

OPEN NEWS

A WOMEN'S CULTURAL CENTRE IN BARCELONA (Spain)

My name is Teresa Urroz. I was born, live and work in Barcelona, a port city of Catalonia, a community located in the northeast of Spain with its own language and character. I have worked professionally in theatre for nineteen years, most of the time as an actress and the rest as a playwright and/or director. Since 1999 I have belonged to the Association of Scenic Creative Artists, Projecte Vaca, of which I have been the president for the last four years. For me, Projecte Vaca has been the opportunity to unify the association and gender commitment with creative work, and it has become the nerve centre of my activity because it brings together some of my biggest passions. It is from this perspective that I came into contact with the Bonnemaïson.

To give some historical background, we have to go back to the Barcelona of 1909 when a team of women, led by Francesca Bonnemaïson, started the Women's Community Library. It was the first women's library in Europe and also the first public library in the city. This initiative was later expanded with the Women's Culture Institute, a cultural space created, financed and run by women.

At the end of the civil war, the Institute and the Library were donated to the Municipality of Barcelona, on condition that it continued the work already developed in favour of women. However, the Municipality didn't respect this clause and it donated the facilities to the Theatre Institute, while the Library was integrated into the general system of Public Libraries. It was clear that things could not remain like this, nevertheless they did until 1986, when the 20th Anniversary of Feminism in Catalonia was celebrated and the need to reclaim the Bonnemaïson for women began to be voiced.

In 1990 the first public protests and petitions began. That year, the first assembly of around fifty women's groups was held, and a manifesto compiled, that the Women's Congress of Barcelona then included in its constitution. A project for a centre was created taking apprenticeship, research and production in the different cultural sectors of stage, plastic and visual arts, and new technologies, into account.

Over the next ten years negotiation, demonstrations, symbolic occupations, assemblies and protest festivals took place employing slogans such as "women open new spaces for creativity", "reject the institutionalisation of culture", "the Bonnemaïson is ours", etc.

An association backing a cultural centre was formed, supported by more than five hundred members, and, although the negotiations did not

advance until 2002, finally in April 2003 an agreement was signed and the Women's Centre of Culture got its space within the Bonnemaison building.

It is difficult to summarise a complex process such as the gestation of the Women's Centre of Culture; a process that still continues, defining its progress, methods and aims day by day. The experience alongside my companions in *Proyecto Vaca*, directly taking part in this struggle, has been very moving. On one hand I have always been aware of the historical importance of an initiative of this calibre and on the other of the difficulty of developing a process that breaks with usual procedures to generate new and more flexible structures that facilitate the understanding between the different positions of the women involved.

Now we have a space in which to work. It is imperative that this Centre becomes an expression of the widest possible representation of feminist creative thinking, a meeting place for debate, exchange and enrichment. The challenge is set. For more information you can consult www.bonnemaison-ccd.pangea.org

Teresa Urroz

JO RANDERSON (Aotearoa New Zealand)

Jo Randerson has launched her new book *The Keys to Hell* in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. The launch featured the local Scottish Country Dancing Troupe and guests dressed as famous philosophers, religious figures or any kind of key figures. Jo came as Robin Hood, the greatest economic philosopher of them all. Jo Randerson's theatre company, Barbarian Productions, which she runs with Mel Hamilton, just received a solid amount of funding from the government to develop a new travelling carnival show in New Zealand. Jo Randerson writes:

"It has been a busy year, wonderful, and full, and we are amazed at how we have managed to keep eating and not freezing, but finally support is coming for our work, and we are very excited about the years ahead. A particular highlight was being in Norway for the PIT Festival, which filled me with hope and optimism. I am very grateful to the Grenland Friteater and especially to Geddy Aniksdal for this opportunity, and for introducing me to the Circus Ronaldo, who, fingers crossed, will be in New Zealand in 2006!"

RHODE ISLAND MAGDALENA (USA)

At the final round of the 4th International Festival of Women and Theatre, Roots in Transit (January 15-25, 2004) I expressed my desire and will to organise a Magdalena gathering in my hometown of Providence, Rhode Island, USA. Now, a year later, I am deep into the organisation of the first ever Magdalena USA festival, Theatre-Women-Weaving, which will happen July 31-August 6, 2005.

Perhaps the best outcome of this daunting task thus far is my discovery that there is indeed a thriving culture of women in contemporary performance on my own shores. Almost daily I am in contact with an individual artist or company diligently making work in their home spaces, work that challenges assumptions, that gives voice to truths, that testifies in these troubled political times. It is ironic that I had to travel to Serbia, to Australia, and finally to Denmark in order to meet the people I needed to meet in my own country.

