister-in-law, staying at home, played by Nelli Szűcs. This actress always fully embodies the roles she plays and is always full destiny with the help of her own endless, natural and intuitive effective instruments – this is wonder itself. Furthermore she has no propensity for theatrical demonstration – she lives in the moment onstage, she is always there. We can only wonder how she does it. Otherwise I look at this "devils' play", also called a lifestyle-tragedy, of János Háty as a hard, heavy play. Bérczes' instincts were good. This mythical-mystical land of the play and its passage of time has to be metaphorically suggested: the wine streams are communicating vessels, and there are apples as well, waiting to be rolled away. All of that happens in the small

playing space of Thália's Studio.

I even saw two "Pécs-like qualifiers" during the last season of the Örkény Theatre – this means that in addition to being popular with audiences, I also appreciated their virtue and style of performance. There were some really great performances in the *Glass Shoe*, e.g. Gabriella Hámos's Irma, who somehow rises from the other performances in this classical play of Molnár because she manages not to rise at all. The real proceeds of this performance are that Irma's flaming is equal to the complicated story of the others. For example, the bumpy relationship of Adél and Mr Sípós. Traditionally Irma shines in this play, but Pál Mácsai's direction lets the agitation of the two middle-aged characters shine as well. Furthermore the Adél, played by Anikó Für, is really shocking with her curt tone and her cold rationalism. She uses these to hide her sensitive heart and the pain of her middle-age years – these choices prove effective together. The "sweet-angry-man" of Gálffi, Mr Sípós, in spite of all of his seeming stubbornness and whim, serves as a kind of soft prey for the women. There is another nice performance: we just cannot miss the silence of Kriszta Bíró in the role of Ilona Keceli, a coquette

with a big heart, who keeps silent for about 10 minutes in this play.

Gabriella Hámori did have another big role: she played Élektra under the direction of László Bocsárdi – and I truly would have invited that play to Pécs as well. This *Élektra's* motivation is really rich: she doesn't have truth but she does have mania. She dries into her own thirst for revenge. Her rich motivation is fueled by her surroundings – and by a lot of delicious performances. The choir, for example, is a bunch of pregnant women with their own great tummies. They confront Élektra with the drought of a childless life. Or Klütaimnestra, who would have good reason for killing her selfish, fanatic and unfaithful husband, Agamemnon, and could set herself free with that action – Judit Pogány's big scene is really wonderful. Or Orestes, an elegant man of the world, who falls down into the deepness of the cellar into the hollow of Élektra's free will. This man, played by Pál Mácsai, left not only his family behind but also the whole ancient honourcodex: neither the revenge nor the jurisdiction is to his taste. He is full of doubt and hesitating. He is derived from us.

Árpád Sopsits brought to the studio stage of the National Theatre Sophocles' *King Oidipus* and *Oidipus in Kolonos* in sum under the title *Oidipus* (just like Oidipus of Zsolt László – although he is not characterised by hesitating at all). The simple and monumental set by Csaba Antal (clear and shining walls – dark in the first part, bright during the second) frames not only the atmosphere of the performance but also joins with the running rubber carpets in the fore – to make it seem as if the background is moving itself. Sopsits' Oidipus is a ruler with a clear soul and high moral standards who "cannot see with his eyes" and this – temporarily only virtual – blindness sweeps him towards his tragic offence and his real blindness. Zsolt László is not interested in the traditional rich instruments of an actor, which are known from the classical plays. His ruler is heated by the feelings of today. He loves his wife passionately (who is also his mother), he is also passionate about the administration of justice – the killer of the former ruler (and that of his father) has to be punished no matter who it is...

In the second part – without the help of the outside – a blind man is standing in front of us. He roams homeless in the world – helped by his daughter,

Antigone – and only a death worthy of him is always before his eyes. Sopsits creates a great brightness for him when he steps out from life – but how bright is it really if it can only be seen by us? In addition to Zsolt László's performance, other memorable performances include: the brightening up of Dorottya Udvaros' Iokaste and the depressing apathy of János Kulka's Kreon.

There could and maybe should have been a place in Pécs for the performance of the theatre in Tatabánya. The play, *The Good Man from Szecsuán*, was directed by Eszter Novák. Most of all it is about the hope of goodness. There are hesitating gods (who behave like human beings), there is the boggy, Szecsuán, and the more and more desperate Sen Te, who can separate (and divide) herself worse and worse from her harder and more rational ego, Sui Ta. Novák's direction, which is spectacular and rich in emotions, is a real experience of total theatre in that the music, the voices, the moving (moreover the director's instructions for mass-moving together) tell us a lot. Ildikó Tóth's acting is, again, wonderfully sensitive. Sen Te is not an ethereal figure in her interpretation. She does not play her as the one who personifies heavenly good-

ness but as a good woman, practically without any alternatives, to which goodness neither gives power nor helps to be clear-sighted. Sen Te is weak – but Sui Ta isn't strong at all: at most she is desperate in the moment when she saves her life (which is Sen Te's life as well). The waterseller Vang, played by János Derzs, could also appear in every subway in Pest. We wouldn't even turn our heads towards him because he is so familiar. The pilot, Szun, Virgil Horváth's role, the lover of Sen Te, is also a victim of the circumstances, of the misery and of a hopeless life. But his fate leaves a long-lasting mark on his personality: he was, is and will be a selfish man consumed by his own interests. Some things that help this production are that there is the choir of gods in this play and that we can see good portraits in many of the other roles. For example, the roles played by Ági Margitai, Kati Takács and György Honti. In this play there is no prosperity from inside: this Sen Te stands with her little child and faces a sad future.

There were some other performances in my season, which I watched with love – *My Mother's Nose* from Pintér Béla Company and *A Woman from the Past*, a third premiere in the

Örkény Theatre, or *The Key*, a play by András Forgách, are productions which stand with the above mentioned on my list (no place for them, what a pity!). And of course there are

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There is a continuous changing and transformation of the theatre structure in process, even if it's happening without guidance, without any concept behind it or, at is were, spontaneously. The makeup of a company today is totally different than even a decade ago. The content of a repertoire has been altered as well. Now we need to clearly see what the owners – the state and the local governments – intend to do and what their capacity really is.

The fizzle around the directors is, in part, politically intended. A mayor seriously thinks that only the political opinion or affiliation of one of the greatest artists of the Hungarian theatre life makes him the most competent choice to be the director of a major theatre. That a mayor can think like that at all is partly because of unregulated theatrical life. Professionals' opinions play only a part in nominations, which depend mostly on the common-sense and discretion of the local government. This political clean-

more performances for sure, which, unfairly and/or accidentally, I was not able to see (also no time for them, what a pity!). I'm sorry, really.

up is not considered tragic at all as the group of the less competent theatre directors multiplies itself...

Now I think we have a pretty good season behind us – we also can see that in the lineup of the POSZT. We can hear neither the hoot of Cassandra nor the baleful-crones of Macbeth... maybe it was the last peaceful season.

Eger arrives with two performances – the Gárdonyi Géza Theatre is a developing, balanced theatre. If we speak about a peaceful season, this theatre can be the isle of peace. In contrast to Kaposvár, which outstrips a stormy year. Or maybe they outstrip only the year and not the storm. There are some kind of dead doldrums nowadays, and maybe the director (who is posted for an only year – what a decision of the culture-politic and dilettantism it is!) – will succeed by not thinking about the theatre's position, but his position. Success meaning that the theatre is stabil, its company is

solid and it is in small default only of the "solists". The play of the Mohácsi brothers, *56/06 őrült lélek vert hadak* (*56/06 mad soul beaten army*), is one of the most important performances of the year and not only because of the anniversary celebration of '56.

Celebration isn't enough for everything per se. The many wretched occasional dramas and performances, which cannot overstep touched, arty gestures (among them is *Liberté* from Debrecen, invited to the POSZT as well) are evidence enough for me. There is one exception, which was welcomed with an inexplicable incomprehension and abstention: this is the *Casemates* of the Katona Theatre (Budapest), a play by András Papp and János Térey. The self-celebrators just didn't like it, although it's tone is moderate and it's approach is tinted. Unfortunately the celebrators didn't like it either.

And if I mention Katona: the workshop, which is preparing for it's 25th anniversary, closed a real strong season. *The Wild Duck* and *One of the Last Nights of Carnival* (both in the big theatre) and *The Trachinae* and *War*, a play by Goldoni invited from the Theatre Academy, (both played in the Kamra – the studio theatre of Katona) are all on this season's "best-

of" list. And it's not a courageous act to foretell that they will get several prizes from the critics. The performances of Eszter Ónodi, Andrea Fullajtár, Gábor Máté, Ernő Fekete, Károly Hajduk, Lehel Kovács and Gergely Kocsis are among the best of this season.

If we speak about a strong season, we have to say that the Örkény Theatre also got something out of this season. *Finito*, the play written by István Tasnádi and directed by Pál Mácsai, has been invited to Pécs. It is a good performance with good roles and a bunch of great interpretations, so it surely will meet with a warm response. The television-show-parody of the play's second part is telling and entertaining all in one. If someone competent from a schlockmeister TV channel would take a wrong turn and come in the theatre to see this part, he would feel ashamed on the spot – if he could believe his eyes at all.

But the direction of András Dömötör could have been also invited, which is *Vízkereszt, vagy bánom is én...* (*Twelfth Night; or As You Like It...*). This modified version shed light on the notorious parts of Shakespeare's drama. There were also a lot of great performances: Gabriella Hátori, Ani-

kó Für, Imre Csujá, László Gálffi, Judit Pogány, Éva Kerekes (mentioning only the main roles). There were also two one-acts presented at Örkény: *Kávécarnok (Café Hall)* and *Tűzoltó (Fireman)* by Ernő Szép are a double gratification both for the actors and for the audience. Éva Kerekes and László Széles are playing confidently on a wide scale. They visibly and pleasurably alter Ernő Szép's gentle or chunky tones – it is a very, very delightful night...

I remember two performances from the Víg's studio theatre (Pesti Theatre). The *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is monumental and impressive and also rich in beautiful details – Enikő Böröcsök's Ursula gives a heavy and consistent performance. Géza D. Hegedűs' Buendía shows the craggy picture of a cursed, stiff day-dreamer. There are many other delicious interpretations as well: from Endre Harkányi to Vera Venczel and so on. The other play is an adaptation of Thomas Vinterberg's film, *Az ünnep (The Feast)*. Enikő Eszenyi directed a brutal, effective and ornate play. The despot father is very well played again by Géza D. Hegedűs.

