

Rome, 2.1.2001

Dear Julia

I am sending you what for me is one of the most beautiful testimonies on the theme "woman and theatre". I cannot even tell you all the reasons why it has always touched me very deeply. It is an episode that concerns a very great actress and a writer who is particularly dear to me, Charlotte Brontë.

In 1851, Charlotte Brontë, visiting London for longer than usual, was accompanied to the theatre to see Elisabeth Rachel Félix play - the famous Rachel. She wrote to a friend, describing her engagements in London: "On Saturday I went to hear and see Rachel; a wonderful sight - terrible as if the earth had cracked deep at your feet, and revealed a glimpse of hell. I shall never forget it. She made me shudder to the marrow of my bones; in her some fiend has certainly taken up an incarnate home. She is not a woman; she is a snake." Rachel was probably not only the greatest tragic actor of the 19th century, but she also triumphed over the culture of her times. She was the young and ignorant daughter of a poor Jewish family, yet she was able to put the "classic" repertory back on to the French stage in such a way that the audience loved the tragic genre again. The journalist and scholar Jules Janin was one of the first to affirm Rachel's greatness: he said that it was as if she had a star shining on her forehead when she was on stage. "With eyes full of life and a voice full of passion, she promenaded through this vast theatre open to all that can be imagined, to all love stories and lascivious dances, like a Queen seizing her legitimate possessions."

Janin was a great critic, and a really passionate spectator, but the austere Brontë was able to see in Rachel other more intimate things. After having seen her play, and being impressed by her, Brontë wished strongly to include the image of the French actress in *Villette*, the novel she was starting to write at exactly that time, that was published in 1853: "I wondered if she would justify her renown: with strange curiosity, with feelings severe and austere, yet of riveted interest, I waited [...] I waited her rising. She rose at nine that December night; above the horizon I saw her come. She could shine yet with pale grandeur and steady might; but that star verged already on this judgement day. Seen near, it was a chaos - hollow, half-consumed: an orb perished or perishing - half lava, half glow."

When she was in London, Rachel was thirty years old, and Brontë five years older. A little later they were both dead.

You see, I feel that almost only in novels is it really possible to hear the voice of the audience; of the kind of spectators who search in theatre for different values from those of the critics; spectators who speak about themselves and their dreams, and about the way in which they react, consider

OPEN LETTERS

and are changed by the influence of actors. At times, in novels theatre seems to be the place of transient, impossible, incomplete contact, although still real for those moments. It is

as if a very small channel, a magic pair of binoculars, is inserted between stage and auditorium that allows the spectators to "see". They don't see the beautiful gestures, the great interpretation, but the soul of the actor. Charlotte Brontë saw a spiral of hell inside Rachel, behind the luminous star that she carried on her forehead. But she also saw something else, more private, personal and secret. She saw pain. Brontë in 1851 had already lost many brothers and sisters. In September 1848, she had first seen her beloved and greatly gifted brother Branwell die, transformed into a mad alcoholic. Two months later her adored sister Emily died, as a rebellious and "savage woman", without a lament, broken down by pain, but violently and stubbornly refusing any medical help. In May 1849 the last, gentle sister Anne passed away, serene and in the grace of God. And earlier still when she was young she had seen her first two sisters die as children. Brontë knew all about pain, and also about rebellion: "Suffering had struck that stage empress; and she stood before her audience neither yielding to, nor enduring, nor, in finite measure, resenting it: she stood, not dressed, but draped in pale antique folds, long and regular like sculpture. A background and entourage and flooring of deepest crimson threw her out, white like alabaster - like silver, rather, be it said, like Death [...] I have said that she does not resent her grief. No, the weakness of that world would make it a lie. To her, what hurts becomes immediately embodied: she looks on it as a thing that can be attacked, worried down, torn in shreds. Scarcely a substance herself, she grapples to conflict with abstractions. Before calamity she is a tigress; she rends her woes, shivers them in convulsed abhorrence. Pain, for her, has no result in good; tears water no harvest of wisdom; on sickness, on death itself, she looks with the eye of a rebel. Wicked, perhaps, she is, but also she is strong; and her strength has conquered Beauty, has overcome Grace, and bound both at her side, captives peerlessly fair, and docile as fair. Even in uttermost frenzy of energy is each mænad movement royally, imperially, incedingly upborne. Her hair, flying loose in revel or war, is still an angel's hair, and glorious under a halo. Fallen, insurgent, banished, she remembers the heaven where she rebelled."

