

„Holy“. Written, directed and choreographed by Duda Paiva (Netherlands). Scenography and playwright by Yaka Ivanc (Slovenia). Puppets Jim Barnard (Great Britain). Costumes Julian Tabakov. Assistant Director Manuela Sarkissyan. Cast: Tsvetoslava Simeonova (Rebecca), Ivet Lazarova (Maria), Dimitar Todorov (Arthur), Marieta Petrova (Lilo) and Ivan Raykov (Butler). International Project of Sofia Puppet Theater. Premiere on 19.9.2012.

Sincerely for „Holy“

Silvia Hristova

„I was astonished by the fact that I came to put in Sofia Puppet Theater, respectful of the talent of its actors, but actually faced the greatest resistance on their behalf! I have directed in many places, but nothing like that happened before“ - Duda Paiva said to me with a mixture of surprise and disappointment on her second visit to Bulgaria.

Fortunately, (and unfortunately), I was able to follow this project from the very beginning, „behind the walls of the fortress“ as the playwright of Sofia Puppet Theater then, so my opinion is certainly subjective, emotional and thus extreme, but, maybe, because of that, precious!

The implementation of the project „Saint“, which later assumed the pretty good title „Holy“, began after a long exchange of e-mails in February 2012, when Duda held his three-day casting for choice of cast. That is when the narrow-minded conformism of the acting part of the team of SPT „showed up“. Most of them did not want to participate. For different reasons! Then Duda really acted with diplomacy and really made the wisest decision - into the project he admitted only those people, who longed to work with him and thought it would be a unique chance to reach different, banally said, creative horizons. For me this was an absurd situation - stage-shifters were anticipating the arrival of Duda Paiva (one of them even took part in the competition), the interest from applicants outside of SPT was huge, but the most interested - the actors from SPT - were dominated by cool criticism and destructive pessimism!

Among the selected, who received the director's approval of Duda Paiva, were the most motivated and keen on his style of staging - Marieta Petrova, Ivet Lazarova, Dimitar Todorov Tsvetoslava Simeonova and Ivan Raykov! Duda Paiva kept a distance from all actors, who according to his point of view, were fighting with their own ego - he did not have time to gain someone else's battles.

I begin with pure facts and the enormous desire to reflect a bit without any hints on how a big event of the Bulgarian puppet stage was organized and took place.

Somehow, the forcefully imposed marketing thinking in our home theater converted the creative existence into agony and the creative spontaneity was reduced to an estimated commercial risk. „Holy“ is a bold puppet experiment, discussed and refuted in its own native place, which naturally determines a hard future. Adding an additional factor - this is a performance that belongs to the performances for adults - a genre that in our country still cannot find its audience.

Again, fortunately (or unfortunately) just during the rehearsals I was not a playwright of SPT anymore and stood away from the

rehearsal process... I showed up directly at the premiere and I still remember the feeling that dominated me throughout the show - an almost emotional numbness when from the stage you sense that something is happening, that a really specific energy is flowing around and it pierces you and grips your attention. Actors who I used to see in the role of brilliant performers in children's productions of SPT, now were trying to absorb into something very deep, serious and even frightening to them. Yes, their behavior was shy, especially in the drama sections of the show, but only by one specific actor training, Duda Paiva had accomplished wonders. „Holy“ was rehearsed and „put together“ only for one month. The director came with a sketched draft of the story and it came to life during rehearsals and improvisations with the actors. The first performances went under the slogan „open rehearsals“ and ended with conversations with the audience - naturally full of professional theater experts. Duda sat down with a pencil in his hand and listened sincerely to the opinion of everyone (a practice that may be useful to our directors!). I almost smiled as I watched him agitate by any negative criticism and record it in his notebook... And I was convinced that when he had to, he would pay attention to the remarks...

The prevailing professional opinion is that Duda Paiva is a brilliant performer, but as a director he has not yet found his way... And „Holy“ is an egocentric expression of his directing narcissism, or simply put - a creative „self-sufficiency“ (I would use another word, but they would not publish it!)

I would warmly welcome such „self-sufficiency“ and from our directors, as long as they manage to combine both homogeneously and sincerely dance, puppet and conceptual theater with the truly justified use of multimedia (as one journalist said on one of the Open rehearsals)...

In fact, it is always right to hear both sides...

Silvia Hristova talked to Duda Paiva

- First at all I want to tell you that I am in love with your „Holy“.

- Oh, thank you! You are very kind!

- What about you - are you satisfied with your work for Sofia Puppet Theatre?

- There are a lot of things that happened during the process of creation. There were a lot of limitations because of the body language of the actors, but they led me somewhere else because they were so eager to do it. That really inspired me to work with them, within their possibilities.