The Bárka Theatre suffered a lot and survived its first new season. The

Threepenny Opera directed by Róbert Alföldi was more a sort of team-spirit-developing, pedagogical production. We can see the results of this work in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*: a sombre, deeply deliberated interpretation finds it's extraordinary, artistically justified form. The actors are wading in a metal pool and the colorful plastic crumbs make the movements difficult. The gestures are filled with much meaning, the socialized elegance of behaviours disappear and the interest-controlled feelings show themselves nude and rough in this medium. A wise, ancestress-Puck, powerfully played by Kati Lázár, is sitting over this whole rambling, searching, yearning for love – like she is outside of time and space.

Béla Pintér's *Árva csillag (Orphan(ed) Star)* meets with big appreciation from the audience – I belong to rare exceptions. Pintér's well-known form of expression – and Benedek Darvas' music – work well again together. The usual frenetic humour appears, which is a mixture of biting irony and emotionalism – but in this case I had the feeling that the basic material, the play itself, melts away and takes so many different turns that it has no main direction. There is an immobil-panama, UFOs, bad alcohol, a small

has-been, a brother-in-law from Austria, a corrupt policeman, a longing-to-be-off and going-away – less would have been more.

Krétaör began with a stone-hard adaptation of Sorokin's *The Ice* – the performance, which experiments with the audience, is the play of a real company – and that is what we rarely see in theatres. The performance is full of rich interpretations, pretty natural effects in the first part, and there is also a group photograph of poetical beauty in the second part. The company presented *Bánk-bán* by József Katona toward the end. As the title's original writing shows, the script of the performance is also written "just" by Katona. The play is set in a special, wonderful space, the assembly hall of the Institute for Blind. The space and the set affected the play so much that the analyzed details appeared to be just as remarkable as the complex message of the drama (directed by Sándor Zsótér). The intonation of the play is moderated, just like the actors' interpretations – only Annamária Láng excels with a fresh interpretation of Gertrudis' role.

I spent only one overjoyed night at the Új Theatre this last season. I saw Racine's *Phaedra*, directed by Péter

Valló. I'm really sorry that it doesn't fit into the OFF-programs of the POSZT. There is a lot of dramatic tension, generated first of all by Katalin Takács, on the small playing space built in the front of the audience (who are seated on the stage). This woman loves her stepson *a lot* and she suffers *a lot* because of it; in both of these emotions is the storm of a middle-aged woman's whole life. An intellectual, anguished, tired Theseus (a role perfect for András Bálint) gradually steps into high-heated emotional flaming. This man will neither understand nor soothe the conflict, he just wants *to avoid* it. And many people die from this kind of damage-control...

More likely than not, many people will be interested in one of the most exciting performances of the year. But the audience is not really a consumer of *Jane Eyre*, directed by Sándor Zsótér. More exactly: it is very likely that the form is apprehensible but not the interpretation. This half-epic theatre piece, with narrations by different characters (not with psychological but stylized playing) takes place in the two-story, box-theatre. Kata Wéber's *Jane Eyre* is passionate with a lot of emotions. The other important play to mention with deep interest is the *Radnóti Night* of András Bálint. It is

truly an engrossing conversation during which one party principally listens – implicitly. Radnóti's poetry and his Jewishness (which is on the one hand lived in contradiction but uncontradicted, and brutally endured on the other hand) are the two guidelines of the night. Letters, diaries and "comments" of others enlighten the present colorful phenomenon of debating what it means "to be a Jew".

The central point of the problem pile this year is that the actors, newly graduated from the Theatrical Academies (two academies are in Budapest, one in Kaposvár), are unable to find employment. A contract is waiting for, altogether, five actors of the three academic classes – this ill omen is a reason to make a revision in the case of the companies' situation.

Theatres can not engage young actors at the moment mostly because of their financial situation, but this is more a sign of a deeper tendency. It is possible that the actors have to concentrate on jobs and single roles instead of reaching a position in a company.

Sándor Zsótér directed Brecht's play, the *Mother Courage* at the Theatre Academy in Budapest. The musical theatre class, led by Tamás Ascher and Eszter Novák, created an effective and strong contemporary perform-

ance in the small courtyard, on the outside balconies, on the corridors and in the staircase of the building in Rákóczi street. The performance was also enough for a catharsis. The scenes the small yard served as the battlefield and the dustbin for the cart of Mother Courage.

The same class performed the condensed variant of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*; the biggest virtue of this happy, sad and intense show is that it speaks to everyone in the audience, which, in this case, spanned 80 years. The performance of the class, led by Eszter Novák, is characterized by its humour and inventiveness – they needed only a few things for this play (a ladder or chair etc.).

The graduating class this year in Kaposvár plays *The Beggar's Opera* in a changing cast; the good and talented flashes of interpretations don't fit together well so far – every Macheath starts from "the zero point". Just like in our lives...

Also the above mentioned realization of a play (where the cast changes, which is usual at the academies) characterizes the performance *The Comedy of Errors* of the second-year students in Kaposvár. The play, directed by János Mohácsi, is a real firework-like

idea-rush, an outstanding possibility for the young actors who look nice together in appearance and also in team-work. And they still have a year to study. This performance can be seen at POSZT as well...

HUNGARIAN DANCE ART MOSAIC

by Tamás Halász

Tamás Halász, dance critic, is a collaborator of HTMI and an expert on Hungarian contemporary dance ambitions.

To give a comprehensive picture of the Hungarian dance art of today is almost an impossible task. The clear, outstanding tendencies, streams and schools before the 90's can be followed easily because they were closely regulated and guarded by the regime. But, in the years since 1990, dance art has been blooming in the midst of unblest, bitter, hard and various other states and circumstances (the word "satisfying" is not characteristically used to describe the situation for the whole trade from 1990 to the present). Almost inexpressible new energies arose from the next to nothing. Dozens of new companies were born under difficult circumstances and the educational institution of the contemporary world

This is my subjective portrait, undoubtedly not really subjective but also not really a portrait, of the whole season. It is a draft, for the most part...

became widespread. Studios, schools and workshops were established. A dance season of today can be proud of 130–150 premiers. This colorful genre is now deeply rooted in the social sense. So it would be difficult to draw a diagram of this precious and exciting story, which stands behind the recent history of dance art on stage. But if we recall some particular names, locations and formations – by focusing less on the present and more on the future – the salient angles could be connected with each other. Because of the lack of space I can not deal with the huge and rich world of folkdance in this essay...

In 1884, in the presence of Franz Josef, the Royal Hungarian Opera House

opened its' doors to the Hungarian ballet (with its decades long tradition) and offered it shelter within the institute – to this day, the National Hungarian Ballet works among its walls. In 1902 the Italian Nicola Guerra, became the leader of the Operaballet. His 13 year long work paved the way for a high-standard in dancer qualification: classical dance was, at that time, (before the revolutionary appearance of the Hungarian guest performance of Gyagilev's Russian Ballett) not more than a showy attraction. Gyula Harangozó, the outstanding dancer-coreographer of the 20's and a renewing, creating, and, for decades, determining personality, was the leader of the ballet section from 1950. The illustrious works of classical ballet literature (held on programme up to the present) became, in his time, part of the repertoire. László Seregi signed up from the Artists Company of Néphadsereg to the Singspiel Theater (Dalszínház) and became a dancer and the leading coreographer of the company. His *Spartacus*, born in 1968, is one of the emblematic performances of 20th Century Hungarian Ballet. The 60's and 70's were the days of glory for the ballet in the Hungarian Opera. The performances of the company, which is rich in important dancers, preserve, nowadays, the

conservative style, but sometimes they also perform more modern coreographies in a great interpreted way. The work of this leading, classical Hungarian group is recently defined by the work of László Seregi, Lilla Pártay, Gyula Harangozó Jr. (ballet director 1996–2005), Antal Fodor and Gábor Keveházi (recent ballet director).

Internationally recognized work began in the three ballet centres of the Hungarian countryside in the 60's, 70's and 80's. Pécs Ballet was founded in 1960 and led for three determinant decades by Imre Eck. He leaned on the classical traditions and – reserved from the trends of the west – he was also searching for new forms and ways of expression. The great period of the Pécs Ballet, the first modern Hungarian ballet company, was over a long time ago, but it is still working and actively guarding its illustrious traditions in the frames of the National Theatre Pécs. It is now under the leadership of Balázs Vincze, just like before.

The company of the Győr Ballet was founded by the college graduates of the Hungarian Ballett Academy under the leadership of a Béjart student, Iván Markó. The company, working in the Győr National Theatre, reached

great popularity in Hungary and also abroad. Their premiers were considered a national sensation and moved masses in motion like nothing before and nothing since. (From the highly talented dancers of Győr, Andrea Ladányi, an always present personality, is leading her own company, la Dance Company. Today she also presents immortal performances as Csaba Horváth's partner.)

The outstanding period, determined by István Markó (dancer-coreographer) and Judit Gombár (set- and costume-designer), came to an end in 1991. (In 1996, when Markó returned from abroad, he formed the Hungarian Festival Ballett, a company composed of young dancers.) Since then Győr Ballett is led by János Kiss. Their repertoire contains choreographic works from Hungarian and foreign masters.

Szeged Ballet, as the dance section of the National Theatre Szeged, began to work independently in 1946 and, after two breaks, began its great period in 1987. The work of the company, re-founded by Roland Bokor (ballet director), was established by the dancer-coreographer Imre Zoltán. The company is, since 1993, under the leadership of the excellent dancer-coreographers Tamás Juronics

and András Pataki. Their monumental productions include adaptations and new interpretations of many standard works and new versions of the most outstanding music opuses, which are coreographed by Tamás Juronics.

Until the change of the regime in Hungary, the varied arsenal from abroad could have hardly oozed through the tight borders and prohibitions. The world of modern dance, contemporary dance, movement art – how many names it has – is a complex and colorful world, which the national field was growing supremely – in every meaning of the word. The prominent companies and the smaller groups (there are about 2–3 dozen of them today in Hungary), independent dancers, and freelancers represent about hundred people. Today we can be proud of more and more of them. However they are working unsystematically or casually (in a project system) and from a smaller budgets than the other contemporary trades.

