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Theater

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The best New York theater directors

- [Jay Scheib](#)
Mixing multimedia with deadpan-cool (and very sexy) actors, Scheib is forging new ways of seeing drama.
- [Ken Rus Schmoll](#)
Schmoll takes on more difficult playwrights, teasing out the ambiguity and menace in their words.
- [Elizabeth LeCompte](#)
As chief engineer of the Wooster Group's postmodern tech spectacles, she has influenced a generation of experimenters.
- [Anne Kauffman](#)
She helmed two of our favorite shows in years: The Thugs and God's Ear. Sensitive to thorny language, she makes the murky crystal clear.
- [Joe Mantello](#)
Sure, he helmed the blockbuster Wicked, but the former actor is most at home working on tough drama on an intimate level.
- [Richard Foreman](#)
They don't call him the king of the avant-garde for nothing; Foreman is the auteur's auteur: He writes, designs, directs and even operates the sound.
- [Robert Woodruff](#)
It's criminal how little he works in the city, but when he does, we're transfixed by the elegant brutality of his cool tableaux.
- [Stephen Daldry](#)
Without this bold British director (of stage and screen), Billy Elliot wouldn't have been nearly so magical.
- [Julie Taymor](#)
We're waiting for a follow-up as impressive as The Lion King, but until then, we'll still get weepy over "Circle of Life."
- [Bartlett Sher](#)
This guy can do everything: old-fashioned musicals like *South Pacific* and great drama like *Awake and Sing!* He's a treasure.

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AN EYE ON THE FUTURE

I'VE developed most of my work outside of traditional theatre institutions, which causes me to see the future as an ongoing, disparate collection of events. My thinking about the future is really very short-term.

In the past 10 years I have tried to assemble my creative process into makeshift seasons. The first season lasted from 2003 to 2007 and was titled "The Flight Out of Naturalism." This season was comprised of about nine productions and focused dually on Naturalism and Cinema Vérité. I was interested in Reality.

My interest is now in Fiction. The upcoming season is called "Simulated Cities / Simulated Systems," and it looks like this: a trilogy of science-fiction performance works (of which part two, *Bellona, Destroyer of Cities*, will be developed in Salzburg, Germany, then New York); an opera about ice in Antarctica composed by Eric Sanko (premiering in Australia); a

documentary performance with Andrew Andrew (on North Korea) and another with Tanya Selvaratnam (on Sri Lanka); a play by Brecht in

his hometown state-theatre in Augsburg; an evening of songs about the life and times of Peter Lorre, with the World/Inferno Friendship Society (at the Spoleto Festival, and later at the Vancouver Winter Olympics); a choreographic installation for a solo performer based on *All's Well that Ends Well*; and *Motion Studies*, an opera with composer Keeril Makan and Alarm Will Sound (to premiere in New York).

This is roughly my Future, for three years.

This Future relies on relationships with a dozen or so producers and theatres, a host of collaborators, some six or seven countries, and several institutions. In this Future, Organization is the price of Independence. I'm not sure that this is what the future should look like, but I suspect it is not so different from that devised by other independent theatre artists.

In the American theatre we are so Independent. We barely have a center toward which to aspire, or against which to rebel. But we have a Market, and we have a rich history in need of synthesis. In this Market, however, the discussion of synthesis is usually swallowed by the noise of Negotiations. Many of my friends speak with optimism about the collapse of the Market because in the silence which remains, a discussion is beginning to emerge, and it is getting louder and louder.

We barely have a center toward which to aspire, or against which to rebel.

APR09 AMERICAN THEATRE

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JAY SCHEIB, director,
writer and designer, Cambridge, Mass.,
and New York City

JAY SCHEIB

Riding a Different Circuit

The experimental director is making a name for himself outside the traditional resident theatre network



Scheib

BY AARON MACK SCHLOFF

Important things to know about director Jay Scheib: Born: 1969, Shenandoah, Iowa. Occupation: associate professor in music and theatre arts, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Number of productions slated for 2008: five, three of them world premieres, taking place in three countries. ("Last season, I had seven premieres in five different countries," Scheib says evenly. He says everything evenly.) Number of resident theatre gigs this year and every year heretofore: zero.

How can such a director as Scheib—who, not so incidentally, has also written or adapted scripts for about a dozen of his own productions—earn degrees and awards from impeccably conventional bodies (B.A., University of Minnesota; MFA, Columbia University; NEA/TCG Career Development Program grant) and then go on to fashion his career entirely outside of the institutions they were intended to serve—ostensibly the center of the American theatre? The circuit he is now riding—stretching from New York City's P.S. 122 to Minnesota's Walker Art Center to theatres and festivals in Hungary, Austria and Germany—suggests that another center exists and that another kind of theatrical life is possible, even if it's not quite, or not yet, a living.

"One of my goals is to pay my actors as much as they would make temping," he says. Still, his regular actors, a group of six to eight that one might call the Jay Scheib Players, moan like addicts when they think of working with him again. "Whenever I get a call from Jay, I just stop the presses," says New York-based performer Eric Dean Scott. He and

the rest of Team Scheib are gambling big as they develop Scheib's exuberantly physical, heavily technologized but emotionally open style of theatremaking. Audiences and critics may love it or hate it, but they are rarely indifferent. Scheib himself cites Tadeusz Kantor, Robert Wilson, William Forsythe, Rem Koolhaas and Anne Bogart among his various inspirations

and mentors—famous names that would mean nothing if Scheib couldn't refine those influences to give every work (whether it be a song cycle or straight play, with his own text or not, high-tech or low) a genuine sense of excitement and risk.

Let's look at the projects. In January *This Place Is a Desert* appears at Mark Russell's Under the Radar Festival at New York City's Public Theater, the equivalent, for Scheib's circuit,



April Sweeney and Thomas Keating in Scheib's *This Place Is a Desert* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

HAYDEN TAYLOR

of the resident theatre's Humana Festival of New American Plays. *Desert* is a smashup of relationships inspired by the works of filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni and Three Mile Island transcripts. Disintegrating couples video and re-video each other with multiple live feeds designed by Scheib's frequent collaborator Leah Gelpe.

In March, his as-yet-untitled Mars project premieres at P.S. 122, combining scientific fact and fiction to imagine genuine space colonization. In July, Scheib's staging of the biographical song cycle by the gypsy cabaret punk band World Inferno Friendship Society, titled *Addicted to Bad Ideas: Peter Lorre's Twentieth Century*, has its European premiere at the Salzburg Sommerszene (it played this past September at the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival). This coming September, not far away in Budapest, he will adapt Philip K. Dick's science fiction in a piece called *Time Again and Again*, for Pont Mühely theatre (whose actors also plan to take part in the Mars project, if funding permits). An engagement tentatively scheduled for December will bring him to Minneapolis to direct the premiere of Anthony Gatto's opera



World Inferno Friendship Society in *Addicted to Bad Ideas* at the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival.

of Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* at the Walker Art Center. Scheib is writing the libretto.

And that's the year. Add to that at least one student production, various readings, teaching. "For the past three years, I've been booked a year and half in advance," he says, again, evenly. "This year it's almost two."

Scheib is tall and lanky, with thick brown curly hair going gray and a square, friendly face with a point of a chin. He moves and speaks casually—at a roundtable discussion, he'd rather sprawl than sit. A former high school track-and-fielder, he can live in his body as well as his mind. (The result, perhaps, of his Midwestern farm-boy



Malaika Ledig in *Kommander Kobayashi* at Germany's Saarländisches Staatstheater.

upbringing. Actor Aimée Phelan-Deconinck remembers, “In Germany, we were outside a rehearsal space. A shirt was in a tree, very high, and he lassoed it.”)

This casualness is also deceptive—or no longer the whole story. The sprawling productions of Heiner Müller and of Scheib’s own works (produced by his own theatres, the Arcade Theatre and the American Theatre Institute) that gave him outlaw cred in Minneapolis in the ’90s have been replaced, 10 years later, by shows that display a more focused mind and structured development.

WHAT REMAINS IS HIS BREADTH OF

taste. “He likes high culture, but he also likes trash,” declares German opera director Berthold Schneider of the Saarländisches Staatstheater in Saarbrücken, who imported Scheib to direct episodes of the space opera *Kommander Kobayashi* after seeing his work in Berlin. “This is rare—there are few people who can contain such various visual and other impressions.” When asked why so many of his adapted works have “after” in the credits—“after Tolstoy,” or Euripides—Scheib speaks of searching for ways to make the works as surprising as they were when they were born. With Tolstoy’s play *The Power of Darkness*, which he developed with his MIT students before directing the show for Pont Mühely, he dropped characters, restored censored scenes and rewrote based on actor improvisations. The play’s rural violence resonated for Scheib. “I grew up in Iowa in the ’80s when every third farmer went bankrupt. Rather than doing the play as a museum piece, I did research to see to what extent it paid homage to its time and engaged social

issues—and then I found a way to reassess them.”

I witnessed a sample of Scheib’s approach last year, when he directed Daniel Veronese’s *Women Dreamt Horses* at the Buenos Aires in Translation festival at P.S. 122. I’d seen Veronese’s own production of his play in Argentina—a semi-realistic dinner party in cramped quarters, brimming with suppressed violence. Under Scheib’s direction, the playing space was vast and the violence was drawn to the surface, enacted with boxing, slap fights, compulsive

vomiting and semi-gymnastic stunts. Was this acting or contact improv? It played like both—and, at the first show, also a bit like porn (when they’re talking, you just want the action). But when I returned for the final show of the run, all was knit together: sensible, Argentine at the source, but American in tone and, most important, continuously

interesting. Scheib had gambled and won.

Scheib is perfectly comfortable being textually faithful to other writers’ new plays, but one thing about *Women* was atypical—its low-tech style. At the finish of *Women*, the gun-toting actor just yelled “Bang.” (By comparison, *This Place Is a Desert* has four screens with live video feed. The role of video mediation in live performance has obsessed Scheib for more than a decade.)

Listening to his players talk about how they developed *Women* reveals a lot about Scheib’s method. First of all, like his teacher Anne Bogart, Scheib treats his actors as collaborators rather than instruments. “He’s interested in people—who you are, what you bring to the process and how you and only you can bring that thing,” says another frequent actor-collaborator April Sweeney. When their extensive table work on *Women* finally ended, Scheib brought the cast to its feet with small exercises and wild-card requests—recipes for moments the actors would go off and create. “We composed a list of things to have,” says Scott, “like 30 seconds of a repetition or one moment of the smallest possible violent event.” One actor knew how to box.

They used it. Dance-trained Phelan-Deconinck can stretch her ankle above her head, casually. So they used that too.

Like the late Polish experimentalist Kantor, Scheib gives titles to different periods of his work. The past seven years, ending with *Desert*, were “The Flight out of Naturalism.” A new era, “Simulated Cities/Simulated Systems,” is being born with the Mars project.

Scheib’s research bent is supported by his current berth at MIT, which, he says, forces him to organize his thinking. “MIT is a research institution.

If my research has to do with the integration of media and live performance, or development of tech for use in live performance, or exploring other theatrical idioms, I have to theorize them and describe them in concrete ways.” He can also use student productions to begin explorations—he had his first crack at the Mars project at MIT in October, for instance. “So long as I can continue to main-



This Place Is a Desert at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art.

HAYDEN TAYLOR

tain a studio environment that I connect to teaching, then I'll continue to be happy,” he says. “When it becomes routine, it's time to leave—but as yet it's never routine.”

The practical challenge for Scheib is turning his theatre life into a living. In the past year, Shoshana Polanco, who produced the Buenos Aires in Translation festival, has joined him as creative producer (a title that

suggests a formal economic relationship that they do not yet have). Her role is flexible, she says, but the management responsibilities are now hers. Financial stability is still a goal. “We fantasize about taking over one of the regional theatres,” she says, even as she admits she has no contact with them.

How long this alternative circuit can sustain them is a hanging question. “I put the work out; I write letters. Most theatres are not interested,” shrugs Scheib. Still, with the Under the Radar showcase, the

array of other projects on tap and Polanco on board—not to mention the continuing loyalty of his players—2008 (or 2009 or 2010, when his schedule opens up) could be the year love meets money. **Q**

Playwright and journalist Aaron Mack Schloff writes frequently for this magazine.

March 24-30, 2010

THEATER

TWO MOONS, LOTSA BEER

BY ALEXIS SOLOSKI | JAY SCHEIB ADAPTS SAMUEL R. DELANY'S EPIC SCIENCE-FICTION CLASSIC *DHALGREN*



Group sex plus civic catastrophe: *Bellona's* Scheib

In *Bellona*, a city somewhere in the Midwest, a disaster has occurred. The few citizens remaining negotiate an urban space in which scientific rationalism and civilized conduct no longer apply. A red sun haunts the sky by day; two moons hover

in the night. Buildings burn but are not consumed. The geography of streets alters. Time twists. Disorder reigns. And director Jay Scheib has the privilege of translating all this chaos onto the stage. "It's horrifying," he says. "Really hard to do. It's just so huge."

On April 1 at the Kitchen, Scheib will debut *Bellona: Destroyer of Cities*, described as "part dance, part live cinema, part theater, part urban simulation for disappearing cities." He has derived the piece from *Dhalgren*, Samuel R. Delany's sprawling, cyberpunk

meditation on sexuality, race, and catastrophe. While some sci-fi luminaries (Philip K. Dick and Harlan Ellison among them) have termed the 1975 book unreadable, it has sold more than a million copies and attained the status of a genre classic.

After a day of rehearsal at the Performing Garage, Scheib reflects on what drew him to *Dhalgren*. Though its nearly 900 nonlinear pages do not readily suggest theatrical adaptation, he wanted to make a play of the novel even before he'd read half of it. He found himself attracted to the imagery of a damaged city and the troubling timeliness of Delany's concerns. "We're trying to tackle a piece that looks very unapologetically at race and gender in America in the '70s," says Scheib, "but it reads like it was written this morning. We're grappling with that."

Happily, Delany, who attended an early workshop of *Bellona*, approves of Scheib's adaptation. "It's quite wonderful to have your work interpreted by artists of such energy and vision—not to mention such theatrical intelligence," he wrote the *Voice* in an e-mail. Despite this authorial endorsement, Scheib and his cast (most of whom have read *Dhalgren* at least twice) have plenty to wrestle with. They need to animate an abstruse and disjunctive text, which includes several troubling passages that verge on the pornographic. During rehearsal, they had practiced a sequence involving group sex and scandalous language. Shirts were doffed, belts were loosened, a mattress's springs were strained, and Scheib was moved to answer questions such as, "Do I do that before or after I say, 'Smell my dick?'"

Bellona marks Scheib's second attempt to stage sci-fi. It follows *Untitled Mars* (*This Title May Change*) in a venture he's named "Simulated Cities/Simulated Systems." Drawing on his fascination with technology and the resources that an associate professorship in directing at MIT permits him, the project weds theater and science. *Untitled Mars* employed research into aerospace and astronautics; *Bellona* will refer to civil engineering and urban planning. Though he has not yet discovered how to integrate those disciplines into this production, Scheib hopes they will provide insight into how *Bellona* functions. "It has been more or less forgotten and abandoned by the world outside it," he explains, "but nonetheless, it is an ongoing system. No one knows where the food comes from, why there's always beer. It's like a strange social experiment."

The showing at the Kitchen may simply mark the first iteration of this "strange, social experiment." Scheib has fantasies of producing the play in a specific site over the course of several days. "The way to do this project is to actually do it in a neighborhood," he muses. "The audience would have to travel around and live more or less by the rules or lack thereof." His desire to achieve a more naturalistic setting for the piece speaks to the competing impulses that animate his work—science fiction on the one hand, theatrical realities on the other. As to how the two will align in this project, Scheib admits, "I'm very, very scared."

'BELLONA: DESTROYER OF CITIES'
APRIL 1-10, THE KITCHEN, 512 WEST
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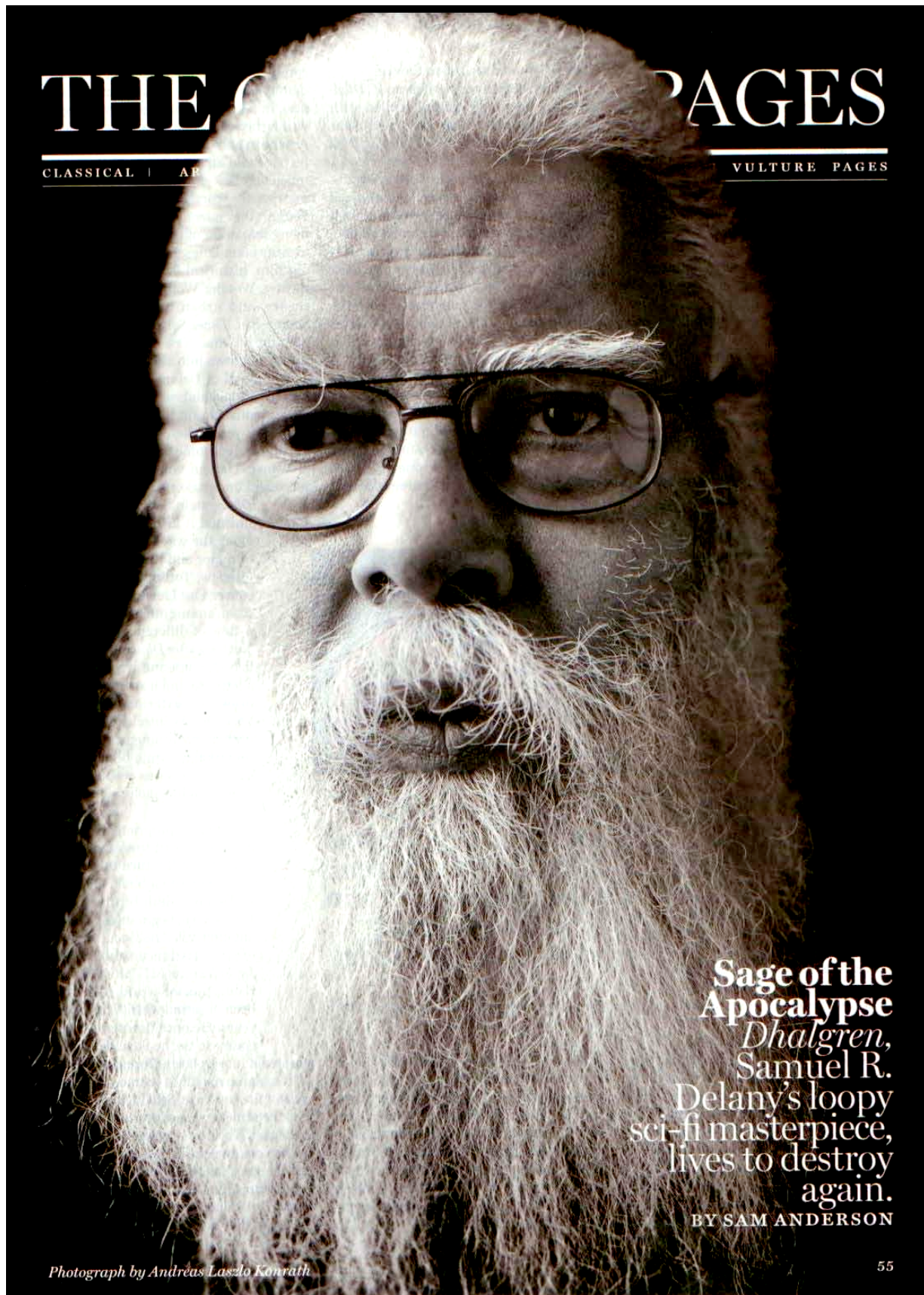
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April 5, 2010

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**Sage of the
Apocalypse**
Dhalgren,
Samuel R.
Delany's loopy
sci-fi masterpiece,
lives to destroy
again.

BY SAM ANDERSON

Photograph by Andr  as Laszlo Konrath

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NEW YORK

April 5, 2010

SAMUEL R. DELANY'S *Dhalgren* is—like *Moby-Dick*, *Naked Lunch*, or “Chocolate Rain”—an essential monument both to, and of, American craziness. It doesn't just document our craziness, it documents our craziness crazily: 800 epic pages of gorgeous, profound, clumsy, rambling, violent, randy, visionary, goofy, postapocalyptic sci-fi prose poetry. The book is set in Bellona, a middle-American city struggling in the aftermath of an unspecified cataclysm. Phones and TVs are out; electricity is spotty; money is obsolete. Riots and fires have cut the population down to a thousand. Gangsters roam the streets hidden inside menacing holograms of dragons and griffins and giant praying mantises. The paper arrives every morning bearing arbitrary dates: 1837, 1984, 2022. Buildings burn, then repair themselves, then burn again. The smoke clears, occasionally, to reveal celestial impossibilities: two moons, a giant swollen sun. To top it off, this craziness trickles down to us through the consciousness of a character who is, himself, very likely crazy: a disoriented outsider who arrives in Bellona with no memory of his name, wearing only one sandal, and who proceeds to spend most of his time either having graphic sex with fellow refugees or writing inscrutable poems in a notebook—a notebook that also happens to contain actual passages of *Dhalgren* itself. The book forms a *Finnegans Wake*-style loop—its opening and closing sentences feed into one another—so the whole thing just keeps going and going forever. It's like *Gertrude Stein: Beyond Thunderdome*. It seems to have been written by an insane person in a tantric blurt of automatic writing.

When I mention this to Delany, he is pleased. It is, he says, exactly the effect he was going for. And yet, he tells me, the actual writing process was deliberate and precise. “I wrote out hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of sentences at the top of notebook pages,” he remembers. “Then I would work my way down the page, revising the sentence, again and again. When I got to the bottom I'd copy the sentence out to see if I

wanted it. Then I'd put them back together again. It was a very long, slow process.” It took him five years—not long by epic-novel standards, but a lifetime for an author who once wrote a book in

eleven days to fund a trip to Europe.

In the 35 years since its publication, *Dhalgren* has been adored and reviled with roughly equal vigor. It has been cited as the downfall of science fiction (Philip K. Dick once called it “the worst trash I've ever read”), turned into a rock opera, dropped by its publisher, and reissued by others. These days, it seems to have settled into the groove of a cult classic. In a foreword in the current edition, William Gibson describes the book as “a literary singularity” and Delany as “the most remarkable prose stylist to have emerged from the culture of American science fiction.” Jonathan Lethem called it “the secret masterpiece, the city-book-labyrinth that has swallowed astonished readers alive.”

Delany, meanwhile, with his restless mind and his giant white cyberpunk-Santa beard, has become a science-fiction icon—a grandfatherly figure without any visible grandfatherly tendencies. He first emerged as a prodigy in the sixties, one of a loose band of young writers sometimes referred

combine: He was pulpy, literary, lusty, academic, prolific, and meticulous. He was also, in a genre dominated by white guys writing heteronormative fantasies, African-American and openly gay. “From 1968 on,” he once told an interviewer, “I was pretty much the black gay SF writer.” (He was also married, for years, to lesbian poet Marilyn Hacker; they have a daughter.) Delany is a living refutation of the fixity of genre and identity boundaries. He has written memoir, film, historical fiction, pornography, theater, Wonder Woman comics, literary theory, and urban history—his *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* is a classic account of what New York lost when it turned midtown into a shopping mall.

Among all of Delany's many projects, *Dhalgren* is still his best known. At its core, it's a meditation on the nature of cities: how they live and die, cohere and fracture, nurture and consume their citizens. Delany grew up in Harlem, where his father was a successful undertaker. He started writing

Dhalgren in the East Village and finished it in London, stopping along the way in a smorgasbord of major and minor cities: New Orleans, Toronto, Seattle, Vancouver, East Lansing, and Middletown, among others. The result is a stew of different urban vibes. Not long after *Dhalgren* was published, someone wrote Delany a letter saying it seemed to have drawn its exteriors from New York and its interiors from San Francisco. “I thought that was a remarkably astute observation,” he says. “This was a woman who lived in Indianapolis.”



Dhalgren is like *Gertrude Stein: Beyond Thunderdome*. It seems to have been written in a tantric blurt of automatic writing.

Above, Jay Scheib's *Bellona, Destroyer of Cities*.

to as sci-fi's “new wave,” whose work helped to push the tradition away from robots and spaceships toward deep questions about race, sexuality, and identity. His characters had explicit sex but also gave each other lectures on metalogic. By his mid-twenties, Delany had written a career's worth of novels and won a career's worth of major awards. He managed to fuse, unapologetically, qualities that few had ever thought to

IT SEEMS appropriate that *Dhalgren*, or at least the latest mutation of it, will return this month to the city of its birth. On April 1—Delany's 68th birthday—the Kitchen will begin staging an adaptation called *Bellona, Destroyer of Cities*. Its director and writer is Jay Scheib, an MIT professor and rising theater-world star who's been obsessed with *Dhalgren* for years. He once devoted an MIT course to the book, and has even adapted it into a play in German.

“It took me roughly a year to read *Dhalgren* for the first time,” Scheib says. “I would read the same ten pages over and over and over again.” The loop structure impelled him to keep coming back. “You get the feeling that the story has been going on like a fugue for millennia,” he says. “The second time you read it, it's thrilling. The third time, it makes you high. After that it's like reading philoso-

DHALGREN
BY SAMUEL R.
DELANY
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**BELLONA,
DESTROYER OF
CITIES**
THE KITCHEN
APRIL 1-10

NEW YORK

April 5, 2010

phy." The play's producer, Tanya Selvaratnam, took the opposite approach, reading the entire book in a day and a half; by the end, she says, she felt like she was hallucinating. One of the actors told Scheib that reading the novel was the hardest thing he did all year. (Delany hasn't read the book in probably fifteen years and has little interest in doing so; his energy is focused on "futz" with his next novel, *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, due in November.)