I am organising the festival gathering to facilitate these meetings internationally as well as nationally, and also to create the space for such work to continue in Providence, Rhode Island. With the idea

of creating spaces, this festival will focus strongly on pedagogy and building a technique. Weaving was once a necessary skill, passed on from one generation of women to the next. At this festival, one generation of artists will be teaching and performing, another generation of artists learning and showcasing their work. I hope that this festival will allow us to share experiences, leaving behind a tapestry of memory that will feed us for many years to come.

For more information and applications to the festival: www.magdalenausa.org
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Vanessa Gilbert

IDA KELAROVÁ (Czech Republic)

Ida Kellarová studied piano and cello at the Brno Conservatoire. Then she worked with Divadlo na Provázku theatre company. Her major turning point was the death of her father, whom she considers to be her greatest teacher and source of inspiration.

Ida's work is accompanied by the basic conviction that everybody is able to sing and she aims for authenticity and purity of the emotion expressed: "How to work with the fire of emotions in one's heart, so as not to burn oneself, but at the same time not to put out our inner fire." Ida often emphasises that she does not regard emotions as the expression of weakness; for her, the word "emotion" is synonymous with the word "power".

The Human Voice which lies deep in our inner self is the True Voice. In current times, full of lies, dissimulation, masks and clichés, we have to work consciously so the lie does not become true. Truth is regarded as painful, because our ego has a strong voice, which we learned to listen to and obey in order to survive. We do not realise that this foolish voice has immense

power and operates in such a way as to avoid us ever listening to the True Voice. The journey towards the True Voice is a struggle.

It is easy to recognise whether a voice is true or not. If the performer receives a sad song to sing - how is s/he going to sing it? Should s/he pretend how sadness sounds, or search for the form? I can only sing a sad song if I am not afraid of my sadness - my true sadness, which is inside each one of us.

Everyone who sings, creates, because a song is for every person the means of expressing her or his truth. It is a means of seeking the voice in the depth of our innermost selves. This is especially true for the Roma people. Therefore I believe that we should learn more about the importance of our songs, even if only in order to find the way to express our everyday pain and joy through our song. Tones and rhythms in a song are just a way, which will help us not to get lost. We can walk slower or faster, or stop for a while and lie on the grass, according to how we feel. Roma people have always known these things. Therefore let their songs teach us. These songs will bring you new sources of power and inspiration.

When my father died, I could not cry. I was singing and since that time I keep singing. He always used to tell me: "Open your heart, open your throat, fear nothing and simply sing".

META-POINT (Israel)

Meta-Point is a self-directed performance with Anastasia Polonsky and Karin Shtang, which uses Gypsy, Israeli and Russian songs and Opera singing. David Ma'ayan and Pancho Adelberg made the dramaturgy, and Netta Plotsky assisted with the actors' training.

Anastasia Polonsky is an actress and social worker, born in Russia, who came to live in Israel when she was twenty years old. Anastasia became familiar with the medium

of theatre through the Shelter Theatre in Tel-Aviv. Unfortunately, shelters in Israel are still commonly used for protection from bombs. However, in times of peace, shelters are often used for arts activities. After graduating in Social Work, work with children and teenagers at risk gave Anastasia the courage to deal with personal and social issues through theatre. Karin Shtang is an actress, drama teacher and member of Shelter Theatre, after having graduated from Seminar Kibutzim Theatre School and the Alternative Theatre School in Shlomy.

Meta-Point was born in an old hangar in a factory area, next to the Israel-Lebanon border. Three years ago Anastasia Polonsky and Karin Shtang hooked up with a theatre group artistically directed by David Ma'ayan. This group left the centre and went to work on the border, touching personal and artistic boundaries. From the rehearsal room's windows the border between Israel and Lebanon and a Hezbollah camp can be seen. There, risks can be taken while looking at life as a fairy-tale.

The performance *Meta-Point* comes from touching the boundaries of art and personal experience in our lives, families and country. *Meta-Point* is an attempt to collect the fractions of our divided identity as immigrants, artists and women. The performance describes the metaphysic, chemical and metabolic formation of identity.

Meta-Point is two worlds with two stages in one space, circus and laboratory, for four characters: 1. The Masked-girl who fits into a small box; 2. The Clown-immigrant who laughs and bleeds at the same time; 3. The Researcher investigating the chemical reactions of her growth; 4. The Ballet-dancer who experiences growing pains on her points.

