

# OPEN NEWS

## **UNTER WASSER FLIEGEN (Germany)**

Kordula Lobeck of Unter Wasser Fliegen organised Bridges Back to the Roots, from October 10th to 19th, 1997. Gilly Adams of the Magdalena Project, responsible for the documentation of the event, has sent the following lines:

Wuppertal, Germany, Autumn 1997. Unexpectedly blue skies and sunny days. Companies and artists congregate from Europe and Colombia to make connections to the "invisible city" of people who normally have no access to theatre. In a week of workshops we work with young people, male offenders in prison, with children in psychiatric hospitals and with young people in day centres and youth clubs. The results are often startlingly good - and full of diverse emotions, but the work raises serious questions. Is it valid to open up this connection with those on the margins if the dialogue cannot continue? What exactly is the function of the artist? These matters are debated at a three day colloquium which brings together even more theatre workers who are concerned with the political, cultural and social implications of their art. One affirmative statement, voiced by many, is that, whatever the context, an artist works as an artist and not a social worker or therapist. Finally, we all assemble on the last Sunday to make a public performance involving participants from the Festival's diverse elements which celebrates the "invisible city" and makes it visible in Wuppertal.

## **I<sup>ra</sup> ESCUELA POPULAR DE TEATRO (Argentina)**

The intention of this community theatre school is to establish an alternative actors training which focuses research on cultural roots and on creative group work. The actors that leave the school should have an understanding of the sources of the Andean culture and be engaged in community issues. To confront the training process respecting the rich diversity of origin and identity, allows the actors to stand on any stage with a syncretistic vision. The students prepare and train in the neighbourhoods and communities of Mendoza. Mariú Carrera and Maria Lorena Tereyra are responsible for this school which occupies a building obtained with money given by the state as repayment for eight years in prison, during the military dictatorship, of one of their companions.



## THE NATASHA PROJECT (International)

*Art Saves Lives* is a graffiti written over a human silhouette painted on the wall of a building in Los Angeles. This graffiti was taken as the title of the project of the International Theatre Network Natasha Group. The actors and directors of this young network met around one central theme: "The meeting of differences", meaning an exchange of different experiences in theatre, social and historical realities and personal affinities. The most ambitious collaborative project to date has been a performance based on *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

## DAH THEATRE (Yugoslavia)

Dah Teatar will present a new performance *The Helen Keller Case* at the end of April 1998 in Belgrade. Helen Keller, although blind and deaf from early childhood, became a renowned intellectual and supporter of human rights. The performance aims to explore the possibilities of different ways of communication between human beings in a society which is stepping into a new era with many unresolved conflicts. The life of Helen Keller is a strong metaphor for the situation in the Balkan Peninsula, where the people roam in "darkness", trying to find "the light" for the future.

## TRIPURARI SHARMA (India)

Tripurari Sharma, a New Dehli based director and teacher of acting at the National School of Drama in Dehli, has conducted numerous theatre workshops around the

country to develop scripts around social issues and local problems with women's groups, college students, factory workers and others. She was the Indian Representative at the first International Women Playwrights Conference in the USA in 1988, and she co-ordinated a year-long project on women and theatre for the Women's Conference in Beijing.

Her play *Kaath Ki Gaard* (The Wooden Cart), originally commissioned by UNICEF as part of an anti-leprosy communication package, addresses the ostracising of the leper as well as the broader restraints that tradition imposes on the individual.

## EL GALPON (Uruguay)

*La reina de los bandidos* (Bandit Queen) (Uruguay) is a production by Teatro El Galpón in Montevideo. It premiered in May 1997 under the auspices of La Republica de las Mujeres. This piece, written by Hélène Cixous, is based on the story of the infamous Indian bandit queen Phoolan Devi. Born into a low caste, abused and violated throughout her young years, she rebelled against the cruelties inflicted upon her as a woman by taking violent revenge upon her perpetrators. Leading a clandestine band of men she continued to terrorise the countryside but achieved great fame and notoriety among the poor throughout India. When she finally gave herself up she demanded in return that a school should be built in her native village using the money that had been placed on her head. She was eventually granted amnesty and now lives as a free woman and as a member of parliament.

Marina Rodríguez plays Sukundeva-Phoolan Devi, presenting a personality who suffers but simultaneously tries to offer hope

to all the women from her same social background. Felisa Jezier plays Pandala, the old seer who brought Sukundeva up.