The notion of turning *Dhalgren*—this disorienting vortex of pure textuality—into a functional play seems, at first, like some kind of literary joke, the equivalent of turning the Tao Te Ching into a murder mystery. Scheib concedes that the task occasionally feels impossible. For the Kitchen show, however, he's come up with a handful of innovative solutions. He describes the set as "buildings and rooms inside of buildings and rooms," portions of which will be hidden from parts of the audience. Live cameras will provide glimpses into areas that can't be seen directly, mimicking the novel's shifting perspectives and layers of mediation. The way the actors move is designed to evoke *Dhalgren*'s strange prose rhythms. "We've tried to find a physically charged syntax that would stand up to the images and actions of the novel," Scheib says. "We move through dance and extreme physical actions. Things that aspire to be a kind of poetry in space."

The surprising thing is that it all seems to be working. When I sit in on a rehearsal, the feel of the novel is unmistakably present: the openness, the casual strangeness, the charmingly aggressive discomfort. Delany, who also sat in on a read-through, agrees. "All too often," he says, "when creative people pick out someone else's creative work as an inspiration, what they end up with is very, very far from the original. I was prepared for that. But this felt *familiar* to me."

The Kitchen adaptation aims to be the next cycle of *Dhalgren*: It begins where the novel ends, with a new character—a woman instead of a man—entering Bellona. "In the novel," Scheib says, "when the narrator shows up, he has sex with a woman who turns into a tree. And then he has sex with a guy, and then with a girl. Then another guy. Then a guy and a girl. So we try to keep that spirit alive." Scheib points out that, 35 years later, *Dhalgren* remains improbably contemporary. "We still battle with race and identity and sexuality," he says. "In the world of Bellona, people seem to have made peace with a lot of that stuff. There's a different attitude: They talk openly about their problems and wear their prejudices on their sleeve, and it's somehow okay. Difference produces meaning in a way that it doesn't sometimes in life." Which is almost as bizarre, in its way, as a pair of moons in the sky. ■

Theater

Time Out New York / Issue 655 : Apr 16–22, 2008

Martian to a different drummer

Multimedia wizard Jay Scheib colonizes the Red Planet for theatrical research.

By Helen Shaw



MISSION CONTROL Scheib probes a strange planet.

Photograph: Naomi White

Deep in the belly of an abandoned vault on Wall Street, a man with a lizard tail talks softly to his foam claws as another stages an aggressive seduction in a boardroom. An almost whisper-soft suggestion—"Could you try that a little more tenderly?"—comes from the lanky director crouching at the lovers' feet. Even though embraces in Jay Scheib's shows usually look like wrestling holds, the note persuades actor Caleb Hammond to grip his paramour slightly less viciously—as he half-nelsons her into a revolving chair. The lizard picks up a camera.

Welcome to Mars. Or at least, welcome to a rehearsal of *Untitled Mars: This Title May Change*, a droll, discomfiting trip to the Red Planet as dreamed up by Scheib. An unlikely collision of scientific experiment and Philip K. Dick, the show takes its inspiration from one of the Mars Desert Research Stations, a deadly serious outpost where researchers wear space suits and run around the Utah desert. While the scientists simulate life on Mars, Scheib's company will simulate the scientists—though with a significantly lower budget. Set designer Peter Ksander describes the mash-up of sci-fi and reality as the new alienation effect: "Jay is using Mars in the same way that Brecht used the Thirty Years War." It's not that alien: The 38-year-old director lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and teaches at MIT, where some of his students might actually have a crack at being Mars pioneers.

As with almost all of Scheib's work, the show will be thick with video, much of it shot live in the room. He may not want to become a one-trick pony ("I have an Iphigenia coming up that has no video at all!" he assures us. "Maybe three light cues!"), but Scheib is still known for his multimedia work. Video appears in most of his shows, its function changing to create phantoms (*The Vomit Talk of Ghosts*), a sensation of surveillance (*This Is the End of Sleeping*) or a self-consciously cinematic composition (the Godard-inflected *This Place Is a Desert*). But the director claims there is a constant. "It all stems from trying to work on naturalism," he explains. "I wanted to take up the game that all my incredibly cool teachers—Robert Woodruff and Anne Bogart—had said was dead. It was my rebellion."

The resulting works, exquisitely designed with the lackadaisical rhythms of everyday speech, look totally unlike the rest of the New York avant-garde, though they ring bells with theater buffs in Germany and France. "I am synthesizing techniques that already exist," Scheib readily admits. "It's just that in Europe, the Wooster Group isn't on the fringes—they've been folded into the mainstream."

Not everybody is a fan. Scheib's dedication to observing human behavior forces theatrical time to slow to something like real time, and the pace downshift can leave viewers impatient and disoriented. (Tip: Pretend you're in a gallery watching an installation.) And while theater has been incorporating projection for decades, audiences still rankle at how the video steals focus. Says Scheib: "Desert upset a lot of people. Theater audiences feel bad that they're watching a screen. But for me, video is a delivery system. It's simply a way to bring the performer closer."

Scheib may be the most acclaimed experimental American director whose work you have never seen. The New York premiere of *This Place Is a Desert* during *Under the Radar* in January moved him into the critical spotlight, but this production at P.S. 122 will be his first high-profile run of any length here.

New York economics hobble Scheib's process. His languorous, ensemble-driven works need long rehearsal periods and the kind of technical fine-tuning that can't be done on Off-Off Broadway's panicky schedule. At MIT, he develops work in peace, and then spends roughly four months in Europe making pieces at well-funded spots like the Staatstheater Saarbrücken or Salzburg's Mozarteum. The expense of dealing with Equity and New York real estate drives our most interesting directors into the arms of European state funding.

Another major director who gigs too rarely in New York, Woodruff taught Scheib, but now sees him as a colleague. "It's great that he found a home at MIT," Woodruff says. "He can fly off to Europe, but he still has a place to do his research. If you find another setup like that—please tell me first." The struggle for funding is just another reason to make *Untitled Mars*. "You should go to these space-vision conferences," Scheib says with a chuckle. "That community sounds just like a theater conference—it's always about the lack of funding. It's very rarely about art."

Untitled Mars: This Title May Change is at P.S. 122.

culture

TOTALLY LEGAL SUBSTANCE

Mars Bard

Playwright Jay Scheib is on a mission to bring planet Mars into the limelight, with a new stage show.

"I love science fiction," says playwright and MIT professor Jay Scheib, 38. "But when it comes to Mars, the actual facts are weirder than anyone could make up."

Example: A group of rogue scientists are planning to inhabit the planet in the next 10 years, but flying there would most likely be a one-way suicide mission. "The fact that there are people willing to give their lives to get to Mars is shocking," says Jay, who first heard about the mission through a few of his drama

and math university in Cambridge, Mass. For one thing, he teaches in the music and theater arts program, introducing otherwise stage-shy engineers to the basics of acting. He also doesn't look like a typical academic. Sitting in the downtown performance space P.S. 122, where *Untitled Mars* debuts on Tuesday, Jay appears more British rocker (à la Jarvis Cocker) than tweedy professor. In his lean pinstripe pants, black blazer and dark wool scarf, he is not at all out of place in the experimental East

P.S. 122.) His usual focus is on opera and Greek drama, but this month he has been devoted to the red planet, rehearsing inside an abandoned Wall Street bank vault ("It's so weird," he says. "There are still employee memos on the wall from 2001") and readying the set at P.S. 122. "We are painting the theater completely white," he says. "I want it to look like a cross between a space station on Mars and a science lab on Earth."

The play tells the story of a seven-person team that lands on Mars and must adapt to a new planet—and its bitter-cold, jail-cell conditions—or die. Throughout the play, Jay interrupts the onstage action to interview (via live video feed) real aeronautics students and their mentors at the Mars Desert Research Station in Utah. His questions about their research lends the show the aura of a real-world science documentary.

Trekkies, rejoice: *Untitled Mars* is the first in a trilogy of space-age plays, called *Simulated Cities/Simulated Systems*, that Jay plans to complete over the coming years. After this show closes in New York, however, Jay is off to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis to stage a new opera based on the works of Gertude Stein. Still, the busy professor is happy to have embraced science in his writing: "I work inside the culture of nerd at MIT," he explains. "I took the time to listen to what my students were talking about, and I was hooked. Now I really want to bring the science into arts and sciences."

—Rachel Syme

Untitled Mars (This Title May Change) will run Apr. 8–27 at P.S. 122 (150 First Ave., at Ninth St.).

Footage of aeronautics students at the Mars Desert Research Station in Utah is interwoven within Jay's play.



students. "I immediately felt inspired to write something."

Despite the justifiably nerdy subject of the resulting work, *Untitled Mars* (This Title May Change), Jay is as far from a geek as one could imagine—especially for a professor at MIT, the famed science

Village theater.

Jay divides his time between Massachusetts and New York, where he keeps an apartment on the Lower East Side, under the Williamsburg Bridge. (Coincidentally, he met his fiancée, a writer and actress, at a November 2006 show at



"When it comes to Mars, the actual facts are weirder than anyone could make up."

Theater

Time Out New York / Issue 655 : Apr 16–22, 2008

Untitled Mars: This Title May Change

P.S. 122 Conceived and directed by Jay Scheib. With ensemble cast.

1hr 30mins. No Intermission.



SPACE ODDITY Sweeney, right, encounters an astronaut.

Photograph: Justin Bernhaut

Director Jay Scheib doesn't look like a geek. With his art-school specs, tousled hair and stylish attire, this laid-back orchestrator of multimedia installations surrounds himself with strikingly attractive actors and sexy technology. Yet scratch the surface and under the hipster auteur you might find a chubby nerd building a spaceship out of tin foil and cardboard in the garage. Now, Scheib and his dedicated actor-technicians have graduated to fancier materials with *Untitled Mars: This Title May Change*, a docu-video-performance piece that merges speculative science and avant-garde theatrics.

The elaborate, multizoned playing space created by Peter Ksander (the most ingenious set designer working downtown) is a recreation of the Mars Desert Research Station in Utah—itsself a simulation of the Martian landscape, where scientists hope we'll establish a colony. The plot (related in elliptical fragments) is a crude pastep of soap-opera seductions and sci-fi pulp, featuring a real-estate villain (Caleb Hammond), a heroic repair woman (Tanya Selvaratnam) and a scientist (April Sweeney) who may have found a link between schizophrenia and clairvoyance. Oh, and there's a guy in green makeup with a giant lizard tail.

Using live video feeds and editing software to create the illusion of walking on the Martian surface, Scheib masterfully blends high-tech effects with his performers, who wrestle and simulate sex with gusto. (He himself appears, quizzing real scientists about space exploration via Skype linkup.) Even though the message—wherever we humans go, we'll bring our problems—is old as Ray Bradbury, at least the vehicle is super space age. (See also “Martian to a different drummer,” page 161.)

—David Cote

<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/events/off-off-broadway/54302/521200/untitled-mars>

Theater

Sightlines

Untitled Mars: Lost in Space

Jay Scheib's beguiling, perplexing trip to the red planet

by Alexis Soloski

April 15th, 2008 12:00 AM



Space case: *Untitled Mars (This Title May Change)*

Justin Bernhaut

"Is there any life on Mars?" David Bowie and various scientists have long inquired. Writer-director-performer Jay Scheib doesn't answer their query, but he does provide a lively look at the attempt to populate the red planet in *Untitled Mars (This Title May Change)*. In collaboration with MIT scientists at the Mars Desert Research Station (MDRS) and members of Budapest's Pont Mühely theater company, Scheib heads a theatrical mission to that far-off sphere.

The script is utterly jumbled—a fusion of Dr. Robert Zubrin's scholarly treatise *The Case for Mars*, Philip K. Dick's science-fiction *Martian Time-Slip*, live video conferencing with a tart-tongued aerospace grad student, as well as footage and transcripts from MDRS. The play primarily discusses the potential of a one-way mission to Mars. But it also includes romantic relationships, sinister experiments, and dodgy real-estate deals.

With three video screens, various computer monitors, and three separate stage environments, the plot isn't the only perplexing element. Often, the eye doesn't know where to settle. Yet what a pleasure to encounter an artist like Scheib, with so many ideas and so many means of presenting them. And if the narrative rather baffles, the visual images—in all their plenitude—are arresting, as are the attractive actors. In a video clip, Dr. Zubrin insists: "We have to go to Mars simply because it's there." If Scheib's leading, we just might go along for the ride.

Untitled Mars (This Title May Change) By Jay Scheib, P.S.122, 150 First Avenue, 212-352-3101

<http://www.villagevoice.com/theater/0816,sightlines-1,411867,11.html>



Goings On About Town

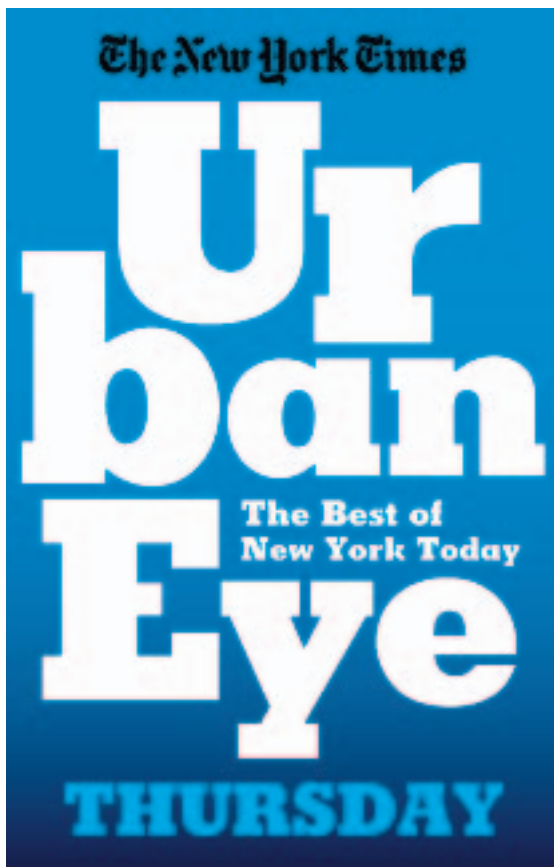
THE THEATRE

April 28, 2008

UNTITLED MARS (THIS TITLE MAY CHANGE)

Jay Scheib's antic play—half lab-rat experiment and half sex farce—grew out of a collaboration with M.I.T. researchers who are studying the possibility of a manned expedition to Mars. Scheib imagines a tightly controlled Martian colony (or is it a simulation?) that devolves into an orgy of greed, lust, and insanity. Between scenes, he speaks with a scientist via Webcam about the potential challenges—technical and psychological—of a Martian voyage.

Throughout, Scheib strikes a tone of semi-academic seriousness laced with deadpan, surrealistic humor. Some of the pulp-inspired elements (time travel, a lesbian affair) are too silly for their own good, but the over-all effect is one of happy disorientation. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Through April 27.) - Michael Schulman



THEATER

I Want to Go to Mars

By MELENA RYZIK

Thursday, April 24, 2008

Attention sci-fi geeks, multimedia freaks and cutting-edge theater lovers: **“Untitled Mars (this title may change),”** running through Sunday at PS 122, may be your kind of show. Created by Jay Scheib with help from his M.I.T. colleagues and the Mars Society, it’s set on a space station on the red planet. With video projections, Skype chats with astronomers and text borrowed from Philip K. Dick, it’s meant to bridge “the hard science of how we get to Mars and the science fiction about what happens when we get there.” The singular performer **Mike Daisey** loved it so much that he agreed to appear tonight as a Mars expert (yep, he’s a nerd).

<http://www.nytimes.com/indexes/2008/04/24/urbaneye/index.html>

KULTÚRA.HU

Kulturális portál » Színház

Mars cím nélkül a Nemzetiben

2008. november 28.

Mars cím nélkül címmel magyar-amerikai színházi produkció premierjét tartották áprilisban New York egyik legismertebb független színházában, a dél-manhattani PS122-ben. A leendő Mars-utazást szimuláló darab november 28-29-én a Nemzeti Színházban látható.



Untitled Mars

Tudomány kontra fikció - ez a témája az amerikai-magyar koprodukcióban készült előadásnak, melynek gerincét egyfelől Philip K. Dick *Időugrás a Marson* című 1964-es, az elképzelt Marson játszódó regénye adja, másfelől az MIT fizikus és kutató hallgatóival és professzoraival, illetve magyar kollégáikkal készült - harminc órányi anyagnál gazdagabb -

interjúk.

Az előadásban élő kapcsolatban jelentkezik az MIT Mars-kutató csoportjából **Zarah Kahn** és **Phillip Cunio**. A *Mars cím nélkül* a szigorú tudomány és az előadást részben ihlető science fiction keveréke egy olyan témáról, amely egyre inkább lázba hozza a világ polgárait. A homo sapiens egyik legsajátabb jellemzője a nem lankadó kíváncsiság, amiből a Mars feltérképezésének szándéka is táplálkozik és ez mozgatja az alapvetően magyar-amerikai, ám négy másik ország művészeit is integráló produkciót.

Az elmúlt öt évben az egyik legsikeresebb fiatal amerikai rendező, **Jay Scheib** munkáiban transzdiszciplináris műfajokra összpontosított. A **Merényi Anna** dramaturg közvetítésével létrejött magyarországi munkái során a Pont Műhellyel, illetve a Krétakör Színházzal két élő film-színházat állított színpadra.

A Mars cím nélkül magyar (**Gryllus Dorka**, **Keszég László**, **Vajna Balázs**) és amerikai (**Natalie**

Thomas, Tanya Selvaratnam, Caleb Hammond, April Sweeney, Laine Rettmer) színházművészek és intézmények közötti földrajzi határokat és műfajokat feszegető koprodukció, melynek során Jay Scheib és Merényi Anna, illetve a Pont Műhely két budapesti produkció után először készített előadást az Egyesült Államokban. Eredeti helyszínén, a rangos New York-i Performance Space 122-ban három hétig volt műsor az Untitled Mars.

Jay Scheib összművészeti színházában különlegesen fontos szerepet játszanak európai tapasztalatai, ahogyan amerikai gyökerei is. A fiatal rendező két európai színművészeti egyetem állandó vendégoktatója (a legendás salzburgi Mozarteum és a norvég Fredrikstadi, többek között Robert Wilson és Anna Viebrock nevével fémjelzett Színművészeti Főiskola), továbbá az MIT docense. Évente többször rendez európai színházakban, köztük a berlini Volksbühnén, a Saarbrückeni Staatstheaterben, de Belgrádban és Bolognában éppúgy visszatérő vendég, mint New Yorkban és Bostonban.

A magyar színházi hagyományok tükrében még mindig szinte forradalminak ható színpadi nyelvezete és látványvilága, a térre való különös érzékenysége, a magyar abszurd hagyományaival ötvözve mindig egyedi és izgalmas eredményt hozott. A közönség és a kritikusok egyaránt nagyra tartják munkáit.

A Mars cím nélkül a Nemzeti Gobbi Hilda Színpadán látható péntek és szombat este.

KÖZLEMÉNY

A szervezőség cikkünk megjelenése óta tájékoztatta szerkesztőségünket, miszerint a szombat délután három órára meghirdetett előadás elmarad, a péntek és szombat este hét órás előadásokat azonban változatlanul megtartják.

Korábban:

[November a Nemzetiben](#)

Fotó:
jayscheib.com

A kultúra.hu tartalmának írásbeli engedély nélküli újraközlése bármely portálon, internetes fórumon, blogon, illetve intézményi és privát honlapon szigorúan tilos, mert törvénybe ütközik, s így azonnali és automatikus jogi következményekkel jár. Kizárólag hivatkozás elhelyezésekor használható fel a szöveg, de akkor is csak a bevezető rész (lead) végéig, illusztráció nélkül.

Superfluities Redux

by George Hunka, Artistic director, theatre minima

Sunday, 12 October 2008

Maintaining the Simulation: Untitled Mars (This Title May Change)

Untitled Mars (This Title May Change). Conceived and directed by Jay Scheib. Scenic design by Peter Ksander. Lighting design by Miranda Hardy. Costume design by Oana Botez-Ban. Sound design by Catherine McCurry. Video design by Balász Vajna and Miklós Buk. Dramaturg: Anna Lengyel. Text assembly by Jay Scheib. A co-production with Pont Muhley, Budapest. With Karl Allen, Dorka Gryllus, Caleb Hammond, László Keszég, Catherine McCurry, Tanya Selvaratnam, April Sweeney, Natalie Thomas and Balázs Vajna (with other on-camera appearances). Running time: 95 minutes, no intermission. At Performance Space 122. Reviewed at the 26 April evening performance. Runs 8-27 April 2008.

Jay Scheib's sci-fact-influenced show says more about life on this planet today than about life on any other planet in the future

Two things about the name of Jay Scheib's new show, which closes today at PS122. First, despite its high-tech sci-fi trappings, Untitled Mars takes place entirely, from beginning to end, in modern-day Utah, home of Mormonism and wide-open deserts; there's not a rocketship, a robot or an alien – not a real one, anyway – in sight. Second, the word "title" isn't applicable only to the work of art, but to real estate – specifically, the title to the land that surrounds the Mars Desert Research Lab (and by extension Mars itself), a title which Arnie, one of Scheib's trademark crude rapacious businessmen, wants in his own possession. Scheib's trick here is to layer technology, design and futuristic vision upon a sardonic satirical comment about the superficial, affectless and materialist surface of 21st-century American life. It's a neat trick, and Scheib pulls it off.

He tried to do so in *This Place Is a Desert* earlier this season at Mark Russell's Under the Radar festival at the Public, but here he skirts the risk of self-indulgence that he couldn't entirely avoid in the earlier show. Perhaps it's the unique presence of the director himself in Untitled Mars that's the saving comic grace; he plays "Jay Scheib," a mordantly skeptical theatre director doing research for the show we're currently watching about a future manned mission to Mars. This research takes the form of a teleconferenced conversation between Scheib and a genial woman with the Mars Desert Research Lab. (The choppy, elliptical nature of this Internet conversation using Skype also begs the question: If this is the fragmented, jerky communication we have between Utah and New York, what can we expect of the conversation between Mars and Earth, let alone between two human beings alone in the same room?) One of the options for this mission is, chillingly, a one-way ticket to the red planet itself for a group of human colonists, who, stranded on the planet, would then be charged with constructing and populating a new outpost for the human race. It's this option that kicks off Scheib's fictionalised vision of the very real experiments and simulations now going on in Utah.

Assuming the worst possible outcome, Untitled Mars becomes a wild, grueling sex farce (and Scheib's sexual imagination runs free, given the admitted lack of research as to sexual relationships and even the possibility of childbirth in such a colony). Researcher Mannie (Natalie Thomas in a flowing red dress, one of the multidimensionally sexy and sexless costumes

designed by the ever-impressive Oana Botez-Ban) has already gone round the bend, induced into acute situational schizophrenia by the emotionless scientific perspective that the research has necessitated; it's up to Jackie (Tanya Selvaratnam), another researcher with her own doubts and questions about her sexuality, to find a cure for her and save the mission itself. It doesn't help that the other two women on the mission are the hard-edged but seductive Anne (April Sweeney), who has her eyes set on Jackie's cynical husband Sylvere (László Keszég); bi-sexual test pilot Doreen (Dorka Gryllus) wouldn't mind a night or two with Jackie, or even Mannie, herself. The women are all in various stages of repression and hysteria, while Arnie (Caleb Hammond) subsumes his own sexuality in alcohol and greed; HabCom (Karl Allen) oversees the experiment as a whole with a poker-face, reflecting the cold scientific perspective that sees irrationality as a problem to be solved instead of a human trait to be explored.

It doesn't take long to see that this landscape isn't Mars of the late 21st-century, but America of 2008. Peter Ksander's set is self-consciously fake – a large glass window turns out to be a large piece of clear Saran Wrap, and except for the highly evolved media technology that the show presents, there's a decidedly artificial, theatrical feel to the control center at stage right, reflecting the rather dim, unimaginative applied-science technocratic mind. (When an encounter with an alien is supposed to be simulated, a mission member daubs some green make-up on his face and lashes a big, silly green rubber tail around his waist.) And indeed, while we have large televisions bearing down at us from Times Square, enough people have been killed on construction sites in New York in the last year to demonstrate that the buildings holding up those television screens might be cheap and shoddy themselves.

This all looks to dissolve in disastrous chaos, but Scheib can't resist offering two endings. In the first, the simulation looks to spin wildly out of control and end in dismal, painful failure. Through the self-evidently silly device of time travel (and the only real representative trope of the genre of science fiction that informs the production), Scheib offers a second, more optimistic close to the fable. In this, the rapacious businessman gets his comeuppance through the agency of a decidedly non-futuristic bow-and-arrow, and the show closes on a touching, moving and hopeful attempt at marital reconciliation.

Scheib is an amazingly prolific director – this is his third New York show in the past few years, and at the same time he's been assiduously working in Europe as well – but as his career goes on he is demonstrating the tightening focus of his vision. He is emotionally drawn to large, empty spaces (in his stagings of both *Women Dreamt Horses* and *This Place is a Desert*) which the human body desires to fill with expressions of its own violent reaches for pleasure and possession; the very American schizophrenia that lurches between utopia, possession, freedom and environmental destruction; the tenuousness of the mediated technological vision in a physically crumbling world; and, finally, the urge to the repression of human irrationality, an irrationality that can erupt in the experience of ecstasy. He is also drawn to the big mess that these tormented human beings can create both in Utah and elsewhere (not to mention the stages on which he works). Though still possessed of a bleak and tragic perspective, *Untitled Mars (This Title May Change)* locates a comic aspect of his vision that may provide a new territory for his own explorations.

