



WELCOME TO FRANCE A meeting in rural environment

After the first meeting of the BAROS partners in Genoa last December 2008, the second encounter took place in France between February 27th and March 4th 2009. The Zarina Khan Company whose headquarters are in Paris, proposed to their partners to join them in the region of Ardèche, in the 9th century citadel of Mirabel, where the Rhône-Alpes branch of the Zarina Khan Company settled in 2000.

Page 2

European Partners

Comment about why The Returns of Socrates is Social Theatre

Page 3-5



The Return of Socrates

It is the pedagogical and artistic approach adopted in The Return of Socrates that the Zarina Khan Company has chosen to share with their European partners

Page 3



“In February 2009, the Baros partners, after experiencing the most urban sort of social Theatre in the shopping arcades of Genoa, are confronted with a rural environment, with audiences they have to persuade to go down their steep villages and “leave the rake for the pen and climb on stage...” ZK

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Feedbacks

How living in this middle age village brought the transnational teams to deep and efficient sharings about social theatre.

Two films presented by the Company to debate and exchange.

Page 6

A meeting in rural environment

It was not a “tourist’s” choice; the purpose was to explore the innovations developed by the Company as well as their theatrical practices in rural areas. On the one hand, the Company set up a cultural café in a deserted village among fields and vineyards to attract an audience made up of agriculturists and building-trade workers who do not usually attend theatre performances, and also to activate the social link between people from backgrounds which do not mix. On the other hand, Zarina Khan created the concept of “Theatrical Wandering”, to go towards the farmers of the region and capture them, as they drive their tractors, on the paths taken by shepherds to pasture their flocks or in the vineyards tended by winegrowers. These wanderings are essentially constituted by the encounters with villagers and by unpublished documents; they become plays with music, bodies and voices which tell the story of the great characters that have left their mark on the land. The sites, the villages are staged and allow the public to discover their history and their cultural heritage, and above all, to communicate, meet and end the isolation of the elderly, of the sick or underprivileged, to open up on to a relation of solidarity. The Wandering about the history of Mirabel gathered the 300 inhabitants of the village as of the first year! Social links tightened strongly on that occasion. The Romanian delegation could enjoy that stroll through Mirabel livened up by a few excerpts...



It is undoubtedly important to contribute to the cultural lives of small villages which risk to be cut off from the mainstream cultural activities. The bottom up approach chosen is interesting.

AT



A very interesting and provoking experience. The background of the village contributed significantly to the break from the modern meaningless world and facilitated the understanding of artistic approach.

IS



I am really really grateful for the unique and special experience.

Those places became one of my favourites in this world. It was something like in a tale, returning back in time, discovering so many senses and most of all, a whole different style of living and approaching life. I believe that in Mirabel I was a step closer to happiness.

DR



The Return of Socrates

*Theatrical Programme of Education
for the promotion of Citizenship*

It is the pedagogical and artistic approach adopted in *The Return of Socrates* that the Zarina Khan Company has chosen to share with their European partners. While staying at the Theatre of Vals les Bains (a small spa town 17 kms from Mirabel) for 3 seasons, the Company initiated that programme to gather the inhabitants of little villages of Southern Ardèche around the universal character of Socrates. The ancient chorus of the Grecian City was thus formed with bakers, factory-workers, mayors, the President of the Chamber of Trades, teachers, pensioners and about a hundred children and adolescents. After a writing workshop, the participants (including handicapped adults and children with behavioural problems) became, after 5 sessions of 3 hours each, both the messengers of the speech of Socrates and the 170 actors of the play. The rehearsals allowed the European Partners to take part very concretely in the preparation of the play and in the training around citizenship and mutual listening and respect, and to work together. The 2 performances gave them the opportunity to discover a varied audience quite unfamiliar with the Theatre but who effectively participated in creating act 4 completely; act 4 is the immediate presentation of the texts written by the spectators and read in music.

The Mirabel Tribune

28th February - 3rd March 2009



“We condemn, then we understand the mistake, then we condemn again. The development of the play obliges us to search our own conscience, to ask ourselves essential questions and make decisions, and find new directions for the future”. IS



*“For years, I worked with children, teenagers and adults with handicaps. I have been very impressed by the dimension of the theatrical work around *The Return of Socrates*, by the beauty of the melody of the French text, although I could not understand the meaning of the words.*

The French partner had sent us the English translation of the text before the trip, and I had already been taken aback by the outstanding quality of the work.

During the rehearsals, I was struck by the peaceful and soothing atmosphere which pervaded the auditorium. More than 100 children were listening, calm and interested. If you can't understand with your ears, you can understand with your eyes.