Charlotte Brontë's letter about Rachel is to her friend Ellen Nussey, and I have taken it from the biography by Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, of 1857, vol. II, chapter IX. In her novel *Villette*, the image of Rachel (who is given the name of Vashti) is in chapter XXIII. Jules Janin has written on the actress, *Rachel et la tragédie*, Paris 1899, and the quotation I use is on page 99.

Mirella (Schino)

OPEN LETTERS

Scilla, 6.1.2001

Dear Julia,

You ask me to tell you about my wish to write and I realise that we are speaking about me. Profoundly. Essentially. In a total, multi-faceted, familiar and foreign, personal and historical way. We are speaking about the complexity of a universe and, simultaneously, about the presence of a clear thread that makes the pursuit of balance possible; a balance that is always new.

We know that writing continually searches for new things. Then I begin to discover that that which the writing creates beyond itself is always new. In the process of discovery the writing moves out towards others; one possible path leads to other possibilities. There, I have already travelled to the borders of writing and I am looking at writing on the edge; the kind that one senses beyond technique, composition and experience; the kind of writing that is born from need, that doesn't search for expression but permits one to express oneself without any mediation. This kind of writing swiftly abandons lines and pages, form and function; it narrates without a framework allowing the writer to pass beyond the point of writing for others.

After working in a theatre company for a long time with the same people, I feel that I write with them. I question them about something and I know I will receive new and unexpected answers. Writing then becomes a dialogue, apparently bred in solitude yet already rooted in the non-verbal; a pre-text animated by the desire to explore oneself and others and together to create a common road along which to travel. From, and with, my writings of these recent years, sculptures, poems, masks, monologues, physical actions and stories have all taken form. This is what I call text today, a texture in which I recognise that my own voice has given voice to many precious, silent moments.

In a notebook I keep accounts of the journeys of the last two years; text that describes productions, invents and gathers them, witnesses their betrayal and moves to revenge. Inside this notebook there are a thousand performances and only one, unique, long text. The experiment of improvising a scenario is already a challenge for the actors, musicians, director and mask makers. If a plot exists and the repertory is built from the performers' improvisations, there seems to be no space for writing. To improvise as a dramaturg has been an adventure. It is a new obstacle to overcome for someone who only knows how to write. I have been repaid by witnessing the birth of a text where one did not exist, by finding unexpected corners for the writing to inhabit. The text of the production is not made in rehearsals (since the group has decided to experiment by not rehearsing), but rather in the work and continuous travelling of people who have chosen to get to know each other on stage. There on stage, literally, they surprise each other in the process of growing, while playing with a half invented language, a constantly forgotten story, a different space, always ready to improvise from yet another dramaturgical cue. On one of these journeys, the scenario took us to a place where we discovered new characters and stories that demanded to be told. Already another production is being born. Only the writing is left and that is what I am doing now. That is why I cannot tell you anything more about writing.