- In which countries have you worked?

- All Europe, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, Canada.

- Are very Bulgarian actors very different from the others?

- Bulgarian actors have passion in what they do. At puppet theatre I constantly remind them of the awareness of the body as a strong device in the story telling. Combined with the art of puppet manipulation it opens a

different door in the way that they are used to work, but they face the challenge with courage and talent.

- Talking about the story, what`s the story about in your new performance?

- I am producing a new show in Norway which is touring in 30 cities right now. I use mythological stories in order to extract a comment about human archetypes from the past and make a comparison with Modern Times.

- Oh, are you talking about this one in Italy?

- There is a huge festival in North Italy - „Teatro a corte“. It`s very famous, but it`s not a puppet festival, it`s for contemporary art. And I`ve got the prize, the Italian prize to present this festival and this is a big success for my company. We went to Milan to get the prize. It was very nice. Yes, actually it`s a big international project that involves many countries - I am going to start in Norway, after that I`ll continue in the Netherlands and Italy.

- Tell me something more about your company, just in a few words?

- Dudapaiva Company investigates the combination between object and theatre, dance and multimedia. This combined art form creates a unique theatrical idiom.

- At first you were a dancer and after that you fell in love with the puppet?

- I have been a professional modern dancer in Europe for ten years and I became really selfish and egocentric in the way of making art. Extremely. Exactly the opposite of my nature. And the puppets were the bridge between me and the audience, between me and the people. The modern dance is an intellectual art, you can have only one person in the hall or you can have a thousand, it doesn`t matter. You do not even need the audience, but the puppet needs it always. The audience tells you if the puppet is alive. That`s what the puppet did for me - it gave me the opportunity to have a close relationship with the public. We are making music together. I can`t sing but I can make music with my puppets.

- Do you sing?

- I can`t sing but I can make music with my puppets.

- Will you start singing?

- I am not a good singer, this is my dream, but unfortunately... may be in my next life.

- Let`s talk about the story in „Holy“? What happens there? Once you told me that you were going to use motives from the Bible?

- I reduced the Bible elements as much as I could because I prefer to emphasize more on the very general feeling of fear of death, of fear to be nothing, of fear to be forgotten. The Bible was the holiest tool I could think about as a first inspiration for this show.

- That`s why the main character Rebecca became blue - what does this color represent for you?

- I used this color in order to define the moment when you discover that you face the end and the fact that you will no longer exist, but you still want to live and still feel young inside, but the body has changed.

- Usually mind is dead and the body is still alive. You treat on the contrary this issue - the body is dying but the mind wants to live. People usually find death firstly in their hearts and their minds and after that comes the end of the body.

- Yes, this is my view of life. I mean the mind is still very active... May be we must turn back to my past, to my childhood. I was always very sick since I was born. I was very fragile and I almost lost my sight. I had many health problems and I am still having them. But that was good because when you are limited, the ways to escape are two - either you overcome the situation or you become a slave of this limitation. In my case my mind became stronger, more alive than my body.

- And now ?

- I am getting older and my mind is fifteen years old and this is horrible - young mind in an old body.

- And why the new generation is so absent-minded and rather dangerous in your eyes?

- Why do you say that?

- Well, the Big baby is like a monster that destroys everything around.

- With his exaggerated dimensions (he is 2 meters) he extrapolates the notion of space, gravity and reality and he „destroys“ what is preconceived. By doing that he brings new ideas and opens new doors (methaphorically speaking).

- May be you have changed some things now on your second visit because in the first version of your performance you did.

- The second visit was to reinforce the dramaturgic line and cut that I thought was excessive.

- And why did you create him so big? And for me your performance gives the impression that the new generation brings nothing good, nothing positive. This big little monster represents only a danger. I didn`t find the final very positive indeed.

- Interesting. Well... it`s a bit scary... but I don`t think he is dangerous!!! He represents the innocence which can be something huge indeed and he breaks barriers. Or at least he is not more dangerous than life itself. It depends on how you look at it. My intention is to give a poetic ending to the show and leave space for interpretation of the audience.

- And what is your statement about the everlasting conflict between the different generations - old and young - they never achieve an agreement. For example, did your parents help you to...

- To be what I am today.

- Did they understand you?

- Not in the beginning. But now we openly learn from each other in a friendly way. That`s the beauty of maturity. We talk about different cultures and values. But they just made me stronger. They gave me the opportunity to fight. Now, finally my family accepts what I am but I have really fought for this. Nowadays they really support me and do everything they can and I am very grateful to them.

- So we can tell that „Holy“ treats the item of the difficult relationship between the different generations. What do you want to say with your performance?