Maybe the best known modern group is the Company Bozsik Yvette, working within the framework of the Katona József Theatre, Budapest. Bozsik, who grew up on the classics but transferred spectacularly to modern, founded her group in 1993 after she left the Természetes Vészek Kollektívája.

(Considering its work, this was an epoch company, which Ladányi established together with György Árvai.) The dancer-coreographer shows a preference for the topics of literature and art history. Her choreographic pieces, composed in an exciting way, work with styles of many periods and interpret oeuvres of the greatest literature and dance art masters. They can be seen on the two stages of the Katona Theatre, Budapest and at the National Dance Theatre. The excellent actors of the Katona (young and old) appear regularly beside the dancers in these creations.

The Artus Theatre is a real workshop combining all artistic styles. In order to underline their independency they work and play in their (for the large part) own studio in Lágymányos, for which they created a special atmosphere. Artus was founded by Gábor Goda (former member of the Corpus, a once legendary pantomim workshop of Hungary) and Ildikó Mándy (an independent artist today). The 20 year old company shows a specific, magical world by using irregular areas and by inviting artists of other artistic branches to collaborate. Their productions weave tales for adults and multimedia devices play an honoured role in them.

Pál Frenák, a dancer-choreographer who has lived in Paris since 1983, founded his company with Hungarian and French dancers in 1999 in Budapest. The works of this artist, who combines sign language with traditional eastern and modern western moving systems for his individual style, attract many audience members. The shows paint a bizarre and cruel picture of a world, which let us reflect on the world we live in. Frenák also invites acrobats, sportsmen and actors to appear in his works. We can also say that his activity and his company functions as an international bridge: his works have been shown worldwide, in countries where the Hungarian dance art was unknown before. In his choreographies, which in Hungary are performed mostly at the Trafó, many young, Hungarian artists have proven their talent.

The Central Europe Dance Theatre (Közép-Európa Táncszínház – KET) found its character under the artistic leadership of the excellent dancer-choreographer, Csaba Horváth, and the direction of Csaba Szögi. This character derives mostly from the past influence of István Énekes and Miklós Küküllő and applies the traditions of folk dance in an innovative spirit. Horváth recently left the company

and founded his own group, Fortedanse. He invited prominent contemporary and classical dancers to be part of the company. Nowadays, their premiers are followed by the dance trade with the highest attention. Horváth interprets the music of contemporary and modern artists with an uncommon sensibility and builds a structure from sound and movement, which can't be compared to anything else.

KET presents its work mostly in its home at the Bethlen square (in the former theatre, then cinema building) in a place with atmosphere. The period after Horváth is characterized by the work of young, ambitious choreographers: this new period is in a state of experimenting, which attaches hope to the future.

Péter Gerzson Kovács' TranzDanz Company stepped out also from the folk traditions into the contemporary world. Kovács, the founder of the first independent Hungarian folk dance company (Summások), attracts attention with his individuality. The company, which won the noted Bagnolet Coreographic Competition in 1992, works with a renewing group whose style is in the process of formation and is becoming refined. There are great, young dancers in the company with contemporary, folk dance and classical education.

The Budapest Dance Theatre was founded by Béla Földi, a choreographer with eminent pedagogical skills, who specifies the groups' style as art-jazz. Many different kinds of works by Hungarian and foreign coreographers are part of their repertoire. They worked successfully in coproduction with the internationally known Dutch dance creator Krisztina de Chatels' company in the remake of the coreographers' piece, *Earth (Föld)*.

The Hungarian Art of Movement Company is working in its own educational studio, building on the Hungarian traditional dance form of the hundred year old tradition of the art of movement – orchestric (hallmarked by the name of Valéria Dienes), under the leadership of Márk Fenyves and István Pálosi.

Attila Csabai's Company began its work under the name of KompMánia. The company worked for a decade and presented exciting premiers but broke up some years ago – Krisztián Gergye and Márta Ladjánszki separated from the company and were promoted to the class of young and determinant artists of today's Hungarian dance art.

The L1 group interprets itself as an association of independent dance artists, which arranged its well-

equipped home in a picturesque factory building on Soroksári street, where they also work and perform. L1 consists of many artists from the Hungarian contemporary art scene: Gyula Berger, who founded the first Hungarian contemporary dance group; the above mentioned Márta Ladjánszki, whose solo and duet choreographies are exciting versions of the human body's theatrical appearance and interpretation; Réka Szabó, the mathematician-dancer-coreographer, whose ingenious, entertaining and clever works are moving on the border of dance with great success. Szabó moved away from pure dance some years ago. Her coreographies show her attraction to the grotesque and her company (working since 1996 under the name *The Symptoms/ Tünet Együttes*, consisting of actors and dancers) puts into practice this kind of attraction. Their performances are very individual mixtures of words and movements. Réka Szabó's individual humour, her "art to build" also became appreciated abroad. The *Symptoms* are one of the most well traveled companies. It is hard to categorize her work – but exactly this kind of a "border-nature" that makes the road she treads exciting.

PR-evolution attracts attention with its high quality of work and international references. Attila Kun (once the soloist of the world renowned London Rambert Ballet and also of the Hungarian State Opera) leads a company of freelancers and aims to inject a new quality, a new speed into today's Hungarian dance art. Dancers with classical and contemporary education are working together in his company. Attila Kun daringly crosses style-borders and his personal history is a good example of those who felt a deep lacking in their traditional roles after classical education. The productions of this exciting company are characterized by a daring experimental spirit and by reflection on the world's events. Besides this moralization the abstract lyric and the demand on pure dance is also characteristic for the group.

Ferenc Fehér, a former street dancer, and Anikó Juhász, known as O. Caruso, are the main artists of the company *Finita la Commedia*, which is one of the most frequently touring Hungarian companies. Ferenc Fehér is a performer with elementary energies who is attracting the attention of more and more people in today's contemporary art world. Their complex, close collaboration lets strong visions

come to alive. The duo invited prominent artist-partners many times for work, in which the multimedia aspects appear regularly with many varied sign-systems.

Krisztián Gergye, former member of the *KompMánia*, began his career in Indonesia, familiarizing himself with traditional Java styles. He has become one of today's most productive and most promising dancer-choreographers. His company, the *GK Impersonators*, is actually a group of independent artists that do not work in the classical sense of a company. It is more a "power-space" with permanent members. Before becoming a company leader Gergye appeared in many of his colleagues' works (eg. Pál Frenák, Rita Bata, Mari Balázs) and enriched his extraordinary, oriental dancing culture at a breakneck speed. There are intimate, harrowing solos and also performances for more dancers among his varied but still characteristically own interpretations.

It is hard intending to be exhaustive in the case of the independent modern artists: this huge and colorful mass. It would be a long-lasting list if I counted all of the individual artists who are walking along the road of the contemporary field in their own ways. The number of them has been rapidly

increasing in the last decade. Thanks to the Budapest Táncművészeti Szak-középiskola és Alapfokú Művészeti Iskola Hungarian Modern Dance College (established 2005 and led by Iván Angelus, an excellent pedagogue in the contemporary field), the number of these people is growing from year to year with many new, skilled young talents with a wide intellectual horizon.

The Hungarian dance art, whose richness can only be compared to western examples, presents its works at many places (first of all, in Budapest). *Trafó* offers the forefront performances of Hungarian and foreign artists in a wide and first-rate variety. The National Dance Theatre (which also organizes many performances at the Festival Theatre in the Palace of Arts) shows an overall (mostly Hungarian) selection of the three presented trends. The MU Theatre in Lágymányos operates in a similar fashion to *Trafó* and welcomes Hungarian and foreign contemporary dance performances of a high standard. There are often dance programs at the Székény Theatre, the Merlin, Milleniar Theatre and also at the Thália. Some important guest performances appear also on the big stages, like at the Operetta, the Madách or at the Víg.

THE HOT TOPIC OF THEATRE STRUCTURE AND FINANCING

by István Szabó

István Szabó is the Associate Director of HTMI and is familiar with the changes in the Hungarian theatrical structure. He is a member of the working group that is preparing the new theatrical law.

The Hungarian theatre of today benefits and suffers from the inheritance, which was accumulated by the period between 1949 and 1989. In 1949 events took an unexpected political turn and theatres were taken into public ownership. This put an end to the uncertainty (which was natural because of the previous market relations) and also to the competition-situation. The regime wanted to run the theatres in the form of a lasting company and also aimed to create a wide theatrical network. So, in the following decades, theatres were founded in every big city of the countryside, just like in the county towns. Theatre companies assured there would be repertoires playing in every theatre in Budapest and this resulted in a variety of programs never seen before. The rigor of the political censorship let up in the 70's, so theatres also played an important role in the preparations for the political changes. In the 80's the decreasing subsidy was equalized by the larger freedom in program planning and management. After the

change of regime in 1989 the previously formulated question arose in a more cutting way: based on the heavy-duty capacity of the country, can this theatrical structure be fiscally sponsored in the future and won't the costs be beyond the country's abilities? The theatrical trade and the local governments (which took the maintenance matters of the theatres in to account for the future) voted for the continuity of sponsorship and allowed us to take the audience, who agreed with the decision, into consideration.

The state also assured future subvention for the field. Democratic changes involved the expansion of theatrical life: new playing spaces and new theatres appeared on the map. The rate of progress at the beginning later diminished, but everyone considered the decreasing of the budgetary supports a temporary situation. The audience's interest was also flagging slightly, but the recession in the number of the audience members was

smaller than in other fields of cultural consumption.

The reserves in the system were enough for the theatres to satisfy all demands of every layer of the audience. Small capacity studios and chamber theatres were opened in addition to the bigger theatres, sometimes unaided and as private ventures. The audience was attracted to go to the big stages by even more performances providing entertaining, which compensated the deficiency of proceeds from the smaller rooms for a short time. The private theatres were not able to be marketable because of their trifling incomes, so new application forms were opened for them. The situation stabilized for the second half of the 90's, however there were still financial problems and other matters. The political standpoints appeared newly stressed by the appointments for directors. The members of the younger generation weren't ambitious as far as attaining directorial positions because of the increasing trouble around functioning. Due to these problems the previous preservation standard of functioning turned problematic for many theatres.