Maria (Ficara)

OPEN NEWS

A WOMAN TOMORROW (Germany)

Who Wants to be a Woman Tomorrow? Female Configurations in the Performing Arts of Today was the title of an encounter between women performing artists and scholars from various cultural regions of the world that took place in Braunschweig, Germany in July 2000. Marie Zimmermann, artistic director of the Festival Theaterformen, offered the possibility of conducting this women-in-theatre-summit as part of the summer academy of the festival. This event was organised in co-operation with the German Centre of ITI, and the direction was conceived by Hedda Kaage, Annette Bühler-Dietrich and Kati Röttger. A symposium was structured on three overlapping topics: Myth and Media; Cross-Mapping, Gender and Ethnicity; Body/Memory/Biography. Lectures, artistic demonstrations, project presentations and round-table discussions were open to artists and scholars working in the field and to the general public. Study-groups and workshops were only open to registered women participants. Present were women from Germany, Britain, Spain, Argentina, USA, Egypt, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh, Korea, Croatia, Iran, Ecuador and Australia. Among the talks can be mentioned: The Gender-question, Women in African Theatre (Elvira Janneh Jones, Sierra Leone); Creativity and Female Images in the Arab World (Nehad Seilaha, Egypt); Goddess and Housewife (Hyonok Kim, South Korea); Trafficking of Women (Sarah Zaker, Bangladesh).

The study group Theatre Visions, Contemporary Women Playwrights was chaired by Annette Bühler-Dietrich, a German literary scholar and it was addressed to women playwrights and women who work in theatre or theatre scholarship. It offered a chance to several international playwrights to present and introduce their work and their ideas on theatre, discussing their plays as intersections of national or ethnic theatre, and gender discourses. How do the aesthetics of the play, its creation for the theatre with its multiple sign-systems, interact with the way the text is anchored in various discourses?

The study group and workshop on Body/Memory/Biography confronted questions like the body being a site for the inscription of history which displays history as well as herstory. What is the task of such "herstories" today? Why is contemporary theatre so fascinated with biographies? The workshop was conducted by Faynia Williams from Britain, Lola-Proaño Gómez from Ecuador and Ana Woolf from Argentina. They worked on different artistic representations of the female universe using Rodin sculptures and paintings by Gauguin, Picasso, Matisse and Cezanne. The work was individual and collective and it moved from the image to the body, from the body to the text, from the text to the story.

Following are some texts written during the workshop by the participants.

1. *The Pensive Back*

When I looked at the picture I thought that the woman in the picture was resting, relaxing, feeling in harmony with herself. I thought that she was protecting her breasts, her whole front with her arms, even caressing herself. Thinking about her life, but not in a bad way. When I built the sculpture with my own body I discovered that the position of protecting the front actually opened the back to pain. I was strongly aware of my back as a vulnerable, open space. Holding my body in this position my back hurt. My breath travelled along my body, concentrating on my back. My own experience collided with the image of the woman in the picture.

2. *The Melancholy of the Fall of Mother Icarus*

Mother Icarus loves to give
Loves to fly
The wave of her giving heart
Makes the earth flourish
Makes the grass green
Icarus, mother if you love me
You can fly
I am your gravity
Your connection to earth
Come back to
the repercussions
of the truth

3. *A Woman Sitting*

A woman sits for as long
As she remembers
Stitching
She is called Hestia
Her thoughts, memories, are all
That has been
The past
Her gaze out of the wisdom
The future
Hermes is her husband

The flying one

LISTENING AND VOICE (Argentina)

The Second Interdisciplinary Days on Listening and Human Voice were held in Tucumán, Argentina from the 16th to 18th of November 2000, organised by the Interdisciplinary Institute of Listening and Human Voice of the National University of Tucumán. This year's theme was Listening, Voice and Ecology. With the participation of international specialists, the work proceeded through lectures, round tables, workshops, video and poster presentations, performances, exhibitions and guided walks in the Sierra of San Javier.

The Institute is directed by Elba Estequín with the assistance of Kozana Lucca, Oscar Németh and Silvia Quírico. Its aims are to produce and systemise knowledge concerning listening and human voice, by means of scientific research and workshops. The titles of some of the ongoing courses are: The Human Voice; Group Laboratory on Sound Experience; Voice and Colours.

