

OPEN NEWS

EGYPTIAN WOMEN DIRECTORS (Egypt)

As a supplement to her article **Nora Amin** sent *The Open Page* some information about female theatre directors in Egypt:

Effat Yehya started her own theatre group, The Caravan, almost eleven years ago. She graduated from the department of the Performing and Visual Arts at the American University in Cairo. Effat focuses on women and gender issues in her productions, and adopts a feminist approach. She has presented her performances at the Hanager Arts Center at the Cairo Opera House space, at the National Theatre and the Taliaa' Theatre (avant-garde theatre) among other venues. She also writes art-reviews and plays, and makes adaptations of some of the plays that she has directed. Her productions include *Virginia*, *Life Sketches*, *Top Girls*, *Rhythms of Memory* and *The Diary of Fatma*. She is currently working on a new production that brings together the characters of Sheherazade and Antigone.

Manal Ibrahim worked as an assistant director for almost eighteen years before making her directorial debut in 2002, with Strindberg's *The Stranger* presented at the Hanager Arts Center. She does not adopt a feminist approach, and works in the traditional style of realism, but the audience tends to call any female director "feminist". Currently Manal is a freelance assistant director.

Katima Mansour is a choreographer and contemporary dancer who founded Maat for Contemporary Dance in 2000. She studied at the Higher Cinema Institute, Academy of Arts in Cairo, then joined an internship at Renato Greco in Rome, studied for her B.A. and M.A. at the London Contemporary Dance School, and came back to teach at the Ballet Institute and work as a dancer/trainer at the Modern Dance Company of the Cairo Opera House, before leaving to start her independent group. As yet she is the only female choreographer in Egypt and female issues are very evident in her shows. She has made collaborative choreographies with foreign artists, presented her work in many festivals abroad and was supported for two years by the Dutch Embassy. Her productions include *Taming*, *Love*, *Solo*, *Passages*, *Temperament* and *Games*.

Abeer Ali has the longest theatre experience among the female theatre directors in independent theatre. She founded her group, Almesaharaty, which adapts popular folkloric theatre style, works with puppets, and biographies; she conducts theatre workshops for children, and makes issue based performances in cooperation with women's NGOs, as Effat Yehya does. Abeer uses improvisation, music and live singing, folkloric tales and storytelling. Her shows include *Sketch Square*, *Goha* and an adaptation of Ibsen's

Ghosts.

Caroleen Khalil graduated from the Performing and Visual Arts Department at the American University in Cairo. She is an actress and freelance theatre director. Caroleen works currently with storytelling from a feminist perspective with the NGO, Women and Memory Forum, where she presented two productions under the title *The Storyteller said...*

Sarah Emany is an opera singer, critic and teacher at the English Literature Department, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. Sarah made her directorial debut with *Vienna*, in 1996, at the Hanager Arts Centre, which remains her only production to date.

Azza Elhousseini is an actor and theatre director. She works with television and film as a freelance actor. Two years ago she founded her independent theatre group, The Gypsies, to create what she cannot find in mainstream theatre. Her shows include *An Ordinary Girl* and *The Killers' Night*.

Reem Hegab graduated from the English Literature Department, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. She was a member of the Modern Dance Company for the Cairo Opera House until 2000, studied dance and choreography, and obtained a Master's degree at Middlesex University, London. Reem presented one show choreographed by her, *Like Everyday* at the Taliaa' Theatre, produced by the Youth Theatre. She is also a freelance actor.

Abeer Lotfy graduated from the Higher Institute of Theatre, The Academy of Arts. She works at the National Theatre, under the Ministry of Culture, as a theatre director, and a freelance actor. She has directed one show.

Dalia Bassyouny graduated from the English Literature Department, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. She obtained a Master's degree in drama, and returned from London to be appointed as a teacher in the

drama department of the Faculty of Arts, Helwan University, then left again on a Fullbright Scholarship for a Ph.D. in the USA. She has directed two shows: *Piano* and another experimental show.

MAGDALENA LATINA (Argentina)

The Magdalena Latina network was founded by a group of women playwrights, directors, performers and producers. One of them, Patricia Ariza, an actor and director from Colombia, opened the Magdalena Latina Festival in 2003 with a speech:

The Magdalena is an interesting movement because it does not work only in the artistic field. It has to become a bridge between new theatre and the social women's movement. The themes and proposals that women focus on in many countries have something in common. It is not a question of reaching the centre of power and taking hold of it. It is a question of strengthening the margins. I think that the role of women working in the performing arts is to create a new way of establishing the hidden nexus that lies underneath the surface of culture, those invisible connections that are typical of the female world. So the Magdalena Latina not only supports women's productions, but also fights against any form of discrimination or exclusion caused by the dominant models.