Untitled Mars is the first installment of Simulated Cities/Simulated Systems; following this vision of Mars on Earth, Scheib will put Earth on Mars and, most intriguingly, Earth on Earth. I get the sneaking suspicion, though, that Scheib will have had Earth on Earth – and, especially, people on Earth – foremost on his mind through the entire trilogy. More than alien life on other planets, Scheib finds the alien (because unexplored and unexpected) life in ourselves.


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Untitled Mars (This Title May Change)

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nytheatre.com review

Richard Hinojosa · April 15, 2008

If we perfected the technology to colonize habitable planets, would we try to rid our new society of all its imperfections or would all the greed, hubris, and malevolence be transported to the colony? Or, on the other hand, would we discover something new in ourselves? *Untitled Mars* offers a simulation of such a colony and yet, at times, it seems so real. The show's creator, Jay Scheib, crashes simulation and reality into each other while weaving together hard science and fiction. The combination makes for an extraordinary experience.

When you walk into the theatre, the simulation is already in progress. There are half-a-dozen cameras and several microphones set up. Three large screens line the back wall, showing us the action on the cameras. You see a lot of audio/video equipment and laptops and cables. I thought I was in for a very technical evening; but there is more story to the production than I expected.

The simulation crew is made up of the roles you may imagine on a Mars mission: the astronaut, the scientist, the psychiatrist, and the spouse. They call one crew member an "anomalous" crew member. She is suffering from schizophrenia. It would seem that almost all of them have this problem but they "manage" it to various degrees. They have affairs and sordid pasts with each other. There is a Martian real estate scam going down and one of them tries to dip his fingers into it, driving him to time travel and murder. The schizoid girl, who communicates strictly through movement, is the key somehow—we just don't know to what.

Mixed in with all this fiction, there is real science from a real crew member of a Mars simulation in Utah, and there are clips of scientists talking about the logistics of a mission to colonize Mars. The crew even tries to follow scientific protocols but the real science is underplayed. The fiction really drives the show. The characters are all quite interesting and funny. The story and the structure of it is odd but not at all hard to follow. It is a bit jarring to have reality bent, broken, and mashed together with fiction. One minute you're watching actors on stage, the next a scientist spouting technical jargon and the next the actors are playing to you through the camera. But it was this controlled chaos that I

OPENED

April 13, 2008

CLOSED

April 26, 2008

CONCEIVED & DIRECTED BY

Jay Scheib

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really enjoyed.

This show grabbed me and held from beginning to end. I could not look away. There is so much to look at, and between all the screens and activity I found myself on the edge of my seat most of the time. The execution of all the switching among cameras and video and all the sound and light cues is flawless. The production quality is great. Scheib's direction is tight and his vision complex and clear. His script contains some insightful thoughts on the nature of human endeavors such as exploration and colonization. There are a couple of brooding poetic monologues and some funny exchanges, though sometimes it is a bit hard to understand if it's supposed to be real or a simulation.

The cast is quite charming. Caleb Hammond gets some good laughs playing the greedy and obnoxious Arnie. Dorka Gryllus is fantastic as the beautiful and mysterious Doreen. Laszlo Keszeg plays very naturally the jaded and tired Sylvere, and Tanya Selvaratnam does a great job as his wife Jackie, the dry and calculating mechanic. April Sweeney is extremely alluring as the psychiatrist with a very effective solution to isolation. And Natalie Thomas is amazing and completely non-stop as Mannie the schizoid girl. Her energy hums throughout the entire performance.

Untitled Mars is a unique experience. I left the show still feeling captivated by what I'd just seen. Sometimes multimedia performances become too convoluted for their own good, but not this one. It's the first part of a trilogy of simulated cities and I for one plan on seeing the other two.

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Wenn wir Glück haben, wird es ein Riesenskandal...

Interview mit Jay Scheib aus New York

Ein New Yorker bringt Bert Brecht in Augsburg auf die Bühne – nicht irgendein Amerikaner, wenn schon, denn schon: Jay Scheib, just vom „Time Magazine“ als angesagtester Regisseur New Yorks betitelt, inszeniert „Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti“ im Großen Haus. Premiere ist am 15. Januar. Wie es Jay Scheib während der Probenzeit ergeht, und warum er den „Puntila“ für Augsburg gibt, verrät er Wilma Seidelmeier.

AUGSBURG JOURNAL: Sie kommen direkt aus New York in die Fuggerstadt geflogen – erste klaustrophobische Symptome?

Jay Scheib: „Es ist ein bisschen kalt hier, aber klaustrophobisch ist es überhaupt nicht. Die Luft ist super, ich esse jetzt lieber Brezen als Bagel und ich weiß gar nicht, was ich tun werde, wenn ich wieder zurück muss. Ich habe mir auf dem Weihnachtsmarkt den besten Schal aller Zeiten gekauft. Die Frau hat mich umarmt und sich Sorgen gemacht, weil ich so weit weg bin von Zuhause. I love it here! Aber ein klaustrophobisches Erlebnis hatte ich heute doch: Ich habe den Schauspieler Klaus Müller, der den Puntila spielt, mindestens sechs Mal auf der Straße getroffen. Er ist spazieren gegangen und ich bin ihm immer wieder über den Weg gelaufen. Eher lustig als klaustrophobisch, oder? Ich glaube, es war für ihn anstrengend, immer wieder grüßen zu müssen!“

AJ: Als angesagtester Regisseur New Yorks werden Sie gefeiert. Große Worte?

Jay Scheib: „Jetzt wird es also ernst. Große Worte, die Sie aber selber in den Mund nehmen. Ich bin einfach sehr froh darüber, wie sich meine Theaterlaufbahn in den letzten Jahren entwickelt hat.“

AJ: Wie kamen Sie an den Hudson River? Und, wie anders ist die US-Theaterszene zur deutschen?

Jay Scheib: „Ich bin auf einem Bauernhof in Iowa aufgewachsen. Das ist mein ureigener Mythos. Seit ich mich erinnern kann, wollte ich weg vom Land, egal wohin, möglichst weit weg.



Jay Scheib

Dann bin ich in die Kulturhauptstadt Amerikas gegangen, weil ich an der Columbia Universität New York Regie studieren konnte. Nach dem Studium hat mich meine Lehrerin, Anne Bogart, an Augsburgs Schauspielregisseur Markus Traubusch vermittelt. Ja, hier bin ich.“

AJ: Ausgerechnet ein New Yorker muss kommen, um Bert Brecht in dessen Heimat auf die Bühne zu bringen. Sehen Sie das genau so?

Jay Scheib: „Ich freue mich – andersherum – jedes Mal, wenn ein europäischer Regisseur Stücke von Tennessee Williams oder Eugene O'Neill inszeniert. Man sieht die Stücke einfach anders als Außenstehender. Ivo von Hove zum Beispiel hat O'Neill einmal auf eine so faszinierende Weise

inszeniert, die mich inspiriert hat wie selten etwas. Dabei hätte ich beinahe den Raum verlassen, weil alles so fremd und komisch war. Wie er damals lese ich Brechts Text heute, so, als ob er gestern geschrieben worden wäre. Ich bin hocherfreut, ein Stück von Brecht in Augsburg inszenieren zu dürfen! Es ist ein Traum, mit so einem tollen Ensemble zu arbeiten. Ich freue mich, hier zu sein, weil meine Familie aus Bayern stammt, etwas südlich von Augsburg.“

AJ: Und wie gehen Sie hier vor, wandeln Sie auf den Spuren Brechts?

Jay Scheib: „Ich beschäftige mich schon lange mit Brecht. „Puntila“ ist mein dritter Brecht. Ich bin

ein großer Fan. Mein nächstes Projekt wird ein Stück nach dem Science-Fiction-Roman „Bellona Destroyer of Cities“ von Samuel Delany sein. Es kommt im April in New York raus. Und danach mache ich etwas von Fassbinder, dann was von Schönberg und danach wieder Brecht. Ich bin am überlegen, ob ich „Mahagony“ angehen soll.“

AJ: Als Augsburger stellt man sich einen Regisseur aus New York großstädtisch, vielleicht sogar ein bisschen großspurig vor, und freilich schön skandalös. Was haben Sie mit unserem „Puntila“ vor?

Jay Scheib: „Kann schon sein, dass der „Puntila“ ein Skandal wird, wenn wir Glück haben, ein Riesenskandal! Aber nicht, weil ich aus New York bin, sondern weil Brecht ein verdammt skandalöses Stück geschrieben hat. Was ich vorhabe? Ein allein erzählender Vater muss seine einzige Tochter mit einem Halbdioten verheiraten. Durch diese Perspektive sieht man eine Mittsommer-nachtslandschaft, Einsamkeit, gebrochene Herzen, ökonomische Katastrophen, Saunasauerelen und „an impossible love story“. Kein Skandal ohne Spaß, oder? Brecht hat einmal gesagt, dass ein Theater mit präzise eingesetzten Skandalen Vorteile für den Kartenverkauf erzielen könnte. „Puntila“ ist ein unterhaltendes Volksstück, hinter dem eine große Bitterkeit spürbar wird, eine Komödie mit scharfen Zähnen.“



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angetan!

„Herr Puntila und Sein Knecht Matti“ von Bertolt Brecht

Gegensätze sind's, die das Volksstück „Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti“ von Bertolt Brecht in der Neuinszenierung am Theater Augsburg des Amerikaners Jay Scheib ausmachen und so reizvoll leicht erscheinen lassen. Besoffen ist Gutsherr Puntila gut zu ertragen, steht auf der Seite seiner Angestellten und will allen nur Gutes tun, sich gar mit ihnen verbrüdern, doch nüchtern erweist er sich als Kapitalist und Menschenfeind, der nach negativster Gutsherrn Art Menschen für sich springen lässt.

Klaus Müller geht in der Rolle des Herrn Puntila auf, zeigt komödiantische Seiten und dann wieder das nüchterne Kalkül des Großgrundbesitzers – eine Paraderolle für ihn, die er voll ausfüllt. Als Gegenspieler und Chauffeur Matti ist Thomas Täht anfangs etwas zurückhaltend, wird dann aber zum vollwertigen Spielpartner für Müller. Täht zieht als Matti manchmal ganz subtil, manchmal überlegen, dann wieder derb an den Fäden der Handlung. Regisseur Scheib legt Wert auf den komödiantischen Teil, lässt die Gesellschafts- und Sozialkritik Brechts immer wieder aufflammen, verfolgt sie aber nicht weiter.

Was heraus kam, ist ein vergnüglicher Abend mit Brecht, der durch spezielle Kameraeinstellungen im



Herr Puntila und sein Chauffeur Matti (von links). Foto: Nik Schölzel

Bühnenbild von Susanne Hiller, mit Nahaufnahmen für den Zuschauer sonst kaum sichtbare Wesenszüge der Figuren erkennen lässt: Die Kamera als Blick in die tiefere Seele! In weiteren Rollen überzeugten vor allem Ute Fiedler als Fina, Christine Diensberg als Eva und Tjark Bernau als Attaché.

Ein entstaubter Brecht, vorsichtig aktualisiert, den man sich unbedingt ansehen sollte!

Stefan Gruber



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Ute Fiedler, Klaus Müller und Thomas Tüht spielen in der neuen Inszenierung von „Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti“ am Theater Augsburg.

Foto: Schöller

Puntilas Macht

Augsburg Brecht-Stück im Großen Haus

Eine multimediale Inszenierung des viel bewachteten amerikanischen Regisseurs Jay Schick ist nun am Theater Augsburg zu sehen: Brechts „Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti“. Brecht thematisiert in seinem ersten Vollstück die Machtgefälle von Knecht- und Herrschaft. Protagonisten sind ein Gutsherr, der im Rausch ein guter Mensch ist, nüchtern aber zum Despoten

wird, und sein Chauffeur mit komplexen psychischen Zielen.

Premiere ist am kommenden Freitag um 19.30 Uhr im Großen Haus. Zu sehen sind in den Hauptrollen Klaus Müller (Puntila) und Thomas Tüht (Matti).

• Karten unter 0821/3244900; weitere Vorstellungen am 17., 28. und 30. Januar, am 5., 12., 13. und 26. Februar sowie im März und April.

Die Schauspieler auch groß auf einer Leinwand

Premiere Jay Scheib inszeniert am Theater Augsburg „Herr Puntilla und sein Knecht Matti“ mit vielen Videoprojektionen

VON SYBILLE SCHILLER

Für seine Komödie „Herr Puntilla und sein Knecht Matti“ gab Bert Brecht selbst die Gattungsbezeichnung Volksstück vor. Freilich spielt dieser ländliche Schwank nicht in deutschen Landen, sondern in Finnland, wo Brecht 1940 im Exil lebte.

Die Idee zu dem Stück lieferte Brecht die finnische Dramatikerin Hella Wuolijoki mit ihrem Lustspiel „Sägemehlprinzessin“. In Zusammenarbeit mit ihr und der ebenfalls im finnischen Exil lebenden Margarete Steffin entstand daraus „Herr Puntilla und sein Knecht Matti“.

Puntilla allerdings ist wirklich keine einfache Persönlichkeit: nüchtern ein Bäckepaket, betrunken dagegen scheinbar ein Menschenfreund. Nüchtern will Puntilla seine Tochter Eva mit einem Attaché verheiraten, betrunken aber verspricht er sie seinem Chauffeur Matti. Dem wiederum ist nicht gerade wohl in seiner Haut, denn er muss Puntilla, ob dieser nun nüchtern ist oder nicht, zu Diensten sein. Als nun der Herr dem

Knecht tatsächlich Eva zur Frau geben will, fordert Matti von ihr ein Eheexamen. Das Ergebnis ist ernüchternd. Die Unterschiede zwischen Oben und Unten, Arm und Reich bleiben ein Hindernis.

Dieses Brecht-Volksstück nun für Augsburg in Szene setzen zu können, darüber ist der amerikanische

Mozartem Salzburg lehrt, durch seine Performance-Installationen und Video-Einspielungen für die Bühne. Auch im Augsburger „Puntilla“ wird das Medium Video integriert.

Theater und Film laufen in der Augsburger Inszenierung parallel. Dabei erlaubt der Einsatz einer Ka-

mera auf der Bühne, den handelnden Personen während des Spiels nahe zu kommen und sie auf der Leinwand heranzuzoomen.

In diesem Zusammenhang nennt Scheib den Charly-Chaplin-Film „City lights“ (Lichter der Großstadt) von 1931. In dem weltberühmten Stummfilmstreifen spielt Chaplin wie später Brecht mit der Reich-und-Arm-Thematik und der Lebensfrage: „Darf man aus Liebe heiraten?“ Jay Scheib verfolgt in seiner Regie genau diese Frage, ohne die im „Puntilla“ spürbar unterschiedliche Gewalt, den Stress, dem die Personen ausgesetzt sind, zu verleugnen.

Uraufgeführt 1948 in Zürich, war „Herr Puntilla und sein Knecht Matti“ 1949 in überarbeiteter Fassung das Eröffnungstück für das im Osten Berlins gegründete Berliner Ensemble. Scheib (Jahrgang 1969) wagt jetzt einen neuen Zugriff auf „Herr Puntilla“, die erfolgten textlichen Eingriffe sowie minimale Kürzungen sind vom Subtext Verlag genehmigt.

Die Premiere

- Premiere Burckhardt Brechts „Herr Puntilla und sein Knecht Matti“ am heutigen Freitag um 19.30 Uhr im Großen Haus
- Regie Jay Scheib
- Bühne und Kostüme Susanne Hiller
- Dramaturgie Roland Martinowich
- Darsteller Klaus Müller (Puntilla), Christine Diehsberg (Eva, seine Tochter), Thomas Täht (Matti), Tjark Bernau (Attaché), Eberhard Pelzer (Büchler), Anton Koelbl (Probst), Uta Fiedler (Finz), Samantha Richter, Olga Nüchtern, Ema Lindgens (Gyrsch)



Wenn Puntilla (Klaus Müller, links) betrunken ist, verspricht er seinem Knecht Matti (Thomas Täht) die eigene Tochter.
Foto: Nik Schödl/Theater Augsburg

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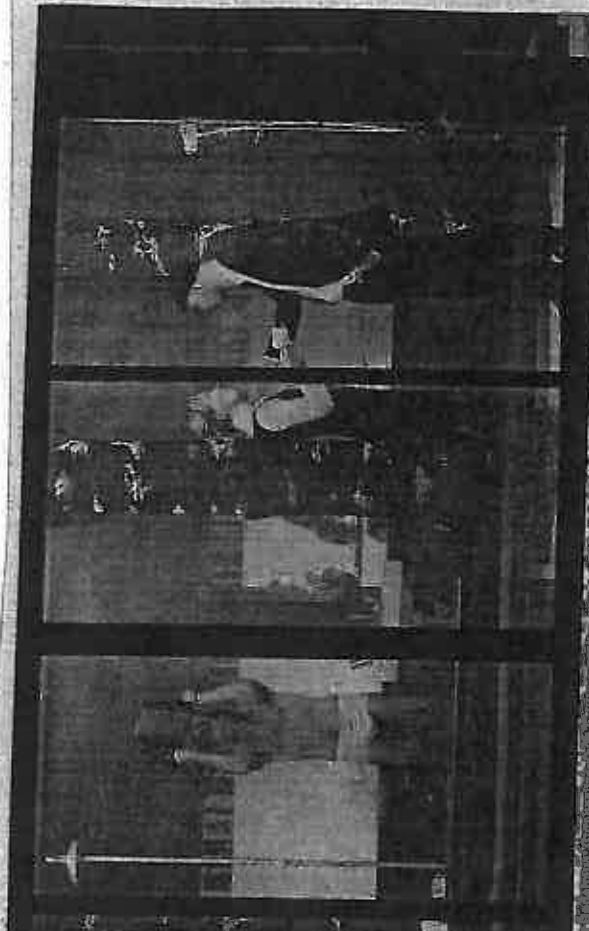
Spiel mit Nähe und Distanz

Brecht's „Puntilla“ in Augsburg

Von Bernd Herrmann

Augsburg 1940. Im Nationaltheater Augsburg wird Brechts „Puntilla“ aufgeführt. Das Stück ist eine Parodie auf die Opern der 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts. Es handelt sich um eine Komödie, die die Geschichte eines Mannes erzählt, der in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation lebt. Der Protagonist, Puntilla, ist ein Mann, der sich in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation befindet. Er ist ein Mann, der sich in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation befindet. Er ist ein Mann, der sich in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation befindet.

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„HERR PUNTILLA UND SEIN KNECHT MATTI“

Brecht's 1940 im Nationaltheater Augsburg aufgeführt. Das Stück ist eine Parodie auf die Opern der 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts. Es handelt sich um eine Komödie, die die Geschichte eines Mannes erzählt, der in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation lebt. Der Protagonist, Puntilla, ist ein Mann, der sich in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation befindet. Er ist ein Mann, der sich in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation befindet. Er ist ein Mann, der sich in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation befindet.

Wo der Schnaps rinnt
Geh's Schnaps hier über Brecht
hin, so himmt er ihn, dann
erst, dass sein Vollstück
populär sein sollte. Er zeigt ein
Theater, dem nichts Menschliches
fremd ist. Da wird auf der
Bühne gesteuert, gesteuert, ko-
puliert und unternimmt es, ründ
der Schnaps, es springt das Bier
und es darauf im Budehau.

Die Aufführung ist eine Parodie auf die Opern der 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts. Es handelt sich um eine Komödie, die die Geschichte eines Mannes erzählt, der in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation lebt. Der Protagonist, Puntilla, ist ein Mann, der sich in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation befindet. Er ist ein Mann, der sich in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation befindet. Er ist ein Mann, der sich in einer Welt voller Distanz und Isolation befindet.

Stadttheater: Gefeierte Puntila-Premiere

Hinreißend und mitreißend – die Stadttheater-Premiere von Brechts "Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti" wurde am Freitagabend im Großen Haus stürmisch gefeiert.



Als "Volksstück" hat Brecht sein Werk um den finnischen Gutsherrn bezeichnet, der "sternhagelnüchtern" als kalter Ausbeuter handelt, besoffen aber eine Seele von Mensch zu sein versucht. Jay Schelbs Inszenierung macht eine deftige Komödie am Rande des Boulevards daraus, erkämpft einer glänzend agierenden Schauspielerriege tosenden Applaus. Sinn und Nutzen seines erheblichen technischen Aufwands mit vielerlei Videovergrößerungen erschloss sich nicht auf Anhieb. Und die politische Botschaft, der doch Brechts ganzer Aufwand galt, geriet ein bisschen in den Hintergrund. Am Montag mehr – und auch zur nächsten Premiere: In der Komödie steht heute Ewald Palmethofers "faust hat hunger und verschluckt sich an einer grete" auf dem Programm.

Saufen für die Menschlichkeit

Premiere I: Brechts „Puntila“ im Großen Haus

Von Frank Heindl

Drei Tage schon säuft der Gutsbesitzer, als Brechts Drama vom Herrn Puntila und seinem Knecht Matti einsetzt. Drei Tage schon säuft er und fürchtet den Moment, da er wieder „sternhagelnüchtern“ sein wird und „zurechnungsfähig“. Das ist schlimm, denn: „Ein zurechnungsfähiger Mensch“, weiß Puntila, „ist ein Mensch, dem man alles zutrauen kann.“ In keinem anderen Drama hat Brecht seine Sicht von der Dialektik der Menschlichkeit so witzig zum Ausdruck gebracht, wie im „Puntila“. Am Freitag war Premiere im Großen Haus.

Nur im Suff, so lautet die Moral, kann der Ausbeuter Mensch sein. Nüchtern dagegen muss er an seinen Vorteil denken und ist daher eine Gefahr für die Allgemeinheit. Beweise dafür liefert das Stück haufenweise: Denn unter dem Einfluss von flaschenweise Aquavit hat Puntila geradezu kommunistische Ideen. Wehe aber, kaltes Wasser und starker Kaffee entfalten ihre verderbliche Wirkung: Dann muss seine Tochter, dem gesellschaftlichen Aufstieg zuliebe, einen tölpelhaften Diplomaten heiraten, dann werden die Untergebenen kujoniert, die „Roten“ vom Hof gejagt. Und der Chauffeur Matti, eben noch ein „Bruder“, ein „Mensch“, ein „Freund“, wird des Diebstahls bezichtigt.



Betrunkenes Rumpelstilzchen: Klaus Müller als Gutsbesitzer Puntila

Bertolt Brecht hat für den 1940 im finnischen Exil geschriebenen „Puntila“ als einziges seiner Dramen den Begriff „Volksstück“ gewählt. Und Regisseur Jay Scheib, im Hauptberuf Theaterprofessor in Massachusetts, macht diesen Begriff zum Programm: Schon zu Anfang brettet der betrunkene Gutsbesitzer mit seinem „Studebaker“-Wagen durch die Wand ins Wohnzimmer, später bringt sich ein pudelnasser, nur mit Unterhosen bekleideter Matti quer über die Stuhlreihen des Publikums vor seinem jähzornigen Herrn in Sicherheit; und der Puntila darf nach Herzenslust auf alle „Weiberärsche“ klopfen, die in seine Reichweite kommen. Das ist oft, nah am Boulevardtheater und macht einen Riesenspaß.



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Menschenfreund und Leuteschinder

Durch die Wand: Tochter Eva
(Christine Diensberg) bei Papas
Helmkehr

Klaus Müller mag man, seiner Statur wegen, anfangs für nicht ganz die richtige Besetzung des Gutsbesitzers halten. Den Puntila hatte man sich bisher als großen, korpulenten, schwitzenden Herrn mit Doppelkinn vorgestellt. Müller ist kleiner als alle um ihn herum. Aber ist das nicht auch der Puntila? Bald schon zeigt ja das Stück, dass auch er durchaus nicht Herr im eigenen Hause ist. Der Probst und der Richter sind größer und wissen ihre Macht auszuspielen, wenn ihnen der Trunkenbold in seiner Menschlichkeit zu weit geht. Rührt vielleicht auch daher sein Alkoholkonsum? Muss er sich womöglich auch deshalb aufführen wie ein irr gewordener Kobold, wie ein Rumpelstilzchen kurz

vorm Platzen? Müller schafft den Übergang vom Menschenfreund zum Leuteschinder ohne Verrenkung, zeigt bravourös, wie nahe die zwei Seelen des Puntila beieinander liegen und warum der kapitalistische Ausbeuter, der er ist und bleiben muss, in beiden Rollen nicht glücklich werden kann, und sorgt mit überbordender Energie dafür, dass der verzweifelter Suffkopf vom ersten Moment alle Sympathie des Publikums genießt.

Toomas Täht als „Knecht“ Matti hat's da schon schwerer, Gehör beim Publikum zu finden. Auch ihm legt Brecht ja eine Menge bedenkenswerter Erkenntnisse und Bonmots in den Mund – seine Rolle ist regelrecht dafür geschaffen, die geringe Haltbarkeit von Puntilas Versprechungen zu demonstrieren, seinen Pathos als Phrase zu entlarven und ihn mit dem gesunden Chauffeursverstand zu konfrontieren. Denn der sagt ihm, dass Herr und Knecht nie Freunde sein können. Und Matti hat auch ein gesundes Gespür für die Unmöglichkeit einer Ehe mit Puntilas Tochter Eva, die dieser ihm in einem seiner menschlich-trunkenen Momente anbietet (als unerfahren-dumme höhere Tochter, als burschikos-intrigant aufbegehrende Zwangsverlobte, als bemüht-unfähige Hausfrau gleich überzeugend: Christine Diensberg).