In addition to the perceptible decreasing of financial sources the state

expended huge amounts for prestige investments and for the maintenance of the institutions. The National Theatre, for example, was built (paying off more than a hundred year old debt), but parallel to that the reconstruction process stopped, which served mostly to modernize theatre buildings founded before the Second World War.

It is typical for theatres that since 1990 they are functioning under the maintenance of the local governments, in the constitutional form of a budget institution. This way organized institutions' personal staff, including the artists, became part of the public employees list (of civil servants), which just doesn't assure the best conditions for the artistic work. Finding peace within functioning is often possible but only by the "loose" interpretation of the law. The increase of ticket incomes plays an ever-growing part in the management, but the number of the solvent audience will make an end of this process. Because a large number of theatres obtain public funds from two sources, the state would load the local governments and the local governments would load the state with the expenses of maintenance. The relatively independent supporter, the National Cultural

Fund, is unable to realize a value centralized orientation because it can support the theatrical budget only in some per-cents. The judicial background of the private sponsorship and patronage is not developed enough and its share of the support is minimal. The non-profit law regulation doesn't aid the transformation of the newer theatres either – the reorganization was started only because of significant support decreases.

Critical voices have gotten louder in the recent years and the theatrical structure is scrutinized more and more. The ghost of closing theatres is always a part of the trade discourse and the discussions concerning reorganization have been unsuccessful. The professional organizations are weak, more exactly they don't have enough initiative to protect professional interests, to change values and to formulate the future. The common apathy can also be felt in theatre performances, however the audience is still persistent. Maybe they don't support the former favorites, that's all. The amusing musical theatre performances are expanding largely and the government is greatly criticized (from a moral point of view) for supporting them. The number of the real theatrical workshops has been decreasing

and the hegemony of the theatres (founded before 1990) will end soon. New values aren't born into the traditional "first line theatres", as international success defines it. The emancipation of the independent theatres is promising but it is hard to imagine the bettering of their financial situation without serious injuries to their interest.

After many unsuccessful experiments of the theatrical trade organizations, the cultural government took the initiative on the necessity of passing laws for the whole trade and to create a new theatrical regulation. Afterwards, professional discussions on this new initiative began – behind closed doors – and today the interests gather around two extreme standpoints. One is in the interest of those who already work as a theatre and get some governmental support. They wait for the judiciary's affirmation of the existing problems and for better financial conditions. The other group would see new possibilities: they would like revised dispensation and extra sources. As it shows, the common denominator is the claim for more support but the conceptions about how to use these sums are very different.

The work on new judicial regulations can lead to transparent relations, that can be better controlled and planned than before. These new, specific judicial frames for theatrical work can help a lot if they reduce not only the essential problems of the employees but also free energies for the creative, artistic processes. The present-day support is not enough to preserve the values of the past. It is also necessary to preserve the fundamentals of the structure and to secure new forms and initiatives at the same time. That's why the promise of the law-maker reads through to his aim – that besides the change of financing methods the

standard of support will also change. The traditional, social authority and importance of the Hungarian theatre can only be preserved this way. The signs showing unfavorable changes continue to increase. The socially high reputation of the actors also lowers, as it is shown by different research and surveys. A larger popularity and material wealth can be achieved with less work and smaller talent in the modern media-world. In this world, theatres have to become a counterpoint, and should be attractive to talented, young people and to the young audience as well. After all, a good law is only born when it serves these aims.

A NEW PHENOMENON: THE INVITING THEATRE

From 1949 to the beginning of the 90's (until the regime change) the theatrical structure in Hungary was mostly standard. Neither the regime nor the so called "stone theatres" (traditional repertoire theatres with permanent companies and governmental support) wanted to notice the independent theatres or their ambitions. However the situation changed in the early 90's and adventurous artists not only appeared in the fields of dance and theatre but inviting theatres were also born (which made and still make a home for these ambitions). We call these places "inviting theatres" (a theatrical venue with no resident company that invites performers and companies to present their work in the space). The differences between the established and continuously functioning inviting theatres are normal, of course, and arise not only from the number of their seats but also from their artistic philosophy.

THEATRE IN A POLYTECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

Interview with János Regős, director of Szkéné

(100 seats)

János Regős has a degree in adult education, his book about Géza Hofi was published in 1979. He wrote many articles about the mass-culture, about Grotowski and the Barba Theatre. He was working as a director assistant at the Népszínház (Volk Theatre) between 1977–1979. He has been the artistic director of the Szkéné Theatre since 1979. He was organising the international meeting of Movement Theatres for many years. He still writes and directs theatre plays.

Could you please give a brief description of the history of Szkéné?

The Szkéné's history goes back to the sixties. For a few decades it served as a cultural center for the university: especially for amateur ensembles, volunteers, gatherings, film showings and so on. In the late sixties István Keleti, who was a very clever renaissance man, a teacher, professor and the leader of Szkéné Group (which was an amateur university theatre company), decided to make a new space that would house the Szkéné Group, the university orchestra, and the community theatre. Keleti and the members of the Szkéné Group re-built this space with their own hands and the help of a student architect. I came here in 1979. At that time there were three ensembles in the Szkéné: a pantomime company (which was very special and rare in Hungary), the Szkéné Group (which was considered the mother ensemble of the theatre) and a third troupe called the Community Theatre. The style of these companies was a bit outdated for me. This was the end of seventies when we were seeing some very strong alternative companies like the Universitas, Stúdió K (led by Tamás Fodor), and Péter Halász (who later lived in New York City). These groups, in a way, made the base of modern theatre in Hungary along, later, with some state theatres like Kaposvár.

So, I started to think about what kind of theatre could we host in these fantastic walls. In 1981 I invited Stúdió K to perform at the theatre with their famous production of *Woyzeck* (directed by Tamás Fodor). We also had a street company called Street Theatre Play Indoors; their work was very political, very actual and full of satire. I also invited a rock band called KFT (Limited Company). We made a fantastic review with them called *The Holidays Have Passed*. These three projects brought in a large audience of totally different people to Szkéné. I kept the older three groups in the theatre for about three or four years – letting them go was a gradual process because the new companies brought a much stronger artistic spirit to the space. In 1979 I met a secondary school, stu-

dent company called Study Group that was based on Grotowski's ideas of movement theatre, physical theatre and monk like behavior of the actors. I eventually invited them to play one or two performances in the theatre. The first real success was based on the novel "The Master and Margarita" by Mikhail Bulgakov, which had a kind of cult following in Hungary and the Eastern Block. This production brought big fame to the company and also got the attention of the Soros Foundation. The Soros Foundation brought a totally new spirit and new opportunity not only for us but almost all Hungarian alternative or avantgarde theatre groups. The Foundation decided to give a grant to the company and a yearly budget to the theatre. The university gave and continues to give us the theatre space at a very low price and covers the basic maintenance and the staff (which is 4-5 people). Once Soros started to support us, we could work on a more professional basis and continue performer-training work with the best professors and teachers. Then we made an internationally acclaimed performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This was the first great story of my time here. Besides a resident group, my philosophy here is to always invite performances from other places so this theatre can be a more representative place. We invited many state theatre's studio productions from the countryside because there were some very strong, progressive moves toward more contemporary theatre, based on the traditional Stanislavski style, in the provinces. Szkéné became a kind of showcase place where everything that people here in the capital previously could not see could be performed. This was the first ten years: from 1980 until the change of the regime. The third thing we realized here was the importance of international theatre life. Movement artists came here from all over Europe. Every two years we organized a big festival called "International Meeting of Movement Theatre". We were able to invite many famous companies: Odin Theatre, Bread and Puppet Theatre, The Living Theatre, Gardzienice, Min Tanaka and many others from all over the world. The countries of the ensembles promot-

ed the shows so we only had to pay for food and lodging. We brought at least sixty or eighty groups into the Hungarian theatre world and infused Hungarian theatrical life with a whole new spirit. We filled up this entire building with performances... thousands of people came here. In the eighties, parallel to our festival, a lot of Hungarian physical theatre performances emerged. This festival ran until the late nineties. It ended because, after the changes, we couldn't get enough money to host this festival. Also, other theatres in the city opened up with the profile of inviting international groups: Trafó, Thália, Merlin, etc. With less money, we tried to change the profile of the festival by focusing on specific genres of the theatre. For example: clownery, Polish theatre, Butoh. We moved from using the whole building to only using the Szkéné theatre because the university changed as well and could no longer let us use the other rooms for free. The world changed. It's also an important part of my philosophy that we don't go against the times. I don't want to have to break down walls. We go to the extremes, but when we see walls we can't break through, we stop and change and try to make something new. I consider the eighties and middle nineties the high life of the theatre.

To mention it briefly, Arvisura (the later version of Szkéné Group) also started to move back, in a way. The actors grew up. They got other contracts and roles in films as well as with other theatres. They went away and there were some gaps between István, the director, who wanted to continue with the Grotowski like training and the actors who were pursuing a more bohemian lifestyle. So there were serious breaks between Istvan and the ensemble. Also it was our luck that this new generation together with the older generation brought up a new group called Last Line Company. Last Line was a strange formation where there was no leader but there were 5 or 6 artists who had equal rights to create or initiate projects. With this company, we survived the dying out of Arvisura. Pintér Béla played in all of my plays in Last Line. He grew up here in the Szkéné with Arvisura and then with Last Line.

So we are not only professional friends but our roots are the same. This is an example of the spirit of this theatre and explains why we are successful and how we continue to survive. For me, the most difficult question is how to keep a theatre alive because theatre is very vulnerable and can die quickly. In 1998 Pintér Béla opened his first play, *Common Bondage*. From then on he built his own theatrical language, which includes personal spirit and memories, irony and satire and deals very much with the Hungarian reality.

What is your relationship now with the Budapest University of Technology and Economics?