The Magdalena Latina Festival entitled *Women on Stage, Connections and Community* took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from the 25th of September to the 5th of October 2003, organised by Armar Artes Escenicas and directed by Graciela E. Rodriguez and Silvia Pritz. More than 300 people participated in the many activities: three workshops, five lectures, eighteen performances by companies from ten countries and more than sixty women artists at the production

forum. One hundred and sixty-five plays and forty-two works in progress were presented at the first initiative of a market of performing arts.

Magdalena Latina is today an open space for the Latin-American women whose work includes the following goals:

- The performing arts as an artistic expression of the female universe;
- Theatre as a place for women's thoughts on performance theory and practice;
- The performing arts as a space for solidarity with women's social and cultural movements in Latin America and the world;
- Theatre as a place for experimentation and research related to the cultural presence of women in society;
- Linking to existing events, festivals and markets and new spaces for the promotion of women's productions.

THEATRE FESTIVAL (Finland)

The third European Women's Theatre Festival took place in Tornio/Haparanda (Finland/Sweden) from the 5th to the 8th of June 2003. For further information contact Tornio Teatteri/Asema, Rautatiea- sema, 95420 Tornio, Finland.

www.lapland.fi/elamyseukot

MAGDALENA PIETRUSKA (Sweden)

Magdalena Pietruska from Institutet for Scenkonst has directed a new solo performance with Nina Hansen from Outlawfields. The performance is based on texts by R.D. Laing and the title of the performance is *Knots*. It will be premiered in Fredrikstad, Norway on the 23rd of May 2004.

Institutet for Scenkonst are also currently working in Italy with six actors, preparing a performance based on text by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Teatri del Vento is orga-

nising this work that will be premiered approximately 15th of April 2004 and then go on tour in Italy.

THE CADIZ MEETINGS (Spain)

In the middle of October 2003 we celebrated the 7th Meeting of Iberoamerican Women in Scenic Arts. The proposal was put forward originally by Sara Molina and Margarita Borja, with the support of the Women's Institute, and presented to the Iberoamerican Festival of Theatre, the FIT of Cadiz. We received the support of some playwrights like Itziar Pascual, Beth Escudé, Gemma Rodriguez, and of the philologist Laura Borrás, of the University of Barcelona for the publications. My colleagues from Sorámbulas provided the infrastructure: Nieves Simon, Pascual Medel, María José Congost, Eugenia Funes and, at the time, Margarita Borja's daughter Margarita.

From the beginning in 1996 until now, the Meetings have followed the course of incorporating new women every time to contribute towards the considerably large task. In the beginning Sorámbulas was the only association of theatre creators, while today four organisations are involved: Marías Guerreras of Madrid, Alma of Málaga and Projecte Vaca of Barcelona, together with Sorámbulas from Alicante. The Meetings also count on the timely collaboration of women from the other side of the Atlantic: Lola Proaño, Maritza Wilde, Alicia del Campo, Ana Mercedes Echevarría and Loreta Bravo, amongst others. Each year the planned activities are presented to the Women's Institute, the Festival itself and the Authors Association that sponsor them. At that point the general lines of the programme are agreed upon.

From the first moment Margarita Borja has taken upon herself the co-ordination, nearly always with another woman. In the

following years, apart from those already mentioned, others took on new responsibilities, like Nieves Simón (actress in *Sorámbulas*, and a dear companion of decades of feminist struggle), Isabelle Bres and Beth Escudé, Asun Bernárdez and Diana Raznovich (renowned playwright and comic cartoonist). Diana was invited for the first time in 2000. She shared the co-ordination in 2002, bringing on one side her connection to the Casa de América of Madrid and on the other with the Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics of the Tisch School of New York University. The director of the Institute, Diana Taylor, came to Cadiz, opening up new perspectives in two directions: towards the Spanish and Portuguese language artists living in the USA and of the Spanish artists towards the USA.

The Meetings in Cadiz have the structure of lectures, round-tables, video and book presentations, readings, encounters and luckily, since 2001, also the presentation of small performances in the Café-theatre of the old town, the Pay Pay, thanks to the generosity of its owner, Virginia Salas, and of her colleagues. The presentation of performances is limited, and the pressure given by the need to create is confronted with the unlikely possibility of influencing the Cadiz Festival in its programming.