Glänzende Akteure, fragwürdige Projektionen



Vom Menschenfreund zum Leuteschlinder: Puntilla duscht sich nüchtern, während Fina (Ute Fiedler) und Matti (Toomas Täht) die Folgen erörtern

Solche Momente, die wichtigen, die, auf denen es Brecht ankam – sie kommen zu kurz. Jay Scheib hat die Lacher auf seiner Seite und das schwungvoll Umwerfende einer tollen, atemlosen, vom Anfang bis zum Schluss mitreißenden Inszenierung. Aber dass das Gelächter bei Brecht im Dienst der Erkenntnis steht, geht zwischen explodierenden Scheinwerfern und spritzenden Bierdosen oft verloren. Da helfen auch die Video-Projektionen nicht, mit denen Scheib arbeitet. Ein Gesichtsausdruck, sagt Scheib, könne vieles zum Ausdruck bringen, was sonst auf der Theaterbühne nicht zu vermitteln sei. Und so sehen wir die Akteure sich vor Kameras verrenken, die ihre Mimik auf eine große Leinwand übertragen. Misstraut Scheib der Wirkungskraft des Stücks? Oder der seiner Schauspieler? Letztere haben das

nicht verdient. Neben Puntilla, Matti und Eva agieren auch Eberhard Peiker als seriöser Richter, der gern mal einen hebt, und Tjark Bernau als tumb herumhangelnder Attaché glaubhaft und ausdrucksstark. Zusätzliche Glanzpunkte setzt die aufgewertete Rolle des Stubenmädchens Fina: Sie darf auch die – von Brecht als Lieder konzipierten – Zwischentexte sprechen, und Ute Fiedler sorgt hier für erdenschwer-sarkastische Tiefe. Wozu also der technische Aufwand? Scheibs Videos machen gelegentlich vorn auf der Leinwand das sichtbar, was sich im jeweiligen Hintergrund der von Susanne Hiller mit Sauna und Gutsherrnwohnung ausgestatteten Drehbühne tut. Doch die Bühnenaufbauten sind klar, licht und durchlässig – da wären auch andere Lösungen möglich gewesen.

V-Effekt im falschen Moment

Verfremdungseffekte? Brechts Theatertheorie fordert sie: Wir sollen jederzeit wissen, dass wir im Theater sind, sollen in keinem Moment das Spiel mit der Wirklichkeit verwechseln. Ganz am Ende, Matti verlässt das Gut, verabschiedet sich von Fina, wird's rührselig. Und damit es nicht zu rührselig wird, dürfen wir sehen, wie Ute Fiedler als Fina nicht wirklich weint, sondern sich für die bessere Wirkung Wasser in die Augen reibt. Der Moment ist großartig gespielt und die Kamera holt ihn ganz

nah ran. Allerdings tritt dafür einmal mehr die Brecht'sche Botschaft in den Hintergrund. Denn genau in diesem Moment fasst Matti seine Erkenntnis und die „Moral“ des Stücks zusammen: dass der Knecht den guten Herrn erst finden kann, wenn die Knechte ihre eigenen Herren sind.

Eine mitreißende, in vielerlei Hinsicht überzeugende Inszenierung, eine hinreißend agierende Schauspielertruppe –vielleicht war das ein wenig zu überwältigend. Ganz dem Sog des Theaters hingegeben, hatte man sich fesseln lassen, klatschte man begeistert und aus vollem Herzen, wie der allergrößte Teil des Publikums. Die Skepsis kam erst später: Brecht hat viel bekommen – er hätte noch etwas mehr verdient.

ArKtype presents
World/Inferno Friendship Society's

Addicted To Bad Ideas: Peter Lorre's 20th Century

Co-Conceived and Directed by Jay Scheib
Presented in association with Bowery Presents

Running Time: 90 minutes plus full band set to follow!
Webster Hall 125 East 11th Street (Between 3rd and 4th Avenues)

\$20 Tickets: ticketmaster.com or at the box office of Mercury Lounge (217 East Houston Street) or Music Hall of Williamsburg (66 North 6th Street)

An unprecedented fusion of one of today's best live punk acts with real time performance media, *Addicted To Bad Ideas* is a furious song cycle dedicated to 20th century movie star, archetype of alienation, Peter Lorre. It is a multimedia spectacle that tracks Lorre's enigmatic existence from formative days alongside Wedekind and Brecht to a pitiless fall from grace in drug-infused Hollywood. Led by punk rock legend Jack Terricloth, *Addicted To Bad Ideas* paints a picture of the twentieth century from the outsider's view recreating key motion picture sequences mixed with live interactive video.

"Not your typical punk act" -SPIN Magazine

This project was created with a commission and residency from Peak Performances @ Montclair, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ, Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director.

worldinferno.com websterhall.com

FRI JAN 9 at 9:30pm - **ONE NIGHT ONLY!**



Photo: Rose Callahan

The New York Times



Jack Terricloth, center, and his band, World/Inferno Friendship Society.

Addicted to Peter Lorre (That Voice, Those Eyes)

By BEN SISARIO

Published: January 7, 2009

Jack Terricloth was practicing his Peter Lorre impression. Sitting at a darkened video booth one recent afternoon at the Paley Center for Media (the former Museum of Television and Radio) in Midtown, he watched a series of obscure television appearances by Lorre from the 1950s and '60s, carefully observing every whine and snivel.

"Oh, *yesss*," he muttered in a mousy Germanic accent, hunching over and twiddling his fingers anxiously. "I am *hee-dee-ous*!"

Lorre's craven characters in films like "M" and "Casablanca" have been fodder for comedians for decades, but Jack Terricloth's aims are more ambitious. As leader of the World/Inferno Friendship Society, a Brooklyn band that mixes Weimar-style cabaret and roisterous ska-punk, he is the driving force behind "Addicted to Bad Ideas: Peter Lorre's 20th Century," a self-described punk songspiel that is part of the Public Theater's Under the Radar festival, including a performance at Webster Hall in the East Village on Friday.

Tall and slim, fond both of dandyish dark suits and heavy, mosh-pit-ready boots, Jack Terricloth looks nothing like the doughy and goggle-eyed Lorre. And despite how much he enjoys imitating Lorre's voice — he says he sometimes falls asleep listening to recordings of Lorre on the radio — his performance in "Addicted to Bad Ideas" is less impersonation than sympathetic interpretation.

"I find Peter Lorre a strangely charismatic, extremely creepy person, which I think most punk rockers can identify with," said Jack Terricloth, 38, who was born Peter Ventantonio and grew up in Bridgewater, N.J. "It's the lure of the other. He's the underdog, the outsider."

Emphasizing that outsider status, the show portrays Lorre as a misunderstood antihero whose life reflected broad political and social tumult. Born in 1904 in what is now Slovakia, Lorre, who was Jewish, had a promising early career in Germany working with Bertolt Brecht and Fritz Lang, but fled Nazi Germany for London and eventually Hollywood, where he was unable to escape typecasting as a sinister, usually foreign, villain. By the time of those 1950s television gigs he often seemed a caricature of himself. He died in 1964. "Lorre is an excellent way to examine the 20th century historically," Jack Terricloth said, "and the concerns and

problems of every artist who works in the culture wars.”

Directed by Jay Scheib, “Addicted to Bad Ideas: Peter Lorre’s 20th Century” is based on the band’s 2007 album of the same title, on Chunksaah Records. The music veers from piano- and guitar-driven rock to tense chamber arrangements, and the lyrics draw from Lorre’s films and Stephen D. Youngkin’s 2005 biography, “The Lost One: A Life of Peter Lorre.” (“I don’t act, I just make faces,” goes one song.) But Mr. Scheib, a theater professor at M.I.T. whose multimedia work “This Place Is a Desert” was in Under the Radar two years ago, said the show was not strictly biographical. “It ended up being more about how the band’s live show is influenced by Lorre’s life and times than any kind of a biopic,” he said.

World/Inferno Friendship Society exists almost completely outside the mainstream but has a following that many bands would envy, with devoted fans (they call themselves Infernites) communicating through an active forum on the band’s Web site (worldinferno.com). “Addicted to Bad Ideas” has quickly raised the group’s profile, however, adding highbrow arts institutions to its usually unglamorous tour itinerary of bars and clubs. In the fall the show opened the Peak Performances series at Montclair State University in New Jersey, and in May it will have a short run at the Spoleto Festival U.S.A. in Charleston, S.C.



If the idea of a raucous rock band performing a semiclassical song cycle in a proscenium theater sounds somewhat incongruous, that is exactly the kind of challenge that World/Inferno Friendship Society has been cultivating for more than a decade. The group’s eight current players — membership has been somewhat fluid — play saxophones and accordion in addition to guitar and drums, and dress in suits and gowns. Jack Terricloth sings in a smarmy slur and maintains a constant devilish smirk.

“We are a punk-rock band, and we play punk-rock shows, but our music couldn’t be more different,” he said. “Kids see us and think: ‘Guys in suits and makeup at a hardcore show? Come on.’ But we always have them by the third song, and then we’re something they have to accept about the punk rock scene and about the world. We’ve now entered into the great dialogue that is our culture, which is what any artist should do. I was going to say ‘any good artist,’ but any bad artist too.”

At Montclair State culture clash was part of the idea. The touring contract for “Addicted to Bad Ideas” stipulates that a presenter must make room for a mosh pit, and when fans began tossing themselves around it on the first night, Jedediah Wheeler, the executive director of the series, was at first horrified. “I thought, ‘Oh my God, this is dangerous,’” he said. “But the more I watched, the more I realized

that they had tremendous physical respect for each other. It became a dance. I could not believe how beautiful it was.”

The band first performed “Addicted to Bad Ideas” as a cycle at the Spiegeltent in Lower Manhattan in 2006, encouraged by Thomas Kriegsmann, who booked the summer music series there and is now the producer of the show. Montclair State gave Mr. Scheib and the band money and space to develop the show, which was first performed at the Live Arts Festival in Philadelphia in 2007.

In conversation Jack Terricloth comes across as a stubborn idealist and a wry cynic. He dropped out of high school to live the itinerant punk life, playing in the band Sticks and Stones before founding the World/Inferno Friendship Society, whose name he will only explain in riddles that he says may not be true. He wrote a chapbook novella, “Bakshish,” and said that although he had no formal experience in acting, “just acting out,” the band could well have ended up a theater troupe. Its first album, “The True Story of the Bridgewater Astral League” (1997), was in the style of a musical.

“There was a point where we could have gone really theater or gone really punk rock,” he said. “We just started touring all the time, and theater seems kind of fey, so we put the theater world aside for a good number of years.” Now it is becoming a greater part of the band’s repertoire, and he said there was more theatrical work to come. The band’s next project, he said, is a punk version of “A Prairie Home Companion.”



Hubble-Bubble

The Whole Point Of Peter Lorre

Melik Kaylan, 01.13.09, 12:01 AM EST

Culture, entertainment, tragedy, fun.



By fits and starts I have come to realize that Iran is inexorably filling the vacuum of the defunct Ottoman Empire in the Middle East. It's one of those satisfying notions that, once conceived, seems utterly obvious. I promised my saintly editor that I would unfold the hypothesis this week. And then something rather unexpected derailed my plans. I went to a live performance/concert at downtown New York's Webster Hall.

Readers who are remotely familiar with my intellectual preoccupations through the years know that I like to bang on about how, in the postmodern universe, entertainment and consumption are allowed to masquerade as culture. I have nothing against each separately, only against their being held up to us, by both highbrows and populists alike, as indistinguishable. Then along comes a show like "Addicted To Bad Ideas--Peter Lorre's 20th Century," and I'm forced to admit that sometimes, very rarely, the categories do blend gloriously to produce something greater than the sum

of their parts.

Let me say two things upfront: I've never liked Peter Lorre, and a friend of mine directed the show. To take the last point first, one expends so much ingenuity and hyperbole on insincere praise of work by friends over the years that, when the real thing comes along, you realize that you can find no terminology of praise in your toolbox untarnished by previous misuse. You want to say, No, no I mean it, this is not mere flattery, but you realize you have even said that before all too falsely.

Jay Scheib directed the show. He's an improbably decent and handsome 30-something prodigy from Iowa. He teaches theater at MIT in between trips to Austria to do the same at the grand old Mozarteum music academy. He directs operas in Europe and theater stateside. Nevertheless, I was gearing up to deploy all the tired flim-flam of flattery for yet another ho-hum product of very hard work by a friend. Not least because Jay Scheib is also the husband of an even older friend, the lovely and unstoppable Harvard-educated Sri Lankan theater performer, much beloved by venues like BAM and the Knitting Factory, Tanya Selvaratnam.

Peter Lorre. I've never understood why Americans, or some persistent strain of pop-culture tastemakers, have constantly pushed Peter Lorre to the fore as someone to remember or revere. He's a sniveling, sniffing, congenitally ignoble figure with a whingeing voice who gets typecast as just that in all his major roles from Casablanca to The Maltese Falcon. He is, at times, a petty thief, a child molester and a black marketer, but always a deeply untrustworthy, smear-featured minor villain of indeterminate Central European origin. He died in Hollywood in the 1960s, alone, in debt, addicted to morphine and largely unmourned. What's to like?

The live show, with music composed and performed by the seven-piece band World/Inferno Friendship Society, was a wholly unexpected thing, a phenomenon. How to describe it? Imagine a cross between the Rocky Horror Picture Show, Cabaret, the Moth, an episode of Biography and a bruising 1979 gig by The Clash. You can't? Well, I couldn't either until I saw it unfold. I mean, where else in rock music have you ever

seen an entire performance or album devoted to history? Or tuxedos and two saxophonists on stage in front of a crowd of shirtless hooligans headbanging in the mosh pit? Or at the back of the auditorium a large bar with middle-aged theater folk boozing happily away while watching the shenanigans?

The one-night performance we attended at Webster Hall began with a frustrating wait, with the audience separated from the band by a large paper scrim that acted as a translucent curtain. The paper curtain slowly turned into a graffiti canvas for the hidden performers as they spray-painted unintelligible scribbles on it. Then suddenly a mad, slender, Mephistophelean figure in black-tie and gelled receding hairline crashed through the paper curtain roaring out the first number.

The lead singer, Jack Terricloth, when he wasn't banging out hard-driving punk-smash numbers, sang with a perfect dreamy-crooner tenor to waltzy melodies. They evoked the lost lifetimes, forgotten places and morphine-smudged principles of a certain era. Terricloth also doubled as the lead actor in the role of Lorre in a kind of multidimensional posture. He was at once the protagonist, the ironic elegizer of his life, the emcee for the bygone century and for the night.

The evening really took off when I moved from the main floor to the balcony. I got a glimpse of the barreling mosh pit below, the bodies being carried aloft in the usual way, elbows and heads smashing, catastrophe pending every instant. I remember such scenes from my youth in punk-era Britain. It seemed perfectly necessary and routine at the time. But in the context of cabaret-theater these many decades later, it seemed shocking. Up above the stage, a multi-screen display showed scenes from Lorre's movies, a solitary smoking figure drifting along in old black-and-white filmstock, now turned sepia, walking on a nameless war-torn country road somewhere in wintry Europe.

As it became clear that the audience knew all the numbers by heart, my sense of wonder deepened. With the music biz fading, how does a band even develop a following these days--via Facebook?--let alone one so devoted that they sang out the title song louder than the band--a kind of mordant, self-hating morphine addict's anthem, "Because I can/'Cause no one can stop me/'Cause it makes up for things I've lost/'Cause I'm addicted to bad ideas/And all the beauty in this world." Meanwhile, on stage, scenes from a life unfolded. Lorre's bullying patron, the great director Fritz Lang (played by the pianist) is interviewed by Goebbels (played by the drummer). The encounter happened in real life. Goebbels offered Lang a position in the Nazi propaganda mill. Lang refused and fled abroad.

Then one sees photos of Lorre in the absurd Californian paradise of later years, his little daughter sitting on his suntanned shoulders, life's a consumer beach--how on earth could he have explained the inscape of such an odyssey to anyone? One realized that Lorre lived a classic 20th century arc of mute despair, before immigrants found a voice, at a time when the world's center of gravity shifted from east to west, from ancient hatreds to Polaroid smiles, from crushing history to weightless celluloid. He was the most unlikely person to embody such a grand narrative, and that, I realized, is the whole point of Peter Lorre. History randomly singled him out, as it did so many others. He spent his life trying to be unworthy of it.

The show on the other hand is worthy of all that and much else besides. It turns out to be a profound, thrilling ride through the last century's tragicomic confluence of cultural genres. Here, it matters that culture and entertainment, tragedy and fun, are confused. That's the whole point.

Melik Kaylan, a writer based in New York, writes a weekly column for Forbes.com. His story "Georgia In The Time of Misha" is featured in The Best American Travel Writing 2008.

Addicted to “Addicted to Bad Ideas,” a Good Idea

Posted 1/5/2009 3:26:00 PM by Tyler Gray, photo by Rose Gallagher

A couple of months ago, Blender boarded a slightly stank Port Authority bus to New Jersey on the promise of a rock opera of sorts based on the life of actor Peter Lorre called “Addicted to Bad Ideas.” It’s the brainchild of Boston/New York director Jay Scheib and band World/Inferno Friendship Society, both of whom we’re nuts about. Then again, we’re suckers for cabaret punk.

The hour or so ride - during which the chatter was almost as robust as the cough billowing from the gentleman behind us - was in stark contrast to the meticulously curated show. The location was a state-of-the-art theater at Montclair University on a street called Normal Avenue. The lighting on stage was stark and white. A glittery chandelier dangled overhead. The band’s outfits were straight out of a 1950s debutante ball (the music was not - more like Rocket from the Crypt or even Misfits with horns).

Singer Jack Terricloth was stylishly malnourished, slicked back and buttoned down in a crisp tux, and in between-song monologues and improvisational responses to hecklers, he pulled off Lorre’s weirdo nasal affectation (the Hungarian actor is famous for his roles in M and the lead in the Mr. Moto detective series). Speaking of the audience, the ones up front, anyway, they were the unofficial cast members in the production. They dressed smart-casual like the older onlookers seated in the back of the theater but moshed and crowd surfed (remember that?) when the music started (see photo, above). The theater had removed a few front rows of chairs and booked bulky campus cops to keep reins on the controlled anarchy. Mirrors assured it was all visible from the Geritol section. The band members are also shot by a series of video cameras and projected on giant screens above the stage (that’s Scheib’s signature touch).

In fact, the only thing bad I’d say about the night was that it ended with a 30-minute wait for a ride back to Manhattan at a dark, unmarked bus stop just past a cemetery in a chillingly silent suburban Jersey neighborhood. NYC residents will have it much easier Friday when Scheib and W/IFS take “Addicted to Bad Ideas” the Webster Hall for a one-off performance. We’re going and can only imagine how Scheib’s video and mirrors and the band and their fans’ antics will play in a proper concert hall. You should go.

POST AND COURIER, CHARLESTON, SC

Band's show a thrill ride

BY ADAM PARKER
The Post and Courier
Thursday, May 28, 2009

It really wasn't that strange. Go to the Knitting Factory in New York City most nights and you'll find odder stuff than World/Inferno Friendship Society.

The band's "Addicted to Bad ideas: Peter Lorre's 20th Century" was a terrific, loud, rock-and-roll romp replete with a charismatic rendering of the famous German-born actor by frontman Jack Terricloth.

Based in Brooklyn, the band mostly plays a quasi-conceptual rock that relies on big arrangements, lots of bouncing around on stage and the intriguing presence of Terricloth. It's got groupies (a few attended Wednesday night's gig). It's got merchandise. It's cool to know about World/Inferno.

But the band is more than a la mode. It's hip, a little retro, clever. Though the configuration can change, it's offering up drums, bass guitar, keyboards, guitar, three saxophones and Terricloth's lead vocals at the Emmett Robinson Theatre.

More cabaret than punk, and vaguely reminiscent of the band Oingo Boingo, the irreverent show took the audience through Lorre's life. The show began with shadows behind a scrim and ended with a waltz called "Heart Attack '69." As Terricloth sang "What a wonderful, wonderful world," drummer Brian Viglione grabbed a fan from the miniscule mosh pit and began dancing with him up the aisle steps.

The "narrative" — if we can call it that — consisted of odd monologues and skits played out self-consciously between songs.

Terricloth, dressed in a tux, eyeliner emphasizing sarcastic and occasionally demonic glances, mesmerized those relaxed enough to go with the flow. (Not everyone liked the show.)

It was a courageous and inspired addition to the Spoleto menu by producer (and avid fan) Nunally Kersh, for World/Inferno Friendship Society certainly inspires — joy, fascination and cheers by admirers; grimaces or blank stares by those unprepared for the big, wild ride.

Let's put it this way: Everyone knows Coney Island's Cyclone roller coaster is a rickety thrill. Those made uncomfortable by fast drops and sharp turns probably should avoid it.



January 7, 2009

NOW

Dramatically less expensive

If one of your New Year's resolutions is to broaden your experimental-theater horizons, the Under the Radar festival is a good way to start.

And the price is right. Tickets are just \$15-\$20 to this celebration of works by emerging and veteran talents from across the U.S. and around the world. The festival runs tonight through Jan. 18 at the Public Theater and other downtown venues.

"Under the Radar," says producer Mark Russell, "is a platform for artists to use the form of theater to talk about the world today."

As with any festival, the topics of conversation vary widely. There's a version of "Woyzeck" from Korea, a Scottish multimedia requiem for modern America, a dramatization of the Samuel Beckett novella "First Love," an Irish anti-fairy tale and a folk musical about "moving, storage and, of course, crushes on sexy people."

New York City writers are well-represented here.

"County of Kings" is a coming-of-age memoir written and performed by hip-hop artist Lemon Anderson.

"Transition," performed and co-written by beat-box musician, singer and comic Reggie Watts, is a multimedia comic romp through life's various stages.

The provocatively titled "Addicted to Bad Ideas: Peter Lorre's 20th Century" is a punk-music song cycle dedicated to the movie star and archetype of alienation. Unlike most shows, which have multiple performances, "Bad Ideas" runs this Friday only.

"I want people to approach it like a film fest and to see more than one show," says Russell. "They're short, and the prices are low. Dive in and sample. You may not have to go to see any more experimental theater all year."

For a complete schedule, go to www.publictheater.org.

Joe Dziemianowicz



"Addicted to Bad Ideas: Peter Lorre's 20th Century," Friday

Obscene Jester

the performance art blog

2008.09.21

loudly, loudly, catchee lorre



I've been a huge fan of **Stick and Stones**, and, by extension, **World / Inferno Friendship Society** for years, so I was naturally thrilled and confused that they would stage their new concept album, **Addicted to Bad Ideas**, as a part of their residence at **Montclair State's Peak Performances series**. W/IFS is known for their all-too rare true punk following (with their own Baroque, carnivalesque twists), proven by a conversation I overheard before the performance: *"Dude, it's a really nice theatre; there's no shit to break in there!"*

Oh man, was I excited to see what happened.

The result was one of the more bizarre clashes in what we academics like to call "audience reception theory" that I've come across. The new album is a tribute to the volatile life of **Peter Lorre**, the actor and director who has, since the end of his career, has become more a parody of himself than a credit to his stellar turns in Lang's **M**, **Casablanca**, and as the first **Bond villain**. It's no surprise that Lorre is the subject for W/IFS: their album **Just the Best Party** (2002) included a track titled "Peter Lorre," and the disturbing, absurd grotesque has been a lure for most hardcore punk, from the **Stooges** to the **Cramps** to the **Circle Jerks**, even to more recent bands like the **Offspring** and **Green Day** in their heydays. Lorre, a character actor who was always resentful of his typecast persona (*"I don't want to go down in history as a monster,"* he once rued). Sadly, the end of his career with the likes of **Vincent Prince**, **Bela Lugosi**, and **Boris Karloff** overshadowed his work with **Brecht**, **Lang**, psychodrama father **Jacob Moreno**, and **Hitchcock**. The "negative superman" becomes a beautiful object of inquiry for **Jack Terricloth** and company.

Terricloth, like many punk frontmen, certainly belongs to the Weimar era, with his slicked back hair and Spandau Ballet digs, he has the look of a lanky, more defined Lorre, and plays the part well in "Bad Ideas." Between songs, Terricloth performs a number of "Mystery in the Air" radio plays in his best huffing, Hungarian-affected voice.



And the piece is successful in two very conflicted, distinct forums: the first is what most were there to see and feel: the music and the mosh pit. And kudos to the people at the Kasser Theatre for removing the first few rows of seats to allow this. If it had remained a stuffy, "this is *theatre*, people!" aesthetic, the natives would have been restless. And the kids were alright: rushing each other, stage

diving, and general young but stupid horse play. Never have I been to a performance in which security detail waits in the aisles, just in case. Awesome. And they quickly establish it as a punk force to be reckoned with. As a old-time waltz plays in the background, we begin to see band members backlit behind the scrim, twirling and mingling, which gives way to grafitti-ing words like "Riot," "Murder," "Steal," and "Make Out." Are these calls to the kids, though, or themes in Lorre's life? Either way, the band quickly tears through and comes out swinging with the opening, "With a Good Criminal Heart."

