

Tremendous Joy and Silent Melancholy in Varna

Nikola Vandov

And so, the XVI edition of the prestigious Varna Puppet Festival has already passed. As usual, it presented nice and no so nice shows. The new meaning of the festival does not include the creation and the distribution of Bulgarian puppet dramaturgy abroad, as it used to happen before. And this is a pity. Even today, awards for original plays or dramatizations are granted, but as a rule these awards are refused to be conferred by the Jury. Considering this, today's competition is poor and uninteresting. Recently, I came to realize that the boom of the puppet dramaturgy, an event that happened long time ago and was headed by persons like Valeri Petrov, Rada Moskova, Boris Aprilov – let us stop here, because there are many more, could not be repeated. I hope that something else might happen and this will be a landmark, which will follow the old exciting path of theater and the seeds of the new puppet expressiveness will be sown more efficiently in the gardens of puppet dramaturgy. Yes, but this might happen after some time. And today's situation only reinforces our melancholy and desperation.

And yet in the beginning – a contrast! Because this year's Festival was based on contrasts. The puppeteers were fascinating. They enchanted us directly from the stage, they won our attention, they made us laugh, they solved so difficult tasks and all of them demonstrated the same great abilities in the melodrama, the satirical farce, the didactic texts and the slapstick... Some of them showed remarkable skills in the popular

sketch and the dance theater. Today it is unthinkable to see them behind the screen (said better not to see them!). Because the puppet today is only present on the stage by chance or as an illustration, somewhat shy in the corner and maybe not necessary anymore.

The actor seems to feel uncomfortable, harmed by his intermediated (by the puppet) show. Today he is young, strong, handsome and gifted. And if not now when, and who if not him is going to play this role. Awarded actors from Varna Puppet Theater expressed their gratitude to Vera Stoykova for helping them achieve their dreams. You must be blind if you do not see that the spirit of collectivity, of spiritual society is characteristic for this type of theater. But I wonder and keep asking myself if it could not be possible that we start to dream not only in the field of variety (ballet, opera, circus, etc.), but also in quality – for going deeper in the possibilities of the unaccomplished, the unexplored and the unseen in the puppetry. The drama theater does not dispose with the possibilities of the puppet theater and this is an elementary truth, in which the puppeteers must be convinced. For them, it should be an initial occasion of pride, and not an occasion for feeling lack of importance, which will generate complexes. Here is Rhodes, so here you jump!

That is why I finished my words before the beginning of the award ceremony with saying the following: "During the last edition of the festival I examined your patience again with some words,

the idea of which was: "Do not forget to befriend the puppet often, the puppet is the tool, which makes this theater unique!" In this edition we saw 13 shows for children and 5 for adults. There were also puppet shows among the performances. Is not this worrying? Colleagues of mine, love the puppet, feel the God inside of you, because He can give life to the dead material, the puppet is the chance of this theater, and not the duty to play only rabbits and bears. I understand your great desire to experiment with the unknown, but the unknown can be sought mainly in the deep penetration of puppetry. Love the puppet, without your love it will remain lifeless and with empty eyes."

In the magnificent bulletin of the festival (edited with the talent and the professional attitude by Silvia Hristova and Nina Lokmadzhieva) can be read the words of Prof. Nikolina Georgieva, said on the occasion of the most widely discussed show (at least by the Jury): "This performance is some kind of happiness for the actors, but in a different theater field. They showed high qualities in this so called dance theater. The actors in the puppet theater develop all their capacities and therefore it is curious for them to play in shows, which are not typical for the puppet art, they are pleased with the participation in such shows. "Silent legends" is a complex theatrical project, rich in its means of expression – we have choreography, pantomime, multimedia, the dance that is prevailing. The topic and the perspective are very curious, the possibilities



of the troupe of actors from Varna are impressive and during the show they managed to demonstrate their diverse and versatile talent. A wonderful experiment, which I would like to see performed again... with puppets!"

This is said by a person, whose words we should listen attentively. It has always happened so and now it is a tradition, the fact that on the 4th of October meanwhile the Festival is held, Prof. Georgieva has a Birthday. In Varna the entire milieu of the puppetry gathers and this is the perfect occasion for Bulgarian puppeteers to express gratitude to their teacher. The ritual is memorable and beautiful because of its sincerity and spontaneity. The people in the hall stand up and applaud Prof. Georgieva. Flowers, smiles, kindness and love in everyone's heart. Now this is a holy tradition. Because the love for Nikolina Georgieva must also find some "vents", when today, let's say our shyness is trying to get over. And when we say to the person that we love, the one that we admire, the one that has helped us make our own "living", but has also made us love this "living" to insanity, and when we say to her that she is our criterion for so many things in the world

around us, that we will always want to look on our deeds from her perspective and that it is an incredible feeling – the fact that she has always been here, close to us – smiling, discreetly ironic and infectiously benevolent. And so by having her next to us, we are becoming a little kinder. Happy Birthday, Nikolina! We wish you a lot of health and many more "Golden Dolphins"...

After this lyrical digression, I would like to share with you the names of the foreign shows that have impressed me most. These are "Prometheus" and "Shakespeare's Daughter Tells Her Midsummer Night's Dream". They are very different, but close in their minimalism and the infectious energy of the performance. The daughter of Shakespeare is trying to understand the world, to understand the motives for Shakespeare's run away from the family, to understand both the world that he has escaped into and the world, in which he has created his plays. The humor is the typically English accurate, universal and witty. And at some point you forget that the puppets are too static, as if they were chessmen in the fields of history, because the engrossing of the storyteller has engrossed you as well.