First the theatre belonged to a student organization here in the University called The Communist Youth Organization. It was always very strong politically in the University. This gave us a kind of nest or umbrella against any kind of intervention to our programming or our profile. Now we belong to the student office of the University. The staff of our theatre is employed by the University. So we have two technicians, the artistic secretary and myself as full time public employees. All other costs we pay from outside sources. The University provides the basic maintenance. But all other costs: box office, extra staff for Béla's performances, press, communication, etc. is paid by outside sources. In the Ministry there is something called the operational fund given on a competition basis to the receiving theatres as well as other theatre groups. We pay honorariums from this as well as all other costs that the University doesn't cover. The University gives us a small budget of 2.5 million forints per year, which is not only for the theatre but also for the club we run called R Club. The resident group here, which is usually an exceptionally acclaimed group, gets 39 million forints for operation and an extra 4 or 5 million is also possible through other grants or competitions. So they have their own budget. I pay them back about half of the ticket income (also about 4 or 5 million forints per year). The theatre budget from the National Cultural Fund is getting lower and

lower. The Hungarian theatre structure is changing but there is still a very large difference between the "stone" theatres and the free theatres. So around one percent of the total Hungarian theatre budget is going to the free theatres. This is completely uneven because when Hungarian theatre life is presented to the international public, most of the time it is the free theatres that are introduced.

We still belong organically to the University. But we are very independent. Maybe the thing I'm most proud of during my thirty years here is the difficult and interesting process of how the theatre of the Technical University became something the University community and the director of the University are proud of. We are getting a new space here, the Heating House has been appointed for us. It's a very nice, old, industrial building. We will have terraces and a café. Of course I know that we will have to start over in a way to grow and bring theatrical life into those walls.

So when you invite a group into the Szkéné, do you consider that a co-production?

What I am responsible for is the decision of who plays in the Szkéné. I also decide how many times they play and what status the project has. There are three types of status here: resident group, permanently invited group and invited project. This is my decision. But I never intervene in the creative process of the company or their financial decisions. These are their responsibilities. Of course, I am responsible for what goes on in the theatre space. The cooperation looks like this: Béla gets rehearsal space and rehearsal opportunities first, they get first place when we make programming and they perform their shows a greater number of times. Béla has this theatre for 15 days out of the month. This means they usually play about 12 times and the other days are used to change the set. The other companies usually play about 3 or 4 times a month. Unfortunately we cannot offer rehearsal space so the other companies have to rehearse elsewhere.

What about international work?

International work is legally and financially very difficult for us now because we don't have the kind of professional apparatus needed for dealing with taxes, contract making, etc. It was much easier for us in the eighties. But the world changed and I don't have the ability to do this anymore. But Trafó does it very well. The Szkéné is based on world theatre and movement theatre but mostly focuses on Hungarians.

What do you think is the future for Szkéné?

The first thing is this new building. Also, Pintér Béla's company is still going strong. I like their new performance very much. In the coming three to five years I would like to build on this residential company. I would like to strengthen this young group, Kompánia. And, in the new place, we will need some new, special projects with artists that are young but have experience and have a kind of fame but not such a big level of fame... we need two or three projects that can fill up a big space. I want to also build a smaller space in the roof, which will be a rehearsal and try out space. I don't see much sense in putting effort into international work at the moment. I don't want to leave my family to travel and find work. In the eighties and nineties I traveled half of the year. This doesn't mean that I'm not curious. In international theatre, I don't see the kind of important theatre companies and ensembles that are on the same level with who I was working with in the seventies and eighties. I now think that if Hungarian theatre can climb the ladder with our own culture and our own audience, then we will make other countries curious about our work (like Béla did). That is real international success to me.

SMALL PLACE WITH A BIG HEART

Interview with Tibor Leszták, Director of MU Theatre

(Big Stage: 130 seats, Studio: 40 seats)

Tibor Leszták has a degree in cultural management. From the end of the 80's he was organizing programs, mostly dance and theatre performances, at the Community Centre in Lágymányos (11th district of Budapest). He was developing his idea concerning the modern model of an "inviting theatre", with the main pillars being theatrical projects and artist-qualification, at the end of the 90's. He was the director of the MU Theatrical Association between 1994–2001 and has been the Artistic Director of the MU Theatre since 2002.

Can you please give us a short history of your theatre?

The theatre worked as a small working project from 1991–1994. Since 1994 we have been working as a non-profit organization. There are different applications for contests and awards that we put together in order to fund the working of the theatre. We tried to be independent from the beginning. After the political changes in 1989 MU was the first theatre to be an "inviting house". We have a long history – we know the positive and negative sides of being an independent, inviting theatre in Hungary.

Can you please talk about how your theatre is financed?

The Thália Theatre was supported by the city of Budapest to be an inviting theatre but MU has been independent from the beginning. Trafó is also supported by the city of Budapest to be a contemporary, cultural center. The MU theatre is only supported by the competitions we win as a result of the applications we submit. This is a difficult situation because it creates a sort of cross financing, which means that the timing of receiving money is often after

we need it. That is how it works here in Hungary for us and the other independent theatres. At the beginning there were many different foundations that we applied to for funding (e.g. the Soros Foundation), but they do not exist in Hungary anymore. Sometimes the city sponsors submissions for funding but there is no separation of funds for theatre or performance. All applications fall under the heading of "culture" – so we are competing with many different types of organizations. We can apply for some support from the National Cultural Fund. Another option is applying annually to the Ministry of Culture for funding to run the theatre and present work. We received 32 million forints this year while Trafó received 250 million forints. We are a non-profit organization, so we are in control of our own programming, but this means that our funding is quite low. We used to work with the Lágymányosi Community House in order to rent our theatre space, but the cultural house was closed in 2000. We wondered what would happen to us. After that we had to rent our building for 10 million forints per year. Roughly 30 percent of the money given to us by the Ministry of Culture was going toward rent. This year we were able to create a contract changing our rent to 1000 forints per month. This is a much better situation for us.

What is the idea behind the programming here?

The programs here are very different. We show contemporary work: theatre, dance, performance, exhibitions and now literature as well. Because we were the first place to show the work of many of the first contemporary dance groups (e.g. Artus, Yvette Bozsik, TranzDance) many of the present contemporary theatre and dance artists are on our stage today. Sixty percent of what we show here is dance, twenty percent theatre and twenty percent exhibitions and literature.

MU works as an inviting theatre but we also try to work as a so-called "incubator" as well. We give background support for groups and artists. They can use our space to create and present original work and we write about them in our different brochures

and newsletters. We try to help give them an infrastructure. For example the latest incubation project we are working on is a one-year program called MU Terminal. It is a collaboration with a three-year dance training program that brings together students from many different schools. These young people can work in our space as a company and make three performances a year to be performed at Trafó.

Cooperation is very important in the life of MU. We work together with Trafó on many programs. For example there is a program that focuses on contemporary visual art. We also provide space for the Orkesztika Foundation. We have organized a solo festival for the past four years and we have provided space for the L1 Festival (a contemporary dance festival) here from the beginning. We also cooperate with the University of Arts here in Budapest by inviting the students every Monday from 8 am until noon to receive practical training in how lighting and technology works in a theatre.

What are some of your most successful and unsuccessful productions?

This is an interesting question. Because we are an independent theatre with no regular acting company the way we judge success is very different from other theatres. For example last year we received the Pro-Cultura Award for theatre. We consider this a success. If a director or a performance here receives an award, we consider this a success. The artists that work and present here are well known as contemporary artists in Hungary and internationally; we consider that to be successful. We bring international performances here to the MU stage at least four or five times a year even with our small amount of financing. I consider this successful. Something that is an artistic success is that two years ago we established a choreographic award with Trafo called the Laban Award. We cannot really say what was unsuccessful because we have such a different definition of success here.

Can you please describe the relationship between MU and the various festivals organized here?

The groups involved in the various festivals do not have to rent space here. They use our stage for free and receive fifty percent of the ticket income. We helped start the L1 Festival but they are now also working in other venues. The MU Theatre was a partner of the Budapest Autumn Festival from the beginning.

During our regular season, the amount we charge a certain group to use our theatre depends on the company and the history of our relationship with them. We usually receive all of the ticket sales and, from that figure, give the company an honorarium. There is another program theatre here at MU with a dance teacher here in Budapest. Every year she conducts a Contact Improvisation Festival that takes place in the MU Theatre and the Artus Studio. Companies involved in this festival do not have to pay to rent the MU but they do have to pay a small cleaning fee.

What do you see in the future for MU?

I have no idea. We live in the present. We don't know anything about the future because of the situation here in Hungary with theatre financing. We hope that there will continue to be competitive so we can apply for governmental support. In 2002 we began thinking about what we wanted to accomplish as a theatre. We have been able to reach at least eighty percent of these goals. I think this is a real success but, unfortunately, it is difficult right now for us to think long term.

THE HOUSE OF EXPANDING WALLS

Interview with György Szabó, Director of Trafó

(big stage: 297 seats)

György Szabó studied as an economist. Since his time in the university, he has been interested in the arts and organizing musical events. As a program director and organizer in Petőfi Csarnok, he organized showings of some of the best foreign dance companies in Europe and around the world. This provided the Hungarian dance community and the viewing public with an "education" in different ways of thinking about art. Szabó continues this education through his work as the Director of Trafó.

Can you briefly describe the history of Trafó?

I found this building in 1991... it was handed over by the 9th district of the city because there was a group of anarchist type artists who wanted to organize a festival. But after this, they left and the building stood completely empty. Different artists squatted here from time to time. The building was extremely dirty and nobody really seemed to care about its upkeep. Because of this, the district municipality decided to close it and they sold it to a private entrepreneur who then wanted to re-sell it. When I saw this building I thought it would be nice to use but I had no opportunity to buy it (not for my personal use but in a way where it could be used for cultural activity). Nothing happened for a long time. Finally the municipality had just enough to buy the building. For the next two or three years it was closed except for occasional artistic activity. There was no heating, so not much happened during the wintertime. It was also difficult because there was no money for a guard. After the political changes the city decided to change the situation of contemporary art in Budapest. They wanted to do something with the building and gave money to transform this place into a theatre and begin its current function. Altogether this process took six years. So Trafó, House of Contemporary Arts, was opened in 1998.

How would you describe the overall focus or vision of Trafó?

Our focus is to create a dialogue between all kinds of art forms and, at the same time, create a dialogue between Hungary and the rest of the world. We are trying to introduce new aesthetics. It's a continuous confrontation with the mainstream. We are also trying to raise the average level of consumption... it's a kind of educational process. This is why we do a lot of talkbacks.