These four characters or figures, or four states of mind, try to open a connection to the past with a traditional ceremony. The

performance highlights contradictions: every place with an entrance has an exit; in every start the end is embedded; every tear involves some laughter. *Meta-point* lives in a world where humour and tragedy are two sides of the same coin, where children play the piano behind the iron curtain, where girls experience the chemical reactions of growing, and clowns turn into monsters because of negligence.

Anastasia Polonsky

HAMLET NOIR (Burkina Faso)

In the month of December 2004 the Afro-Italian show *Hamlet Noir* made its first Italian tour. *Hamlet Noir* is a project conceived and directed by Serena Sartori in Burkina Faso, promoted by the Siraba of Bobo Dioulasso Centre and by the Intercultural Koron Tle Centre of Milan, and supported by ANLAIDS, the association that for a number of years has been involved in the huge global struggle against AIDS.

The performance is interpreted by five African and five Italian actors, singers and musicians. It is based on the Shakespearean text, telling the story of a young African actor, Kuikga, who during rehearsals of the performance discovers he is ill, but hides his disease from everyone, gripped by doubts about facing it openly and the fight against fear, refusal and pity, or about the possibility of taking his destiny in hand and being an example for others with his struggle.

His thoughts paralyse him, while he slowly merges and confuses his own doubts with those of Hamlet himself, leading him to an epilogue that weaves the levels of his own life with the performance itself.

Hamlet Noir is inspired by a true story of mourning, which is symbolic and dreadfully common in Africa. It was created

thanks to the collaboration of African artists such as Dani Kouyaté and Ildevert Meda, the medical advice of ANLAIDS and of Professor Moroni of the Milan Sacco Hospital, one of the greatest experts in the struggle against AIDS and of Doctor Sawadogo, a brave doctor of infectious diseases in Bobo Doiulasso, the Reve Association of HIV Positive People, and many other precious contributions.

Hamlet Noir was created in 2002, and, after an important tour in Burkina and Benin, it was taken up again for a second production in 2003 when it toured Mali and Burkina in festivals, events, towns and villages.

Hamlet Noir was invited by ANLAIDS in Milan to open The National Conference of the Struggle against AIDS on the 28th of November 2004, and around this important event a tour was organised so that this experience and its central theme could be known elsewhere.

For further information please contact www.siraba.20m.com or siraba99@hotmail.com

WITHOUT BORDERS (Cuba)

The Festival of Magdalena Sin Fronteras (Magdalena Without Borders) took place in Santa Clara, Cuba from the 8th to the 18th of January 2005, organised by Roxana Pineda of Estudio Teatral de Santa Clara with the support of the Cuban Ministry of Culture.

Roxana Pineda made the decision, like many before her, to make a Magdalena Project happen in her country. The success of this venture - an unprecedented international encounter between theatre artists in the provinces of a Cuba whose politics and inherent bureaucracy fiercely protects border lines - was the result of a tenacious, patient determination and willpower.

It was not so much of a problem to persuade any of the international contributors to find their own fares and give their performances and workshops for free. We all wanted to go to Cuba. To feel this country before it changes, to experience the legacy of revolution and try to comprehend how it is that this small island has managed to resist for so long - simply that, to resist.

It was a very fine festival; well organised - the performance programme was varied and inspiring. Ten workshops were filled to capacity with professional artists from throughout Cuba who really wanted to participate and exchange with those of us who had the privilege to lead the work. There were meetings and exchanges with the intellectuals, with old people and children, with young emerging artists, with street vendors and musicians, with the officials who all gave the most they could to help Roxana make her vision a reality. We felt that we met with the people of Santa Clara; we were a part of this town for ten days; people knew who we were; and we visited Che Guevara, whose remains lay, alongside his band of men (and one woman) in a gigantic yet dignified mausoleum on the edge of town.

Roxana lost her voice and could hardly speak for the majority of the festival - ironic injustice or perhaps she just needed to be silent and listen and watch the unfolding of all her efforts. Roxana, and the members of the Odiseo Theatre Research Centre and Teatro Estudio, pulled it off! And it appears that they will do so again as they now propose a tri-annual Magdalena Cuba Festival.

More detailed information about Magdalena Cuba can be found on www.themagdalenaproject.org/archive/cuba.htm or by contacting Roxana Pineda directly at rosa@cenit.cult.cu

Jill Greenhalgh

WOMEN ON STAGE (Spain)

The Teatro del Norte organised the Fourth Meeting of Women on Stage in the Culture House of Lugones, Asturias, from the 3rd to the 6th of November 2004. After dealing with themes concerning women and acting and theatre apprenticeship, Ana Eva Guerra, Elisa Marinas and Ana Díaz, actresses of Teatro del Norte and coordinators of the meetings, decided to widen the perspective beyond the reality of theatre in Asturias.

