Monologue for Street Theater

Boryana Georgieva recorded the monologue of the scenographer prof. **Maya Petrova**

A happening-parade of the School for Attraction Arts to the National Palace of Children in Sofia. Unfortunately, the rain obstacled the parade, which had to pass from the garden in front of the National Theatre to the Youth Theatre, where the opening was. I say unfortunately, because this type of attractions, such as the performance-parade, which includes the viewer himself who becomes part of the performance, are extremely important, especially at a festival, such as the Puppet Fair in Sofia. In fact, it is now known as a festival for street and puppet theater. This is extremely important for the promotion of the festival and the activity of the puppet theater. The show was held in the lobby of the Youth Theatre. For me, this is a unique troupe with a very high level of professionalism, children from 8 to 18 years and as I read in the program a large number of the children were from an orphanage in Sofia.

This is an amazing integration by the art and to the art of these children and it was nice to watch them because the show involved many types of circus art – juggling, acrobatics, stilt, swallowing fire, live sculptures... Watching the show, one sees the joy of the children participating in such a performance, a very high level of professionalism, that I admired a lot. They infected the audience with enthusiasm, joy, cheered them up in the middle of the pouring rain and I am not surprised that they have won awards, mostly international. This is admirable. The instructors have achieved a lot with these kids. Even when the smallest mistakes were made (whether clubs or hoops fell or they could not blow the fire sometimes), they were so charming playing it, that the joy and the enthusiasm, that they were feeling, was obvious and contagious. And, of course, this was transmitted to the viewers.

In fact, for me the selection of street theaters this time was on a much higher level than in previous years. „Circoactivo“ (Spain) with the show **„Air“** of the author Ivan Alonso was a very interesting performance. Captivating, highly innovative performance, with very active participation of the audience all the time, and this in a charming, intriguing manner, without the aggression, that the street actors often have, and what mattered most – with a great sense of humor. The means, which the actor used, were very simple. Actually this was a sectional rod-pylon (five meters long), a bucket, an umbrella, a suit – cami-knickers, which he weared at the beginning and took off off during the show in a very attractive and comic way, until he reached almost a striptease and remained in briefs. The other element was a carpet-arena, which determined his place of action, a small magic suitcase from which the actor took out the small accessories and played with an exceptional skill with every attribute, every props and changed its purpose. The bucket became a ladder and then he put it on his head, and during all that time Ivan Alonso communicated with the audience, which was a participant, i.e. they underpinned the so-called pylon, which

was on a small stand. The plot was simple and fairy. The construction of a floating circus. And this was natural with the active help of the audience. I can say that Alonso is truly an actor virtuoso, acrobat and a clown, but not only in the popular sense of slapstick that we are used to watching. For me, it was striking precisely the grace, which he showed in the performance of acrobatics, the ease by which he managed everything. As if in his performance there was a challenge to gravity. When you watch him climb on this five-meter pylon, you feel that the actor may collapse at any moment. And you wonder how he is managing with this extraordinary flexibility. The audience held their breath, because the overcome of the gravity was achieved with incredible acrobatic performances and with comedic, absurd slapstick. He played out every element, used on stage. In the show the inclination to the pylon is

„Свободният клоун“
„Clown in Liberta“

now a symbol of something else (a storm, a chaos) the turning down of the umbrella forms a ship ... Children were included in the show, along with the actor they overcame the distance, when they had to give him an item. And all that in a comic-drama way.

„Cock Tales“ of „Passepartout“ Theater (Germany). I watched the show in the South Park in the middle of the grass, fountains and on the ground of course. They were three feathered, a trio of a pompous, vain, brawler cock, quarrelsome, envious, vain mother hen and a rickety, nervous, at times choleric, at times cocky and aggressive chicken. This was a kind of music show – a show with funny played scenes with the participation of human beings and animals, because that was the time when people walked their dogs and the dogs, similar to people, enjoyed and responded to the feathered. What was very impressive was their flexible behavior and the building of the typical images, that is, the different types of characters and a masterful musical performance (a very remembering and readable musical score). The music and the sounds, that illustrated their condition, were sufficient to conduct something like a conversation and contact – only by the sounds of wind instruments.