What is the balance between art forms here?

I have been closely following the dance scene since the middle of the eighties. That was the core group of the new tendency here. There was more money for dance than theatre because the costs are relatively higher for theatre. At the same time, dance is not as demanding or complex as theatre as far as the working conditions. This means that the dance world can be more flexible than the theatre world. I believe the contemporary dance world is more developed than the independent theatre world because independent theatres are strongly influenced by, yet must deviate from, the traditional theatrical structure and financing. That's why what we would do was never a question. The dominant part of our activity is dance and not theatre. You cannot find very many independent theatres and they have a much more narrow gap in aesthetics because there are many established theatres but only a few established dance companies...so there is more maneuvering space in dance. This determines what we can do. We also have music and visual arts here as well.

Do you focus more on International or Hungarian work?

The proportion between the Hungarian and foreign companies depends on several things. One element is dominant now – the independent companies don't have very much money, this means they can hardly develop a structure. If they don't have a

structure it's more and more difficult to work with them. It's becoming significant to have a staff or management behind an art group because we can no longer handle the promotion and the funding ourselves. We gave lots of support and did lots of promotion before. Now it's not easy so we can only give a little money and do some promotion because the market, the communication changed so much. It's a new situation. I can often get foreign companies at a cheap price, so I am doing more and more international work and less and less Hungarian. Also there is a lot of Hungarian work but it lacks quality. I would say that I'm not very satisfied with what I see on the Hungarian side. It is a very closed society, so they shut the door behind them and don't look out at all. So they are not open minded and they have a fear of comparison. This results in them keeping their distance from the rest of the world. So they don't know how to be competitive. There are two ways: if you are not open to the world then you don't know your place in it and maybe you are completely uninteresting. Or the positive side could be that you find something very special and it's only yours. But there's a very small chance for that. I'm more skeptical than optimistic. Next November we'll do a platform or "showcase" of Hungarian performing art. As I said before, Hungarian artists need to overcome this fear of comparison and competition. I plan to do this showcase with Krétakör and others who have an international reputation. The reason for the showcase is to acknowledge the productions of the Hungarian artists. It's to let the foreign experts get to know them. We want to introduce the most exciting fifteen productions of the Hungarian art society. The best ones of those will probably tour, and this means that they can survive because the ones who can't tour will die out. It's a way for some artists to escape. We will have a strong selection process – not following any specific allegiance but to create a dialogue between Hungarian and foreign art.

Could you describe how your structure and financing have evolved over the years?

In the beginning it was very difficult because we did not have a fixed budget. We had to keep the cost of productions as low as possible. The first year we had many problems because the houses were often empty. At the end of the second year something started because the Pál Frenák Company made their first piece at Trafó. It was extremely successful and somehow was a big push for Trafó. But at the same time there were three other main companies we worked with, one of which was Yvette Bozsik's company. That was an exciting period. In 2003 our situation changed because the Ministry of Culture and the City decided to put Trafó into the category of a theatre. Since 2003 we have been considered a theatre with a fixed budget of about 1 million Euros. Our income comes from different resources and grants. We have all together 1.5 million Euros. This is a much more guaranteed financial situation for us. But we were lucky in the beginning because more of the foreign institutes were still very active; nowadays this has changed completely. It's gone. So it means we have to raise money all the time. I spend seventy percent of my time and energy raising money.

How do you choose who you invite here?

I should tell you that there are not many performances I really like. But this is not my institution. This is an institution for the public. There is also a criteria we have to fill, which means we must provide programs. But I can draw the aesthetic lines. We are focused on mostly non-verbal, non-linear (usually no story), abstract, visual work. We want to pose questions to the public so that the public has to analyze. So very often we present analytic pieces that use visuality and use the body and sometimes text. The people can come here because they know the aesthetic boundaries and they know the pluses and minuses of what they will see. It's becoming more and more difficult because the

social/economic situation of the country, particularly in the city, is very bad. The people have lost a certain sensibility or openness; they want to be entertained and don't want a critical point of view. They want to get rid of the problems of every day and would somehow like to come out from the dirt and onto the surface to breathe, not to stagger in the problems. This is a big transformation.

Is it typical for you to present a company multiple times?

No, only Krétakör and Pál Frenák. And then I bring back some companies but it's difficult, particularly if it's the same production, because we have lost lots of public over the last four or five years. The market changed so much and there is so much commercial stuff; the people have more choices now than they did.

Will you please talk about the idea behind the Temps d'Images Festival and why you created it?

This festival came by chance because we organize an informal European Network theatre meeting. 500 people came here for discussions and exchanging experiences in order to make their work more professional. It's kind of a stock market of information. It's a very informal meeting to talk and make all kinds of connections. It's a laboratory for discussing different issues and topics, a big mixture of everything. So, finally, when this group was here four years ago they said they were planning to apply for European money and they asked me to join the Network. I said yes because we do lots of international, interdisciplinary work. This festival focuses on building bridges between performing arts and video. That's why the name translates to "the time of the vision" or "the time of pictures", which is actually video. This is one kind of activity we have with the EU Network. We have two more. We have a collaboration with the P.A.R.T.S. (Performing Arts Research & Training Studios) school with Anne Teresa De

Keersmaecker. There are six partners altogether on that collaboration. The third collaboration is with a circus network.

What is Trafó's place in the theatre culture of Hungary?

We are not taken seriously in Hungary... not at all. We are on the edge of everything. We are put into the theatre world but are completely on the edge. The independent theatres are envious because they don't have as much money as we do and their position is not as strong. They are very critical of us because we are critical of them, which means we do a strong selection. We are at a critical standing point to everybody because of the philosophy of the institution. Nobody loves us because we do not want to be a lover. There are so many institutions that want to be in a kind of love affair with the artists, which I think is a mistake... nobody wants confrontation, nobody wants a conflict. From this point of view we are absolutely unpopular. We are trying to attain a certain quality. But the public has no mercy. Our audience is young because we try to keep the prices low. I'd like for them to be lower but the politicians don't agree.

What do you see as the future for Trafó?

There's a plan for a new performing arts law, so I don't know what kind of decisions will be laid down. What I've read is not an optimistic script because it's based on quantity and not quality. Quality is not a criteria. So I don't know what is in the future for us.

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Interview with László Megyeri, the Director of the Thália Theatre
(big stage: 522 seats, new studio: 110 seats, old studio: 100 seats)

László Megyeri has a degree in economics. Since graduation he has been working in the field of theatre. He was the economic director of the Rock Theatre, the Budapest Chamber Theatre and the Művész Theatre. Since 1998 he has been the director of the Thália Theatre. He has written many articles about the economic situation of the theatres in Hungary and how to lead those theatres.

When did Thália first appear as a theatre?

After a two-year reconstruction of the building, the actual Thália opened its doors as an inviting theatre in 1996. It was the first big theatre within the theatrical structure that had no repertoire and no company but was charged with the task of organizing large theatrical events and inviting other theatre and contemporary dance companies in addition to working with independent theatre companies.

We applied for government support and summarized our concept by saying we would like to create a theatre for performers who had no home theatrical venue. In 1998 there was no theatre that catered to large dance companies (for example, the contemporary dance company in Szeged). In this case, we were also involved with and worked very closely with several festivals. From the beginning, we were a partner of the Spring Festival, the most important artistic festival in Hungary. The first year we focused on dance, the second year was devoted to music theatre and the third year was drama. We were also a partner of a separate dance theatre festival in 1999. It's true that if there is no marketing behind such a festival, there will be no audience. Marketing the Spring Festival was very important to us. Another important thing

was that we brought theatres from abroad, Hungarian speaking theatre from the neighboring countries and theatres from the countryside to Budapest to perform.

Were you able to get large audiences for these performances?

We had problems with the theatres from abroad because audiences weren't expecting to see these theatres here in the Thália. Audiences couldn't understand what these groups were doing here. We thought that instead of marketing the actual performances we should market the ideas or concepts behind the performances. We wanted the ideas to reach the audiences and theatre professionals who believe similarly. We needed two years to market these performances.

How do you finance the theatre and its activities?

We don't get a lot of money from the government. There are twelve theatres that are financed by the city and we are the ninth on the list. There are no individual or corporate sponsors. There are some performances in which we sometimes look for supporters. But this is a complicated situation because if you find a supporter once, it is difficult to know if they will give continued support. It is also difficult to decide which offers to accept and how to establish criteria. Also, there are very few individuals who can support productions because the general financial situation here is grim.

We have three performance spaces: two studios and a big stage. These stages provide three different theatrical experiences. The New Studio is a playing space for citizens where the actor is dominant (ex: *Talking Heads*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*). The Old Studio is an experiencing area where the directors are dominant (ex: Krétakör's *Seagull* and *Peer Gynt*, Viktória Jaross, Róbert Alföldi). Krétakör has been here for five years. In the Old Studio the idea is much more important. The Big Theatre is a mix-

ture. We also do own productions here and we try to cater to the audience's needs.

What are some productions from the last two seasons that were successful? Unsuccessful?

You can't get tickets for our new production called *Six Weeks, Six Dances*. The director and the actors are very well known which makes the quality high. There was another production by a director from the East that was difficult for the audience to understand because it was not the vocabulary of a Hungarian director and it was in an unfamiliar style.

There are many ways we collaborate with different theatrical companies. The idea can come from the other theatre or we can propose a collaboration. There have been many positive experiences in the studio. For Example, the co-production between Thália and Krétakör, *Peer Gynt*, was a big success. With this collaboration, there were many artistic decisions to be made and the financing was split between Krétakör and Thália. We looked at the budget and decided how much each partner would spend on this production. If there is an income from a production we usually separate it 50/50. But if the company involved in the co-production is less financially stable they will sometimes get more money. For example, Réka Szabó and her company performed *Alibi* at the Thália. This was when the company first started and they were struggling financially. We talked with them about who would perform in the piece and also agreed on a financial arrangement that could work for them.

Death of a Salesman was a success on the Big Stage. The director and the actors were impressive. It was performed for two and a half seasons. We're expecting *Six Weeks, Six Dances* to run even longer. For an audience to come see a performance on the big stage, the most important factors are the title, and (obviously) the actors and, finally, the director.

