

OPEN NEWS

This section of the journal publishes edited news about current work related to the theme of each issue. This can include letters, information on performances, festivals, books, conferences ... The Open Page hopes to receive information for the next issue Women - Theatre - Politics by November 1997.

DENISE STOKLOS (Brazil)

Mary Stuart

A performance written, directed, choreographed and performed by Denise Stoklos, who is also the sound, lighting and costume designer. In this production Denise Stoklos takes her inspiration from various writings about Mary Queen of Scots imprisoned and sentenced to death by her cousin, Elizabeth I. The piece is a dialogue between the two women, who historically never met. In *Mary Stuart* she evokes the figure of the imprisoned queen as a representative of all prisoners of injustice, historical and contemporary. Without being anchored in specific time or place, the range of evoked images from her monologue and song is enormous. With humour and precision lust is a curling lip, sorrow a torso and shoulder bent into the shape of a cup and death is a perfectly poised woman gazing into a blazing light. The set is austere: blank walls, a single chair. One minute she is Mary Stuart in her dungeon, the next, Elizabeth I. Seconds later we are in Brazil and four hundred years have passed. The power structure remains the same.

Denise Stoklos, with a repertory of thirteen original works, has performed in more than thirty countries. She began her career as a playwright, director and actor in 1968 in Brazil. Denise Stoklos has created a style of drama entitled Essential Theatre that is a synthesis of body, voice and gesture. She has two children.

GILLA CREMER (Germany)

Die Kommandeuse - The Bitch of Buchenwald

Ilse Koch was in charge of Buchenwald concentration camp and in 1951 she was sentenced to life imprisonment for incitement to murder and grievous bodily harm. In Gilla Cremer's new solo performance *Die Kommandeuse - The Bitch of Buchenwald*, directed by Johannes Kaetzler with dramaturgy by Christel Wejler, Ilse Koch is resurrected from court transcripts, eye-witness accounts and her own statements. The performance is not intended as an accurate historical reconstruction of Ilse Koch, but

more as an encounter with her being, an actress' fragmentary exploration of a criminal mind. "You have to understand to go with the times" - so young Ilse Köhler justifies her decision to join the Nazi party in 1923. She meets Obersturmbannführer Karl Koch and moves with him as his wife to the Ettersberg, the beautiful hill near Weimar where Goethe composed *Wanderers Nachtlied*. The years she spent in the Koch Mansion adjacent to the Buchenwald camp are later described by Ilse Koch as the "time of her life" - a time of plenty, characterised by a luxurious and ostentatious lifestyle. Ilse Koch, for whom Zarah Leander's song *Der Wind hat mir ein Lied* erzählt was a personal favourite, filled headlines in post-war Germany as the Bitch of Buchenwald. Yet she still claimed after twenty-two years in prison: "I can't remember anything. I know nothing, I never took any interest in the running of the camp or in politics. My sole concern was always to be a good wife and mother to my husband and children".

Other solo performances by Gilla Cremer are *Odyssee Embryonale* (Embryonic Odyssey, about genetic engineering and motherhood), *Einmal Lebt Ich* (Once I Lived, based on the autobiographical novel by Natascha Wodin) and *Rita - Allein Gegen die Mafia* (Rita - Alone Against the Mafia, an amusing story told by a supermarket cashier).

THE ROSE THEATRE COMPANY (Britain/Australia)

I, Hamlet

I, Hamlet is an experimental work devised for three performers. An adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* which explores contexts such as women's roles in Shakespeare and contemporary cultural taboos surrounding identity, madness and death. A male

and a female actor will play Hamlet. The performance will travel world-wide and employs both a strong visual style and a dynamic vocal approach. Using a minimalist set, masks and puppets, *I, Hamlet* is designed not only as spectacle, but seeks to access and challenge archetypal characters such as the Tyrant, Mother, Lover, Fool, Warrior and Virgin. *I, Hamlet* was adapted by Jane Prendergast and directed by Erik Norlin.