The other success is in the production concept. The band and director **Jay Scheib** pull off a phenomenal job of staging the album, towing the line between the reverence to the music, and well placed additions of fantasies, radio plays, and video installation. (My particular favorite is Lorre's imagined encounter between Lang and Nazi Minister of Propoganda **Josef Goebbels**.) Scheib's video work mixes live feeds of the band with film of Lorre and music video-esque footage of the band, continuing the subtle supplement to larger project.

But where do these two aesthetics intersect? Far be it from me to take the snobbish route, shake my fists, and yell *"You damn kids don't appreciate the fine performance work at hand!"* But when I hear the fifteen year-old with horrible B.O. in front of me before the performance, commenting on the projection of M, "What the hell is this? This is the gayest movie I've ever seen! It's in black and white and backwards!" I have to cringe a bit. When the interludes were too quiet, many ran to the bathroom or outside for a smoke.

But, above all, the band enjoyed the aesthetic battle. Of course. After Terricloth is asked to put away the bottle of wine which he constantly returns to for a big swig or two, he mocks the university for not allowing the band to smoke or drink anywhere: it's a "Bad Idea." As the security rushes to push potential stage divers off the stage, Terricloth grins widely and gestures to let it happen. Ultimately, the question is *"Who cares?"* Neither aesthetic threatens the other. Who knows?: maybe that smelly kid will go home and rent *M* in all its glorious shades of gray.

Posted by Tweed on 2008.09.21 at 04:04 PM | [Permalink](#)

Comments

This Place Is A Desert

Conceived and Directed by Jay Scheib
In collaboration with media artist Leah Gelpe
Produced by Shoshana Polanco

Running time: 110 min

The Public Theater 425 Lafayette Street

\$15 tickets: publictheater.org or 212-967-7555

She wants to disappear. She has an affair. She feels worse. Partially seen and partially screened, *This Place Is A Desert* follows four lovers as they demolish each other in an attempt to defy their irreparable loneliness. See the action in fragments—through windows, reflected in mirrors, through partially-drawn curtains and projected live onto a wide screen looming above the stage architecture. A lone cinematographer careens through the wreckage of bankers and writers, nuclear disasters, and accidents that might better have been avoided. This play is a motion portrait parody of human loves and human emotion increasingly diminished.

"Taking a cue from the work of Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni, Scheib conjures a life's worth of tragedy and comedy, and relates them in the most fascinating way possible."

— The Mass Media

jayscheib.com

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9	10	11	12	13	16	19	20
8pm	1pm	9:30	2pm	7pm	7pm	4pm	7pm



Photo: Hayden Taylor



Theater

Time Out New York / Issue 690.691 : Dec 18-31, 2008

Theater: The best (and worst) of 2008

Helen Shaw, Theater writer

1. *All My Sons*

A rare instance of *TONY* unanimity! Director Simon McBurney puts his elegance and innovation at the service of Miller's painfully relevant tale.

2. *This Place Is a Desert*

Jay Scheib's stunning, silly, repetitive, touching multimedia beast of a show used video to bridge the divide between stage and dream.

3. *Die Soldaten*

David Pountney and designer Robert Innes Hopkins moved the audience—literally—for this stunning opera at the Park Avenue armory. Last 20 minutes: the scars are still healing.

4. *I'll Go On*

For this merely dutiful Beckett-goer, Barry McGovern's lacerating solo sliced through decades of received wisdom and made the author discombobulating again.

5. *Don Juan*

The National Theater of the United States, rolling in goofiness like a pup in leaves, found a way to reclaim Molière from the stuffy highbrows.

6. *Sunday in the Park with George*

I went with my sneer on and then wept it completely away as George Seurat (Daniel Evans) surrendered everything (sniffle) for art.

7. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*

This Christopher Durang revival—deliciously bitter—was worth giving up my romantic notions of family.

8. *Trojan Women*

Classical Theater of Harlem and Alfred Preisser head into yet another decade of slapping the classics into relevancy with this keen-eyed adaptation of Euripides.

9. *The Seagull*

Not the splashy one on Broadway, but the quieter version at Classic Stage Company—where Viacheslav Dolgachev fired up Dianne Wiest and Alan Cumming.

10. *Hey Girl*

Even a second-rate nightmare from Societas Raffaello Sanzio is still astounding enough to gobble my imagination whole.



2008 Under the Radar Festival Reviews

This Place Is A Desert

reviewed by Saviana Stanescu

Jan 11, 2008

The Under the Radar Festival manages to create a special atmosphere at The Public Theatre, a buzz that's shared by theatre-goers and industry people, all excited to see what's "new and hot" in the contemporary performance arena.

One of the must-see shows on the "menu," *This Place Is A Desert* is a fascinating new piece conceived and directed by Jay Scheib (in collaboration with media designer Leah Gelpe), and produced by Shoshana Polanco, which proves once again that Scheib is one of the creators of a new *theatre d'auteur*. His shows have a distinctive stylistic mark, an aesthetic that combines a conceptual exploration with a high-tech multimedia universe that allows the procession to resume.

Inspired by the works of the Italian filmmaker **Antonioni**—who explored a similar world of emotional alienation in his films *L'Avventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1961), and *L'Eclisse* (1962), creating an exciting non-narrative, psychological cinema that made him famous—Scheib is similarly obsessed with a modern world of loneliness and despair, where people cling onto each other in violent sexual encounters in the hope of finding themselves in the process. Of course it never happens and a frustration leads to a new frustration, and a depression to a new one. Antonioni's somewhat political concern of examining the barren eroticism of the bourgeoisie and implicitly criticizing its lack of meaningful values, becomes for Scheib a stylized reality of random love affairs and betrayals in an alienated society where people are desperate to connect, masochistically throwing themselves into identity crises solved temporarily through sexual passion.

The ensemble of performers is diverse and exceptional, fully committed to the director's vision. Extremely powerful actresses such as April Sweeney and Sarita Choudhury keep the audience with their eyes glued to their movement, be it live or on screen. The beautiful costumes created by Oana Botez-Ban contribute largely to the sensuality that the performers share, bringing a palpable sense of carnality on stage.

Scheib's aesthetic relies on the various angles through which we can see the scenes, always a fragmented reality that never reveals itself fully. We can see faces in mirrors, bodies moving on the screen,

entangled arms and legs, sneaky eyes sliding in a corner of an image, a few rooms where people interact more or less violently, always with some erotic anticipation or sexual desire that burns hearts and destroys relationships. Still—in an alienated universe where people are islands, a burning heart is a sure sign that one is still alive, a violent sexual encounter is a proof that one exists.

And Jay Scheib and his ensemble are a sure proof that a powerful performance brings onstage a vibrant space of conflict and passion, that theatre and film can feed each other and create together a brilliant cocktail of human emotions, going way beyond words and stories.

Directed by Jay Scheib

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Jay Scheib's This Place is a Desert

ICA Hosts World Premiere

Erica H. Adams - 2007-03-28



From the ICA's World Premiere.



Prismatic views of four simultaneous film and stage actions.



Vignettes of stylish, clueless and violent 21st Century couplings.



Dialogue pierced the air like bullets in chilly pinteresque scenes.



The Institute of Contemporary Art's world premiere of *This Place is a Desert*, March 22 –25th, advertised as theater for a generation raised on cinema, posed vital contemporary issues of isolation, violence and surveillance in a Post 9/11 culture that freely mixes fact with fiction. Conceived and directed by Jay Scheib, this production is his 20th collaboration since 1996, with media specialist Leah Gelpe and was produced by Shoshana Polanco.

At the ICA's Water Café, before Thursday's premiere Scheib spoke about working on his family's Minnesota farm plowing a field: he realized, he could only finish one small section of the field at a time but, that he "was able to change the earth, incrementally".

Living in New York through the events of 9/11, Scheib witnessed in its aftermath, the frightening rise of reality television and the media's willful construction of news from re-purposed facts and, fiction. Even Michael Moore, he said was 'propaganda'. For the next three years, Scheib worked in Europe, in self-exile.

The current production of *This Place is a Desert* was begun as a workshop with the Kretakor Ensemble in Budapest, was developed in residence at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where Scheib is a theater professor and was part of an open studio showing at the Prelude Festival in New York in 2005.

Scheib met Gelpe at Columbia University in the late '90's where she studied film and he studied with director Robert Woodruff and Anne Bogart. Gelpe was the video artist for A.R.T. director Woodruff's production of *Britannicus* and *Island of Slaves* before his recent departure to the San Francisco Opera.

At the ICA/Boston premiere, Scheib and Gelpe's 'motion portrait' read like a voyeurist's tableau vivant: vignettes of stylish, clueless and violent 21st century couplings -ill conceived and run amok –were filmed and projected onto four screens through live-feeds over the staged actions below. Their production's hybrid form followed dysfunction as Scheib explains:

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Cameras and their technicians moved freely among the actors.

"So from ecological point of view we ask the question: Are we ugly people? And therefore deserving of the ugliness of the world that we live. Or is there something wrong in us? Something that needs to be fixed? And the

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world in which we live is merely symptomatic of a deeper anxiety . . . From another point of view: why, when we are always feeling bad, are we inspired to make things worse?"

Inspired by filmmaker Antonioni, master of the erotic partial view, one of the four staged actions was only visible on screen. The 'prismatic views' of four simultaneously staged and filmed actions exceeded Shakespeare's theater-in-the-round with fewer angles than a cubist painting and delivered perceived depths of jewel cut, faceted surface. Like a house of mirrors, each scene refracted a single dysfunction: fear of intimacy in a field of accidents. These 'vision tools' Gelpe said, of the staged, filmed and replicated actions, allowed the play to develop 'organically'.

Throughout the performance, cameras and their technicians moved freely among actors, like the black clothed Kabuki kuroko (stage hands) we're not supposed to notice, this artifice engendered a parallel world.

Structurally, ICA/Boston's theater, like a sports arena, posits all staged action at a steep incline, far below audiences. It was easier to watch screens placed at eye level with live action close-ups than the stage. In part, this generalized situation has contributed to our preference for film over real life (R.L.) and, underlines a major theme of this production. While living in a culture of screens has allowed us to communicate globally, it has isolated us, locally.

During the opening sequences of the play, as the crew and actors set up, the audience continued to talk, uncertain it had begun, when in fact, the intentional blurring of real, staged and filmed action was already in-process. In one corner, a woman read a book by short story writer Raymond Carver, the first of many women readers savagely interrupted by potential sex partners. The one man who admitted to taking pleasure in watching a woman read, paid her to beat him, as well. Readers punctuated the set, marking time as book covers posed as symbolic content, in this action-based desert of sleepwalkers. Awkward couplings included ritualized violence often followed by spasmodic break dances and the occasional ballet.

Rhythms, as much dance as visual music, constructed themes and accrued a sense of dread, not parody. Dialogue pierced the air like bullets in chilly, Pinteresque scenes of miscommunication. This Place is a Desert exposed narcissists addicted to velocity:

Emily: (wiping blood from her lip) I am not into philosophy, I'm into the military. I'm into bullets, I like speed, I'm into intelligence—seeing more than my opponent sees. I love missiles that pilot themselves; missiles that see. Do you get it? Ideas don't interest me anymore, or history; I am interested in velocity. And that's really it. This Place is a Desert.

The inability to focus on any one scene of this complex network replicated a contemporary phenomenon of relentless motion, one that's sleepless, dreamless and numb; it's productivity-oriented, but produces little of worth. This Place is a Desert began as it ended with a blur, in process. A phantasm; a thousand arrows were shot into the air, some still in suspension, others lodged deeply through our bodies into the next day: hard to shake, hard to take. Scheib quotes Philip K. Dick: "Reality is that which when you stop believing in it, it doesn't go away."

Scheib's recent works include the critically acclaimed Women Dreamt Horses at PS122 in New York; a multimedia adaptation of Tolstoy's The Power of Darkness; at Trafo in Budapest; a live art installation All Good Everything Good at Raum Space, Bologna Italy, and the world premier of Irena Popovic's opera Mozart Luster Lustik at the Sava Center in Belgrade; Other credits include: The Medea after Heiner Müller and Euripides at La Mama in New York with subsequent performances in Turkey; The Demolition Downtown by Tennessee Williams at MIT; Musset's Lorenzaccio at the Loeb Drama Center; Koltès' West Pier at the Ohio Theatre; Falling and Waving, at St. Ann's in Brooklyn. He is winner of the Richard Sherwood Award, The Wade Award and numerous fellowships. Scheib is currently assistant professor of theatre at MIT, and a regular guest professor at the Mozarteum Institute für Schauspiel und Regie, in Salzburg, Austria. He holds an MFA from Columbia University.

Leah Gelpe has collaborated with Scheib on 15 productions since 1996, including The Power of Darkness, The Medea, West Pier and Falling and Waving. She was video designer for Britannicus and Island of Slaves at the ART, and sound designer for David Rabe's The Black Monk at Yale Rep, The Lady from the Sea at the Intiman Theatre, Saved at Theatre for a New Audience, and Godard (distant & right) at the Ohio Theatre in New York and Theatre des Amandiers, Nanterre, Paris. She holds an MFA in film from Columbia University.

Producer Shoshana Polanco has been creating, producing, and performing original work since 1997. Her latest ventures have been La Perla in her native Buenos Aires, committed in New York and Pedestrian: A Walking Tour for Multiple Voices and Portable Phones in New York. She was Creative Producer of BAiT - Buenos Aires in Translation, a festival of 4 English-Language World Premieres at PS122 in New York.

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Jay Scheib (right) makes video a central focus of his work, says Leah Gelpe (left), who handles the video in Scheib's work, "This Place Is a Desert." (Essdras M. Suarez/Globe Staff)

THEATER

The Boston Globe

A little of everything

Video, break-dancing, and dodge ball are all in Jay Scheib's new theater piece

By Geoff Edgers, Globe Staff | March 18, 2007

Even as a student, Jay Scheib wasn't afraid to take chances.

In the early '90s, while an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota, he made his directing debut with a piece that called for his cast to enter a stage littered with trash and a huge mound of earth, stop, and remain quiet and still for 72 minutes. "The Device Machine," presented at a theater festival in Hungary, garnered no applause.

"The place was roaring with laughter for the first 12 minutes," Scheib recounts one recent morning in the Stata Center cafe at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he's an associate professor of music and theater. "Then there was heckling."

In comparison, Scheib's latest piece, "This Place Is a Desert," which runs at the Institute of Contemporary Art Thursday through Sunday, could be considered a crowd pleaser. Inspired by the films of Michelangelo Antonioni ("Blowup," "L'Avventura"), it presents a tale of relationships gone bad, framed by Scheib's twisted, pop-culture savvy sense of humor. Six hand-held video cameras track the actors from different angles through a set shaped like a house, projecting their images on four panels above. There's also break-dancing, dodge ball, nuclear disaster, and a romantic scene done partially in Italian.

For Scheib, who believes in using cinematic tools to make theater more powerful, "This Place Is a Desert" is nothing revolutionary. It's just the latest of his hybrid creations. For the ICA, the production is something else: a tough sell.

"This is probably the riskiest thing I'm doing this spring," says David Henry, the ICA's director of programs. That's because it's so hard to categorize. "It's not a dance, but it's as physical as a lot of dance I've seen. It's not a film or video, but you spend a lot of time watching a screen. It's not theater, but there's a set and actors down there."

The script was developed largely out of a series of rehearsals and workshops that culminated two years ago in a short version performed at the Prelude Festival in New York.

The main characters -- four couples in various states of dysfunction -- "are essentially demolishing each other," says Scheib. "In dealing with their loneliness, some of them embrace the impulse to make things worse."

Though Scheib's work is emotionally charged, the curly-haired director, 37, is soft-spoken in person. He's tall, about 6 foot 4, and 190 pounds, only a bit heavier than he was in high school, where he was a standout high jumper.

There's nothing new about using video in theater. But Leah Gelpe, the New York artist who handles the video in this production, describes Scheib's approach to the medium as unique.

Gelpe, who recently worked on the American Repertory Theatre's production of "Britannicus," says that Scheib doesn't merely use video as a complement to his plays, he makes it a central focus of the work. The cameras are brought in as early as the first rehearsal. "This is the only way to develop the media hand in hand with the performance," says Gelpe.

Scheib says his use of video is an important link to his research at MIT, which focuses on integrating media with live performance. People throughout the world are familiar with movie techniques, he notes.

"They're used to jump cuts, and seeing a story told through cinematic techniques," says Scheib. "Whereas a lot of people are just bored at the theater."

The VCR revolution

Scheib's attachment to film began in Iowa. His father ran a farm. His mother worked as a warden at the state prison. The family TV got only three channels, and the town's lone movie house showed second-run mainstream films. Then videocassettes arrived, and the teenage Scheib found himself mesmerized by Pasolini and Godard, John Hughes and Clint Eastwood.

Driving a tractor all day long developed his visual sensibility, Scheib says, his sense of scale and the landscape. He also noticed changes as the farm economy of the 1980s began to collapse. Barns went unpainted. Families moved away. That sense of desolation stuck with him and runs through his work.

At the University of Minnesota, where he would earn his undergraduate degree in theater arts, a professor exposed Scheib to the work of the Polish theater director Tadeusz Kantor. Scheib began to stage productions, first in the basement of a school gymnasium, then in the abandoned rehearsal space of the Minnesota Opera, and later on the stages of international festivals.

In 1997, Scheib entered Columbia University's graduate program in theater directing, where he would study under Robert Woodruff and Anne Bogart.

"When he applied, I looked at his material and said, 'This guy's already a rock star,' " remembers Bogart. "He's clearly got a major career. His three years at Columbia, he basically used Columbia to do his projects."

In New York, Scheib also met Gelpe and developed a rapport with some of the actors who will come to the ICA for "This Place Is a Desert." April Sweeney, who is in the show, says that working with Scheib is liberating. He creates a script but leaves in opportunities -- the dodge ball game in "Desert," for example -- to allow a moment to shift and turn differently each night. Most importantly, she says, he doesn't abide by the rigid rules that she feels govern much of regional theater.

"You go to work in regional theater, and you only have a certain amount of time to make a play, actors aren't supposed to talk that much, and there's sort of this acceptable way of rehearsing and working," says Sweeney. "It's about doing a job as opposed to doing a piece of theater."

Confronting reality

"Desert" opens with a cameraman who has two names (Haskell Wexler, after the real-life cinematographer, and Glen Chick, after the real-life operator of the Three Mile Island control room) shooting away. Cut to a woman crying, a man working out, and another woman reading a Raymond Carver book with her cancer-stricken friend, named William Faulkner, in the room. Another character, called Richard Harris, is the son of the man who designed the reactor at Chernobyl.

What does it all mean?

Scheib describes the play as an examination of human loves and emotions in the face of industrial developments. He draws on Antonioni, he says, because the director explored those themes. But the play also incorporates testimonies from the Chernobyl and Three Mile Island disasters.

"I think anyone who expects a staging of one of Antonioni's films will be disappointed," says Scheib. "Maybe outraged."

As for the colorful names, some are purely comic asides, while others have deeper meanings. Harris, the late actor, performed in Antonioni's 1964 film "The Red Desert." Faulkner created an entirely fake universe -- Yoknapatawpha County -- to heighten the reality of his novels, a concept that intrigues Scheib.

As in all his productions, the idea is to get as close as possible to his characters, whoever they are. He doesn't want them to speak with put-on accents or to hide anything, physically or emotionally. And video technology helps make that kind of intimacy possible.

"I'm working from the same position as a typical director," says Scheib. "It's just that I'm using some of the tools in our hands. I can be close to the action, I can see around corners, and I can present a stage design that turns the rules of stage design on its head."

"We're trying to get as close to reality as possible," he says. "In a way, my interest in theater is the same as it was it was in the 1880s. . . . Using fiction to confront reality and using reality to confront fiction. That's my slogan, if I had one right now."

Geoff Edgers can be reached at gedgers@globe.com. ■

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The Making of Americans: An opera by Jay Scheib and Anthony Gatto based on the novel by Gertrude Stein

Friday-Saturday, December 12-13, 8 pm \$25 (\$21 Walker members)



Still from *Crash Collision* (2006), a film by Chris Larson

A few months ago, Jay Scheib got his first glimpse of the model for the stage set of *The Making of Americans*, a new chamber opera distilled from Gertrude Stein's 1925 novel of the same name. The set contains, among other things, a billboard that will double as a film screen alongside a house that looked as if it had been touched by a tornado.

"It's the Cubist alternative to *Little House on the Prairie*," says Scheib, who is creating the Walker-commissioned opera with Brooklyn-based composer Anthony Gatto. "There's a quote from Gertrude Stein, who said [the novel] is about the history of everyone, at every time, at every point in space. Representing that in a single frame, what does that look like? I'm trying to show that here." Scheib hewed tight to Stein's novel, in which she describes humanity through the path of three generations of a single family. He boils down the narrative to this: "Every individual is going to fail sometimes, every individual is going to succeed sometimes, and everybody is going to die. So this coming of every generation—doing the best they can do—is the making of Americans. Notice I didn't say the making of America."

Scheib was still in his twenties when he became a rising star of avant-garde theater. With *The Making of Americans*, he delivers a double surprise—first by merely tackling Stein's dense, sweeping, 900-page text, and second, by dealing with its operatic treatment. There's also a third surprise—that this work, about Americans in the aggregate, is happening in the United States. An Iowa farm boy at his roots, Scheib works more often in Europe than he does in America (he recently directed five short operas in a science-fiction saga at the state theater in Saarbrücken, Germany). And he sees it as natural that his first complete opera in the United States is coming to life not through an opera company but a contemporary art center. "The opera palette in Europe is maybe a little more contemporary than in the United States. In Germany, this would totally fit into XYZ opera house," Scheib says. "In theater, I control time, but in opera, time is measured from beginning to end. The challenge of the restraint is

inspiring, and I actually have to think in music. I have to be a sharper thinker."

Scheib and Gatto conceived *The Making of Americans* as a cross-media chamber opera for small orchestra, string quartet, and six singers. Joining the vocalists onstage are the Twin Cities contemporary music group Zeitgeist, New York's JACK Quartet, and 20 Twin Cities families recruited for the chorus, led by local favorites Bradley Greenwald and David Echelard. Minneapolis-based artist Chris Larson is designing the set. In Scheib's three-dimensional staging, storms fill the sky, shingles are ripped from the roof of a small house, and a tree is torn from the ground, its roots pointing upward. Rain falls and a violinist is lifted into the air, where she remains suspended. As the clouds roll in, the stage becomes a landscape filled with families. Scheib relies on live and prerecorded video streams and extensive sound design to realize the piece.

"In a way, Stein is doing to literature what Duchamp did to painting—describing a single object from multiple points in space. Our approach is deeply informed by the discipline of portraiture. Our portraits exist in multiple dimensions. They're living," he says. "I once dropped a cinderblock through the roof of a house and an entire bedroom from the ceiling onto a bare stage. I guarantee you more people jump out of their seats when that happens than when a car does flips on a movie screen. I want to develop interesting experiences that are at least as powerful as watching the latest *Batman*, if not more so."

Commissioned by the Walker Art Center and Zeitgeist with support provided by the William and Nadine McGuire Commissioning Fund and Meet the Composer.

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Made in America

• A plucky creative team has translated Gertrude Stein's sprawling 'cubist novel' into a multimedia, avant-garde opera at the Walker.

By ROHAN PRESTON
rpreston@startribune.com

How does a director adapt Gertrude Stein's sprawling novel "The Making of Americans" into an opera?

Jay Scheib took a cue from one of his drama students at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"One of them told me that if you put a Poland Springs water bottle in a microwave — a 12-fluid-ounce bottle — and you have a little bit of water in it, it will shrink perfectly down to the size of a 6-ounce bottle," he said. "Now, I didn't try that experiment myself, but I think of this project as microwaving Gertrude Stein."

Scheib and composer Anthony Gatto have been working for two years on their multimedia version of Stein's messy, logorrheic work. The result of their efforts premieres Friday at Walker Art Center, which commissioned the work.

"Americans" is a multigenerational saga about two immigrant families whose offspring marry in the United States. When Stein published it in 1925 it was a critical and commercial failure. Yet Stein and her book have retained iconic status among the avant-garde. When Gatto first read "Americans," he wept.

"She just carried me into a deep, emotional connection," he said. "The genesis of this is deep and personal."

New 'Americans'

The "Americans" that opens at Walker is not the first attempt to transform it into an opera. Stein, who died in 1946, worked with composer Virgil Thomson on two adaptations of the book: "Four Saints in Three Acts" and "The Mother of Us All" (The Walker presented the latter decades ago.)

Gatto, whose "Elijah's Wake" will be remounted at Open Eye Figure Theatre in the Twin Cities next fall, said that past adaptations of Stein were inadequate.

"Everyone plays her work like she's just playing with words — like she's [messing] with you," he said. "But there's a real emotional, real visceral connection to this



HAROLD TAYLOR

"The Making of Americans" will involve video, music and performers, including Tanya Selvaratnam (foreground) and Elizabeth Muzin (behind her).

work."

Scheib agreed. "The usual approach to Gertrude Stein is to go in and window-shop interesting sentences," he said. "We wanted to be fully immersed in it, and technology has made that now possible."

The scale of "Americans" is huge, with actors, dancers and singers, plus a chorus numbering between 20 and 40 singers. The show also has eight instrumentalists, as well as a set by Chris Larson that includes a two-story house. Zeitgeist, a Twin Cities new-music group, and Jack Quartet are also in the production, which will feature Scheib's electronic manip-

THE MAKING OF AMERICANS

What: World premiere of an opera by director Jay Scheib and composer Anthony Gatto, based on the novel by Gertrude Stein.