Where is Thália Theatre located in the theatrical structure of Budapest?

The Thália was the first big theatre in Hungary to make inviting theatres from abroad, theatres from the countryside and dancers its aim. There were some other places that were doing the same thing but they were not large, traditionally structured theatres. For example, there was the Millenáris Cultural Center and the Trafó but Thália was the first from the Hungarian theatres to invite in these different groups. The performances here have a very specific style – this is important. We also try to bring in new and exciting work. At the moment, theatres from abroad are coming here, theatres from the countryside, national theatres, alternative theatres. So, no one is left out. Everyone can come to the Thália. So, the Thália is a program theatre and a place of culture where you can find everything that is important for someone who likes theatre. And we have our own programs as well.

What about foreign performances?

We don't have the financial base for inviting foreign theatres. For example, we would have loved to bring in Róbert Alföldi's *Hamlet* from Nitra but we aren't able to invite foreign theatrical productions to Thália because of our financial restrictions.

If you are looking at similar theatres in Hungary with similar sizes and capacities, we only get roughly forty percent of the support that those other theatres get from the state. And there are only two big music theatres (Madách and the Operetta) that are more effective in drawing in audiences than the Thália. So, the Thália is a very successful theatre as far as bringing in income from ticket sales.

In the opinion of the audience, which is important as well, the Thália is also successful. This past year, the audience voted the Thália theatre to be in fifth place behind theatres like the Katona József and the Víg. I think this is a very good place considering we don't have as large a budget as these other theatres.

Could you talk about the co-productions between the Thalia and other theatres such as the Radnóti Theatre or Operetta Theatre?

There is a system for co-productions. Because we don't have a company of our own actors and actresses here, we can only mount a production on the Big Stage if we are working with another theatre.

Why is it interesting to create a co-production with a theatre from Budapest? The Radnóti is in the next street.

Working with the Radnóti is important for the Radnóti Theatre. The actors can move out of that theatre (which is a small stage) and work in a new space. It gives them the opportunity to perform on a large stage. As far as working with the National Theatre, there are more actors in the company than are performing at the theatre at any given time (forty actors and actresses in the company). So this gives those actors who aren't performing a chance to work. There is the same situation in the Operetta Theatre. There are many musicians and singers who relish the chance to work.

It is difficult to do co-productions with theatres from the countryside because there is a repertoire system. It is difficult to work out the schedule with the theatres because it is impossible to have the performers come to Budapest and perform while they are also needed for the productions in their home theatres. They are unable to be in both places simultaneously.

When productions do come from the countryside, they have already played for some time in their theatres and then come to us in Budapest.

What do you think about the situation and the future of Thália?

We have to take a look at the country. Hungary is in a difficult sit-

uation. There isn't enough government support for theatres. There aren't many individuals who can support theatre and average people are not in a good financial situation. If theatres can't get money from the government that means that there is no stable financial base for them. Government support is now less than in the previous years. For us that means that we had to turn away many groups who wanted to show their work here because we simply didn't have the financial strength to support them. The Opera and Operetta theatres are working from government funds, but we can only work if we produce income from the projects we would like to make. The Opera and Operetta theatres pay a fixed amount to perform at the Thália and that means a fixed income for us. This was a characteristic for us from the beginning – having to watch audience trends and then basing our prices on what the audience wants. There are also fixed partners (banks, etc.) who organize different events here every year. This is a very important income for the theatre. Many theatres feel that audiences have become smaller in the last months, but we have not felt this yet. It's interesting that we see smaller audiences for serious plays and the very expensive music performances. It also seems that the audience trend in the United States and Britain of popularizing musicals has now appeared in Hungary. So the next one or two years will be a "safety period" in the life of the theatre. We would like to have this fixed income and possibly receive a little extra support from the government. The aim for the future is to privatize the Thália Theatre and make it a real firm. If Thália can work like a real firm then we can have projects outside of the theatre that can guarantee the income of the theatre. Those are our future plans but no one knows if it will happen.

ABOUT SOME HUNGARIAN, INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVALS

After the political changes Hungarian and international theatre festivals grew like mushrooms after a strong rain. The 90's brought about a feeling of freedom, and many theatre professionals in Budapest and the countryside were eager to share what was happening here in Hungary with the rest of the world. The creators of both large and small festivals were interested in each other's work and closely followed the success and failures in order to strengthen their own programs. Many of these festivals grew up to be successful, some became unimportant and others disappeared altogether. From the various festivals we have chosen to represent three. Each of them represents a different size, different way of programming, targets a different audience and houses a different philosophy.

THE CONTEMPORARY DRAMA FESTIVAL BUDAPEST

Interview with Mária Mayer-Szilágyi, Festival Director of the Contemporary Drama Festival Budapest

Mária Mayer-Szilágyi is collaborator of the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute and author of several articles and translations.

Please give a brief history of the festival

After the political changes in 1989 I got many questions from abroad about new Hungarian theatre. Everybody wanted to know who was writing in Hungary, what was the style of writing, what plays were being performed in the various theatres, etc. It was incredibly difficult to answer these questions. I thought it would be better if people came here and we could show them. This would be more effective as well as cheaper for us (it is expensive to export our theatre to foreign countries). I created a festival concept. Many people said they

thought it was a great idea. But when I asked them to help me start the festival they said they had no time, money or personnel. So I had to think of a different way. I had some good friends, mostly female dramaturges, who were supportive of my idea and helped me a great deal. The main organization of Hungarian theatre offered us a place to organize the festival. The first one was only dedicated to new Hungarian plays. In spite of this being our pioneer project, the festival was successful for the many foreign guests. However there was nothing new for the Hungarians. So I altered the concept and decided to have Hungarian and foreign plays running at the same time. So the festival in 1999 became the first international Contemporary Drama Festival. We had about fifty guests from abroad: the best festival makers, dramaturgs, playwrights and critics of the European theatre world. We decided to show one play with two different performances. For example, we had a play by Péter Kárpáti that was performed by a theatre from Budapest as well as another theatre from Debrecen. Another play was performed by the Katona József Theatre Company (Budapest) and by a theatre from Kaposvár. We also held discussions after the shows.

At the beginning it was very important for me (this is one of my beliefs), that through the presentation of new plays we could also showcase new and different theatrical forms. We tried to invite performances of new plays to our festival where the director was able to go outside of the bounds of the play. It was not so normal to direct this way at the time. When we presented new plays and new ways of making theatre we also had to theoretically analyze these ideas. For example, I created a workshop for young directors in order for them to "test" new Hungarian plays. There was another seminar for translators from abroad to work with new Hungarian texts. I also invited festival directors to discuss how we can present new theatre productions. So it was a very good beginning. There was a lot of enthusiasm from people who were interested in new drama and new dramaturgy, but we had very little money and support. This was a time when proposals were being taken by many funding sources, but we were all private people and had no official, legal organization. I had a little B.T., the smallest commercial form in the business world. So I created my little company that would be behind the festival organizing it. This was a step toward our future that allowed us to receive money from the Hungarian Cultural Fund, from the Soros Foundation and from the Hungarian Ministry of Culture. As the festival progressed the structure and personnel became clearer.

What is your current funding structure?

Our biggest supporter now is the Hungarian Cultural Fund. But we don't receive a fixed budget, so we have to re apply for funding before every festival. We never know how much we will receive or if we will receive anything at all. This means I can never truly plan our bi-annual festival ahead. It would be nice if the government realized this problem because, for several reasons, it appears to be necessary to organize this festival annually.

What are some of the other reasons behind this decision?

My definition of festival is not only fiesta or to celebrate. I would like more of the work to continue. For example, we present staged readings of new plays from abroad. But what happens to these plays after the readings? Maybe we could produce them as full productions. We now know many new groups from abroad. Maybe we could collaborate with them and find unconventional ways for producing. We house our staged readings in the Sirály and the director, Vili Vajdai, the Director of Táp Színház, will direct them. (Táp Színház plays every Monday in a club in the neighbourhood called West Balkan.) I'm sure that it will be a big success. These will not be conventional staged readings. Maybe we could work on these plays more and turn them into productions for the festival. This bi-annual existence is difficult because every two years we have to start from scratch. We loose our momentum.

What is the structure of the current programming?

We have a Hungarian program, an international program, a series of staged readings, a workshop for translators and a visitor's program (with meetings, discussions, presentations, etc.). Also, for every festival we focus on a particular country from abroad. It began in 2003 with Spain. In 2005 it was Russia. We don't have an overall "theme" for each festival-but we focus on new writing from these countries. We call it "focus land". This year's festival the focus is on Israel. We are brining in a production from Tel Aviv and we are organizing staged readings of Israeli plays translated into Hungarian. Then we're organizing a translating seminar in Hebrew for young professionals. We're also organizing an open lecture on Israeli drama. So it's a huge focus.

The festival has a very important function in the theatre scene because not many people in the Hungarian theatre community speak a foreign language. It is also not usual for people to drive in their car and go to Vienna to see something at the Vienna Festival – or to fly on a plane to Berlin or Paris or any other city in Europe. Hungarians swim between thinking we are the center of the world and we are nobody. This is a conflicting feeling. We can make good theatre here but it is usually very traditional. Our relationship to new things and other parts of the world is complicated. Hungarians have a difficult time looking outside, beyond the borders. We are a little country with a long history of being occupied by other countries. So maybe this fear to look outside is a kind of self-protection. Our festival tries to import new plays and new ways of thinking to Hungary. The past two or three years it has become fashionable to create international festivals in Hungary. But we have done this for ten years with the same profile. So when I talk about making a focused program as part of our festival, it might not be new in Western Europe or the US but it is very innovative here. We bring in work from different countries in order to transfer knowledge and to show different ways of thinking about the theatre. Nobody else is doing this.

What is the selection process?

We have many theatre friends abroad who recommend productions to us. When we can, we visit different theatre festivals. We are constantly listening to opinions and reading about different productions. This is now part of my work at the Theatre Institute – we have a department focused on contemporary theatre and my colleagues and I have many projects involving looking for new productions. We write about them. This is our work. We want to bring in productions that are different than what we can find in Hungarian theatre. Hungarian theatre is very one sided. The mainstream focuses on psychological realism. Sometimes you can see other forms, but it seems like everybody is making the same theatre. We need new influences... but Hungarians have a very fixed concept about what theatre is.

