

# OPEN NEWS

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## WOMEN'S VOICES (Belgium)

In March 2000 the Festival of Women's Voices organised a three-day meeting of mothers, spouses and sisters of people who have "disappeared" (some of whom were themselves victims of enforced "disappearance"). This gathering was held in parallel with evenings of African, Caribbean and Asian music and dance presented by incredibly beautiful women. The result of the meeting of the Mothers, who had previously believed they were alone in their struggle, was the creation of the International Network of Mothers and Family of the Disappeared and the issue of a joint public statement (published in the News section of *The Open Page* 6).

Two years later, in March 2002, the Festival of Women's Voices took place for the sixth time in Brussels, organised and directed by Brigitte Kaquet with the assistance of Laurence Vanpaeschen. During the Festival the Network of Mothers met again. Nearly all the women who had met originally in 2000 were present (in the meantime, Julie Mukamutali from Rwanda had died of Aids and the meeting was dedicated to her), with other women who came from countries where there have been "disappearances", massacres, colonisations and torture: Palestine, Algeria, Lebanon, Chechnya...

Since 2000 Brigitte refers to the Festival as an artistic event at the heart of which is the meeting of the Mothers. So the Festival has acquired the unique character of both artistic rebellion and political provocation. The famous singers and political activists come from very different backgrounds, but there is a strong desire to create unity amongst them, and this is achieved by allowing everyone's individual voice to weave into a fabric made by the artists and the intensity of the experiences narrated by the Mothers. In addition to the concerts, the workshops, talks and theatre performances facilitate not only communication between the artists and the Mothers, but also amongst the artists themselves. An intimate and safe atmosphere is created in which the Mothers start singing and dancing and the artists begin to talk. It is a real meeting of art and politics, of artistic work that is a kind of resistance and an obstinate political activism that withstands the adversities of age (many Mothers are old now), and psychological and physical violence.

The fusion is helped by the fact that many of the Mothers come from the same countries as the artists. There are representatives from countries as various as Morocco, Algeria, Kurdistan, Senegal, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mexico, Argentina, Rwanda, Western Sahara, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Macedonia, Mauritania, Cape Verde and Colombia, and, on the evening

when their "country" will sing, the Mothers are full of expectation.

For three days, from early 'til late, the Mothers meet. On the first day they meet alone to talk about themselves and the relatives they have lost; on the second day the artists from the Festival join them and on the third the meeting is open to the general public. The Mothers share their memories, tears and the pain of absence, as well as photographs and poems. Their words are coloured by new sounds and music and the real stories that they tell help to correct the misleading information disseminated by the press.

One of the artists, Kim Hyeran from Korea, said: "Until now I have lived as an artist, rather than as a woman. Here in the meeting I have acknowledged my solidarity with all the artists and the Mothers. I realise now that I am one of them, one of the many women suffering around the world."

At the closing concert, when all the artists sang one after another, the Mothers invaded the stage to make a public statement. Their presentation was powerful and moving for everyone who was present. At the end a Berber song came from the audience to allow the Mothers to leave the stage to the accompaniment of a joyful rhythm. Off stage, Soha Béchara, a Lebanese who has spent ten years in solitary confinement, and who had read the new manifesto on stage whilst the Mothers displayed their banners in silence, smiled and said to me: "We will change the world!"

Ana Woolf

## **MAGDALENA PACIFICA (Colombia)**

I returned from Colombia in awe of the women and men who made Magdalena Pacifica a reality. It was quite a trip: exhausting, maddening, frightening, but

above all rewarding. And I believe a huge success for the theatre group La Mascara of Cali, Pilar Restrepo, Lucy Bolanos and Susana Uribe.

La Mascara has suffered a humiliating level of "invisibilisation" of their work of thirty years. But they are extremely stubborn and have worked consistently developing performances and working with marginalised groups of women in their community. Their refusal to be undermined by a lack of recognition has now, finally, paid off. The Cali community and Colombian Theatre community could not ignore the success of Magdalena Pacifica.