- I want to say that whatever generation you are, whatever conflict you have, there is always a space for transformation. And that`s really universal, it really doesn`t matter what kind of generation you are, you can always change, you can always transform and accept yourself, not only the others. Because before accepting the others, firstly you must

accept yourself. Although it may sound pragmatic, but in simple words that's how I can explain it.

- I see that you are making a new version of „Holy“. About two months ago you did an open performance with audience. Did you understand something new about your work? What did you change in your performance, concerning these discussions?

- Oh, yes, definitely. I care a lot about the audience because after all I don't do all this for myself. Sometimes when you are making a show you are so connected to it that you believe that you deliver successfully your message, but often the reality is completely different. Sometimes your own show can teach you where it wants to go but you are the director so I'm striving to achieve a balance. I also have to see how the audience accepts my performance, how my work is going on. I had a „feedback“ and I really felt closer to the things I wanted to tell and some that didn't work. I took the information and I made them work.

- You told me that you are working with so little puppets for the first time.

- No, I used them ten years ago. I am in love with their beauty and vulnerability and very tiny things are blowing up with live video. The emotional state in the control of the actors when they manipulate such small puppets needs a special delicacy, which is very precious.

- You said that „Holy“ is also very experimental and rebellious. Why?

- This performance is very experimental for me because of the way choreography and story telling are mixed together. We have a very abstract choreography that helps to tell the story upon an emotional and aesthetic level. It's not easy to combine so many techniques and subjects. We will try to change the Bulgarian puppet's language for sure, the way of combining a show with a puppet is very different. Not only in Bulgaria, we are making different theatre in general. Because a puppet needs a story to be told on stage while dance sublimates the linear aspect of storytelling.

- We arrive to the hot moments – sex is always present in your works?

- I think sex in live is always present.



The actress Marieta Petrova for her work with puppets in „Holy“

„A very interesting director – because of the tasks he has given, because of what he was searching in each one of us. How far can you go in the concentration to control a puppet, which actually is almost uncontrollable. The puppets in this show are so tiny, with a toothpick stuck in their head and you turn them in your hands and you simply do not know how to grab them. And in the moment, you as an actor feel tension, it is immediately forwarded to the puppet and becomes noticeable to the viewer. The puppet itself begins to tremble as a whole, because it is made of foam and is hypersensitive to touch. We have not done such a thing before in SPT – to work with such small puppets. It required absolute precision. And imagine what will happen with a stage-fright.“

- You don't use it to be provocative, do you?

- No, my art is really not provocative in that way.

- Yes, it's rather violent.

- It's rather shy. It's still doesn't compare with what I would like to do... or what Ivo Dimchev does.

- Do you know him?

- No, but I am following everything that he does. He is a genius.

- A final question – how did you manage to convince Kiryakos Argiropoulos to do this show without any script and concrete ideas?

- I have been invited to come on your festival several times. On the other hand Kiryakos has been looking at my work and the development of my research throughout the years and somehow he appreciated it. It is not the script that matters but my way of making theatre. You can't step forward in the art and in the theatre without taking a risk.

- Did you ever failed in any project working without script?

- This is quite individual. It happened that I consider some performance kind of sucks, but people admire it or I like it very much but nobody understands it.

- I am talking about the cases when you feel inside that you didn't succeed and you were not able to communicate your directors' intentions?

- Many times... it's really subjective. You have to listen all the time to what the work is asking. That's how I am making theatre and I am an actor. I also listen to the audience, I need this open dialogue, this special close relationship that helps me grow. Being close I can listen and understand more the other persons. We must think about the collective as well.

- Do you always do an open rehearsal?

- Always. I learnt this practice in Holland... After a lot of failures...

A wicked light in the eyes of Duda flared very slightly and for a while. The tease was harmless and left me with the feeling that for him the dialogue is really an important form of communication. All that we have said is stored in the director's memory and will be used at the right time. ■

The actress Tzvetoslava Simeonova for her role as the mother in „Holy“

„For me, the role of the older woman Rebecca in „Holy“ is something very different from anything that I have done in theater before. She is a very rich and complex character, extreme in her reactions, passing through opposite emotional states of pain, love, joy, fear, pride, inexorability, authority... „A crazy“ woman, trapped into a vortex of hormones, obsessions, negative balance-sheet. Her birthday becomes the final point of her existence, when she chooses to get immersed into another reality, giving way to the new ... The role is profound, exciting and challenging. I worked on it with all my heart and maybe that helped me overcome a number of difficulties – like the language barrier and the very short rehearsal process – just a month, which is not enough for this type of performance, but Duda really managed to compensate that with understanding and dedication...“

Translation by Nadia Zhereva