We have a jury for the Hungarian program. The jury consists of the three editors of the major theatre magazines here in Hungary (*Critikai Lapok*, *Ellenfény*, *Színház*). We rely heavily on them – they make suggestions about what to invite. But we can also decide to invite something on our own.

What is the place of this festival in the overall Hungarian theatre culture?

We try to provoke but also to create a dialogue. Our aim is to influence the theatre scene and the theatre professionals. We are always trying to mix the Hungarians with people from abroad. It involves a lot of introductions. But I hope we can influence the audience as well. We can't do anything without the audience. We aren't a big festival. We are very small – we present mostly studio performances. So, unfortunately, not a great number of people can come see them.

Is the visitor's program part of this too?

Yes, that's the other way. This program was created in order to show foreign theatre makers and festival makers what Hungarian theatre looks like. When I go to other festivals abroad I want to see what the people are thinking and doing. What is special about the theatre landscape there? I don't want to see how they can play Molnár or how they do a Hungarian play. This is not interesting for me. We want to show our visitors what makes Hungarian theatre different and unique – we show them the best productions the country has to offer... the most innovative and interesting works of the theatre.

OPTIMISTIC SKEPTICISM

by Balázs Kovalik

BÖF (Budapest Autumn Festival)

Balázs Kovalik was studying at the Bavarian Theatre Academy and at the College of Musical Arts in München. He was a member of the Pincészház (a former independant theatre in Budapest). He studied at the Actors Academy at the National Theatre in 1987. He has been teaching at the opera faculty of the Liszt Ferenc University for Music Art since 1997. He also teaches at the Theatrical Academy in Budapest. He has been a permanent guest of the Hungarian State Opera since 2000. Since 2003 he has been the Artistic Director of the Budapest Autumn Festival.

What is all this hype about CONTEMPORARY art, and what's more... a whole festival of it! Spend money on all this when there are many more important things happening in the world... and anyway, how dare they distort, reconsider and see anything differently? They just couldn't let Boulez and Kagel spoil everything... besides, that Schönberg and that Bartók already ruined it a long time ago after that abnormally ambitious Wagner didn't leave anything behind (by no means) – not mentioning what this waster, Mozart, subverted.

But then why this big ordeal, why is it so hard to find sponsors and supporters, why do we have to bend all our energies to win the audience if we speak about CONTEMPORARY art? Because no one is more optimistic than the innovators who don't put up with endless repetition. They are not willing to mope, they just go on and on: they discover, find out, try out, add and build... as it was fated for man to find his happiness. The biggest CONTEMPORARY art festival in Budapest guarantees the opportunity to meet those who will not give up and must be real optimists. We will return next year too!

Just another word! A hamburger with a medium soft drink and an order of french fries is a bit more than a thousand Forints. I hope the performance of Yasmeen Godder is worth this price! The work of one of the most individual approaches to choreography is worth seeing, even if you don't like french fries. And we won't continue this process of introducing the public to the most

significant directors of our time only to please our regular audience. We, ourselves, are also interested in how Thalheimer, Castorf, Warlikowski or, this year, Peter Zadek think about the world. It is possible for those, who give up ice cream with strawberry syrup, to see Zadek's *Peer Gynt* in the Berliner Ensemble's first visit to Budapest. And you can also celebrate your birthday by us – like UMZE, the Association for New Hungarian Music. Their first concert was part of the program of the BÖF ten years ago. Instead of balloons and paper crowns, the music of Edgard Varése and Mauricio Kagel will make the party really hot. Anyway it was Varése's lifework that significantly affected the world of Frank Zappa. We will dedicate a whole day to this legend – and maybe the most unexpected turn will be the Hungarian premiere of his symphonic compositions. And art films will appear throughout the whole festival – by all means! Dance films, Russian avant-garde, horror and other attempts... after dark, a concert with *Nosferatu* and an organist while the guard of the Eiffel-tower is mysteriously awake *While Paris Sleeps*. FUSK! means "scam" in Swedish, but because it has been chosen as the title of a performance by a Danish circus group, we can count on something similar in a most professional way.

It's time to think about the advantages of a healthy, nutritious diet!

SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL – GYULA

by Adrienne Darvay Nagy (fragment)

József Gedeon has a degree in the faculty of arts. Since 1995 he has been the Director of the Castle Theatre in Gyula and the managing director of the Association of Open-Air Theatres since 1997.

Adrienne Darvay Nagy is a theatre expert and theatre historian.

Gyula, a quaint health resort with 30 thousand inhabitants, lies 50 kilometres from the Romanian border. The brick-castle of the city, which was built in the 16th century, is in perfect condition (this is unique in Central Europe). The English playwright, who lived 400 years ago, became the proper "home-author" for the Central and Eastern European people when they woke up to their national consciousness. And because of the Shakespeare, cult-like characteristics the Hungarian stages, it proved to be a good idea to organize a Shakespeare Festival in the castle theatre of Gyula – which has become a tradition for 42 seasons. Ferenc Sík (1931–1995), festival director, initiated the drama-series of Avon's swan and József Gedeon has been continuing this tradition from 1999 up to the present. He has invited many internationally known directors and their brilliant performances to Gyula: Beatrice Bleon from Bucharest with *Romeo and Juliet*, Róbert Alföldi from Budapest with *The Taming of the Shrew*, the Transylvanian László Bocsárdi with *Titus Andronicus* and the Ukrainian Sergey Masloboyschchykov with his adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were among the invited guests. In the walls of the newly reconstructed castle, the timeless passions immortalized by the author and playwright of the Renaissance become the frames for an international festival in 2005.

The aim of the festival is to invite noted Shakespeare productions to Gyula. The main program of the two-weeks-long occasion includes the new premiere of the castle theatre, the best Hungarian language performances, and two "world-class" interpretations. The Gremium has to decide which of these should be seen in Gyula.

The artistic council of the festival considered the *Othello* of Tamási Áron Theatre (Sepsiszentgyörgy, Romania) to be the best Hungarian language Shakespeare performance of the 2004/05 season. This shocking tragedy of the sublime love between the lord and his Desdemona was directed by László Bocsárdi. The original interpretation, the use of graphic metaphores and symbols, the art of playing and many extraordinary performances made *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* from the city of Craiova (a special adaptation of Silviu Purcărete) one of the biggest successes in Gyula. Purcărete's direction was among the three best Hungarian-language productions in Romania and finally won the prize of UNITER (The Theatre Union of Romania).

A Midsummer Night's Dream of the young director, Oskaras Korsunovas, is an uncommon direction. For the play the actors needed only boards – which also served as the set, the costumes and the accessoires – and, of course, their virtuous talent. This was combined with the audience's fantasy and, finally, a real festival hit was born. The audience and press warmly welcomed this absolutely amazing performance.

Among the accompanying programs was the new premier of the Hungarian Theatre Academy, Shakespeare: *Sonets*. The students of the Theatre Academy of Novi Sad (Serbia) played their exam-performance, *Wyhar*. Shakespeare's home was also represented by musicians and the jester, John Ballanger, of the Globe. Briefly: between the 5th and 17th of July, 2005 the first International Shakespeare Festival was born in Gyula.

In 2006 the festival attracted more enquiring minds to the city. The opening performance, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, was a co-production of three theatres starring the young actor from Budapest, András Dömötör. The ground idea and set of this modernized drama was the public laundry. The artistic council voted *Troilus and Cressida* of the Katona József Theatre Budapest, directed by Silviu Purcărete, as for the best Shakespeare performance of 2006. Despite the difficulties of building the set of this play, finally, the *Hamlet* from the Bárka Theatre got an invitation. In Tim Carroll's improvisation-play, only the script and the actor in the leading-role are defined, everything else is accidental. For example, the place, or the accessoires (which were brought by the

audience), and the other roles (which will be selected by a drawing from the audience at the beginning of the performance).

Both of the foreign performances, which were the main program of the festival in 2006, arrived from the former Soviet Union. These were directed by world renowned directors and played by internationally noted companies. One of them was an irregular *Hamlet* performance. Eimuntas Nekrošius has been shocking the world since 1997 with his cold and cruel melodramas. The Rustaveli Dramatic Theatre from Tbilisi and the "patchwork"-burlesque of Robert Sturua were seen outside of Georgia for the first time – in spite of that, the company and its director (who have been standing on the frontline of the theatre for 20 years) are regular guests of many European countries. Robert Sturua directed the tragedy of the Danish prince seven times (at home and abroad) – with seven different approaches. One of the Hungarian critics, after seeing this play in Pécs, wrote: "Sturua generates the dreamed form so strongly, and builds such a complex net of associations around it, that the performance enchants – or amuses at least – even those who would wait for inspiration from a fragment of the whole, despite ambivalence of the obvious, in spite of farce and humour and the serious."

Foreword to *Richard III* is the performance by the DAH Theatre that Kijev was also invited to the festival. This play was the second part of Vladylav Troitsky's project: the director wanted to attract the public's attention to the situation in Ukraine, which is suffering from the struggles for power. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* from Budapest, *Macbeth* from the Győr Ballett and the fantastic concert of the King's Singers were also big hits in 2006. The audiences were given the possibility to see many Shakespeare films and plays, listen to concerts, see street theatre performances and enjoy the gastronomical offerings in Gyula.

The 3rd Shakespeare Festival took place at the castle from July 2nd through the 15th, 2007. The opening performance was *King Lear*, set for the stage by the many times prized, internationally known film director, János Szász. The artistic gremium voted Róbert Alföldi's *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* as for the best performance. The two invited foreign performances of the main program were

Othello (the second play of Eimuntas Nekrošius' trilogy) and *Romeo and Juliet* of the Aquila Theatre, New York. Other outstanding programs were the *The Comedy of Errors*, adapted for the stage in Gyula by the Odd-socks Productions, and the Turkmen *King Lear*, played as a monodrama (which has been a real success on many international festivals).

For the initiative of József Gedeon the International Network of European Shakespeare Festivals was founded in 2006. The festival directors of Gyula, Gdansk and Craiova agreed on a co-production for 2008, which will be directed by Silviu Purcărete.

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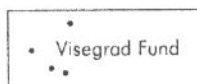
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