From September 21<sup>st</sup> 2002, in more than seventy events spread over nine days throughout the city - audiences of Cali citizens packed the venues and demanded more. The forum each afternoon was also clearly a watershed series of debates within the context of women and culture in Colombia. Leading feminists, artists and scholars converged from throughout the country and the level of discourse was passionate and forceful, and will, I am certain, lead to the insistence on further debate surrounding women's social and cultural status.

The second part of the festival (1-5 October, 2002) took place in Bogotá at the invitation of Patricia Ariza who is one of the most important and well-respected theatre-activists in Colombia. She has had a long relationship with the Magdalena Project and was instrumental in helping La Mascara to mount their festival. Patricia Ariza organised a number of opportunities for exchange both with artists and political activists. A final meeting in her home gave birth to a new network of Women in Theatre in Colombia and Latin America. Graciela Rodriguez of Armar in Argentina will focus and co-ordinate the practicalities of this network with the aim of creating a number of smaller meetings in

Ecuador, Peru, Argentina and Colombia in the first instance. She will be very glad to hear from anyone who has an interest. She can be contacted at [gr50@fullzero.com.ar](mailto:gr50@fullzero.com.ar)

Patricia Ariza concluded with an open proposal to invite theatre artists to come and work for three or six months on theatre projects in Bogotá. In return she can offer accommodation and food. She believes that bringing artists in to work on cultural projects with the community is one way to bring the reality of what is happening in Colombia to the outside world. The terror-mongering press that is keeping foreign visitors at bay could result in isolating the country and its people to a destructive extreme, allowing the current corrupt regimes to continue to maintain their stronghold on the people and the economy. Patricia can be contacted on [cesatizabal@hotmail.com](mailto:cesatizabal@hotmail.com)

I want to extend a personal thanks to all the women and men that I met in Colombia, and in particular Lucy, Pilar, Susana and Patricia. I feel humbled by their solidarity with each other and by their ceaseless activity to redress the violence that attempts to paralyse their lives. Their work sustains the dignity of their beautiful country.

Jill Greenhalgh

(For the complete article see [www.themagdalenaproject.org](http://www.themagdalenaproject.org))

## UHAN SHII (Taiwan)

From March 30<sup>th</sup> to April 29<sup>th</sup> Ya Ling Peng, director of the Uhan Shii Theatre Group organised the 2002 Taipei International Theatre Festival. Ya Ling Peng was inspired to organise this event by her participation in the Transit Festival in Denmark. Nothing similar had ever been organised in Taiwan before and it was only her overpowering enthusiasm that convinced the National Theatre that she could

fill the small theatre with spectators. Participants included: Voix Polyphoniques from France, Birgitte Grimstad and the Sagliocco Ensemble from Norway, Odin Teatret from Denmark and the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre. From Taiwan, U Theatre, Off PW and the Uhan Shii Group took part. In addition to performances the Festival offered a wide range of workshops, lectures and demonstrations. With the Festival Ya Ling Peng has managed to achieve recognition from the official theatre circles that look down on her work with amateur actors and older people from the rural regions of Taiwan.

## MEETINGS IN ASIA (Singapore and The Philippines)

Arranged by Audrey Wong (director of the Substation Arts Center) and Verena Tay, a meeting of international and Singaporean women to explore the task of writing for performance will take place from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2003. Performing Words will be led by Gilly Adams and Geddy Aniksdal, and the theme of the project is Travel-Home. Playwright and performer Verena Tay also premiered her new work *Medea One to One* in 2002.

The women of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) have sent an invitation to the Asia-Pacific Festival-Conference of Women in the Arts from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2003. The festival and conference will bring together women artists largely from the Asia-Pacific region. The theme of the festival is, Changing SHE-Images: Women Re-Imag(in)ing the World. PETA invites women from all over the world to come and participate in this festival.