When: 8 p.m. Fri.-Sat.

Where: Walker Art Center,

1750 Hennepin Av. S., Mpls.

Tickets: \$25, \$12-375-7600 or

walkerart.org

ulations of live video.

Stein was so far ahead of her time that it is only now, with technological advances, that the work can be properly translated for the

stage, said Scheib.

"I'm able to deal with this notion of Stein's everything happening in every place at the same time by using the video to highlight the way in which repetition occurs in music and also in text by mediating the action onstage with media technologies. I'm using video the way [artist Marcel] Duchamp might have used a canvas," he said. "You will see the live performer, but the sound might be looped, so you get a sense of being in the past, the present and the future, all at once."

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« I THINK OF THIS PROJECT AS MICROWAVING GERTRUDE STEIN. »

Jay Scheib, director

Scene4 Magazine, International Magazine of Arts and Media

February / March 2009

The Steiny Road To Operadom
with Karren Alenier

Conversation with a Genius

The Steiny Road Poet thinks she has met a genius—director Jay Scheib, who in six months read and digested Gertrude Stein's 900-plus-page novel *The Making of Americans*. After the Poet gasped, she could hear the director shrugging as they each held a telephone receiver to their respective ears on January 8, 2009.

BIRTH OF A NATION, BIRTH OF A STEINIAN OPERA

Composer Anthony Gatto approached Scheib suggesting they collaborate on a Stein-based project. Gatto wanted to use Stein's voice (i.e. text from her novel *The Making of Americans*) with his original electronic music set to the film *Birth of a Nation*. Scheib said D. J. Spooky (Paul D. Miller) had already done something similar with this film and so Scheib told Gatto that he wanted to do a "real adaptation of Stein's novel" to create a chamber opera. When Scheib asked Gatto what he thought, Gatto said he hadn't read the novel, that he was only familiar with excerpts, particularly those recorded by Stein in her voice so Scheib picked up the heavy tome and started reading. He said he had to be careful to pay attention because in Stein's repetitions were sudden bits of vital information that might be easily missed. "I could read for four hours and miss the point because I started daydreaming and missed one key sentence that may have appeared once in two hundred pages."

POINTS OF CONNECTION

Less than a week before the premier of the Scheib-Gatto opera *The Making of Americans*, the Poet got an email from her fellow Steinian Hans Gallasemail and web surfs a little while she works. She can't decide if she hopes they call her back for another day or not. On Thursday nobody calls. She lugs two bags of books to sell at Cooper's, but they only take her *Joy of Cooking* and a Billy Collins collection. Later, she does laundry and has a frugal but yummy dinner of a baked potato with cheese and broccoli. On Friday she is queen of Atlantis. He

said he just heard about The Making of Americans opera but he couldn't get there. The Poet did a Google search on Anthony Gatto and found a juggler by that name and then the composer. What clinched the Poet's decision to get on a plane December 12th for that night's first performance in cold Minneapolis was that Gatto had also written a piece of music based on Paul Bowles' novel The Sheltering Sky. Jane and Paul Bowles are the subjects of the Steiny Road Poet's second opera libretto.

One more thing that the Poet did was contact Gatto by email to get a personal vibration and see how much access she could have to him after the performance. In those exchanges—email and a brief encounter in the theater after the performance—Gatto emphasized that this opera was a collaboration with Scheib. Except for points of clarification related to who certain characters were in the opera cast, the Poet wrote her Scene4 review of the Scheib-Gatto opera without



benefit of the phone interview with Scheib. The Poet had read enough of Stein's novel to know that the handling of Stein's ideas and the selection of text for the opera preserved the integrity of Stein's landmark Modernist novel. What the Poet did not know before she finished writing her review was Scheib's reputation for the use of video in his work.

PORTRAITURE AND IMAGES IN MOTION

In a telling article entitled "A Little of Everything" written for The Boston Globe by Geoff Edgers dated March 18, 2007, Edgers quotes the New York artist Leah Gelpe as follows, "Scheib doesn't merely use video as a complement to his plays, he makes it a central focus of the work." Also, Edgers stated, "Scheib says his use of video is an important link to his research at MIT, which focuses on integrating media with live performance."

Therefore, the Poet had no idea how large her second question was—could you talk about your use of video in this opera and how it relates to the choreography or actor movement? However, Scheib took this in stride saying he had "two to three things he wanted to accomplish with this opera." His

approach was built on "portraiture" and "images in motion." He used the video to set up portraits of his characters and then "catch the reflection of a single performer in relation to the event on stage." In keeping with Stein's influence from Picasso and her intention to present a story from multiple points of view, Scheib's guiding motif was cubism, using video to achieve simultaneity. By processing the live video feeds, he said he hoped to delve into the deep logic of Stein's writing. For example, he explained, the ballerina would run into the house and perform a pirouette and later appear on stage performing the same thing, but this time, there would also be the video running that showed her inside the house performing the earlier pirouette. Scheib said he wanted to immerse the viewer in the experience and he hoped that Gatto's music would accomplish this as well.

THE ALGORITHM OF DANCE

Next the Poet asked him to talk about who his dancers were. He said he has a studio workshop at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where he teaches performance media and dance theater. His students are budding mathematicians, aerospace engineers, and other scientists. The dancers in *The Making of Americans* were selected from his students at MIT. What he worked on with this selected group of dancers was "use of repetition, how to handle architecture, tempo, use of basic ballet forms which much like in novel deteriorate over time. A ballerina gets dropped over and over. We developed this by looking at passages of the novel. We developed an algorithm where they could improvise in time-space, how they kinesthetically react. We had nine rehearsals with the total cast but the dancers had to be ready to improvise.

THE ACTOR WITH A VIDEOGRAPHIC MIND

Another point of curiosity for the Poet was Tanya Selvaratnam who played the part of Mary Maxworthig. The Poet wanted to know if he selected the text she recites at the end of the play with this particular actor in mind. The text she delivered was extremely repetitious and had to be a challenge to memorize. Scheib said Selvaratnam has "photographic memory" and that he wanted her to recite the entire last chapter of Stein's novel, except he had to compromise with his collaborator and therefore only one fourth of Stein's text was used in the speech delivered by Selvaratnam as Mary Maxworthig. Respectfully, the Poet felt that had Maxworthig's recitation continued any longer than it was, the focus of the opera and the energy it had accrued would have suffered.

Additionally, the Poet had noticed after the performance that, in the actor's bio printed in the playbill, Selvaratnam had acted in the Wooster Group's *House/Lights* (a performance piece that mixed Stein's play *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* with a grade B porn movie) in March 2005 and that she had an intimate connection to the use of video. Up to Selvaratnam's extended recitation, the Poet kept wondering who the woman walking through the scenes with a bouquet of flowers was and how eerie and larger than life she seemed.

FINDING THE NEW FREAKS

One other thing that the Poet wondered about was the house that sat on the stage and how its architectural structure affected the dramatic action and why it had been billed as a "little house on the prairie." Was this an attempt to draw in the Minnesotans, who to the Poet's experience with Minnesotans met along the way and in the crowd at premier of *The Making of Americans* seemed like an extraordinary audience for experimental art? To this, Scheib said the attempt to connect the house, which was a piece not specifically built for this opera by multimedia artist Chris Larson, to the Midwest and Stein's location of her novel was not fully realized. Earlier, Scheib had commented this was "the first outing with the piece and it was still an experiment for now."

To ratchet back to the bigger view, the Poet asked, "What are the critical elements in your mind that move opera into the 21st century?" Scheib answered that he saw new opera as "interesting synthesis of the experiments of the last 100 years. Somewhere between Handel and Luigi NoNo. This is what will keep opera alive." What was important to him was combining the old with the new. When asked what was the best city to present new operatic work, he said, "Boston is a great city to do that in because there are so many composers, musicians, and music lovers there. But, of course, New York City is a good place too. I wasn't in Minneapolis long enough to get a sense of what the reaction was, but the reaction of the audience seemed very strong and no one was walking out so it [*The Making of Americans*] seemed to have been well received." He also said he liked working in Germany, where he can present radical work for what a conductor he once worked with called the "new freaks."

Finding what is new out of what is familiar seems to be a gift Scheib has and, for a "first outing," *The Making of Americans* was exceptionally well put together and emotionally compelling. The Steiny Road Poet would love to hear the music again as well as experience the next production.

Photo - N. White

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Scene4 Magazine — Karren Alenier

Karren LaLonde Alenier is the author of five collections of poetry and, recently, *The Steiny Road to Operadom: The Making of American Operas* and she is a Senior Writer and Columnist for Scene4.

<http://www.scene4.com/html/karrenalenier0209.html>

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February / March 2009



by Karren Alenier

What does new American opera look and sound like? This critic suggests new American opera both embraces what is innovative with subtle incorporation of what is old and in achieving a finely tuned balance awakens its audience in that fleeting window of the present moment. Such operas happen with rare frequency because any opera premiere is expensive and requires the support and cooperation of exponentially more people than are seen on stage during such a production. This critic had the rare pleasure to experience such an opera off the beaten path at the Walker Art Center's McGuire Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota, when she attended on December 12, 2008, the opening night performance of *The Making of Americans* by composer Anthony Gatto and director Jay Scheib based on text Scheib took from Gertrude Stein's groundbreaking novel *The Making of Americans: Being a History of a Family's Progress*.



NARROWING 900 PAGES TO 100 MINUTES

For anyone who has had the curiosity and courage to dip into Stein's 900-page-plus novel, which is filled with the painstaking details of a middle class family across many generations, one would now be wondering what aspect of this non-narrative novel Scheib featured in this 100-minute opera. The best way to answer this is to provide the synopsis listed in the Walker Art Center program brochure:

Prelude

Act 1

Scene 1: Mr. Hersland, Sr. reflects on the loss of his wife

Scene 2: History is repeating, changing. Martha Hersland considers a whole life repeating.

Scene 3: The marriage of Julia Dehning and Alfred Hersland

Act 2

Scene 1: Martha Redfern-Hersland reflects on her recent divorce.

Scene 2: Alfred Hersland and Julia Dehning reflect on breaking up.

Scene 3: The funeral oratorio of David Hersland he reflects on his life, his lover, Mary Maxworthing, and his family.

Epilogue: Mary Maxworthing reflects on living and dying and being in family living.

To Scheib's credit, his interpretation of Stein's generational saga based on the psychological portraits of her parents—represented in the novel by David and Fanny Hersland—and other family members—is not literal or chronological. For example, Stein opens her novel with the apocryphal vignette of the angry man who drags his father through the old man's orchard while the father shouts, "Stop, I did not drag my father beyond this tree." While Scheib does enact this powerful moment, he does not open the opera in this way. In the applied method of Stein, Scheib goes for a cross-pollination of artistic forms. In his program notes, he writes, "This opera is neither a painted canvas, nor sculpture, nor literature but some unusual combination of all of these. What we are seeing will be informed by what we are hearing."



THE CONVERSATION OF OPPOSITES

As the audience entered the three hundred and fifty seat auditorium which was mostly filled, two women periodically rolled through the stage as if swept along by a hurricane force, except they looked like figures being viewed in slow motion film footage. In Chris Larson's design, the stage featured a two-storey house outfitted with a video camera as well as a small orchestra and a projection screen where video footage shot from within the house could be seen by the audience. In addition to the musical performance by singers and orchestra, spoken voice performance, and streaming and freeze-frame video projections, the production integrated fluid choreography that often had elements of yoga postures. These antithetical combinations: sung versus spoken words, live versus still video projection, and active dance versus yoga postures produced a surprising

dialectic in this reviewer. Did I see what I thought I saw? Did I hear correctly what was delivered? Yes, these elements were repeated so there was time to digest what was being shaped and delivered from the stage. In Gertrude Stein's vocabulary, the "syncopation"—the gap in time between what was delivered on stage and what was received by the audience member—narrowed to a comfortable interval of real time, achieving engagement in the present moment.



Anthony Gatto's music also achieved a conversation of opposites. For example, in scene 1, Mrs. Hersland sang in a musical style reminiscent of plainchant, a type of monophonic music going back to the sixth century, A.D. and associated with religious liturgy, while Mr. Hersland, in answer to his wife, sang in a style reminiscent of the twentieth century cutting-edge music theater work of Kurt Weill, such as *The Three Penny Opera*. Other musical styles that entered Gatto's palette included compositions that sounded like Jewish folk songs, a nod to Aaron Copland's opera *The Tender Land*, and stately Renaissance airs.

If one listens to the prelude to *The Making of Americans*, one hears a Minimalist repetition of church bells that seems to tick out an urgency about life in general. Greatly enhancing the delivery of the music for this production was a collaboration between *Zeitgeist*, a chamber music group of two percussionists, a woodwind player and a keyboardist, and the *JACK Quartet*, a New York City-based string group of violins, viola, and cello.

By no means does this reviewer intend to intimate that Gatto's music is either derivative or unfocused. Gatto has achieved with this original, lyrical, and mostly

tonal work a fine balance between subtle references to the history of musical styles and his own musical voice. With this anchor into the distant and near past, he achieves an integrity that wakes up the senses and is highly compatible with what Jay Scheib accomplishes in his *mise-en-scène* or, as Scheib prefers, *gesamtkunstwerk*, a term coined by Richard Wagner referring to operatic work that integrates music, theater, and visual arts.

Another aspect of Gatto's yin-yang sensibility was his edgy introduction of a countertenor, which this critic thought came to represent the voice of Gertrude Stein. Gatto wrote the part of David Hersland, Jr. for the accomplished performer David Lee Echelard who brought his *Volksgurdy*, a contemporarily made *Hurdy-gurdy* based on Renaissance design, to the stage as melodic (and not the typical drone) accompaniment for his plaintive but sensual aria about how Julia was the only one who found him worthy and important. Occasionally, contemporary opera draws on the resources of rare countertenor voices that typically find opportunities in the Early Music arena. Echelard's challenging and moving performance in Act 2 requires him to sing about sadness (the sadness that comes when no one listens) while lying belly down on a table. In this aria, the countertenor channels the voice of Gertrude Stein, but it could also be the voice of a new music and opera composer.

SPOKEN WORD ACTOR'S TOUR DE FORCE PERFORMANCE

Periodically through the scenes, a mysterious woman walked around the stage with a bouquet of flowers. Eventually, one came to the understanding that she was David Hersland, Jr.'s lover, Mary Maxworth. According to an email exchange with Jay Scheib on January 8, 2008, Mary Maxworth is a character in Stein's novel that Scheib has "loosely associated with David, Jr." In the epilogue, Tanya Selvaratnam as Mary Maxworth executes an extended spoken word performance with tears streaming down her face that heightens the emotional wallop of the opera and especially harkens back to Echelard's sadness aria even if one is uncertain who this woman was. The combined effect of the tail end of the opera presents like the cemetery scene in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, which seems entirely appropriate since Stein greatly influenced Wilder before he wrote this classic for American theater. If anything would convince a lover of fine literature to pick up *The Making of Americans*, Stein's hefty tome, it would be Selvaratnam's performance at the close of this extraordinary chamber opera.

THE MELDING OF IMAGE AND MOVEMENT

While the use of video and film footage is happening more often in theatrical stagings, Scheib's use of video meshed well with the structure of Stein's psychological novel, which does not follow a linear path. It also had the effect that reality TV creates with its "spying" on the lives of ordinary people. Much to Scheib's good judgment, the video aspect did not overwhelm the live performance, which was also accented in compelling ways by the choreography. The odd thing about the dancers that Scheib chose for this production is that they

were not per say professional dancers, but students or graduates of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in such subjects as neuroscience. Nevertheless, the dancing was every bit as moving as anything on stage by known modern dance companies founded by such greats as Alvin Ailey, Paul Taylor, or Merce Cunningham. Costuming for the dancers created by Oana Botez-Ban especially caught this critic's eye. The understated costumes seemed appropriately attractive to movement but also entirely comfortable for the dancers.

Most of the innovative American opera is taking place in tiny windows of time and often in places off the beaten path if one considers major cities, starting with New York, the cultural hubs for such events. Universities and colleges, as opposed to well-known opera companies, often are major players in producing new operatic works. In the case of Gatto's and Scheib's *The Making of Americans*, the producing organization was an art museum but hardly a warehouse for relics.

Production Photos - Cameron Wittig

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Scene4 Magazine — Karren Alenier

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MUSIC | "The Making of Americans" at the Walker: Baaaaaad!



Gertrude Stein and Rudy Ray Moore

BY JAY GABLER, [TC DAILY PLANET](#)

December 13, 2008

This weekend, Twin Cities residents had the opportunity to experience two daringly stylized, profoundly insightful meditations on American culture. The [Walker Art Center](#) staged the world premiere of the opera *The Making of Americans*, adapted by Jay Scheib and Anthony Gatto from the novel by Gertrude Stein; and the [Riverview Theater](#) presented a rare screening of *Dolemite*, the epic 1975 Rudy Ray Moore film about a kung fu street war between two L.A. pimps. I saw *Dolemite* on Friday night and *The Making of Americans* on Saturday night, so I was able to enjoy two very different but pleasantly complementary views on life in our great nation. A comparison is instructive.

On Repetition

The Making of Americans: All our feelings and actions are cyclical. It is only through repetition that we discover who we truly are.

Dolemite: Don't ask that girl to repeat herself—you heard her the first time. She said she's waiting for *Dolemite*, motherfucker!

On the Music of Life

The Making of Americans: A string quartet and a contemporary music ensemble, with a little bandoneón and hurdy-gurdy thrown in for instrumental color.

Dolemite: Funk, with a little bongo thrown in for instrumental color.

On Sex

The Making of Americans: Tortured tabletop copulation, with singing, relayed to a big screen by live video feed.

Dolemite: Ecstatic copulation in the love den of a woman who used to turn tricks in Dolemite's brothel but, though now living independently, bailed his ass out of jail because she just wanted him that bad. With slapping. Relayed to the big screen by Comedian International Enterprise Productions.

On Violence

The Making of Americans: Emotional, symbolized by a hail of nutshells and the bare-handed uprooting of plants.

Dolemite: Physical, symbolized by a hail of Hush Puppies in your motherfuckin' ass and the bare-handed uprooting of Willie Green's entrails.

On Drinking

The Making of Americans: One can of Grain Belt Premium, consumed slowly and deliberately.

Dolemite: At the age of one he was drinking whisky and gin. At the age of two he was eating the bottles they came in.

On Those Who Have Gone Before Us

The Making of Americans: We are haunted by the sins of our fathers, and yet doomed to repeat their mistakes.

Dolemite: If you see a ghost, you *cut* that motherfucker.

I could be wrong, but I think this new opera may just elevate Gertrude Stein to her proper place beside Rudy Ray Moore in the American cultural pantheon.

[Jay Gabler](#) is the *Daily Planet's* arts editor.

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Production makes Gertrude Stein sing

by [Euan Kerr](#), Minnesota Public Radio
 December 12, 2008

EMBED | HELP

A new opera being performed this weekend in Minneapolis has a lofty goal: to portray all Americans - past, present, and future. "The Making of Americans" is an adaptation of Gertrude Stein's novel of the same name. It gets its world premiere tonight at the Walker Art Center.

St. Paul, Minn. — Published in 1925, Gertrude Stein's "The Making of Americans" was described as a cubist novel.

It embraced the ideas of cubist painters, most notably Stein's friend Pablo Picasso. Cubists would paint images of objects disassembled into their component parts and then re-imagined them from several perspectives at once.

Stein's novel had a much larger subject.

"(It's)a telling of everyone, at every time, at every place," says director Jay Scheib.

Scheib says the novel is an extended portrait of multiple generations of a single family.

"For Gertrude Stein this creation of a history a single family's progress would in some way be symbolic of all Americans or most Americans," said Scheib.

"Stein very interesting said that in the theater you are very rarely in the same time as the performance. Either you are a little bit ahead of the performance, i.e. you know what will happen next. Or you are a little behind, and you are disoriented a

- Jay Scheib

"The Making of Americans" set sprawls across the stage of the Walker's Maguire Theater.

A small two story clapboard house, made by Minnesota sculptor Chris Larson, sits on one side and mini-orchestra on the other side. There is just one actor, but six solo singers, an 18 member chorus and several dancers.

It's a lot of activity, but Scheib wants to create a situation where the audience is constantly in the moment.

"Stein very interesting said that in the theater you are very rarely in the same time as the performance," explained Scheib. "Either you are a little bit ahead of the performance, i.e. you know what will happen next, or you are a little behind, and you are disoriented and trying to catch up to what is happening."

To help with this there are large screens mounted over the stage.

"We use a lot of video in this production, so we film some scenes live, and then we manipulate those signals in real time," said Scheib.

For example, there are cameras in the house allowing the projection of giant images of anyone inside to appear above the orchestra, images

which can then be time shifted.

"The ballerina runs inside the house and performs a pirouette on camera, and when she comes outside the house to perform another pirouette, we still see her spinning on the screen even though she's now here in front of us."

The performers for "The Making of Americans" are drawn from all over. There are members of the St. Paul based Zeitgeist new music ensemble, and local singers Bradley Greenwald and David Echelard.

Other members of the ensemble come from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where Scheib teaches drama. He says they bring their own dynamics and understanding to the production.

The ballerina works for NASA during the summer, and one of the singers is a mathematician at MIT.

"I think they have an understanding of space and time," said Scheib, "a more radical understanding of space and time, and it just turns out they are able to apply it in performance."

The performers and images are in constant movement, giving the audience an impression of the larger world encompassed in Stein's novel.

The Walker's Performing Arts Curator Phillip Bither says he believes the ensemble has done a remarkable job of distilling Stein's novel, which he also believes may actually just be coming of age.

"It's a non-linear mediation about families and about the country of America and about multiple generations that is compelling and emotional and at the same time very rigorous both musically and theatrically," said Bither.

Bither says this is one of the few new contemporary operas around this year. Given a recent success over at the Guthrie he says composer Anthony Gatto joked it should be called the "Cubist Little House on the Prairie."

Joking aside, director Jay Scheib says he hopes audience members will realize Gertrude Stein's theatrical vision.

"The most ideal thing in my mind would be for someone to be engaged minute by minute and moment by moment, and be as much as possible at the same time as the performance that is happening before them," said Scheib.

Scheib also hopes the images from the show will return to audience members in coming weeks and months.

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The New York Times

November 13, 2006

THEATER REVIEW | BUENOS AIRES IN TRANSLATION FESTIVAL

Never Mind Language. Excess Is Easy to Translate.

By JASON ZINOMAN

Daniel Veronese's "Women Dreamt Horses," one of the four plays in the Buenos Aires in Translation festival running at P.S. 122 through Nov. 19, begins with a "Blech!"

A frail-looking woman (April Sweeney) opens her mouth to talk and vomits all over herself. The five other casually dressed characters onstage stare blankly as she composes herself and then vomits again. After racing to the bathroom, she washes her mouth, returns and repeats the whole messy process about a dozen or so times.

This kind of absurd excess should prepare you for the rest of the festival, which includes, by my count, three dysfunctional families, two incestuous relationships, multiple murders, a topless retarded girl, wrestling sisters, boxing brothers, a few head locks and at least two characters losing their lunch.

Two years ago, when it was announced that the Australian-born Vallejo Gantner was taking over as artistic director of P.S. 122, he said he wanted to create more cross-cultural exchanges between this East Village institution and the rest of the world. By presenting (along with creative producer Shoshana Polanco) this ambitious series — which pairs Argentine writers with American directors — he has succeeded in making the downtown scene a little less provincial, even if the artistic results are mixed, at best.

A variety of styles is on display, ranging from the farcical ("Panic") to the dreamily melodramatic ("Women Dreamt Horses"); from a multimedia drama in which the past keeps intruding on the present ("Ex-Antwone") to a futuristic fairy tale ("A Kingdom, a Country or a Wasteland, in the Snow").

What these dramas share, for the most part, is a dark, often violent worldview expressed with aggressive, crude and highly physical staging. Jean Graham-Jones translated all four shows, and her verbose work can occasionally sound off-key. ("I'm not indifferent to your drama" a character in "Panic" says.) One gets the sense that the directors are often trying to overcome the language and cultural barriers with rough and tumble stagings. The idea being: You don't need a translator to explain vomiting.

"Women Dreamt Horses" is a caustic play about three brothers and their failing family business, set at a dinner party gone wrong. In the hands of the director, Jay Scheib, it breaks out into fight night at P.S. 122. And the bruising (and bruised) actors aren't playing around with stylized shadow boxing. Their swings connect. Bettina (Zishan Ugurlu) slaps her husband, Roger (Jorge Alberto Rubio), on his bald head so many times that it sounds like applause, and he returns the favor with a bull rush that must have knocked her breath away.

Once again Mr. Scheib, whose past productions include a "Medea" told in reverse narrative order, will not be accused of conceptual subtlety, but his show does have a kind of visceral energy and

anger, and it's not out of keeping with the script. "You know what I'm realizing," Bettina says in a line that seems like the inspiration for the entire production. "Violence is the topic of our times."

"A Kingdom, a Country or a Wasteland, in the Snow," by Lola Arias, a post-apocalyptic drama about a terrible family secret, also begins with a grappling match. The sisters Lisa (Andrea Moro Winslow) and Luba (Hayli Henderson), who live in a chilly wasteland with their parents, toss each other across the stage with abandon.

The sibling rivalry heats up when, while hunting for rabbits, the sisters find an orphan boy whom they see as husband material. This development worries their father (James Lloyd Reynolds) whose guilty face indicates that he knows something about the orphan that he's not telling us.

