

Else Marie Laukvik

Do Miracles Happen?

Very often, in life and art, achieving one thing means losing something else. What we achieve and what we lose is quite unpredictable. I have the feeling that if conflicts arise during an artistic process they are mainly due to misunderstandings. We are so vulnerable when we give ourselves, so hypersensitive about being accepted and so quick to misinterpret when we don't know each other sufficiently.

We don't know the limits of our bodies. Crossing certain borders of body resistance one does not feel pain or experience fatigue and no warning comes to say that now is the moment to slow down. In certain extreme physical situations one can be tempted to do exactly the opposite of what is reasonable. As an actress I experienced a similar phenomenon many times. During a performance there might be great joy and involvement, but after the performance pain awaits.

To me, trespassing in the field of acting might be the result of a total involvement that can lead to either a negative or positive result. Negative when one cannot perceive the red warning-light concerning physical engagement, and positive on the spiritual level when one's understanding is enriched and the door opens to a domain, one which I would call a domain of "surprises".

Zusha Mal'ak is a character I played in *The Gospel according to Oxyrhincus*, the last ensemble performance of Odin Teatret in which I participated. He was "born" in 1986 and since he turned out to be a Jewish tailor waiting for the Messiah to arrive, I started to research Yiddish folk songs.

I felt that I had entered a completely new area. Learning one song led me to another. It was as if I did not want to stop before I knew them all. Years later I made the performance *Memoria* which was a continuation of this research into Yiddish songs. The songs were calling me as if they were forgotten people, bodies and events from the past. The songs wanted to be reborn and memories wanted to be remembered.

Zusha Mal'ak often drained me of all my energy and

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nearly killed me, but he also gave me the belief that one can and must overcome difficulties. It was the essence of his faith that Good would overcome Evil, and that singing, dancing and joy were manifestations of divine powers in daily life. He knew that miracles can happen, because we are all small miracles. But to achieve something, you must give or sacrifice something.

Since 1992 when I stopped acting because I felt exhausted, Michele Baraldi, a friend of mine, has written to me regularly to remind me of Zusha Mal'ak and indirectly encourage me to start acting again. Michele saw *The Gospel according to Oxyrhincus* about eleven times. I think he identified himself with Zusha Mal'ak in having the same awe and respect for life, for the divine and for creation. Other friends say to me: "Else Marie, why do you always say that you can't do it, that it is too difficult and hard and then you do it, and it is really good!" But it is true, it is difficult, hard and really *too* much, but acknowledging that makes you gather all your forces. I prefer to have an insecure point of departure and then work to make it secure. This means that I deliberately put on the red warning light saying "Beware of trespassing" and then if all turns out to be positive in the process, trespassing will come by itself.

In 1996 I started acting again and made *La Saga di Peer Gynt* with Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo, in Italy. The difficulties I had to overcome were numerous.

THE GAMBLER

There are moments when I see "No trespassing" signs all around me. Should I jump or crawl as Zusha Mal'ak did when he hid under the table watching white figures appear that he thought were divine messengers? Or should I turn around and walk backwards with closed eyes? Or should I

wait for someone to arrive and hold on to the person's coat as in a Hasidic story in Yaffa Eliach's *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*?

Michele gave me a gift when he saw *La Saga di Peer Gynt*. It was a game of Chinese Checkers in wood. I played constantly with Tiziana Barbiero, the other actress in the performance, and I realised that I suffer from *ludomania*. I am a player, a gambler, who enjoys the play for the sake of constantly finding new solutions and new pathways that lead from one to the next. In the creative process I play, inventing new games and seeking all possible solutions, before I finally make my choice, both as director and actress. Whilst in the performing process I build up a complete set of rules and I am limited by the fixed score and by the interaction with the other players. Nevertheless, I can't prevent myself from creating new games when driven by a total involvement. This is why the computer triggers my imagination: the possibilities are endless. There are no "No trespassing" signs, only problems to solve.

With *La Saga di Peer Gynt* it took time to overcome my physical restrictions and hearing problems before I could start to enjoy acting again. Enjoyment is necessary for me. It is like an internal melody, a feeling that I can dance in the air or sing on the ground - trespass into an area of complete understanding, and be as strong as a lion and as soft as a squirrel. It is a domain where no question marks are needed and where everything is possible.

Our knowledge and insight is the fruit of our ancestors and one must be conscious of this in modern times when we conquer new territories and break down boundaries

throw me out at closing time.

And theatre? Which part will it play in my life? The future will tell. Life is so full of surprises.

Miracles happen when you don't really believe they will or when you make an effort to make them happen.

ELSE MARIE LAUKVIK (Norway) founded Odin Teatret in 1964 with Eugenio Barba and has since then worked with the group touring the world. Recently she has also worked with Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo, Italy. An active director, her work includes productions with Teater Marquez and Munin Teater both from Denmark.