The "trick" of Marcelo Lafontana in "Prometheus" is similar, but with the use of totally different means. What a might, what a concentration, what power of the impact. All that compensates the definite statics of this type of theater: the Indonesian shadow theater "Wayang Kulit". And now it is not the history, which is in the focus of our attention, but the mastership, the infectious energy, which incorporates us to the "preparation" of the show.

The critics have written a lot about the shows in Bulgaria. It seems to me that it is more important to say a few words about the changes, which this festival urgently needs.

After each show I keep on fighting with the impossibility of separating the show in its components. And I try to do this with endeavor and perseverance. Respecting all rules of the art of theater, I should say that these components are mutually interlaced artistic performances within the show, but life itself (f. ex. being member of the Jury, if this is life) makes us try to achieve the mentioned above impossibility. Do not think that I do not realize the whole relativity of the situation and the indispensable necessity to find an acceptable decision for at least most people.

Already after the first 2 days, I kept on noting "the individual" achievements and I noticed that on my personal list there are more names of stage designers than names of directors. Svila Velichkova, Stanislava Krasteva, Rin Yamamura, Dimitar Dimitrov, Petya Dimitrova... And the directors are only a few. So what is this? Is it a coincidence? Or is it a consequence of the fact that we live in the time of images, and not reflection?

In some of our puppet theaters shows (and these are the most interesting, and it is normal) it is established some specific, infec-

tious and enthusiastic way of performing the team work, which respectively leads to collective shows of the group, which is engaged with the show and so it would be unfair to distinguish only some of its members. Is it possible that in the “Tale of the Tramp-King“ of Sofia Puppet Theater you could point out only one of the actors and do not feel unfair to the others? Is it not how the troupes of Varna and Burgas have performed?

Obviously it is time to change the status of the festivals in their award sections. Maybe there should be more awards for the stage designers and the actors' awards should become more and more collectively granted...

In order to avoid the problem of puppet or non-puppet, a competition of shows should be held, and yet on the level of selection (this year the selector was Bogdana Kosturkova) the non-puppet shows should be drawn away from the competitor's program. Of course here, the definition “puppet“ shall be considered very open-mindedly: both classi-

cal puppet and object theatre, etc. all those types of theater, in which in general the dead object is revived by the actor.

I think that two years before the next festival there must be announced a playwright contest for Bulgarian puppet play. The Theater of Varna should be obliged to stage the text, which has won first award at the contest (if there is a winner). This play, translated into English, should be distributed among the guests of the festival and sent to the puppet theaters abroad.

And finally, I would like to thank Vera Stoykova – the life and the soul of this festival today – for the fact that she invited me to become a member of the International Jury and I would also like to thank my colleagues from Varna State Puppet Theater, which made the work as easy and pleasant as possible. And after all, nobody said that being a member of the Jury of a competition would guarantee calm and quiet life.

I owe a deep gratitude to the members of the Jury - Prof. Remo Melloni, Prof. Shu-Ming, Mr.



„Машината Ян Бибиан“
“Jan Bibian the machine“

Todor Ignatov, Mr. Nelko Kolarov and Mrs. Ina Bozhidarova, with whom I worked in special harmony, but I may also say, became friends. We discussed, specified our approaches to the shows, conceded and agreed with each other, and what matters most is that we finally reached unanimous agreement. It was love and concern for the art of puppetry - the things that related us. ■

Translation by **Nadia Zhereva**

Куклите могат всичко

Милена Минчева

Куклите са най-прекрасните не живи – живи същества, които човешката ръка може да одухотвори! Те плачат с нашите сълзи, смеят се с нашите усмивки и лекуват детските души! Станахме свидетели на това по време на XVI-я международен куклен фестивал „Златния делфин“, който превърна град Варна в мажоран пристан на красотата и добротата, където групи от различни краища на света показаха своето майсторство.

„Ла мар де марионетас“ от Мадрид, Испания ни убедиха в лечебната сила на куклите с постановката „Говори, не си сама“ с режисьори Хектор Лопез Хиронто и Марта Баутиста, която играе и една от главните роли. Спектакълът е за децата, претърпели сексуално насилие, проблем който, за съжаление, е често срещан в съвременното общество. И събира в себе си две приказки, едната европейска

„Магарешка кожа“, а другата африканска – за мочичето-маймуна. Историята разказва как главната героиня има своя тайна, която не смее да сподели. Тя е скрита зад кожа, която я предпазва от останалия свят. И се явява нейното второ „Аз“, чрез което тя контактува с околните. Нещо, което правят и жертвите, претърпели насилие. Те се затварят в себе си. Тях не можеш да ги докоснеш просто така, защото дори обикновено ръкостискане отключва в тях поредица от негативни емоции.

В постановката на „Ла мар де марионетас“ куклата контактува с кукли, за да предизвика усмивки по лицата на своите малки зрители с нелека съдба и да им покаже, че те не са виновни за това, което им се е случило, че не трябва да си мълчат и да таят всичко в себе си! А поетичният език и живата музика в спектакъла достигат до детското съзнание,