In her rehearsal notes Jane Prendergast writes: "We worked for hours building up the psychic reality of the character of Ophelia. I felt taken out of myself into another spatial reality, to a place that exists on the periphery of time being both time and non-time; at once attempting to take hold of reason, but slipping into an experience of lightness and madness. I the actor attempt to take hold of this madness, to control her slipping away, but it is not possible and she takes me to the very edge of the 'other' where I find and experience fear. I dance her and she dances me to the edge of an experience that is familiar, but I find I can only place in context when I stand in relation to men and the society in which we live. I decide that this experience is not my experience, but an experience that is induced by patriarchy or male ways of thinking".

DEA KOERT (Holland)

Breakfast without Fur

From Picture to Stage, a visual summary of Dea Koert's recent multimedia theatre works was shown by way of a video installation, slides and a theatrical reading in September 1994 at the Magdalena Festival in Cardiff. It included *What the Water Gave Me*, part one and two, inspired by the Mexican surrealist painter Frida Kahlo, and *A Hairy Locomotion*, inspired by Remedios Varo, the Spanish refugee painter in Mexico. The

trilogy, which started in 1989, will be completed in September 1997 with the performance *Breakfast without Fur*, inspired by the Swiss multi-media artist Meret Oppenheim. Research on her life and artwork in Switzerland was completed in 1996 together with a fictional documentary script, a "travel guide" for the new production.

This trilogy is based on Dea Koert's interest and research in women's contribution to the surrealist movement between the two World Wars. Fragility of human lives and internal journeys are recurring themes in the scenes, partly performed, partly projected. Photographer Diana Blok and a team of ad-hoc actors, dancers, mime-players, sculptors and painters, participate in these montage productions initiated and directed by Dea Koert. The material has been prepared on several locations, for example travelling three times to Mexico for background pictures. In the next production the still photographs will move and the first half of the piece will be a film. The play will take place in a museum-like building with four different rooms which will be especially designed for this project.

THEATER MU (Denmark)

Lady Aoi

A solo performance with Miyoko Katakao, artistic director of Teater Mu, with texts and songs taken from Yokio Mishima's *Lady Aoi*, and from the 15th century Nô plays *Aoi no Ue* and *Nonomia*. These texts are based on the world's oldest novel *Genji Monogatari* from 1020 about Prince Genji. Gengji's first wife was called Aoi. Ue stood for the first wife, the most important. The marriage was arranged for political reasons. Aoi died whilst giving birth, killed by the troubled soul of a noblewoman from Rokujo, who Genji had betrayed. In the novel, Prince

Genji has great respect for the well educated noble woman from Rokujo, but as she is much older than him, the fascination soon disappears. The noble woman never forgets the Prince and remains jealous until her death, taking revenge on many of Genji's lovers.

Hanjo

Performed in Danish by actresses from Denmark, Germany, Norway and Japan, *Hanjo* is about waiting and never having expected anything. A young girl goes mad waiting for her lover; she waits every day for years at the station where he promised to come and fetch her. An old spinster takes care of the young girl and, because of her, remembers her own hopeless love. Reality becomes too hard and dreams take over. When the lover finally arrives, the meeting is different from expected.

GERD CHRISTIANSEN (Norway)

Persefone - Part of the Labyrinth - Pandora's Box

Persefone, a performance with a dancer, a violinist and a choir of five women, based on the Greek myth of Persephone and her passage from the underworld up into the light, was presented in May 1996. The performance included images, bodies in space and music. The choir was singing, but without using a text. The only text - a poem by Inger Christensen - was spoken on tape by three old Danish ladies. In 1997 a section of the work will be toured as smaller performances together with an installation entitled *Part of the Labyrinth* in galleries, museums and other places not normally used for theatre. Images and scenes from *Persefone* will be deconstructed and reinvented, adapting to each new room and event. The central element of the choir will be

elaborated, exploring the relationship between the individual and the choir in the next production *Pandora's Box*, with rehearsals starting in autumn 1997.

TEATRO SFERA DI OM (Italy/Denmark)

When Time Takes Body

Often in the age of pyramids the creation of a piece of art was not achieved during the lifetime of an artist. Time probably had a different meaning then. Today the aim is to finish the work in the least possible time. When one is ill and the possibility of dying becomes a reality, time becomes embodied, it does not rush away, it exists. Future, present and past condense and merge.