ZOELIA AND GRONELIO (Peru)

Maria Teresa Zuñiga Norero is a playwright who lives in Huancayo, a small town in the Peruvian Andes. She has written twenty plays; the last one, entitled *Lucero*, in 2000. After working as an actress since the age of fourteen, she wrote her first play in 1988 at the age of twenty-six and since then has often played in her works as well as creating the concrete requisites for the plays to be produced under very difficult conditions. For example, in 1998, her play *Zoelia and Gronelio* (Twin Souls) was presented in a theatre festival in Ayacucho. She played Zoelia and her husband played Gronelio.

Her young son was responsible for the lights and her brother César Escuza directed the performance. In the play, a couple lives in one of the corners of a big city in the year 2015. They have built their abode with the remains of the advance of modernity and the indifference of men. At the beginning one hears the sound of a siren and a voice from off stage shouting: "Beware! Beware! To all the survivors of the explosion, keep inside, don't go out. The radiation has started, it has started..." The performance was presented in a ruined and very noisy school room and the first evening the spectators had to wait for the electricity to be reconnected in town. The locals were used to living in a state of emergency, but the spectators coming from other countries had difficulty in making a clear distinction between the situation on stage and in real life. The struggle to make theatre and to see the written texts coming alive on stage was apparent to everyone, turning the performance into a particularly moving occasion.

Maria Teresa Zuñiga Norero has received many prizes for her poetry and plays and has been made Living Cultural Patrimony of the Junin Region. *Zoelia y Gronelio*, *Metamorfosis* and *Mades-Medus* are three of her plays which have been published in Spanish.

MAGDALENA AOTEAROA (Aotearoa New Zealand)

In New Zealand, Magdalena Aotearoa continues to grow and expand the network and promote the ideals and philosophy of the Magdalena Project in the South Pacific. After the mania of the Festival year - 1999 - we devoted ourselves in 2000 to producing a series of workshops and performance events called Making Waves. In parallel, Magdalena Maori Aotearoa created a programme called Te Ao Te Tohatoha Mohiotanga (a world in which to share knowledge), which explored

things as diverse as the art of the DJ, bi-cultural stand-up comedy, and working with *harakeke* (weaving with flax) as an inspiration for choreography. At the close of the year we hosted a series of encounters with community groups, including Women's Centres, Independent Rape Crisis, Migrant and Refugee Services and women Trade Union officials, to plan joint projects for 2001. Our final event was *The Wild Wild Dell Day*, a community picnic with hip hop dancers, rap poets, egg 'n' spoon races and a salsa band.

This year we will focus on community theatre projects and produce further workshops investigating the Treaty of Waitangi through performance. Works created will be presented in a series of evenings of Radical Cabaret. We are planning to host tours by international guests - Cristina Castrillo (Teatro delle Radici) and Silvia Pritz (ARMAR), who propose to work in collaboration with performers from Aotearoa. (And after, walk along our wild and beautiful beaches.)

We continue to work in partnership with Tii Kouka (formerly Magdalena Maori Aotearoa) and to publish a quarterly newsletter. We welcome your articles and news of your projects, and also your subscriptions. Send these to: Magdalena Aotearoa, P. O. Box 27-300, Wellington, New Zealand. email: magdalen@actrix.gen.nz

The video documentary of the Magdalena Aotearoa International Festival 1999, *Crazy Voyage*, a 90-minute fast-moving series of impressions of the Festival from Wellington to Paekakariki, is available from March 31st 2001 in all VHS formats for US\$ 40.00 (includes postage).

Sally Rodwell

WOMEN'S VOICES FESTIVAL (Belgium)

The Fifth International Women's Voices Festival was held in Brussels and Liege in

April 2000, gathering around one hundred and fifty artists, mainly from African and Eastern European countries. During a meeting called Cultures in Resistance, which lasted three days, the Festival made the choice of a more political commitment by mixing the singing, speaking and dancing voices of the invited artists with the voices of a dozen women relatives of disappeared people from various parts of the world. Concrete resolutions have come out of this exchange. The "Mothers" wrote a Declaration and decided to mutually sustain each other's struggles, to follow up the meetings in April with a second round table and enlarge the resource.