Nevertheless we cannot forget that in 1996 the Festival welcomed the Meetings because they had been criticised for not having programmed female playwrights and directors in the thirteen years of the Festival, and that absence was scandalous. Today things have changed, reversing the tendency, especially in relation to the presence of plays in Spanish or Portuguese from Latin America by female playwrights or directed by women. The small performances in the Pay Pay have grown to bigger formats. This is the case with *Cabaret Diabólico* by Escudé and Bres, and *Tras las Tocas* and *Piezas Hilvanadas* by the Marías Guerreras, amongst others. For

those who come from Latin America with solid theatre experience, Cadiz has offered the possibility of accessing their individual works in Spain and provoked a useful personal, artistic and discussion exchange. Last year, the Meeting and Festival were dedicated to Argentina, due to the very difficult situation of that country so rich in theatre. Mercedes Farriols presented *Encarnación* and Diana Raznovich presented *Efectos personales* directed by Laura Suárez. The Meetings also had the pleasure of hosting Susana Rinaldi in one of the encounter sessions, after her show.

The Meetings have managed to reduce the area of the continent where our invisibility as female creators reigns by giving women reciprocal support. Each year the Meeting starts with the presentation of the book documenting the previous year's talks, published by the Fundación de la Sociedad General de Autores, with the support of the Women's Institute, ensuring the memory of what has already been achieved.

Margarita Borja

GRISELDA GAMBARO (Argentina)

With more than forty plays staged since 1965, Griselda Gambaro is the best-known playwright in Argentina. Four of her stories are presently being staged as dance-plays in Buenos Aires: *Mi querida*, *Historias breves*, *Señora Macbeth* and *Una ama como uno puede*.

In an interview she gave to Susana Freire, Griselda Gambaro spoke about her work that is often inspired by the classics of literature, but set in the present:

As I did with Antigona Furiosa, where I take Sophocles' play as a starting point but then talk about the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the source of Mi querida is a short story by Chekhov, which is a springboard for the creation of a play on women's loneliness,

whilst Señora Macbeth uses Shakespeare's play to discuss the gender issue, the male-female relationship and the question of power. Women must not imitate men's power but rather look for new ways. A different political space is necessary.

Griselda Gambaro also commented on the situation in her country:

In Argentina a change is essential: how can we have hope for the future if we see ghost cities, people demonstrating or on strike and the jobless young people begging? The economic situation has to improve. In Una ama como uno puede I speak of the sorrow of seeing a society where the weak are excluded and I also warn of the danger of a fight among the poor.

KALEIDOSCOPE (Singapore)

"There is no such thing as too much colour in life..." After the first successful event at the Women's Open Space in August 2003, the second Kaleidoscope took place in December 2003. It consisted of a series of readings, work presentations and small-scale performances. Magdalena Singapore is a group aiming to promote networking and sharing among women theatre/arts practitioners and is already organising the Magdalena Singapore Festival which will be held in 2006. For more info contact verenatay@pacific.net.sg; and for Kaleidoscope audrey@substation.org

VOIX POLYPHONIQUES (France)

The economic situation of small theatre companies like ours is threatened in the short term. The political decisions recently taken by the French government concerning artistic structures will lead to the disappearance or

weakening of many of them. Culminating in the cancellation of the Avignon Festival, artists have been fighting recently not only for their social rights but also against an unacceptable social direction. We know that the status artists had in France was particularly envied abroad, but the change necessary in order to comply with the European practice not only means the loss of social rights but also emphasizes the political choice made by a commercial society. Artists here keep on thinking, meeting, demonstrating, striking, discussing, questioning... and working.

With these words Brigitte Cirila tells us of the current situation in France, while she and Samuel Coquard are directing the workshop Mouvement de la Polyphonie, for six weekends, from October 2003 to June 2004, and a week in August 2004.

Voix Polyphoniques also announces the release of the CD *Songs from the Black Sea* which is available through the website www.voixpolyphoniques.org
For contacts: voixpolyphoniques@lafriche.org

UDI GRUDI (Brazil)

Udi Grudi, directed by Leo Sykes, has just opened its new show *Ovo*, a performance of musical clowns and other strange beings. *Ovo* will be at the Edinburgh Festival in 2004 and will be performed in Holstebro in September 2004 as part of Odin Teatret's 40th birthday celebrations. Udi Grudi has also recently created a musical street performance, *Lixaranga*. All the musical instruments are invented by one of the actors and are made of alternative materials such as old plastic bottles and kitchen tiles.

Leo Sykes and Marcelo Beré also announce the birth of their second daughter, Maya.