The characters themselves were attractive, funny, with some wonderfully made costumes and impressive makeup. The story was simple and funny, a conflict between the feathered, but most impressive really was their flexibility – chicken's, cock's, or hen's. Step, behavior that clearly highlighted the nature of the characters and in a way that was cartoon, clever, funny. For example in the typical bird behavior – flapping, attempt of flying, or rather flying about, fluffing up, stiffening, sticking bottoms out, attacking each other, hatching, i.e. various options. They were extremely funny. For example, the hen started to hatch and the cock walked around her, making court to her, urging her to be faster. And she did not hatch out an egg, but a banana, for example. Or finally, at the end, she hatched out a golden egg or an addle egg. And no claim to a complex show only with flexibility and sound, with findings in communicating, an extremely comic and funny to watch story, was told, and the audience reacted beautifully.

Usually these are simple stories that are played with plain means. But there was a show that was complete, a family show of full value – **„The Strongman“** of „Bash Street Theater“ (England). It enchanted me! The style of the show was inspired by the silent movies, Charlie Chaplin, „The circus“ and „The road“ by Fellini. Artistically consistent show, on a high level, with a simple, functional, inventive, surprising, magical in its surprises scenography, sustained in black and white, as the silent movies are. With funny, stylish and functional suits, also developed in black, white and grey with possibilities for fast and effective transformation. A bright comedy show with a live band, as in silent movies. The plot was simple, semi-classic. A circus came to town with its circus attractions. The boss of the circus naturally was a negative character. There was a maltreat woman, wife of the former „Strong man“. The boss was looking for a new actor, and the one, who he met, as fortune willed, was a casual and insignificant passenger. Looking thin, but with inner strength, he won the actress. The show was full of endless intrigue that could happen in life and in a work environment. With a lot of jealousy, infidelity, endless pursuit, made in a very comic way, attempts on murder. The show was an explosion of comic scenes, made very professionally, comically, magically and attractively. There were entry and exit of a box (middle, supposedly neutral space, and you wonder how the actor can bend or stretch inside), the scenery itself disjointed and closed. The audience reacted incredibly nice. Usually this type of comedy shows is predictable as an action, but here we were constantly surprised. I speak both for the scenery, which is supposed to look very simple, but is incredibly functional and precisely these details, small matters (like opening windows, tearing down shutters, dividing the actual boxes, which make up the scenery) were very impressive, including the present-

ing of the magic chest, the head without body or the body without head, in a very funny and unsolvable way. A very stylish performance, I enjoyed the fact that it did not deviate from the task they had set not even for a second. Both the acting and the scenery were well sustained from the beginning to the end in this stylistics. This is wonderful. Of course, you could recognize in the scenes models from the silent movies, in the behavior of the actors, in the elements that they used, you could recognize the actors from the silent films and their tricks. That is why the live music also helped. With the reaction of every single thing, including the clapping of the hands of the audience, the rhythm changed and this provoked even more applause.

Fire Theatre of Bulgaria presented **„Anima alegra"** („Happy soul"). This is one of the few theaters, playing street performances in Bulgaria. It is present in the program of almost all puppet festivals with different performances. „Anima Alegra" was played in front of the National Theatre and exactly on Saturday, the last day, when it was accompanied by an initiative of the municipality, with an infinite number of interesting workshops for children, there were also other performances. The show was built in the style of the Italian Commedia dell' Arte, in the style of the Venetian carnival. The poetic story of the puppet Piero, who wanted or desired to obtain a heart and become a human being. The play of actors, who led Piero, on stilts, was attractive. The performance itself was played with luxurious, vivid costumes of nice material, with a very beautiful makeup. The appearance, always very attractive to children, was also very impressive. In this way fairytale characters like the Moon's daughter, the Sun's son appeared. He was the one that became friends with the puppet and helped him overcome the obstacles, in order to reach to the human heart and become a human being. Actually, it was a journey from the puppet to the human being. Similar performances always attract the attention and have a lot of audience.