Declaration of the Birth of a World Solidarity Network of Mothers, Wives, Sisters, Daughters, Relatives of Disappeared People

At the Fifth International Festival of Women's Voices in Brussels in April 2000, women representatives of committees of disappeared people's families, mothers, wives, daughters, sisters and friends of disappeared people, some of whom are themselves former disappeared persons and victims of torture, met and united. We, women from Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Morocco, Turkey, Lebanon, Rwanda, Kurdistan, Western Sahara, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Belgium, have shared our pains, our struggle, our determination. This exchange has strengthened our will to keep on fighting for truth, justice, remembrance, peace and freedom, and against oblivion and collusive silence.

As of today, we shall fight together, united throughout the world by the solidarity network that we have set up. We will actively support the actions led by each of us, we will swiftly spread our news far and wide, together we will lobby national and international authorities and organisations. Abductions, murders, genocide, torture, repression, planned poverty, the

retention of information, and illiteracy are the means used by some authorities to force people into silence and submission. Their methods are terror and oppression. Our methods are the power of struggle and solidarity. Together we shall fight, without hatred but relentlessly, and we shall overcome our fear. The cries of "Truth, Justice and Freedom" will now come with one voice from every corner of the world to demand: the immediate release of all living prisoners/disappeared persons; the truth concerning crimes committed and the identification of those to blame for abductions, torture, the murder of opponents, genocide and worse; the abolition of all laws granting impunity and amnesty to all those responsible for such crimes and their judgement without leniency; redress for the wrongs done to the victims and their families; an end to the collusion of so-called democratic states that support inhuman regimes, arm the hands that kill and turn a blind eye to shameful and bloody practices, all out of economic interest; the genuine enforcement of laws, conventions, treaties and charters supposed to protect the rights of all human beings; the creation, in the places of origin of all victims, of a public visible memorial area for meditation and vigilance. In fighting for truth and justice, we fight so that at long last, now and in the future, everyone may have the right to live in justice and dignity.

Brussels, April 2000

Carmen Vivanco and Ana Rojas, Agrupacion de familiares de detenidos desaparecidos, Chile; Lourdes Uranga, ex-disappeared person, Mexico; Delia Bisutti, ex-disappeared person and wife of a disappeared man, Argentina; Sanaa Bachir Elbizri, Comité des familles de disparus, Lebanon; Khadija Rouissi, Forum Marocain pour la Vérité et la Justice, Morocco; Nadire Mater, Saturday's Mothers, Turkey; Sdiga Settaf Charif, National Secretary of the Union of Sahraui Women; Rujin, Comité des mères de la Paix, Kurdistan; Yolande Mukagasana and Julie Mukamutali, survivors

of the genocide, Rwanda; Dusica Bursac-Babic, Samohrane Majke (women alone with children), Committee of Disappeared People in Kosovo, Yugoslavia; Madjiguène Cissé, Mouvement des Sans Papiers, France; Carine Russo, Julie et MéliSSa Association, Belgium.

Present at the second Meeting of Mothers in February 2001 in Liege were Wadad Halwani, President of the Comité des parents de Disparus au Liban; Khadija Rouissi, representative of the Forum Marocain pour la Vérité et la Justice; Fariba Hachtroudi, of the association Moha, author of *Iran, les rives du sang*, and Yolande Mukagasana, survivor of genocide, Rwanda. The singers Cherifa (Morocco) and Esmá (Gypsy from Macedonia) also participated. Fanchon Daemers presented acappella songs dedicated to the "Mothers". For more information contact Festival Voix de Femmes, Brigitte Kaquet, rue des Mineurs 9-11, 4000 Liege, Belgium, tel. +32.4.2221246, fax +32.4.2232126 women.voices@skynet.be

JOSEFINA BÁEZ (Dominican Republic/New York)

