

## Introductory Note



The special focus of this issue is Eastern European theatre, for an obvious reason: the anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall. Thirty years later, it's no surprise that the key word for the traditionally very rich theatre landscape of this part of Europe is *diversity*. In addition to that, two other words come to the fore: *unusual* and *extraordinary*. They perfectly fit most of the over ten productions (created in nine countries and by artists from even more Eastern European countries) covered here.

One of them is a result of the unique multilingual undertaking of the Croatian National Theatre "Ivan pl. Zajc," in Rijeka, to gather five national minority European theatres to work together: the German Theatre of the City of Timisoara (Romania), the Slovene Permanent Theatre in Trieste (Italy), the National Institution Albanian Theatre, Skopje (Macedonia), the Hungarian Theatre Kosztolányi Dezs?, Subotica (Serbia), and its own Italian Drama section. Their co-production of *The Mountain Giants*, by Luigi Pirandello, directed by Paolo Magelli and reviewed here by Kim Cuculi?, comes as a central part of the *(Re)discovering Europe* program and as part of a pre-program celebrating Rijeka as a 2020 European Capital of Culture.

A first-ever is also *The Shadow of My Soul*, concept and directing by the Bulgarian Velemir Velevev, with a cast of entirely blind non-professional actors and a stunning high-level professionalism achieved on stage. Gergana Traikova writes about its deeply moving and spiritual-eye-opening effect, as well as about the polyvalent talent of its director, also a creator of a "School for Vision."

The Romanian critic Maria Z?rnescu offers another glimpse into the cross-cultural realities of Eastern Europe, presenting the eclectic, take-what-you-will-from-my-play *Merchant of Venice*, at the Hungarian Theatre in the Romanian city of Cluj. The show highlights the work of a team that is “a model of artistic force and creative discipline in the Romanian last decades,” and of a director, Gábor Tompa, whose position of an artistic and managing director of the theatre since 1990 puts him first “in the longevity top of theatre managers in Romania,” as Z?rnescu underlines.

Two shows of Jiří Havelka, the famous Czech master of documentary-inspired theatre who’s been urging audiences to rethink both its present and past are presented by Jitka Šotkovská. Appropriately defined by her as state-of-society theatre, they offer an opportunity for glimpsing into both the Czech and Slovak socio-political realities of today--one of the shows (*The Fellowship of Owners*) being produced at VOSTO5, Prague, and the other, (*Elites*) at the Slovak National Theater, Bratislava.

Three productions of another National Theatre – in Belgrade, Serbia – are reviewed by Ksenija Radulović. She chooses them as representative of the rise of its Drama department that started in 2015 and that marks a shift in paradigm of the institution. Namely: hosting “authors of the young and middle generations... whose aesthetics are in line with the latest dramatist and staging practices” and who have been artistically formed as “children of BITEF” (the Belgrade International Theatre Festival, held since 1967).

The panache of a fellow Eastern European festival, this time in Romania—the Sibiu International Theatre Festival, now ranking third in Europe in size and scope—and home of one of the most prominent contemporary directors—Silviu Purcărete—is the focus of Ion M. Tomu?’ review of *The Scarlet Princess*, at Radu Stanca National Theatre in Sibiu. Inspired by Tsuruya Namboku IV’s drama *Sakura Hime Azuma Bunshō* and by Kabuki theatre, the show is representative of the spectacular, larger-than-life directorial style of Purcărete. Moreover, it manages to literally “redesign multiculturalism,” as Tomu? puts it, enriching the Romanian-Japanese theatre embrace already well tried-out via touring of shows and the volunteer program of the Festival which bring tens of Japanese participants each year.

A festival of a much smaller size but of a very high artistic value is also presented here: the Mezinárodní festival Divadlo, in Pilsen, the Czech Republic. An overview of its typically strong 26<sup>th</sup> edition traces its underlying, albeit not explicitly announced, philosophical focus on the relationship between life and death in three of its most notable shows. “Life is what we borrow” – the refrain in *The Iliad*, the masterpiece take on the Homer’s classics by the Slovenian director Jernej Lorenci (in a co-production of the Slovenian National Theatre, Ljubljana City Theatre and Ljubljana Cultural and Congress Center) seems to resound through two other extraordinary shows. One is *Rooms after People*—a nearly metaphysical experience on the borderline between life and death, offered by the Berlin-based Rimini Protocol in an unassuming theatre-installation, with no actors involved. The other is *An Imitation of Life* by the new Hungarian star Kornél Mundruczó, directed by him at Proton Theatre, Budapest—quite riveting both with its sad documentary-based gypsy-maltreatment story and the set that slowly turns at 360 degrees upside-down in ten unforgettable minutes and makes the audience feel as if they have witnessed a tectonic cataclysm.

Finally, there are two hats-off farewells. To Eimuntas Nekrošius, the Lithuanian director, whose special, unmistakably his, theatre language – visceral and literally using the elements on stage – moved the borders of both Eastern European and world theatre ahead into the unknown. Artur Duda has reviewed his

production of Witold Gombrowicz's *Marriage*, at the National Theatre in Warsaw, and also his long-term relationship with Poland. And Krystyna Illakowicz has penned an appropriately memorable farewell note to Andrzej T. Wirth, known as ATW, an acronym referring to (Angewandte Theaterwissenschaft) the Institute of Applied Theater Studies he started in Giessen in 1982. We dedicate this issue to them.

The theatre of Eastern Europe is indeed so rich and diverse that all these are just glimpses into its wealth of stages, faces, endeavours, keeping and updating tradition, venturing into new territories. Importantly, the focus on it remains open for the next issue, too.

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[www.EuropeanStages.org](http://www.EuropeanStages.org)  
[europeanstages@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:europeanstages@gc.cuny.edu)