*In the staging, the fourth Wall was missing, the wall which usually separates the actors from the spectators who watch the performance as out of a window opening onto a room; there, everyone was close to everyone else, in a sincere, new contact and there were no spectators. It is the major principle of the performance. You can't see the stage, the plot is near, above, behind you; **you are not a spectator but a participant in a human adventure.** For the video or sound insets, we ran to the control room, we crossed the auditorium, nothing was pre-recorded, everything was live and was being done gradually, by all together, and everything was in its place and was right.”*

TV



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Newsletter n°2 Baros France

It is first necessary to identify the disease, the cause of all the disorders which shake the world, and the social Theatre is a manner of treating those problems by sharpening everyone's conscience. Violence, injustice, totalitarianism, the dictatorships which are denounced in Socrates take place here and now in our world. The play reveals the major problems of our society. The technical devices which are used, the costumes, the permanent interaction with the public erase the limits of time and space to let the essential through and lead us to become aware of the tainted morals of the being, to start acting together to mend them. LI



We were no longer at the Theatre but in action, together, as citizens. DR

I saw that it was the first time that the children had played. That was very moving; each of them was giving something out of themselves, something true. One hundred actors who play the first performance, and not a single incident, not a single hitch! It is indeed the very process that you have been setting up that has made that smoothness possible and enabled everyone to find their place in that great coordination. They will never forget. TV



The social Theatre concerns the whole society; it is a remedy against social diseases. To transform society, it is first necessary to prepare it to change. The audience has the most important role. The spectators must understand the messages before becoming messengers in their turn because every citizen is entitled to promote transformation. For me, The Return of Socrates does meet that indispensable criterion of the social Theatre meant to cure the ills of a sick society. That play clearly calls the members of the audience to work together, and incites everyone to go beyond the bounds to cure the diseases of the human community.



FB

In Socrates, the actors, the audience, the stage director, the playwright are united in their humanity. The stage stretches in all directions; the audience goes onto the stage, the actors play in the auditorium. The faces which are projected on the screen are everyone's faces. Music was what I heard, a kind of music that is not usually heard at the Theatre. My neighbour was shouting, standing up; I could hear cries and murmurs all around, from the balcony, from the stalls. The trial was real and we were all judges. The emotional impact was incredible. DR



Socrates' sentences are pronounced consciously in front of an audience who reacts, interacts, and is called to participate effectively. The place of Socrates, a human being like us, in the centre, not only on a horizontal level but also on a vertical one when he rises above the children, suggests the capacity that we, mortals, have to rise too. The play helps us understand that human values can be aroused anew in every one of us, and that every one of us has a role to play in that awakening of conscience! LI



On the stage stood our future Socrates and all the future Socrates. CH

Page 4

The Return of Socrates is, in its very essence a social play. The creation of Act 4, writing and giving an immediate feedback of what they have seen, is extraordinary for the spectators. They are involved, invited to participate and share their feelings. Their words are at once said on stage, read in their entirety. Every one looks forward to hearing their own messages, to listening to those of the others. The whole community speaks and is listened to. We are at the heart of the social Theatre and Socrates provides evidence that the Theatre was effectively born FOR THE CITY!

DR



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That was a unique opportunity to be able to see the performance twice. The first time, I felt an incredible feeling of serene fulfilment, as if, all of a sudden, I understood French. I had become someone who participated, a citizen. That was a feeling of achievement, of perfection of the state of being. The second time, I felt I was immensely familiar with it all, I was at home. I work with very young children; as soon as they are 3 years old, we conjure up death with them. They are confronted with the death of a parent, of a grandparent. Children are emotionally very aware of death, of injustice, and they are structured with those notions; when we think that we must protect children from death and barbarity, and that they cannot understand, we are mistaken. Sharing those notions, as you recommend in Socrates, is more than important, and as a psychologist, I consider that theatrical work is essential to the development of children, and in particular of children with problems.

RB



The formidable contrast in Socrates between the children, the hope they represent and the horrors of war, has permitted to awaken the adults. As to their personal development, it was indeed fantastic. The adults learnt from the children. Those hundred children gathered for the robots' ballet were a sort of revelation for me, like the Wall by Pink Floyd. I have understood that it is hard for us to really face certain realities in this world, and that the children bring us round to do it.

During rehearsals, I could see how deeply the children were prepared for their roles of awakeners, for their responsibility as actors and citizens. It is just like in medicine, we cannot cure the sore part only; the whole body must be treated. To deal with the social diseases which undermine our world, we need remedies for the whole social network and not for a few isolated individuals. And what is the point of rehabilitating a few individuals to send them back into a rotten society? We need awakening tools on a large scale. The process of The Return of Socrates is a social remedy which develops the responsibility of individuals and incites them to transform and build that world together.

DR



As a painter, I really liked the stage process: the empty stage, the character of Socrates, central, alone, motionless at the beginning and then at the end, multiplying into a hundred Socrates, and motionlessness becoming movement. The ascent is permanent, it is an emotional crescendo, and at the same time, it is an elevation of the self. The background video is startling; I was in a film, in a film which was being made. I was eyes. Things were moving everywhere, around me; the movement of life took place on stage and in the auditorium as well. Here, the theatre is a place for living, for sharing, it is the place of the City.