Ms. Arias, whose writing has a tactile, sensual quality, sneaks in images of fetuses and drowning idiots to prepare you for the horrors to come. And even if the play's shocks are hardly original, the director, Yana Ross, finds clever ways to stage them.

"Ex-Antwone" — a fragmented dream of a play by Federico León, who is described in the program as a protégé of the experimental theater legend Robert Wilson — takes place in the present, but just barely. Antwone, played moodily by Miguel Govea, seems stuck in his memories, which keep intruding on his day with his girlfriend, Stella (performed with wide-eyed warmth by Liz Dahmen), who provides what seems to be the sole comfort in his life.

Neither of these characters comes alive quite like the woman on the television set hanging above them, Antwone's shift-eyed mother (Corrine Edgerly). This paranoid nag hectors him throughout the show. It's an exuberant hoot of a performance that could explain a lifetime of neuroses.

Perhaps the most disappointing show was Rafael Spreglbud's "Panic," a tedious two-hour farce produced with the Theater of a Two-Headed Calf (and directed by Brooke O'Harra), about a vulgar family scrambling to find a key to unlock a safe-deposit box that belonged to the patriarch who recently died.

It starts as a promising parody of horror movies, with the requisite violins and stark lighting, but quickly broadens its sights to, well, just about anything in pursuit of zaniness (a cop dressed like a stripper, incest played for laughs). There might be a cutting satire of bourgeois family values somewhere inside this lackadaisically paced production, but if so, it's lost in translation.

The festival continues through Nov. 19 at P.S. 122, 150 First Avenue, at Ninth Street; (212) 352-3101.

Correction: Nov. 16, 2006

A theater review on Monday about the Buenos Aires in Translation festival, at Performance Space 122 in the East Village, referred incorrectly to the translator of the festival's four plays. The translator, Jean Graham-Jones, is a woman.

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Going south

A sampler of daring new Argentine theater comes to P.S. 122.

By George Hunka

Don't cry for us, Argentina: This month, New Yorkers can expect a generous helping of your theater. While many of us are familiar with Argentine writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, or tango spectacles, the country's contemporary dramatists remain virtually unknown in the north. But the minifestival Buenos Aires in Translation (BAiT) hopes to change that, pairing four of Argentina's young experimental playwrights—Daniel Veronese, Lola Arias, Rafael Sprgelburd and Federico León—with four local

directors to build a theatrical bridge between the Americas.

BAiT is the brainchild of Shoshana Polanco, 36, a native-born Argentine performer-impresario. All four of the plays she's chosen to showcase are tinged with Buenos Aires culture and history, but have a global appeal. Veronese's *Women Dream of Horses* examines, in violently physical abstractions choreographed by Jay Scheib, the tensions involved in the closure of a family business. Arias's *A Kingdom, a Country or a Wasteland, in the Snow*, staged by Yana Ross, is a poetic tragedy set in a bleak, postapocalyptic landscape. Brooke O'Hara will lead members of the Theatre of a Two-Headed Calf through Sprgelburd's *Panic*, a family comedy-drama with low-

budget horror-movie undertones. And León's *Ex-Antuone* examines a dreamlike labyrinth of history and fantasy, directed by Juan Souki. Excerpts from the plays presented at CUNY's Prelude '06 festival earlier this fall were enthusiastically received, and while Argentine drama will probably not be as hot a trend as tango lessons, there's definitely some lust for Latin American arts in NYC.

One major cultural disconnect that playwright Sprgelburd noticed during visits to New York is in the structure of theatrical funding and production: Americans face more challenges transferring their vision from the page to the stage. The well-subsidized Sprgelburd expects support and resources to usher one of his plays through a year of preparation and production; the

calendar is less forgiving to New York artists, for whom he expresses enormous admiration. "If I were to produce a play over there—the way independent groups are forced to do—knowing that they'll have only 15 days to perform, I don't think I'd invest a year of my life, my creative time, in such a process," he admits from Buenos Aires via e-mail. "This leads to a reduction of risks and, unfortunately, to standardization. I look up to groups that maintain high quality while struggling in such harsh conditions." Polanco explains that Buenos Aires has a three-tiered theater scene not unlike New York's: large-scale commercial shows, subsidized nonprofit venues and a scrappy Fringe. Unlike here, though, an Argentine "Off-Off" show can run for months if there's an audience.

The idea for BAiT evolved from a modest set of script-in-hand

"I couldn't invest a year of my life for only 15 New York performances."

readings to a more fully realized event. "The project took the form it has right now thanks to [P.S. 122 artistic director] Vallejo Gantner's enthusiasm," Polanco explains. "Frank Hentschker [from CUNY] also championed us from the beginning. He gave us a home for a May 2006 reading, and he introduced us to our translator, Jean Graham-Jones, who was a perfect match." Polanco chose scripts from both authors she knew as a result of ten years working in the Buenos Aires theater scene, and new writers.

Gantner views BAiT as a means of broadening not only his venue's mission but the theater scene in general. "I see it as a model for the kind of international projects we'd like to set up," Gantner says. "The exchange opens interesting doors for American artists, in terms of both creativity and career."

Alas, BAiT is passing through town for only two weeks this time around; but those who miss it can still get a picture of Latin American drama when the plays are published in the festival anthology next year. Also, in 2007, our counterparts in Buenos Aires can expect a similar U.S. drama sampler in their city. Look out, Argentina!

BAiT is at P.S. 122 Sat 1–Nov 19. See *Off-Off Broadway*

Superfluities Redux

by George Hunka, Artistic director, theatre minima

November 2006

Buenos Aires in Translation (BAiT) Festival

Women Dreamt Horses by Daniel Veronese, translated by Jean Graham-Jones. Directed by Jay Scheib. With Caleb Hammond (Ivan), Aimée Phelan-Deconinck (Ulrika), Jorge Alberto Rubio (Roger), Eric Dean Scott (Rainer), April Sweeney (Lucera) and Zishan Ugurlu (Bettina). Justin Townsend, lighting design; Oana Botez-Ban, costume design; Peter Ksander, scenic design; Peter Campbell, dramaturgy; Rachael Rayment, assistant director. Upstairs theater at Performance Space 122. 75 minutes, no intermission.

Women Dreamt Horses begins and ends with violence. As the audience takes their seats, a husband (Roger) and wife (Bettina) prowl the stage, in intense but loving physical battle, to the percussion of fleshy slaps; the percussive noises that close the play are those of gunshots. This externalization of internal sexual and aggressive drives is the core of Daniel Veronese's play about a dissolving family business, but writ large it expresses broader meditations on international violence. Jay Scheib's superbly performed, elemental production is as much a 75-minute dance piece with dialogue -- in almost never-ending motion, punctuated by tense tableaux of powerless desperation -- that points up, unfortunately, a few weaknesses of Veronese's alternately flat and lyrical script.

Rainer has called together his two brothers and their wives to discuss the closure of the family business; hosting this tendentious soirée are Bettina and Roger, who live in a half-finished loft (for which PS122's upstairs theatre, quite bare and windows open to 9th Street and 1st Avenue below, serves an eerily identical stand-in, in Peter Ksander's and Justin Townsend's deliberately low-tech design for which there are precisely two light cues: up at the start of the play, down at the end). Enter Ivan and Lucera, whose desire for a child has frightening consequences for poor Lucera, who spends much of the first ten minutes of the play throwing up; also enter, more dangerously, Rainer's wife Ulrika, who describes a screenplay she is writing about a woman's sexual reawakening which verges on a metaphorical bestiality involving horses. As the evening transpires and the characters give vent to the animalistic impulses that drive their shame, lust, and pride, the "business" (which has become, in the absence of belief, their sole constraint) disappears, and blood flows as the only, inescapable result.

The Latin American culture of machismo, demonstrated in such cultural products as the tango, gives Veronese an idiosyncratic insider's view of the ways in which physicality and gender drive society. The aggressively violent tussling and wrestling of the three brothers (one of whom is being slowly weakened by cancer) is curiously one-sided, with a homoerotic edge that also has its parallel in the history of the tango itself; the men constantly fight among themselves, occasionally taking on their partners, but the women remain quite isolated and alone, denied (or disavowing) even this violent same-sex physical contact. Bettina, an older and more mature woman, can draw aggression-as-affection from the youngest brother Roger, because she can see these dynamics the most clearly of the six characters. Ivan and Lucera's physical relationship seems stymied by their indecision about the wisdom of raising children. Finally, there's Ulrika, a walking explosion of violent mature sexuality, simultaneously threat and attraction to all of them. (Aimée Phelan-Deconinck's aggressive sexuality renders her imitation of a horse parade's angular regularity into an imitation of Nazi goose-stepping; no wonder that the self-effacing Rainer, here played in a profoundly and effectively restrained performance by Eric Dean Scott, is having trouble coping with it.)

And coping is one thing these characters cannot do; in the dissolution of traditional business, family, and gender roles, flesh, blood, and physicality are all that are left. Veronese internationalizes Argentine machismo (the character names: Rainer and Ulrika [playing on the odd relationship between Argentina and Germany], Ivan, Roger), perceiving that machismo written, though subtly repressed, in European culture as well. The aggressive sexuality that Ulrika represents is not the cause of this dissolution; the dissolution provides an opening for the expression of it (and so she is the sole explicit artist among the three women, the others finding expression in domesticity). The final moment of the play presents the threat of continued, constantly reproducing animal bloodlust. Kudos to Veronese for courageously refusing to give in to moral judgement, but lucidly recognizing the potential for unending, eternal destruction.

Not so many kudos, though, for the unevenness of the script, an unevenness implicit in its structure. Among the violences of *Women Dreamt Horses* is a violence between two dramatic voices. At his best, Veronese finds in the murmuring and self-erasing, cautiously mumbled hemming and hawing of everyday conversation, an objective correlative for the disintegration of identity. His more lyrical voice trips this up. The sleek, muscular, wild horse as a metaphor for desire, and the visual dynamic of animal lust as presented in the horse (so common it's even made it to the cover of the latest issue of *Lacanian Ink*) is a rather uninspiring insight this late in the game, and once presented by Ulrika, the metaphor remains largely unexplored, and Lucera's closing monologue verges dangerously close to the sentimental and the lachrymose.

In the noise and lucid brilliance of Jay Scheib's production and outstanding performances of the cast (particularly the three women), this weakness may be subsumed in the physicality of the 75 minute running time, and Jean Graham-Jones' translation, profoundly suited for the stage, can't be blamed for these structural deficiencies. And the production itself is one of the most physically exciting of the festival so far (that alone is saying something). A word here also for Oana Botez-Ban's costumes, which trap and repress Lucera, Bettina, and the men; Ulrika, however, is draped in a near-diaphanous flesh-colored dress that frees her for exquisite sensual movement (Phelan-Deconinck is a veteran of the Bill T. Jones and Martha Graham dance companies). Botez-Ban must be the most brilliant costume designer in the city; rarely does downtown chic meet sexual elegance like this and so expressively serve the characters and the play itself. You will, for the above reasons alone, be very sorry indeed if you miss it.

<http://www.georgehunka.com/blog/bait.html>

eine Revolution» handelt (in der Odyssee von Propagandisten der französischen Revolution auf der Karibik-Insel Haiti) vom notwendigen Scheitern weißer Erlöser in der schwarzen Welt. Neilson Rodrigues entfaltet in der biblisch-archaisch getönten Familien-Schlacht um den unbefriedbaren Hass, um tote Kinder und zwei schwarz-weiße Brüder mit immer derselben Frau im sexuellen Visier die Vision vom noch lange nicht gelösten Widerspruch der Rassen – selbst in der prinzipiell ja auf deren immerwährende Vermischung ausgerichteten Gesellschaft Brasiliens.

Black Power

Castorfs «Negros» nun, eine Gruppe afrobrasilianischer Schauspielstudentinnen und -studenten an der Universität von São Paulo mit stark ausgeprägtem «black power»-Bewusstsein, sind von Beginn an, mit Müller und über Müller hinaus, der allgegenwärtig-bedrohliche Kommentar zur Fabel von Rodrigues. Sie lagern sich zu Beginn, demonstrativ weiß gekleidet und mit weißen Perücken ausgestattet, unter Zeitungspapier auf die Bühne – wie es auch die (überwiegend schwarzen) Menschen ohne Dach überm Kopf jede Nacht tun müssen, unter den Brücken und in den Hauseingängen von São Paulo; und einer von ihnen, der Aufsteiger, der zu spät kommt, wird mit dem grandiosen Text vom «Mann im Fahrstuhl» zum roten Faden fast den ganzen Abend hindurch.

Gerade in der Begegnung mit diesen Studierenden offenbart sich der ganze Sprengstoff der Arbeit zwischen den Kulturen. Denn sie entdecken hier erstmals das, was für Castorfs Theater zwingend nötig ist: Mut zum Ich im Wir vor allem. Tatsächlich orientiert sich selbst das modernere Handwerk des Theaters in Brasilien noch stark am klassisch-konventionellen Kanon. Aber die schwarzen «Filhos de Olorum» überschreiten hier in jedem Augenblick die eigenen Grenzen. Ihren Kolleginnen und Kollegen vor Ort allerdings, die natürlich alle in den Vorstellungen saßen, sind sie und ist ihr Spiel besonders fremd geblieben.

Für den Kern der Rodrigues-Story verfügte Castorf über starke und prominente Profi-Profile – Denise Assuncao vor allem, die als langjährige Protagonistin im «Teatro Oficina» mit vielerlei Exzess vertraut ist. Um ihre Figur der Virginia herum, die hemmungslos

liebt und genau so tötet, die Liebe fordert und Mord zugleich, formt sich ein Ensemble von furioser Kraft: ziemlich typisch Volksbühne. Aber wie neu – und überhaupt nicht abgenutzt.

Für São Paulo verstörend bricht die Inszenierung den vertrauten Blick: überlässt manche Szene zunächst dem (in Berlin ja inzwischen fast selbstverständlichen) Auge der in jeder Hinsicht fabelhaft mit-agierenden Video-Kamera, bevor sie die aus Spanplatten roh gezimmerte Bühnenwand zerlegen lässt, die zuvor den Blick versperrte. Am Ende liegt die Bühne quasi in Trümmern – und aus den Ruinen wächst Müllers Blick auf die drei Welten wie auf die Schlangen in den Straßen von New York.

Die «Methode» wirkt

Das Tempo des Abends, die Temperaturen und Temperaturen, das ausgestellte Grelle, die Mischung aus Video und dem eigenen Zuschauer-Bild, die Musik und die Bühne (recycelt aus dem brasilianischen Nachbau von Bert Neumanns «Dickicht»-Szenario), die ironi-

sierenden Kostüme, Masken und Perücken sorgen für angespannte, zugespitzte Stimmungen. Zudem hat Irina Kastrinidis, zu Hause oft nur die lärmende Marionette ihres Regisseurs, hier offensichtlich als Anchor Woman Vertrauen stiften können für Castorfs «Methode», was wohl auch nötig war bei den Kolleginnen und Kollegen vor Ort. Bevor die Geschichte vom «schwarzen Engel» mit dem letzten lustvollen Hass-Mord im Badezuber endet, bleibt denn auch ihr Castorf-Müllers letztes Wort vorbehalten: der Abgesang auf die Maske des Todes, die die Revolution war, das Hohelied vom Sieger der Geschichte, der sich ein Stück aus ihr schneiden wird.

Die Studierenden aber setzen den Kontrapunkt – denn ihre schwarze Revolte ist ja längst noch nicht zu Ende, sie sehen sie, jenseits von Müller, längst wieder neu. War da was? Ja, da war was: das furiose Beispiel für eine neue Art von internationalem Grenzgang, der alle Partner reicher macht.

Michael Laages

Vitamin Berlin

Argentinische Dramatiker mit Hang zum Existenziellen und amerikanische

Regisseure mit Hang zur Ironie geben New Yorks ermüdeter

Bohème-Theaterszene beim P.S. 122-Festival «Buenos Aires in Translation» einen subkulturellen Vitaminschub

Die Glanzzeit des P.S. 122, der ehrwürdigen East-Village-Institution für experimentelles Theater, war schon lange vorbei, als vor zwei Jahren unter anfänglich großen Protesten der Australier Vallejo Gantner die künstlerische Leitung des Hauses übernahm. Gantner kündigte an, dass er das P.S. 122 wirtschaftlich rentabler machen und für interkulturellen Austausch zwischen dem East Village und dem Rest der Theaterwelt sorgen würde. Zumindest letzteres ist ihm mit seinem jüngsten Coup, dem Festival «Buenos Aires in Translation» (BAiT), gelungen. Das Festival brachte kürzlich eine Frische in die angeschlagene Bohème-Theaterszene Manhattans, die man schon lange für nicht mehr möglich gehalten hatte. Trotz aller Finanznot sahen die vier präsentierten Inszenierungen gut aus. Die ansonsten gängige Political Correctness wurde für existenzielle und manchmal blutrünstige Dramen made in Argentina

aufgegeben, und überhaupt gab es ein cooles, kosmopolitisches Theater-Selbstverständnis zu sehen, das sich verführerisch echt anfühlte.

Das von Shoshana Polanco kuratierte BAIT bestätigt nicht nur die seit ein paar Jahren umlaufenden Gerüchte, dass Buenos Aires das regierende Epizentrum des lateinamerikanischen Theaters sei. Das Festival macht auch keinen Hehl daraus, dass der postdramatische Bühnenstil made in Berlin inzwischen zum Exportschlager geworden ist. Regisseure wie Jay Scheib, Juan Souki oder Yana Ross nämlich, die ihr Handwerk nicht nur in Amerika, sondern auch bei deutschsprachigen Theatermachern und Autoren gelernt haben, setzen die gelungenen argentinischen Stücke mit einem Gespür für Ironie, Nonchalance und Authentizität ein, das stark an die besten Jahre von Pollesch, Ostermeier, Castorf oder Gotscheff erinnert. Theater spielt sich hier trotz al-

ler dramatischer Vorgaben in Echtzeit ab. Wortwörtliche Psychologie findet meist parodistisch statt, und das starre Diktum des amerikanischen Bühnennaturalismus wird mit angebracht respektloser Leichtigkeit zur Seite gekickt.

Argentinierinnen am Rande des Nervenzusammenbruchs

Der Berliner Stil schreibt sich sogar in die Dramen selbst ein. So etwa schwärmt die hip herumdilettierende Tänzerin Bettiana in Rafael Spregelburds «Panic» von Berlin wie Tschewchows Mascha von Moskau. Um dem noch eins draufzusetzen, tritt dann auch noch eine Figur namens Marius von Mayenburg auf. Das almodovareske Drama um Mord, Inzest und Immobilienkauf wird leider jedoch trotz dieses guten Vorbilds von der Amerikanerin Brooke O'Harra als Farce inszeniert. Die drei anderen Festivalregisseure machen da einen ungleich besseren Job.

Juan Souki zum Beispiel inszeniert Federico Leóns «Ex-Antwone» als Etüde des ironischen Non-Acting und versetzt das fragmentarische Drama über den heroinsüchtigen Antwone, seine geistig zurückgebliebene Freundin und seine überstarke, nervige Mutter mit einer gehörigen Portion Sexiness. Die Haupthandlung spielt sich bezeichnenderweise um ein großes Bett herum ab und manchmal auch draußen auf der East-Village-Street, auf die Antwone durch die Fenster und Türen der Erdgeschossbühne ein- und ausgeht. Für fünf Minuten kommuniziert er dann schon mal lautstark und sinnfrei mit einem scheinbar zufällig vorbeilaufenden Hund.

Noch viel schnoddriger setzt Jay Scheib «Women Dreamt Horses» von Daniel Veronese um, eine Dinnerparty-Saga um drei Brüder, ihr in den Sand gesetztes Familienunternehmen und ihre Ehefrauen. Es wird wahnsinnig schnell geredet, gerannt, geprügelt, geschrien und auf überraschend attraktive Weise gekotzt, und die Akteure sprechen sich nicht mit ihren Rollen-, sondern Schauspielernamen an. Das klassisch aufgebaute Familiendrama wird so zu einer Erzählung über die internationale Generation der Fünfunddreißigjährigen, die am bürgerlichen Projekt der ökonomischen und familiären Sicherheit scheitern und stattdessen ein wenig selbstzerstörerisch vor sich hin trinken, rauchen und rumficken. Das Ganze sprüht so sehr vor sarkastischer



→ Coolness und bissiger Intelligenz, dass das Drama der Selbstzerstörung (die Veroneses abgehalfterten Existenzen erst dann richtig Spaß macht, wenn sie ihre Liebsten mit hineinziehen können), anders als im wirklichen Leben, durchaus unterhaltsam bleibt. Nonchalance, auf amerikanischen Bühnen eigentlich ausgeschlossen, ermöglicht hier die schlüssige Erzählung zeitgenössischer Desaster. «Women» endet mit einem Amoklauf, den keine der Figuren überlebt.

Hoffnungsschimmer im post-apokalyptischen Brachland

Jelinek-Regisseurin Yana Ross dagegen, die bekannteste unter den BAiT-Regisseuren, gibt sich dem postdra-

ma te endet mit einer Hochzeit, einer Vergewaltigung und drei Morden. Die als einzige überlebende Tochter fasst die Botschaft des Stücks konzipiert mit dem Satz «to be is to mess up and die» zusammen, «zu sein heißt zu versagen und zu sterben».

Anstatt nun das morbide Stück nur ironisch handhabbar zu machen, setzt Ross es mit behutsamer Schönheit in Szene. Das Bühnenbild sieht mit hochgestapelten Pelzen, einem nackten Baugerüst und einer schweren Holzbauwerkbank aus wie eine Installation von Joseph Beuys, nur sehr viel schicker. Leise Tango- und House-Rhythmen und zarte, symbolische Schauspielgesten kontrastieren die mörderischen Emotionsausbrüche der Figuren. Wo das



Daniel Veroneses «Women Dreamt Horses» – mit Jorge Alberto Rubio, Aimee Phelan-Deconinck und April Sweeney

FOTO RACHEL ROBERTS

matischen Untergrund nicht ganz so ohne Weiteres hin. Ihre Inszenierung des Lola Arias-Stücks «A Kingdom, a Country or a Wasteland, in the Snow» war der große Zuschauererfolg des Festivals, vor allem weil Ross, vom europäischen Inszenierungsstil zwar inspiriert, doch eine eigene, idiosynkratische und handwerklich feine Theatersprache fand. «Kingdom» spielt in einem arktischen, post-apokalyptischen Brachland, in dem sich eine klaustrophobische enge Familie von frisch erlegten Kaninchen und tiefgefrorenen Kartoffeln ernährt. Die biblisch anmutende Geschich-

te entmutigt auf die Sinnlosigkeit und Zerstörung blickt, spürt Ross kleine Hoffnungsschimmer auf.

Noch ist der ironische postdramatische Berliner Theaterstil in New York nur ein Trend für eingeweihte Szenegänger, Festivalreisende und Akademiker. Bei der reaktionären amerikanischen Theaterkritik rief das BAiT ob seiner morbiden Themen und seiner fürs hiesige Schauspiel beinahe ketzerischen Inszenierungen richtiggehend wütende Reaktionen hervor. Was eigentlich das beste Zeichen dafür ist, dass etwas in Bewegung gerät und dass diese Inszenierungen tatsächlich als eine Art Vitaminschub für Manhattans Bohème-Theaterszene wirken könnten.

Daniel Schreiber

Traumpapa Lear

Das «Asia Contemporary Theatre Festival» in Schanghai arbeitet am Glücklichen

Happy Asia» war das diesjährige «Asia Contemporary Theatre Festival» in Schanghai überschrieben. Fragte man Nick Yu, den verschmitzten wie umtriebigen Festivaldirektor nach dem Motto, fiel die Antwort wellnessmäßig schlicht aus. Er fände, die Menschen seien zu gestresst, zu besorgt um ihr wirtschaftliches Fortkommen, ihren beruflichen Erfolg in der neuen Zeit. Deshalb möchte er, dass sie einmal abschalten können und für einen Theaterabend glücklich sind. Nick Yus Bemühung um «Happiness» ist eine Form von Pionierarbeit im heutigen China. Das Festival, ursprünglich im japanischen Kobe als «Asian Theatre Festival» gegründet, wurde erstmals vor einem Jahr in Schanghai veranstaltet. Hier entwickelt es sich langsam.

Wie bei so vielen Disziplinen des modernen Lebens, das binnen kurzer Zeit über die chinesische Gesellschaft gekommen ist, fehlt es an der dazugehörigen Infrastruktur. So wie sich Museen für zeitgenössische Kunst ihre Besucher erst heranbilden müssen, mangelt es dem Gegenwartstheater an einem interessierten Publikum; von einer ausgeprägten Kritik ganz zu schweigen. Beim Buhlen um die junge Zuschauerschaft sieht es sich in Konkurrenz zum Fernsehen, was Mitte der neunziger Jahre mit dem Aufkommen von Soaps und Sitcoms besonders schmerzhaft spürbar wurde. Um dem Schwund entgegenzuwirken, sucht die Bühne, das wurde beim «Asia Contemporary Theatre Festival» deutlich, die Nähe zum Bildschirm. Die Aufführungen zielten, ob sie nun traditionelle Stoffe aktualisierten, Alltagsgeschichten erzählten oder Tanztheater wagten, auf direktestem Weg ins Zuschauerherz: über Komik.

