

Zarina KHAN, a citizen of the world.

By Michel Pastré, Newspaper *Le Dauphiné Libéré*

When I met Zarina Khan, I met not just a sensitive, tolerant, sisterly woman, but also her desire for linking up people, for finding out their hidden gifts within them, her refusals of labels and exclusion.

As she was born in the Russian colony of Tunis, of a Russian mother and an Indian father, she considers herself a citizen of the world. She finds it impossible to belong to only one culture. No single school of thought or philosophy has shaped her mind more than another one. She has chosen Art. "Eastern and Western at the same time".

She preferred poetry as she was still learning writing. Later on, after studying philosophy, she became an actress, "in order to enable my body to express itself in space and tell a story". Then she became a stage director, for "a scene is like a page of a book you are reading". Zarina can speak several languages : French, which she learnt at school, Russian and English ; and Spanish, German and Italian too...she can translate Aeschylus from Ancient Greek to know him better. Aeschylus is the great passion of her life. "Two thousand years ago he invented drama". Since she discovered him, he has been in all her shows. In the middle of war, in Sarajevo, she created the *Dictionary of Life*, a show that is acted in 21 languages simultaneously.

For twenty years, she had been writing, acting, staging, developing a new type of workshop for stage writing and acting. In 1984 she founded the Compagnie Zarina KHAN in Paris, and in 2000 its little sister company was born, the Compagnie Zarina KHAN Rhône-Alpes. Lately, she stating filmmaking. "To make works that no producer would support". In 1996 she became her own producer and shot her first films. It is not her aim to earn money, but to go off the beaten track. She shot "Ados Amor" (Teenager Love) in the hardest Parisian suburbs in the midst of rival gangs in Seine Saint Denis. The actors ring true, they do not need to prove themselves as actors, they just want to prove they exist. When it was released, the film was dubbed "a movie UFO". Her last film, "Essabar ou l'Abri de l'être » (i.e. "Essabar or the Shelter of being") is the story, in the department of Drôme (Southern France) of a remedial teenager group during which we visit their inner desert. Then the group is taken away to the true desert, in Mali, to meet the Tuareg, men basically free. This last work receives the first UNESCO prize for Educational Art, and the prize of the Festival of Mental Health. These films are released in "Art et Essais" networks, and are always followed by debates...She has a different view of society. Where television channels can only see hatred, death and horror, she can also find love, friendship and solidarity.

A many-sided woman, Zarina KHAN is also an expert for the culture of peace for UNESCO. She takes part of think tanks for building peace in the world. She is currently working for an exhibition of photographs in St Petersburg. She also comes to schools to help with school drama workshops. Linking up the extremes remains priority of this uncommon character who has devoted herself to the prevention of violence and risky behaviour.

In 2005, she was nominated for the Nobel Price