A year ago a strange coincidence allowed two actresses to meet. Both had experienced deadly illnesses, one had cancer, the other a brain tumour. Today Sandra Pasini and Petra Lindblom work together in the Danish-Italian Sfera di Om Theatre. They have thought of telling of their experience with theatre, in a performance which will also be presented in hospitals, and with a short film. The project is called *When Time Takes Body* and will start in March 1997 with a period of research in Sami villages in the north of Sweden. The performance will be directed by Jadranka Andjelic of Dah Theatre (Belgrade) and scenography by Antonella Diana. There will also be a film made in connection with the project, *A Tale of Two Heads* directed by Leo Sykes (England).

INSTITUTET FÖR SCENKONST (Sweden/Italy)

Saffo

A performance with Magdalena Pietruska, directed by Ingemar Lindh, based on texts by Saffo. Saffo, the great mystery that everyone

pretends to understand in the most intimate detail. The few words she left us, already mutilated by time, have generated a never ending stream of comments, analysis and studies, where posterity contends the true logic of her life. History has invented the destiny of Saffo, of the woman and of the poet. Saffo's few words are like grains of sand; so natural, so everyday - almost banal because they are already heard and known forever. Each word is an artefact which makes the mind travel, because it embraces a whole world, a constant poetical dimension beyond any context, any destiny. The grace of everyday life.

It is a story about solitude and everyday loneliness. It is a story about becoming old. It is a story about being young through memories written in body and mind. It is a story about longing for death and believing in life. It is a story about love for the sun and beauty. It is a story about the choice of inevitable and repeatable abandon. It is a story about the choice of unlimited love. It is a story about the nothingness that is to love.

TEATRO ACCION (Argentina)

Genoveva

Genoveva is a performance with Verónica Vélez, directed by Eduardo Gilio, inspired by the life of Genoveva Ortiz.

Genoveva Ortiz was born in Catamarca, Argentina, between 1804 and 1886. She married José Cubas, who was to become Governor of the province. An opponent of Rosas' regime, Genoveva's husband was taken prisoner and a payment was demanded to have him set free. Genoveva borrowed money and sold all her jewels so as to reach the amount requested. Even so her husband was decapitated with excuses and his captors kept the ransom. His head was cut off in the main public square. Genoveva paid her

debts, brought up her seven children, worked all her life and turned her house into a home for workers and people in need.

In the performance a woman actress reawakens our memory. She does not interpret a text, but lives Genoveva's story through actions. The actress does not limit herself to presenting only one character, but changes and dances from one character to the other crossing the story or staying with it.

She distances herself from the facts up to the point of commenting them, or feels on her own body the struggle of the plot. The actress creates the surroundings, from subject she becomes object. If now she lives within Genoveva's skin, later she will be the loom and the weaver, the night, the soldiers' laughter or the sound of the death giving sword. She jumps in time, drowns in the past, flows with it and re-emerges. She approaches and leaves the threads that cross and meet following a destiny which is not always accepted.

So it is the actress who reveals herself in the story and finds her own meaning in it. Her song is the breath which accompanies the narration. Her dance is the movement of the shadows.

REMOTE CONTROL PRODUCTIONS (Belgium/Sweden)

Solo Project

Solo Project is the result of a co-operation between the actress Charlotte Engelkes, the director Michael Laub, the composer Larry Steinbachek and the writer Marina Steinmo. The performance is inspired by the nineties trash culture. Fiction and realism blend with the help of soap-operas, documentaries and science fiction. The Swedish actress Charlotte Engelkes has been the leading performer in Remote Control Productions since 1989. She represents a turning point in Michael Laub's work and is a point of reference in building characters which vary from a ballet dancer to a psychotic murderer and a depressed science fiction heroine. In Solo Project Charlotte's talent as actor, dancer and singer is presented at the same time as her own strength and vulnerability, so as to reveal the intimate, private and public aspects of the performer's personality.

Solo Project is the third of a trio of performances in preparation of Lulu - Planet without Love which will be premiered in Århus, Denmark, in March 1997.