Naturally, street theater and street performances are the oldest, they precede the theatrical performances indoors. Unfortunately, in Bulgaria, especially in the second half of the XX century and even nowadays we do not have traditions of the street performances. So it is joyful that at the Festival in Sofia, which is known now as „street and puppet theater", they invite more and more interesting street performances. In Europe there are countless festivals dedicated to street theater or as in most countries it is called „street art". Last year I had the opportunity and luck to be in Charleville Mezieres on the 50-year anniversary of the Festival and 30 years of the Academy. The World Festival is always accompanied, with exception of the performances off, which are in halls, also of street performances. In the whole big center of the city and not only there the space is divided into sections, plots, which are programmed exactly for street performances with a very strict program, which starts early in the morning and ends very late at night. It is calculated so that they do not interfere mutually when played together. At the World Festival in Charleville last year the street troupes were over 450 groups. What is curious in street performances, is that besides the classic slapstick, juggling and acrobatics, more and more performances with their own plot, playwright, development and very interesting, attractive forms, appear. That is, these are performances, really designed for the street and the vision that has been searched from the artists, is that it is able to attract the audience, to be very bright. For example, at the festival there was a Spanish troupe that played „Odyssey" – a performance that lasted 3 hours. There was a huge horse with doors that opened, things were played out and they moved from one place to another, and the audience followed them, of course not all the time, but everything was unexpected as appearance and rarely seen as a show. We would like that at our festival special spaces are build – tents, enclosures or a bus in which they play for a few viewers, or a car. I have seen performances, playing spaces for, let's say, 2-3 viewers. And you wait on a queue to see a 5-minute story. These unconventional spaces always attract the audience.

The viewer knows that at a certain time, on a determinate place, you go to watch a show. It is still street, but of a slightly different type as curiously shaped area. I can compare the Festival in Charleville with another festival that I saw last year in Hradec Kralove. This was a festival of the regions in Europe, where besides all the puppet and drama theaters with worldwide famous artists, there were 200 Czech and international troupes who played until 2-3 A.M on the street. From early in the morning (for the kids) – till late evening. Apart from the old city center, a whole of a park below the castle was prepared for these street performances. The magic in the street performances is precisely the skill of the actor to achieve contact with the audience and provoke it to participate. Not all of them can do it, but when this happens, is wonderful. In Charleville the variety of troupes was huge.

On both festivals, that I watched, there was selection as well as for the street theaters. There are few things that are not interesting, and not every street actor who comes, can play his show somewhere. The variety of forms and of the vision becomes more and more interesting and it does not matter whether we have paper, metal or wood puppets, or the play is with lit fires. The competition between street players also is great, especially for their participation in international forums. And it is very joyful, and I hope, that more and more interesting troupes will come to us in Sofia, at the festival „Puppet Fair".

There are big street troupes – with many actors and many interesting shows that we will hardly have the financial ability to invite here. For example, in Charleville this type of shows are played at the opening and at the closure. One of these troupes is „Royal de Luxe", another is a Spanish theater of fire and fireworks with flying actors, with inflatable scenery that cover the entire city. In fact, these are attractions, which in most cases are financed by the municipalities. They are always kind of a parade, in which the action takes place mainly in one place – usually on the largest square. But a parade, which involves all the viewers, who follow the playing actors, is also made. And it is possible to plan in the future to make such attractions in our country too, especially by our young artists – scenographers, directors, actors. This is a worldwide challenge. We can and we should engage ourselves in such attractions some day. ■

Translation by **Nadia Zhereva**