Website: <http://www.petatheater.org>

E-mail: [peta@drama.com.ph](mailto:peta@drama.com.ph)

## DOROTHY HEWETT (Australia)

*My love is full of summertime,  
With doves a-swing in lilac trees,  
And magpies thick as summer leaves,  
Singing a fine, full-throated ease.  
The gold-white sunlight, thick as milk  
All through the silent leaves lies spilt,  
The summer birds dart, blue as silk.  
My love is full of summertime.*

This is an excerpt from an early poem *My love is full of summertime* written by Dorothy Hewett, one of Australia's national treasures. Dorothy Hewett died in September 2002. She published nine plays, with a further nine more performed. She wrote five collections of poetry and numerous novels including her autobiography *Wildcard*. She had five children and was married to the writer Merv Lilley. Dorothy Hewett made a significant contribution to theatre in her country.

## MAGDALENA AOTEAROA (Aotearoa New Zealand)

It is with great sadness we received the news from New Zealand that Alan Brunton, the partner of Magdalena Aotearoa co-director Sally Rodwell, had died. Many of those involved in the Magdalena Project met Alan at the Aotearoa Festival in 1999 and at the Transit Festival in 2001. Alan was the co-founder of the legendary Red Mole Theatre together with Sally, and it was on their way home from taking part in the Porsgrunn International Theatre Festival that Alan suddenly died in Amsterdam on June 28<sup>th</sup> 2002. Before his death Alan was working on a new book of poetry, *Fq*, that has now been published by Bumper Books posthumously, much thanks to the efforts of Sally Rodwell. Friends of Red Mole and

Bumper Books also held a memorial concert for Alan at the Jazz Club in Wellington in October 2002.

In 2002, Magdalena Aotearoa has had international guests touring the islands; Josefina Baez, Birgitte Grimstad and Cristina Castrillo made extensive visits. Sally Rodwell and Te Itirawa travelled to Brisbane to help launch the Magdalena Theatre Festival there. The Aotearoa Newsletter continues to be published regularly giving more information about the activities of the network in this part of the world. For more information contact:

[magdalen@actrix.gen.nz](mailto:magdalen@actrix.gen.nz)

## TRAVELLING (Australia)

April 19<sup>th</sup> 2002 launched Magdalena Australia as the national chapter of the International Magdalena Project and the heralding of the 2003 Festival - Travelling taking place from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2003. Festival director Dawn Albinger writes: "There was a great turnout for the launch: many colourful women and a few brave men. We were heartened by the number and cross section of women from the worlds of art, arts administration and government who attended. And I was particularly pleased to have my mum Audrey in the audience, whose love and support and huge smile helped carry me through the day. It was our great pleasure to welcome among our guests Joan Benson Wally, who recalled her experiences in Brisbane Theatre through the 1950s to 70s, the dark years of the Bjelke-Petersen government. One anecdote recalled a showdown with Brisbane Police who were called in to close a show and arrest the performers, because it closed with a line containing the word "fuck". As an artist who has appeared with all her kit off and used fairly foul language at times in search of my authentic voice, I feel indebted to the resil-

ience of women like Joan who fought for freedom of expression. In Brisbane, women of Joan's era are not as visible as their male counterparts. I would like to thank Sue Rider for her efforts in bringing Joan to our attention and our launch. Jill Greenhalgh spoke eloquently about the Magdalena Project and the powerful ripple effect that occurs when women gather and exchange information, ideas and experience."

For more information:

<http://magdalena.qut.edu.au>

E-mail: [Magdalena.Festival@qpac.com.au](mailto:Magdalena.Festival@qpac.com.au)

## **SHEHARAZAD NOW? (Egypt)**

Nora Amin has organised the first ever independent theatre festival in Egypt. Sheharazad Now? took place in Cairo from the 20<sup>th</sup> of September to the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2002; it focused on the intersections, dialogue, exchange of experiences and collaborations between cultures. The festival aims to be an annual event with a new theme each year, hoping to create a situation where independent Egyptian theatre groups also find a space for their work to be shared and seen.