For two decades Josefina Báez has been very present in artistic circles in New York and particularly so in the meetings of Dominican writers who live in the USA. Actor, poet, story-teller, performance artist, educator and cultural worker, she founded Latinarte Inc. During the last years the concept of "re-appropriation" of cultures has been much discussed to understand the literary and artistic productions of the Latin community in the USA. Since 1996 Josefina has presented her texts in private homes and apartments in a theatre project called *Apartarte/Casarte*. This project is an alternative to her work in traditional New York City theatre venues. The performances, organised as social events, take place in living-rooms,

and kitchens in Washington Heights and other Dominican immigrant households throughout the city. These performances have allowed her to develop a dialogue in a more intimate space. Josefina Báez's poetry contains irony and a great sense of humour and of the absurd.

Currently she is touring with the production *Dominicanish*. The performance text is also published in a book with the same title. In it Josefina writes:

*There is a multiplicity of trinities
that create unexpected bonds.
A chosen geography,
La Romana, New York, and India
Eclectic use of
symbols, times, and places
where the
past, present, and future
happen in the
here today now
com fortable comfor table comfort able
Soul body and mind local global universal
mon ologue dialogue conversation.
In an acute awareness of the ordinary
from my gladly, not so unique life.*

The book can be ordered at:
www.atiknow.com/dominicanish

PACIFIC UNDERGROUND (Aotearoa New Zealand)

Erolia Ifopo is a writer, director, producer and theatre critic who, with eight other actors and a band, is performing in the Pacific Underground play *Romeo and Tusi*, a modern-day musical and comic version of the Shakespeare tragedy. The story evolves around the meeting between Romeo, a Maori, and Tusi, a Samoan. Irolia Ifopo is co-writer of the play with Oscar Kightley. The musical contains original songs; the music helps tell the story while the humour

helps maintain the attention of the audiences as *Romeo and Tusi* is performed outdoors.

Erolia Ifopo has also co-written the play *Some Daze* with Mishelle Muagututia, another member of Pacific Underground, prompted by her experiences as a waitress. She thinks that other Pacific Islands artists should write so that their stories are told.

NORA AMIN (Egypt)

Nora Amin was born in Cairo in 1970. She is a professional actress, writer and translator as well as teacher at Cairo's Academy of Arts and Institute of Drama since 1993. Amongst her plays are *The Box of Our Lives*, in Arabic and English; *The Bermuda Triangle*, in Arabic and French, *Poison and Rage*, a comedy for three actors; *All is OK*, a musical.

Her play, *The Text*, produced by Cairo Opera House and the Cultural Fund of the Netherlands Embassy, inspired a dance duo choreographed by Karima Mansour which has been presented in Cairo, Amman and Beirut. The lines of the text are divided between a man and a woman, without following a logical division of characters. In the middle of play the text says:

WOMAN - *Until he finishes the song*

MAN - *The woman begins her song*

It's the song that resembles her old one

This time all words are clear

Her voice is strong

WOMAN - *Soft*

MAN - *She says:*

WOMAN - *I don't know any word or anything*

I know no letters or anybody

I know no language

I don't know anyone

I don't know

I'm nothing

MAN - *Silence*

About her work, Nehad Selaiha writes in *Al-Ahram*:

It is against such a background of idealised mother-representations that Nora Amin's recent and daringly iconoclastic *The Box of Our Lives* must be seen and appreciated. Amin gives her play a different title in Arabic, calling it *Al-Dafirah* (The Braid), and the images in both titles complement each other and seem designed to point straight to the core of the play. Two lonely, frightened and obviously traumatised nameless women, a mother and a daughter, cooped up in a tiny, derelict, dark and windowless room are hopelessly interlocked, as in a fatal embrace, in a love-hate relationship, with death as the only hope of release. ...

In both her work and life, Nora Amin's driving force is the attempt to discover her own subjectivity and construct her own self-image amid many possible identities and inherited role models. Like many feminist writers of her generation, she believes that the route to female subjectivity lies through the forbidden body, its physicality, desires, traumas and memories and, of course, all the taboos inscribed on it. ...