IE



The reading of the audience's messages was for me the time to meet Socrates and ask him to forgive us for what we had done to the world.

CH



Accommodation and conviviality in Mirabel's old citadel.

To make the exchanges flexible and convivial, the European delegations were offered to live in old houses in Mirabel, to share meals at the Art'Kafé, and to discover the recipes of each partner country. The Italian delegation preferred the comfort of the hotel in Vals les Bains. The Lithuanians chose to join us at meal-times. Those encounters as village neighbours allowed us to know each other better, to exchange extensively on our mutual practices, to discover that it was possible for us to communicate in Russian - not in English only - with our Lithuanian friends and therefore, not to undergo the language barrier! Work was intense, nights short and enthusiasm unflagging.

One of our Moroccan trainees, Najet, prepared a couscous, the Moroccan national dish that the Romanians could discover, and the Romanians prepared their national dish with ingredients from Romania. Those were delightful moments to enjoy some regenerating rest and enable us to go on working late through the night.

Sharing and preparing meals at the Art'Kafé

It was the best time to discover our souls and to create links from heart to heart. This project around artistic approach is useless if we don't try to understand emotionally how everybody lives and works. Our values, our dreams and our personal philosophy are reflected in what we do and only by discovering the persons that we can understand the conception of an artistic approach. DR



Two films presented by the Company to debate and exchange.

Our European guests could discover, thanks to those 2 projections, the methodology of the Company in other contexts : people caught in wars or handicapped people living together in special homes. A lot of emotion was shared through very deep exchanges.

These films can be seen at these addresses baros.europole.org
www.zarinakhan.org

“Crossing oblivion” originated in a theatre workshop of the Company in a Home for mentally and physically handicapped people.

The films offer a more realistic perspective of the complex Company Zarina Khan's activities. IS

The films had a powerful impact on me and I admire those people who can have the power to live and talk and warm the moments spent in Sarajevo or in hospitals for people with severe disabilities. Those films did not show mainly the sufferance (this is the news style – making a show from pain and not respecting it) but the humanity of those people who are capable to live, love and feel in all unimaginable conditions. The faces of the persons were filled with strong living desire but at the same time a hidden sorrow and will to be perceived as normal. CH

*This films did make me to meditate more on some existential themes. **The ideas must be seen with high lucidity, powerful mind and personal desire to change –at least a little bit – the world we live in, starting by changing the attitude inside ourselves.** FB*

“The Dictionary of Life”, the story of a writing and theatre workshop set up by Zarina Khan in Sarajevo in 1993 during the war, with adolescents who were facing bombings, the loss of loved ones and hunger. That workshop resulted in a play which is performed in numerous countries to support all those who are caught in the horrors of war; a book followed as well as a programme of Education on Citizenship supported by the French Ministry of National Education, which is still played and rewritten across the world.

After the projection of that film, Nicolina School decided to translate and adapt The Dictionary of Life in 2009-2010, with the Theatre workshop at IASI!

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The purpose is not only to promote access to culture to all or invite everyone to enter the completed houses of artistic works, but also and above all to allow those who are excluded from it because of a difficult personal story, to step across the universe of creation and leave there their unique and precious words so that they become part of the cultural life of our society.

ZK

“When I was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2005, my first thought was that, at last, the Theatre was recognized as a fundamental instrument in the Peace process, in the fight against all forms of discrimination and barbarism, as the place for uniting and transforming the world.

When we were asked to participate in the European Learning Partnership Bread and Roses on Stage as French representatives, I welcomed that new opportunity to meet women and men from different countries who also work with the Theatre to promote their own change and also the positive transformation of everyone of us and the world.

ZK

A theatre without masks, a real one – very easy to replace with life itself, without falsity or useless effort. By this type of theatre you can rediscover yourself.

FB

The worlds of the social Theatre meet and learn from each other's riches, widening as much as possible the viewpoints, the scopes and reverse shots of the practices of each of them and of socially-oriented theatrical action. A real international cooperation is sketched out, with the implementation of works which reach beyond the initial goals of the BAROS exchange project.

The Next Meeting will take place in Vilnius, Lithuania, end of October 2009.

PARTNERS

Associazione Alias, Italy
 Teatro dell'Ortica, Italy
 Sigma Art, Romania
 Grup Scolar Nicolina, Romania
 Imotec, Lithuania
 Teatro Studija "T" Lituania
 Compagnie Zarina Khan



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Rasa Butkiene, Psychologist in Children Rehabilitation Centre School "Pusele", Lithuania
Indre Ercmonaite, visual artist at the Teatro Studija "T" in Vilnius, Lithuania



The five French teachers from primary school and college involved in the Return of Socrates project, sharing the happiness of a real pedagogical accomplishment

It is a long way to the discovery of who we are. Writing draws the path, the theatre is the lamp which lights it up.

ZK