## **TEATER SAGOHUSET (Sweden)**

Queen Margareta the First, also known as the King without Trousers, is the main character in Teater Sagohuset's new play. She was an important historical figure, a powerful regent, living in the 1300s and responsible for ending two hundred years of war and misery within the Nordic countries through the establishment of the Kalmar Union.

The playwright Margareta Skantze has a special interest in female figures from the past, with Queen Margareta and the Holy Birgitta being two of the most prominent. The play also deals with the question of how power affects so-called traditional female values.

The performance, which had its premiere in April 1997, can be played in two versions: one especially for churches and a longer version for outdoor spaces. The production is presently touring in some of the Scandinavian countries.

## **PUENTE THEATRE (Canada/Chile)**

Lina de Guevara, originally from Chile, founded and became the artistic director of Puente Theatre, a group based in Victoria, Canada, that creates, produces and performs plays and other works that describe the experiences of mainly Latin American immigrants.

In 1994 she started working on a community play about immigrant women with the working title *Sisters/Strangers*.

Guevara says: "We are all women – commonality of gender, and we are all immigrants – commonality of situation."

Together with a small core group of professional actors, the powerful presence on stage of a large chorus of immigrant women turned them into the true protagonists of the play, although their actions were simple enough to be learnt in short rehearsal periods. The play is based on interviews with immigrant women in Victoria and Vancouver and on theatre workshops where the women learnt to express their experience through images.

*Sister/Strangers* was conceived as a touring production, to reach immigrant women throughout the province, therefore the chorus was different in each city. During the preliminary reading of the script, different women had made it quite clear that they wanted *Sister/Strangers* to be a celebration of their achievements, of the way they had coped with the different challenges that they had encountered. As one woman put it: "We do not want to feel down, stuck in all the problems."

Because many women had experienced war, they agreed that the message they wanted to convey to the other Canadians was not to take peace for granted. The play ended with a chronological line up in which all the women named their countries of origin and the length of time they had been in Canada. *Sisters/Strangers* was transformative because it reaffirmed hope. "It is always a struggle not to give up hope even when you have many objective reasons to be pessimistic", says Guevara.

## **TRIANGLE (Britain)**

Carran Waterfield is the motoring force behind Triangle, a Coventry based group.

She has directed Bare Essentials Youth Theatre latest production *Monsters*. The play features performers aged between ten and twenty-two and deals with things that go bump in the night, bullying, outcasts and much more. Carran presented the latest Triangle production *My Sister, My Angel* at a conference on drama and education at Exeter University and spoke about the role of the artist in initial teacher training. *Ruby Slippers* is the latest Triangle Theatre venture in collaboration with Coventry's Snarling Beasts Company.

## LAMINARIE (Italy)

Laminarie is a cultural association founded in 1994 and based in Bologna, Italy. It is composed of Febo del Zozzo, Bruna Gambarelli and Fabiana Terenzi. During 1994/95 Laminarie mounted a project with the intention of establishing a long-term relationship with Bosnian children. The first year took place in the refugee camp of San Mauro Mare and the second in the nursery school of San Mauro Pascoli and primary school of San Mauro Mare. In August 1996 Laminarie took part in the 17<sup>th</sup> *Days of Youth Festival* in Mostar (the first since the war). In collaboration with Hamica Nametac, a director from Mostar, Laminarie developed the project *Ne takop nego ovako* (Not Like That But Like This), which included a workshop in Mostar and an investigation to explore the theatre realities in Mostar, Sarajevo, Tuzla and Belgrade.

## WOMEN'S VOICES FESTIVAL (Belgium)

The International Women's Voices Festival happens bi-annually and the last took place



*Tu, misura assoluta di tutte le cose*, Laminarie

from 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1997 to January 7<sup>th</sup> 1998. Directed by Brigitte Kaquet of the Cirque Divers, Liège, it is an artistic and pedagogical event. It illustrates the diversity of living cultures through music, theatre and dance. For two weeks singers, musicians, actresses, dancers and choreographers from different cultures lead workshops, take part in forums and give concerts and performances.

