

Timișoara, building bridges between cultures

Irina Wolf

The Euroregional Theatre Festival in Timișoara (TESZT), inaugurated in 2008 by Csiky Gergely Hungarian State Theatre with the aim of supporting a more frequent collaboration among theatres in the region, is closely related to the geographical position of the Romanian city which lies about 100 km away from the Hungarian border and even nearer to the Serbian one.

The opening show of this year's edition which took place from 21 to 28 May perfectly illustrated the festival's goal. Staged by Árpád Schilling, **EXIT** was a co-production between the Ioan Slavici Classical Theatre in Arad (Romania), the National Theatre in Sombor (Serbia) and the organizer of TESZT. The piece developed from the actors' improvisation exercises addresses a subject of contemporary significance: migration. After their arrival in Great Britain, twelve people who fled from Eastern Europe to the West looking for a better life, are locked up in a building. As the British authorities postpone indefinitely their exit from the edifice, the migrants undergo significant transformations to the point where survival skills become essential. In the Main Hall of the Hungarian State Theatre no sets or costumes are used. The minimalist aesthetics of the empty stage allows the viewers to focus on the dialogue between the characters, who speak Hungarian, Romanian, Serbian and English. The audience can follow the text through surtitles in three languages – a common practice used throughout the festival. Despite its tragical component, the show includes a great amount of wit as prejudices are carried to the extreme. EXIT is a mirror of our society undergoing a process of dehumanization and alienation.

Besides Árpád Schilling, major directors like Hajdu Szabolcs, Urbán András, Kokan Mladenović, Gianina Cărbunariu and David Schwartz – both well-known for their political theatre, but also Kristóf Kelemen, one of the great exponents of the young generation and choreographer Adrienn Hód, concluded the group of significant artists from the region. The themes covered a wide range of topics, ranging from ethics in art to the human condition and police brutality. A production of BITEF was quite an unexpected revelation. After having been on a research trip to North Korea, playwrights Maja Pelević and Olga Dimitrijević gave a multimedia presentation of the country's peculiarities. **Freedom is the most expensive capitalist word** was a dynamic, interactive show, which delighted the audience especially through the “Shopping time” scenes during which both performers

successfully sold souvenirs like eternal youth liquor or Korean unification puzzles to spectators, even if, in the end, some of these proved to be fake.

Birdie by Agrupación Señor Serrano and **Riding on a Cloud** by Rabih Mroué stood out among the international performances selected by Balázs Attila, festival director, and Gálovits Zoltán, artistic consultant. Theatre Koreja from Lecce took to presenting the Tragedy of Otranto in **Katër i Radës. The Shipwreck**, whereas German director Oliver Zahn analyzed the origin and use of the Hitler salute in **Situation with Outstretched Arm**.

The daily festival schedule consisted of three shows. But the distinctive feature of this edition was made up of one-to-one performances presented in different locations like art galleries, library rooms or on the Bega Canal. Artists from Poland, Spain, Austria, United Kingdom, Portugal and Romania created through their special concepts intimate atmospheres and provoked to self-reflection. Being preoccupied by environmental issues, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia invited her participant on a journey in an original water paddle boat to envisioning a new society. **Common Dreams** emerged to a contemplation on survival schemes in a utopian future based on generosity, equality and respect. **The Agency of Touch** turned out to be a sublime encounter between one pair of hands and one body. By using a special kind of tactile treatment, Mădălina Dan evoked in each participant lying down with his eyes closed a variety of sensations. Both performances ended with the “spectator” being invited to make a drawing of his experience, bringing thus his perceptions to a conscious level.

TESZT celebrated its tenth anniversary with a mature lineup that featured likewise debates, discussions with the artists, a workshop led by Bulgarian performer Ivo Dimchev – who also gave with **Songs from my Shows** a live concert as closing event.