ANTONIA BUENO

(Spain)

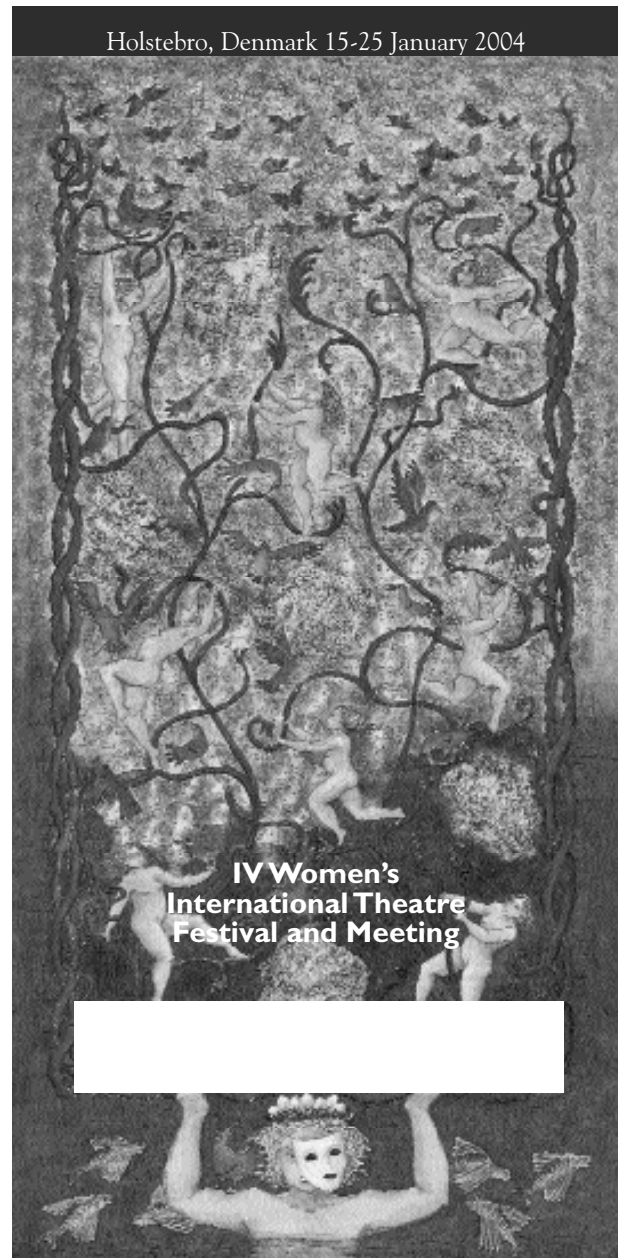
Antonia Bueno from Madrid has written, directed and produced the second play of her *Trilogía de mujeres medievales* (Trilogy of medieval women). The first part was *Sancha, Reina de la Hispania* (Sancha, Queen of Hispania) and after the play which is now being staged, *Zahra, favorita de Al-Andalus* (Zahra, favourite of Al-Andalus), she will work on *Raquel, hija de Sefarad* (Raquel, daughter of Sefarad). *Zahra* describes the arrival in Morocco of hundreds of people who were expelled from Spain and creates a parallel with the contemporary situation, where, like a wave, history is again bringing people through the Straits of Gibraltar.

ROOTS IN TRANSIT (Denmark)

The 4th Women's International Theatre Meeting and Festival *Roots in Transit* took place in Holstebro, Denmark from the 15th to the 25th of January 2004. Hosted by Odin Teatret and directed by Julia Varley *Roots in Transit* consisted of two different parts. During the first five days sixty participants took part in workshops led by Ileana Citaristi and Ana Woolf, Sandra Pasini and Julia Varley, Geddy Aniksdal and Brigitte Cirila, Ni Nyoman Candri, Cristina Wistari and Claudia Contin. Simultaneously Sally Rodwell, Deborah Hunt and Hisako Miura led a production process using masks entitled *Strange Council*.

The second part of the festival presented a total of twenty-seven performances, as well as training sessions, debates, lectures and demonstrations. Thirty-six countries were represented with one hundred and forty women gathered to exchange opinions and experience on the theme of "roots".

The festival was opened with an encounter of voices: Cherifa from the Berber tradition of Morocco, Luisa Calcumil, a Mapuche from Argentina, and Ni Nyoman



Candri from Bali exchanged gifts and greetings coming together in the white room giving a strong emotional start to the work. After the traditional closing round, the festival ended with a banquet feast.

The whole festival is documented through video, photographs and writings. Further feedback, thoughts and reports can be found at www.themagdalenaproject.org