## TRANSIT (Denmark)

From November 5<sup>th</sup> to November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1997 the Transit Festival was held at Odin Teatret, Holstebro, with the title *Theatre, Women, Politics*. Sixteen performances were presented in the evenings by companies coming from Colombia, the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Canada, and various European countries. During the day practical sessions

were followed by debates and presentations under the following titles: Past and Present History, Inside and Outside (on theatre in prison), From the Local to the Global Village, Listening to Children, Art and Exclusion, Theatre in Times of War, Without Papers.

## **ARMAR (Argentina)**

During the first ten days of October 1997 Armar, a collective of theatre workers including Silvia Pritz, Graciela Rodriguez, Karen Sørvik and Claudio Bisigato, mounted the first festival of Women in Theatre - *Mujeres en Escena* - in the capital, Buenos Aires. Despite the fact that the festival was not supported by any national funding, performances, workshops and seminars were led by women theatre practitioners from across Latin America, including Argentina, and from several European countries. Armar's intention is to hold an annual Festival and also to tour the provinces of Argentina with the Festival.

## **SOME NEWS FROM ITALY** by Laura Mariani

### **A symbolic opening**

A symbolic opening: the conference-performance of Lorenza Salvetti from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (Society for Actors and The International Theatre). The famous text has been brought back to its original form, that of a conference, in order to revive, at the end of a century, a dazzling thought, born in the feminist context of the early twentieth century.

### **The fiftieth anniversary of the War**

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Liberation against Nazi-Fascism ended in 1995 and celebrations have prolonged its echo since: from the conquest for the right to vote for women to their participation in the elaboration of the Constitution. Several women theatre artists were inspired by these facts to create performances and events:

*Voices from the Resistance*, Ravenna 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1995. Three partisan women - Ida Camanzi, Santina Masotti and Lucia Rossi - narrate their experience, accompanied by the music of the Officine Schwartz. Director of the performance is Luigi Dadina, the dramaturg is Cristina Ventrucci, who followed and conducted the whole process: from the gathering of oral witnesses to their dramatisation. The event takes place within *Il Linguaggio della dea* (The Language of the Goddess), the space created by Ermanna Montanari at Ravenna Theatre, for women artists and scholars to meet.

*For All of Us. Women's Voices from the Resistance*, is the title of a sound recording which proposes an original montage of oral testimonies from the protagonists of the Liberation struggles, of documents read by an actress and of vocal improvisations over those texts. The aim was to make the memories of the women partisans alive and present, to enter the intimacy of womanhood as active subject, in order to convey to younger generations that experience that is so far removed from current day individualism. The recording, financed by the Women's Union of Modena (together with the partisan associations), presented at Modena on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1995 and then repropounded in a live performance form, is a work of the Teatro della Voce of Bologna. This group, founded by Eleonora Fumagalli and Germana Giannini, has also mounted the project *Libera nos a malo* (Free us from Evil) staging Luciano Violante's text *Song*

for the celebration of the children who died at the hands of the Mafia. The performance, after travelling across Sicily, involving also local actors, then went north, to perform in Piazza Campidoglio in Rome on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1996. At perform this group is committed, among other things, to multicultural projects in the suburbs of Bologna.

*So As Not To Forget*, Teatro Impresa of Belluno, 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1995. In 1991 the director Daniela Nicosia, together with the workshop Theatre 4, presented *Caffé* (Coffee), which developed upon scenic material produced during a seminar with the prisoners of the female section of the Dozza prison in Bologna: the reconstruction of a life "after", in which childhood and war merged in the memory. The event in Belluno, born at the end of an historical research into the most significant events of the fight for Liberation in that area, has brought professionals and amateurs together on a journey of many stages: it was from the reconstruction of the mass meetings, with

their rebellious energy, that the most intense passages of poetry were born.

### **The Most Hidden Secret**

The theme of sexual violence within the family is at the heart of a performance planned and interpreted by Bruna Braidotti, with text by Annamaria Bonarrigo, who also directs the play together with Nelly Quette (Association of Performance Professionals for the North East). *Il segreto più nascosto* (The Most Hidden Secret) derives from the immediate knowledge of some cases of sexual violence on little girls and aims at proposing ways of overcoming that extreme experience.

Translated from Italian by Maria Ficara

LAURA MARIANI (Italy) collaborates with *The Open Page*. She has written various essays on theatre of the 18th and 19th centuries, is one of the directors of the Italian Society of Women Historians and edits the theatre section of the magazine *Lapis*.