Some of the Egyptian performances included Shereen Al Ansary and Caroleen Khalil who made presentations in a storytelling form. A performance directed by Abeer Ali received a lively reception from the audience; children, veiled and unveiled women, young and older men followed the story of a woman telling her husband about her desire to work while her mother-in-law commented disapprovingly. La Musica and The Obligated People Group productions showed an attempt to combine dance and text delivery, recorded and live music, universal themes and local prejudices.

Meetings, workshops, films and lectures were organised bringing together European and Egyptian artists. An active group of

female critics, Nehad Selaiha, Menha El Batrami and Maysa Zaki followed the Festival giving feed-back and support to the emerging Egyptian artistic movements. A concern - when discussing with the festival director Nora Amin the responsibilities and directions to be taken for a next festival - is the contradiction felt by many artists in Egypt who must rely on the help of international institutions to produce, thus generating competition which undermines possible collaboration.

## **MUJERES EN ESCENA (Spain)**

Ana Eva Guerra and Elisa Marinas have, for the two last years, organised an annual meeting, Encuentro de Mujeres en Escena de Asturias. Women artists from Asturias (a region in North Spain) as well as invited women from the rest of Spain and abroad have given talks and lectures. Workshops and performances were also included in the four day long programme. A report is made at the end of each meeting.

The theme for the second meeting in November 2002, was "Women and Theatre Teaching". Yolanda Monreal (drama teacher), Itziar Pascual (playwright and dramaturgy), Esperanza Abad (singer and voice coach) and Olga Mesa (dancer and dance teacher) spoke about their experiences. All four agreed that women become more visible in the teaching field. From the round table discussions concluded that male directors note differences between actors and actresses in the work, while female directors do not; the actresses show more sense of responsibility, care for detail and ability to take risks. For further information contact: Ana Eva Guerra, Teatro del Norte, [etelvinovazques@terra.es](mailto:etelvinovazques@terra.es)

## WOMEN WHO DARED (India)

The new book *Women Who Dared* is a modest but sincere endeavour to record the contribution that a few representative women have engineered in the socio-cultural landscape of India over the last fifty years. The anthology features women who, in their diverse ways, represent the struggle and aspirations of all women. Ritu Menon has edited the book with a chapter by the actor, director and choreographer Maya Krishna Rao, one of the very few women to be trained as a Kathakali dancer, unusually in the male role. The book is published by The National Book Trust, India, ISBN 81-237-3856-0.

## UMBIGÜIDADES (Brazil)

*Umbigüidades* is the performance resulting from a theatre research by the actress Iami Rebouças as part of her PhD at the Theatre School in Salvador, Bahia. Her theoretical and practical research surpassed academic limits and transformed into a monologue, which presents many of the characters and voices belonging to Iami's previous repertoire. In the performance Iami reveals to the spectators the process of creation of the vocal scores belonging to each character. Mother Ubu, Lady Macbeth, Eva, Antigone, a French teacher, a woman who makes *acarajé* (fried vegetable balls), Morgause, a local indigenous woman, meet to tell their story. With the voice of a sports commentator the actress tells of her own struggle to train in solitude, survive and show her work, and finally of her success and recognition. The text, staging and acting is by Iami Rebouças; the stage design is by Fritz Gutmann.

## LENE BETZER

## (Denmark)

I make masks. I have participated in performances with masks where the final expression remains on the inside of the mask. Therefore I have spent time to develop a technique which makes it possible to mould the mask in such a way that the expression is there where I think it should be - on the outside. I am interested in more theatre women getting to know about my work and I can be reached at Louisevej 14 III, 8220 Brabrand, Denmark.

Lene Betzer