They chose to focus on the most ancient forms of Western theatre, on contemporary issues in Spanish theatre and on classical traditions from Asia, with the confidence of knowing that distant traditions are essential for the contemporary work in theatre of many women. The presentation and discussion of the female characters in Indian Classical Theatre, in Ancient Greek Theatre and in contemporary Spanish theatre were the subject of workshops led by Monica de La Fuente, Marta Gonzalez and Inmaculada Alvear respectively. The reflections and conclusions dealt with the position women held in the theatre of the past and the way they are presented on stage today.

Because women are in the majority in contemporary Spanish theatre, the actresses of Teatro del Norte feel that women's needs, challenges and demands as theatre practitioners are greater and greater, and from here comes the necessity for a constant journey between the western and eastern world, between ancient and modern theatre, as a key to see into the future.

ANTIGONE (Italy)

"In reality, Antigone did not kill herself in the tomb, as Sophocles tells us making an

inevitable mistake..." This is the beginning of the prologue to the text *Antigone's Tomb*, written by the Spanish philosopher Maria Zambrano in 1967, that inspired the solo performance presented in Italy by the director Daniela Mattiuzzi and the actress Patricia Zanco.

The director explains that "it was in this text that I found a strong motivation to tell the story. Maria Zambrano offered me a new reading of the classical play. With such a prologue, the author prepares the audience to meet a different Antigone. I was attracted by the irreverence with which Maria Zambrano accuses Sophocles of a lack of understanding of the character he himself had created. Then I was conquered by what Antigone becomes, once she is set free from the heavy chains of being a daughter and sister as in the original tragedy. In the play by Zambrano, Antigone gets out of her tomb, now the owner of her own life and of freedom."

The eight scenes and epilogue successfully premiered in Vicenza and are the outcome of a long period of research and experimentation that Patricia Zanco and Daniela Mattiuzzi started together. Daniela and Patricia were also inspired by the work of Diotima, a collective of women philosophers working at Verona University, and in particular by articles written by Chiara Zamboni and Annarosa Buttarelli.

At a press conference for the performance at a festival in Teheran, a journalist asked Patricia how a woman alone could make such a show and where does a woman go once she is free. The journalist saw the performance in the evening and, with tears in her eyes, told Patricia that only after listening to Antigone, had she understood the answers she had received. Patricia had performed in Italian.

THÉÂTRE DU MOUVEMENT (France)

Claire Heggen of Théâtre du Mouvement, a company born out of Étienne Decroux's tradition, is working on a solo performance that she has conceived and will interpret. *To Be/To Be Born* is an account which looks back on her life and artistic creation as a woman, actor and mime artist, revisiting her thirty years of moving along a path where fiction and reality, silence and words, subjects and objects of art, intimate experiences, symbolism and everyday life are woven together.

The performance illustrates the milestones of this path with extracts from Théâtre du Mouvement's productions in which Claire Heggen was alternately director and interpreter, in live interpretation or with video projections.

This is the story of Him or Her who realised from conception that S/he was not the first to take up residence inside his/her mother. Very quickly S/he felt the emptiness, the desert that lay at the centre of the moist interior that had retained the trace of a minuscule murder. "It could have been a boy", her mother had said, as she rolled the small dark red ball between her fingers. Because of this lost interruption, or thanks to it, S/he learnt that you could be deprived of life before you had time to exist.

WOMEN IN WAR (Colombia)

Women in War is a performance by Carlota Llano directed by Fernando Montes, based on the book with the same title by Patricia Lara. The text presents testimonies from those who suffer from war: women and children. The idea came from seeing the child-like faces of the armed women of the FARC, one of the guerrilla armies in Colombia, and from the desire to unite women against war.

The performance tries to respond to the need that artists have for indicating a

way or showing a small light at the end of the dark tunnel, the crude reality Colombia is going through at the moment.

Three women's stories were chosen: Dora Margarita, the guerrilla fighter; Margot, the mother; and Juana the mother forced to emigrate. They are women who have lost their loved ones and their place in the world, but who still believe in a better future. The circular symbolic space conceived by the painter Cristina Llano brings together the performer and the spectator in an embrace that includes three sculptures representing the women: Margarita as a brain, Margot as a heart, Juana as a belly.

After the premiere in August 2001, in Bogotá, at the Casa del Teatro Nacional, supported by Editorial Planeta and the British Council, *Women in War* has toured to Cali, Medellín, Cartagena, San Andrés, Mompax, Buga, Sincelejo, Quibadó, Barrancabermeja and Popayán and abroad in Spain, Brazil, Greece, Venezuela, Panama and the USA.