The Box of Our Lives is the first production of La Musica independent theatre group founded by Nora Amin in 1999 with a modest grant from the Cultural development Fund. It is an exciting, challenging beginning and if the company lives up to the expectations they have raised and maintains the same standards of integrity, courage and artistic excellence achieved this time, they may well prove a vital force in the battle to change the Egyptian theatrical landscape.

The first lines of *The Box of Our Lives*, performed by Nora Amin and Bassant

تمثيل
نورا أمين
بسنات محسن
موسيقى
هشام جبر
ديكور
إبراهيم الغريب
تصميم أزياء
بسنات محسن
هوتوغرافيا
حمدي رضا
فني اضاءة
ربيع سعد
تنفيذ العرض
هاني المتناوي
مساعد المخرج
آتي هناء عبد الصالح
دعاية وإعلان
محمد أبو شامة

الضفيرة



شكر خاص إلى
سمية رمضان، حسناء مكلش

Mohsen, say:

THE MOTHER - Aren't you even going to thank me?

GIRL - Mother - you promised we'd go out today...

MOTHER - Not possible.

GIRL - But you promised, you promised.

MOTHER - I can't

GIRL - Well then I can go...

MOTHER - And leave me here alone!?

THE PLAINTEXT PLAYERS (On-line)

The Plaintext Players are a group of experimental artists and writers who perform improvisational theatre on-line. The performance is strictly textual, what is performed is a dramatic narrative in the act of being written. Each of a half dozen Plaintext Players logs on from wherever he or she may be (usually spread over several time zones) to a communal text space known as a MOO (Multi-user Object Orientated Space).

Loosely guided by the digital director Antoinette La Farge, the Players type dialogue, action and scenery in. The audience members are also individually logged on and experience a slow uneven scrolling of text from bottom to top of screen. The act of writing is performed live.

Marlena Corcoran is a writer and electronic narrative artist. She is the author of the Internet fiction, *Worst Case Scenarios*. As a member of Plaintext Players, her roles have included *Candide* (Postmasters Gallery, NY) and *Orpheus* (Venice Biennial 1997 and Documenta X).

UNTER WASSER FLIEGEN (Germany)

Kordula Lobeck and Unter Wasser Fliegen organised the festival *Life Stories from Four Continents* in Wuppertal, Germany from the 28th of September to the 3rd of October 2000. Six theatre ensembles from Africa, Asia, America and Europe met, presented work and gave workshops focussing on the theme of senior theatre.

Stella Chiweshe, the mbira queen and singer, with the ensemble Bhata Kumbo, was amongst the invited artists. With the use of text, music and dance, their play, *Light*, tells the story of a girl who is possessed by an ancestral spirit. The people of Zimbabwe think of their ancestral spirits as beings between Man and God. Their tradition of song and story-telling is in danger of disappearing as so called modern civilisation has slowly been introduced into their lives. The actors of Bhata Kumbo, who come from a remote village where they have preserved their contact with the cult of the spirits, are part of this tradition and responsible for its survival in the future.

Flores de Otoño, a group from Colombia, directed by Patricia Ariza, created the text of their production collectively, while Uhan

Shii Theatre from Taiwan, directed by Ya-Ling Peng, presented stories based on the actors' lives.

TRANSIT III (Denmark)

The third Transit Festival took place at the Odin Teatret in Holstebro, Denmark, from the 18th to the 28th of January, 2001. The theme of Transit III was *Theatre-Women-Generations*, leading to a great variety of participants, artists, scholars, practitioners, and events from four continents of the world. The range in age, experience and cultural background was wide and diverse, leading to a very full and stimulating ten-day schedule of programming and activity.

A strong foundation for Transit III for the forty-five participants was the series of workshops which took place in the first four days, and which permeated the rest of the Festival in many ways. Workshops were conducted in *Wind and Rocks* (physical training and actors' material - Ana Woolf and Hisako Miura), *Singing and Speaking Voices* (vocal training and text interpretation - Brigitte Cirila and Julia Varley), *Life Behind a Mask* (work in puppets and masks - Deborah Hunt and Marie Josée Ordener), and *Performing Words* (writing and presenting text - Gilly Adams and Geddy Aniksdal). A selected group of participants attended *Waterwars*, a workshop built on a production process, led by Jill Greenhalgh and leading to a presentation event in the Festival.

The Festival itself included a variety of activities built around the presence of dozens of artists, practitioners, and scholars. Theatre performances were decidedly a highlight. There were eighteen performance events of various kinds, presented by theatre women from around the world. There were also a number of work demonstrations by

actors and directors, as well as a variety of presentations, readings, and public events. Works-in-progress by young people also drew audiences.

Throughout the structure of the Festival/Conference were a number of intermittent and recurring events, all intended to pass knowledge and skills among the generations. *Entrances* took place first thing in the morning; these were active sessions in physical and vocal training conducted by advanced practitioners, a new instructor every session. *Bridges* were events which illustrated the passing of exercises and techniques among generations. *Cornerstones* were sessions in which the creative person talked about and/or illustrated the essentials of her work. *Crossroads* were occasions of exchange and meeting among women. Also available were groups formally exchanging ideas in the form of panels, video and internet presentations, a concluding lecture by philosopher Chiara Zamboni, and - of course - a closing meal and celebration.

The principal focus of the workshop led by Geddy Aniksdal and Gilly Adams called *Performing Words* was the exploration and development of writing. This included the option of communicating the writing through performance to others. One recurring and provocative exercise was *Write Me*. The procedure usually involved the energetic Geddy moving and sometimes sounding in a defined space. Writers watched on, tablets and notebooks in hand, and wrote impulsively from what they saw. This was a timed exercise, usually two minutes. Options for reading aloud followed. Occasionally, other persons moved in the space and provided stimulus for the timed writing exercise. Extraordinary small pieces were generated, sometimes involving the possibilities of expansion into longer pieces.

Another productive exercise for gene-

rating stories and material was Gilly's Matchbox exercise. Sitting in a circle, participants had the opportunity to speak about any topic during the time it took a (very long) match to burn.

In general, the workshop proceeded much of the time on a positive and productive balance between the solitary experience of writing and the group experience of sharing what was written. On the final day, members of the group had the opportunity to present one of their pieces from the workshop period. Presented were four monologues, two poems, one song and a two-person play.

In keeping with its title, the workshop led by Julia Varley and Brigitte Cirila had two distinct areas of focus. Brigitte provided instruction in the singing voice, and Julia led training for the speaking voice. What they shared was their emphasis on vocal production, both the specifics of technique and the challenges of interpretation.

The content of the workshop seemed to fall into three general areas: Brigitte's work with singing, Julia's work with speaking, and an area where the two were combined to create a new and richer content.

One project of the workshop required each member to create a personal scenario related to "Women-Theatre-Generations". This short piece was then broken down into eleven parts, and served as the basis for practical exercises in voice and body. Text, sound, music, stories were integrated in various ways for development and exploration.

The last workshop day in particular expanded and integrated the work in sound, voice, physical expression and ensemble creation. Groups of three (high, middle, low voices) did presentations of scenarios together, integrating singing, text, and movement individually and in an ensemble setting.

Ensemble musical improvisations challenged participants' abilities to hear well while working together and contributing new elements to the sound world already existing. This was followed by improvisational vocal quartets, creating events of melody and rhythm together.

There is no doubt that all of us learned and grew in our understanding of sound and the body. Our abilities in singing and speaking expanded and deepened. As experts in their fields, the workshop leaders introduced us to a demanding discipline, and challenged our commitment to continuing practice and development of these challenging areas.

Beverly Brumm