Das Modern Troup Theatre aus Schanghai lieferte hierfür mit «A Crazy Night» das treffendste Beispiel. Das Stück geht auf einen traditionellen Stoff der Peking-Oper zurück, in dem eine einfache junge Frau zum Objekt wenig diskreter Begierde gleich dreier mächtiger Herren wird. Die Heirat mit einem Diener nutzt sie, um ihre verschiedenen Liebhaber gegeneinander auszuspielen und so als unterprivilegierte Frau über Macht und Reichtum zu triumphieren.

«A Crazy Night» nähert das historische Drama durch populäre Songs und Gags aus bekannten Fernsehshows der Jetztzeit an und modernisiert den Plot, da die begehrte Frau am Ende nicht nur den Mächtigen, sondern auch ihrem Diener-Gatten eine Nase gedreht hat. Für den deutschen Betrachter wirkt die Inszenierung des Verwirrspiels mitunter altbacken: große Gesten und auffälliges Beiseitesprechen, was man so vermutlich nicht mal mehr im Boulevardtheater findet.

Schweigen nach den Mao-Jahren

Wesentlich zeitgemäßer und näher an einer westlichen Ästhetik präsentierte sich da das Tanztheater «Play Play» von The Theatre Practice, einer Gruppe aus Singapur. In einem White Cube lässt Choreografin Kuo Jing Hong vier in Weiß gewandte und mit schwarzen Perücken anonymisierte Performer die körperlichen Möglichkeiten von Gruppendynamik durchbuchstabieren. Abwechselnd spielen die Darsteller mit- und gegeneinander, laden die als Requisiten zur Verfügung stehenden Luftkissen aus Zellophan mit je unterschiedlichen Bedeutungen auf, mal als Wolken, mal als Handys, oder entlehnen sich Bewegungsmuster aus anderen Kontexten wie Kampfposen aus Kung-Fu-Filmen, die bis zum Exzess ausprobiert werden. Das Spiel, das immer wieder neu beginnt, bleibt stumm, sieht man von den Vogelstimmen ab – jenen Blättchen, die auf die Zunge gelegt, helle Laute erzeugen –, was den Performern den Charme von Teletubbies verleiht.

Auseinandersetzungen mit den neuralgischen Fragen der chinesischen Gesellschaft blieben rar – ein Stück wie «Activated Charcoal» von Nick Yu, der normalerweise als Autor am Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre arbeitet, die Ausnahme. In dem Drama geht es um ein junges Paar, das geschieden ist und nur dem Besuch ihres Vaters zuliebe zusammenlebt. Durch die Geschichte des Vaters, seiner Suche nach einer lange verschwundenen Liebe, finden die beiden Getrennten schließlich den Anhaltspunkt für einen möglichen Neuanfang. «Activated Charcoal» spielt, wenn auch unausgesprochen, vor dem Hintergrund



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BAiT (Buenos Aires in Translation)

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nytheatre.com review

Saviana Stanescu · Nov 4, 2006

Under the direction of Vallejo Gantner, P.S. 122 seems to have enhanced its tradition of presenting thought-provoking international work and edgy risk-taking performances. As part of their Buenos Aires in Translation

(BAiT) Festival, *Women Dreamt Horses* by Argentinean playwright Daniel Veronese, directed by the imaginative American Jay Scheib, has made an impressive debut on the New York City scene.

The play tackles issues like global and domestic violence inserted in Freudian dreamscapes, and wrapped in the little red package of a relationship drama. Three brothers and their wives meet for a dinner party, but they never get to the food or the drinks as they move around the room discussing such things as sweaty horses, surreal memories, Turkish pilaf, or a stolen cookbook. Almost each line hides (more or less) a heavy sexual symbolism boiling in simmering violence:

RAINER: With that last take, from behind the horses' haunches, with the horses wobbling sensually over the cobbles, you might get the idea that the horses are the reason for the woman's getting all excited. That what's provocative about the situation are the sweaty horses and not the policemen. And it has certain logic.

ULRIKA: You think?

RAINER: Yes. It's a known fact that adolescent girls dream about horses when they begin to develop sexually. I mean it seriously.

ULRIKA (*containing her violence*): Would you bring in that damned corkscrew, please.

Why to bring a child into such a violent and messy world?—is arguably the main question raised in this play by Veronese.

Jay Scheib, one of the most cutting-edge artists of the moment, takes the Argentinean's lines and pushes them into the physical world using a sexy and violent gestural vocabulary. The actors literally fight in the performance space; the brothers' and couples' main interaction seems to be boxing, they "smash" themselves against the walls and against each

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other. It's a fascinating tour-de-force for the actors in this show, and the bruises on their legs are not painted. It is obvious that the ensemble is completely committed to the director and the production.

Scheib's world is indeed violent and frightening, but also humorous in an unexpected way. The long opening scene with Lucera (the extraordinary April Sweeney) vomiting through all nine months of both pregnancies that she'd missed that completely. Zishan Ugurlu as Bettina, a woman 15 years senior to her husband, seems to be the center of this dysfunctional family. She is tragic and funny at the same time, especially when she describes their marriage: "And I understood then that that's what the two of us are. All that together, the rice, the onion, and the asparagus. Even though we each have a different flavor, we complement each other." Aimee Phelan-Deconinck is impressive as Ulrika, the sensual sexually frustrated wife of Rainer (Eric Dean Scott). Caleb Hammond and Jorge Alberto Rubio invest lots of energy in portraying the other two brothers.

Oana Botez-Ban's costumes help in defining each character with precision, imagination, and wit. It is always great to see costumes with personality in a show, not just outfits meant only to dress but designed to infuse extra meanings.

And it is rare to see such a tough, passionate, powerful, and beautiful show on NYC scenes so I urge you to go catch it. Leave your fears aside and be prepared for gunshots and bodies wriggling onto the floor or jumping over the tables.

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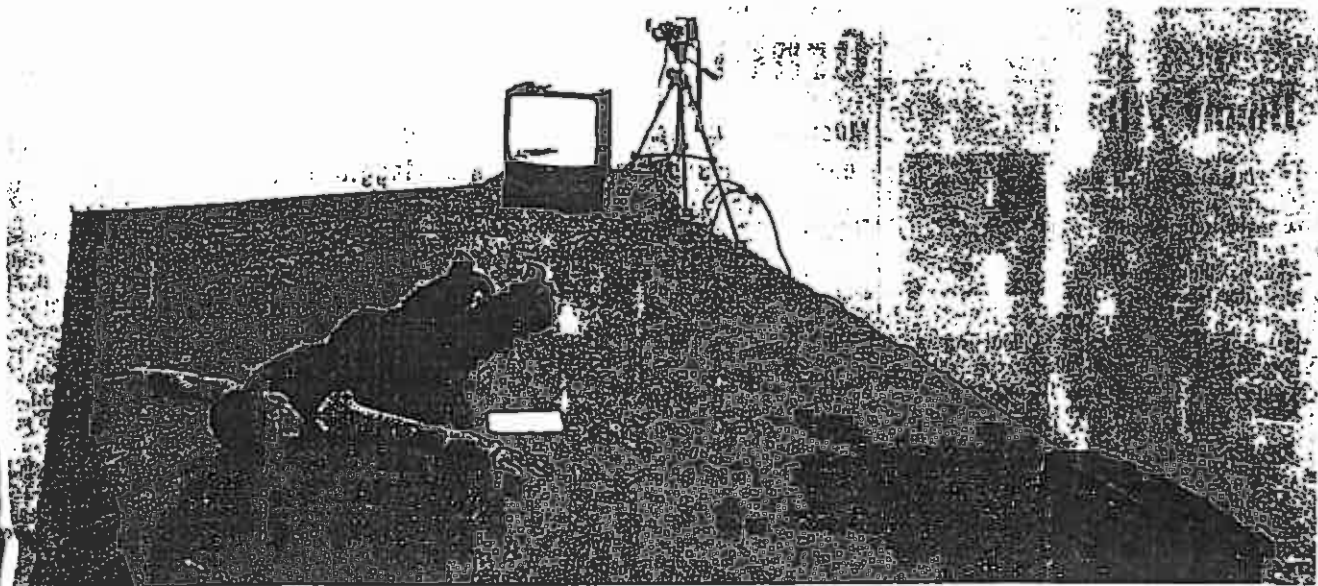
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IL RAUM CHIUDE UN CICLO E GUARDA A BERLINO

La "stanza" di via Ca' Selvatica riapre la programmazione fra musica elettronica e performer internazionali



KINKALERI, "PANDORA"

Foto Buzznegot

Alessandra Testa

Bologna non è Milano ma in questi tre anni l'esperimento "Raum", un ex convento seicentesco in via Ca' Selvatica trasformato in "white cube" per l'ascolto di musica elettronica e performance all'avanguardia, ha funzionato. E ora è tempo di pensare alla nuova era. Le parole d'ordine rimangono contemporaneo, ricerca e produzioni che siano al di fuori dei contesti tradizionali. Magari pensando ad un nuovo spazio (che ne farà BolognaFiere della vecchiaia Gam?), guardando all'esperienza in arrivo di Mambo e riflettendo «se sia il caso di istituzionalizzarsi» spiegano Silvia Fanti e Daniele Gasparinetti di Xing - o mantenere una forma flessibile ed elastica che prosegua con festival come quello dello spettacolo contemporaneo o setimage, che dovrebbe

tornare anche l'anno prossimo a Palazzo Re Enzo. In definitiva, capire se sotto le Due Torri è possibile un ricambio generazionale che colga quanto seminato da tutti coloro che sono passati di qua. Nico Vascellari e Kinkaleri per esempio, e che ora "emigrano" verso Milano o Berlino. Certi del sostegno della Regione (circa 15.000 euro per il 2006) e del Comune, 5.000 euro per l'anno in corso.

Prima di lanciarsi in una nuova sfida, però, Xing e i curatori dello spazio privato (con Fanti ci sono anche Valerio Tricoli, Luciano Maggiore e Riccardo Benassi) lanciano gli ultimi tre mesi del cartellone 2006. «Un ciclo che si chiude», dicono i formati sono ancora quelli che hanno portato in media 60 persone a serata, 2.500 in un anno, e artisti di riconosciuto talento internazionale. Desco Music o musica da tavolo, le perfor-

mance per spazi ridotti *Living Room*, l'live-media lab di *Phonorama*, le notti intere con musica da "sonno" *Hypnomachia* e le installazioni della *Waiting Room*. Merita una segnalazione il rapporto instaurato con l'Ambasciata del Regno dei Paesi Bassi, visti i natati di tre artisti ospiti. Al Raum si parte martedì 10 ottobre con Muna Mussie, la performer etiopica cresciuta con Valdoca e Teatrino Clamdestino, in una installazione accompagnata dalla musica del giovane Lum, *Madrepatria*. Sabato 14 in occasione della seconda Giornata del contemporaneo promossa da Amaci (associazione musei d'arte contemporanea italiani) è l'ora della doppia performance (alle 17 e alle 22) dell'artista visivo Cristian Chironi con *Poster*, tableaux vivants legati all'immaginario del calcio. Giovedì 19 spazio a Mk/Sinistri con *Funzione*,

già presentato al festival di Sant'Arcangelo e ad un video di Blu. E ancora l'olandese Martijn Tellinga con l'installazione visiva *Pan Troglodytes* (il 24), la presentazione sonorizzata del nuovo libro *Confusa-mente* (Clueb) del settantenne Giampiero Cane (il 26), Pita che vedremo anche al *Gender Bender* il 2 novembre, Kinkaleri con *Pasodoble* (9 novembre) e la performance aperta a chiunque di Luca Trevisani e di Antonio Tavanini (23 novembre) *I box*. Ancora *Desco Music* con Kapital Band (15 novembre), Elio Martuscello e Tim Hodgkinson (3 dicembre) e *End Good Everything Good*, performance di Margaret Kammerer con la regia di Jay Scheib (29 novembre). Finalissima con 13 formazioni e il Raum trasformato in un giardino sonoro il 16 dicembre. Info: www.xing.it/raum.html.

Aspettando l'amore assente

Da Raum il solo coreografico "End Good Everything Good" di Scheib e Kammerer ispirato alla commedia di Shakespeare



MARGARETH KAMMERER

Uno studio minimale sull'amore non ricambiato travestito da irragionevole vendetta. Così si definisce il solo coreografico per performer con chitarra che stasera dalle 22 occuperà lo spazio Living Room del Raum (via Ca' Selvatica, 4/d. La performance *End Good Everything Good* ideata dal regista statunitense Jay Scheib per la cantante e compositrice Margareth Kammerer (voce, chitarra, movimento) è il nucleo ridotto all'osso della commedia di Shakespeare *Tutto è bene quel che finisce bene*. È la storia di una ragazza che vuole

averla vinta così malamente da riuscire a malapena a stare in piedi, a malapena a star seduta, a malapena a ballare, a malapena a pensare, a malapena a cantare: non riesce a far nulla, e allora si sdraia nell'attesa dell'amato e mentre aspetta si arrabbia, lancia contro il muro un profumo, si fa una foto, e conduce la sua personale guerra contro il terrore dell'abbandono. Precede la performance, per il ciclo "Waiting Room (opere per l'attesa)", *Cries of Geese*, video dell'artista visivo svizzero Marc Bauer.

SPAZIO RAUM

Kammerer reinterpreta Shakespeare "a malapena"

RAUM (via ca' Selvatica 4/d, ore 22) presenta «End Good Everything Good», solo coreografico per performer con chitarra,



Margareth
Kammerer

liberamente ispirato alla commedia di Shakesperare «Tutto è bene quel che finisce bene». Sulle coreografie di Jay Scheib, lo spettacolo propone uno studio minimale sull'amore non ricambiato travestito da irragionevole vendetta. E' la storia di una ragazza che vuole averla vinta così malamente da riuscire a malapena a stare in piedi, a star seduta, a ballare, a pensare e a malapena, a cantare. Marga-

reth Kammerer, nata nel 1966 a Bolzano è compositrice, vocalist e performer. Ha suonato con il Laboratorio di Musica & Immagine, Fastilio, l'ensemble Eva Kant e altre formazioni. Dal 2000 si è concentrata su progetti per solo voce e chitarra, frequentando ambiti musicali apparentemente lontani come dalla forma canzone alla musica improvvisata e musica elettronica. Le sue composizioni per voce e chitarra sono spesso basate su testi poetici classici e contemporanei. Precede, per Waiting Room, «Cries of Geese», video dell'artista visivo svizzero Marc Bauer.

(michele pompei)

MARGARET KAMMERER, JAY SCHEIB E MARC BAUER NEGLI SPAZI DEL RAUM

Questa stanza non ha più pareti



LO SPAZIO RIDOTTO del Raum (Via Ca' Selvatica 4/d) dalle 22 si espande con gli eventi performativi a cui dà luogo, in una costante ricerca sulle forme di presentazione scenica più sperimentali. L'appuntamento *Living Room* prevede la performance «End Good Everything Good» del regista statunitense Jay Scheib creata per Margareth Kammerer (voce, chitarra, movimento) basata sulla commedia di William Shakespeare «Tutto bene

quel che finisce bene», di cui conserva il nucleo minimale dell'amore non ricambiato e travestito da vendetta. Precede, per *Waiting room* (opere per l'attesa), il video «Cries of Geese» dell'artista svizzero Marc Bauer, da sempre alle dipendenze dell'immagine visiva.

Il Raum continua la sua esplorazione degli eventi attuali più aperti nel formato e nell'ideazione, verificandoli con gli artisti e con il pubblico presente in stretto contatto.

Culture



«West Pier» («Quai ouest») avec Aïmée Phélon, Ryan Justen et Krazim Vondanov. Bernard-Marie Koltès aime New York. Il y séjourne souvent du tournant des années 70 et 80.

KOLTES BACK IN NEW YORK

Un festival propose au public américain une vision panoramique de l'œuvre du dramaturge français.

Madison New York 2003
Ohio Theatre, 48 Wooster St. (off-
Broadway). Jusqu'au 31 mai.

Dire que l'événement **boulevard New York** serait exagéré. Pour trouver mention du festival Koltès, qui s'est ouvert le 6 mai et se déroule jusqu'à la fin du mois, il

faut se reporter à la section «off-off Broadway» du Village Voice. L'Ohio Theatre, qui accueille la manifestation, compte moins de 100 places et ne fait pas le plein tous les soirs. Inutile d'y voir les effets d'un air du temps antifranc-
çais. New York a massivement manifesté contre la guerre en Irak, et il ne viendrait pas à

l'idée d'un seul commerçant de SoHo – cafés, restaurants, boutiques de mode – d'entonner l'air du boycott.

Malentendu. Disparu il y a quatorze ans, Bernard-Marie Koltès, l'un des auteurs français les plus traduits et joués dans le monde (30 langues, 50 pays) n'a jamais vraiment conquis l'Amérique. La cri-

tique du *New York Times*, lorsque Patrice Chéreau vint présenter *Dans la solitude des champs de coton* à la prestigieuse Brooklyn Academy of Music en 1996, donnait la mesure du malentendu: «vaine rhétorique, lourde comme une crème glacée». De fait, sur Broadway, on joue du Yasmina Reza, beaucoup plus light.

Le festival Koltès New York 2003 ne contribuera pas forcément à le sortir du ghetto ultraminoritaire du théâtre de recherche. Mais il a le grand mérite, avec des moyens limités, d'offrir une tentative de vision panoramique de l'œuvre, à travers sept pièces (quatre mises en scène et trois lectures) portées par de jeunes troupes.

Depuis trois semaines, l'Ohio Theatre, dans Wooster Street – un loft au premier étage, avec un vaste plateau nu, des piliers et des gradins –, entretient donc une flamme Koltès, au cœur d'une ville qu'il aime beaucoup au tournant des années 70 et 80.

«Il y avait, sur les bords de l'Hudson River, suite page 32

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suite de la page 31 à l'ouest de Manhattan, un grand hangar, qui appartenait aux anciens Decks. (...) En 1983, le maire de New York, conformément à un plan de sécurité et de moralité, fit passer ce hangar de grandes pilonnades de bois; il y eut même des gardes avec des chiens. Un an après, il fut rasé et il ne reste aujourd'hui qu'une jetée sur pilotis qui s'avance vers la mer» (1). C'est ainsi que Bernard-Marie Koltes raconte la genèse de *Quai Ouest*, créé par Chéreau en 1985, sans dire explicitement qu'il est les quais désaffectés au bord de l'Hudson furent aussi des lieux de drague homosexuelle qu'il fréquentait. Il précisait par ailleurs qu'il «faudrait oublier que le point de départ de cette pièce est New York (...) D'ailleurs, je ne me risquerais jamais à écrire une pièce "américaine"; on ne peut parler que de ce qu'on connaît, et l'Américain d'origine anglo-saxonne m'est aussi étranger qu'un Chinois à un Breton».

Ouvrir le texte. Pièce «américaine» ou pas, c'est sur *Quai Ouest* (*West Pier*) que s'est ouvert le festival. Jay Scheib, la metteuse en scène à peine trentenaire, a notamment travaillé à la Vollostine de Berlin avant de revenir dans sa ville. Tourment le dos au monumental, il transforme le grand hangar en maison préfabriquée, comme un refuge au milieu de nulle part, et accentue la dimension familiale de la pièce. Inégal au plan du jeu (mais hanté par un grand acteur, Michael Stumm, lire ci-contre), systématique dans son utilisation de la vidéo en direct, le spectacle a le grand mérite d'ouvrir le texte: comédie, tragédie, polar, pièce sur le désir, la peur, l'argent, l'exclusion, tous les enjeux et les interprétations s'éclairent, jusqu'à une dernière image où le fond du théâtre s'ouvre sur la rue, ou plutôt sur l'immeuble d'en face. Une créatrice de mode y expose ses collections; derrière les vitres à peine éclairées, une forêt de robes blanches entoure une robe noire, telles des voiles dans la nuit, et c'est tout le théâtre alors qu'il s'avance vers la mer. Un dimanche matin de brume, au lendemain de *West Pier*, les fans pouvaient appuyer sur l'une des sonnettes de l'immeuble qui jouxte le théâtre. Un papier scotché sur la porte du monte-charge, un loft au sixième étage: la salle de répétition de l'Ohio accueillait un colloque rassemblant animateurs du projet, acteurs, traducteurs et spécialistes. Une journée semi-clandestine pour un auteur dont l'universitaire et critique au *Village Voice* Thomas Sellar devait dire qu'il était toujours, aux États-Unis, «plus une rumeur qu'une réalité», mais que le moment était sans doute venu «d'enquêter sur la rumeur», alors que surgit une nouvelle génération de metteurs en scène. La critique

hongroise Nima Kiraly, en insistant sur le caractère «poétique et non naturaliste» de Koltes, mettait le doigt sur l'une des raisons du malentendu américain. Enseignant à Nanterre, Emmanuel Wallon rappelait les multiples influences littéraires de l'auteur, notamment Shakespeare, avant que la Libanaise Donia Moussel, professeur au département de français de Yale, ne disserte sur «les corps diasporiques (diasporic bodies) dans le théâtre de BM Koltes». Initiatrices du projet, animatrices de la compagnie (Un Parenthèse), Marion Schoevaert

et Doris Mirescu revenaient sur les difficultés rencontrées «deux ans de travail corps et âme pour les initiatives du projet Marion Schoevaert et Doris Mirescu, deux Françaises installées à New York».

Georges Bataille, et travaille aux côtés de la metteuse en scène Brigitte Jacques. Leur volontarisme a parfois suscité du scepticisme, notamment leur volonté de tout faire retraduire,

alors que la plupart des pièces étaient déjà disponibles en anglais. Ce n'est que du bout des lèvres que François Koltes, frère et exécuteur testamentaire de l'écrivain, a donné son accord. Il n'est pas certain que les versions new-yorkaises s'imposent comme les meilleures. Ainsi, la récente adaptation de *Black and Dogs* («Combat de nègre et de chiens») pour la mise en scène réalisée par Arthur Nauwyczel, en 2002 à Atlanta, avec des acteurs locaux, semble supérieure à la new-yorkaise (titrée *Battle of Black and Dogs*). Marion Schoevaert et Doris Mirescu signent par ailleurs chacune une mise en scène du festival. La qualité artistique de *In the*

Solitude of Cotton Fields (Schoevaert) et de *Battle of Black and Dogs* (Mirescu) n'est pas tout à fait à la hauteur de leur enthousiasme. Les deux souffrent de la même tendance à l'illustration et à la redite: chorégraphie façon arts martiaux pour *Dans la solitude...*, surjeu permanent dans *Combat...*

Opéra kitsch. Des défauts qu'on ne retrouve pas dans la mise en scène de Roberto Zucco par Daniel Saez, qui n'a pas 30 ans et revient à Zucco pour la deuxième fois. Son spectacle dégage une étrange séduction, à l'image de l'acteur principal Jason Lew, au physique de gambin fragile. Saez théâtralise tout et tire la pièce vers l'opéra kitsch, un bal des démons,

souvent drôle, nourri de musiques de la fin des années 60 (Bob Dylan, Rolling Stones), comme un signe de connivence à Koltes adolescent. D'autres avant lui s'étaient penchés sur Roberto Zucco, ainsi, en 1995, Travis Preston, au Cucaracha Theatre, et l'année d'avant, Françoise Kourilski, indéboulonnable directrice de l'Ubu Repertory Theatre, qui fut la première, au début des années 80, à présenter un texte de Bernard-Marie Koltes — *la Nuit juste avant les forêts* — à New York. La rumeur est donc ancienne. Plus que de découvrir, il faudrait parler de l'éternel retour d'un clandestin.

RENÉ SOLIS (renesol@opéra.com) New York



Zahara Liguori et Michael Stumm dans «West Pier». Michael Stumm, 48 ans, a travaillé au Wooster Group de 1979 à 1993.

Michael Stumm, le survivant

Le comédien, acteur et témoin de trente ans de théâtre alternatif, interprète Koch dans «West Pier».

Dans *West Pier*, Michael Stumm interprète Koch, l'homme riche venu questionner la mort sur le quai. Élégance, détachement, vitesse: Stumm ne passe pas inaperçu au milieu de ses jeunes partenaires. Dans la vie, Stumm, 48 ans, est un survivant, acteur et témoin de trente ans de théâtre non commercial, dont quinze avec le Wooster Group, la compagnie d'Elizabeth LeCompte où se retrouvent des figures telles que Willem Dafoe et plus récemment, Frances McDormand. Il a aussi tourné au cinéma, entre autres avec Claire Denis. Pour jouer Koltes, Stumm a retrouvé le chemin de Wooster Street. Le Performing Garage, la maison mère du groupe, n'est qu'à une centaine de mètres de l'Ohio Theatre. Il y a six ans, Stumm a quitté Manhattan et une vie rongée par la drogue et la maladie. Il est resté cinq ans à Chicago, où il a enseigné le théâtre avant de revenir à New York («*Thuis Brooklyn, personne ne peut se payer un logement à Manhattan*»). Propos choisis.

«J'ai découvert le théâtre au début des années 70 à travers le Living Theater, l'engagement politique, la certitude que le monde allait changer. À l'époque, je croyais sérieusement que Julian Beck (fondateur du Living, ndr) serait un jour président. Ils ont entièrement repensé le vocabulaire du théâtre. J'ai rejoint le Wooster Group où je suis resté de 1979 à 1993. C'est une histoire incroyablement tumultueuse, un ouragan d'émotions. La seule question, toujours posée, était celle de "l'être sur scène". Pendant toutes ces années, le Wooster, avec quelques autres comme Richard Foreman et Peter Sellars, a fonctionné comme une petite tribu qui se battait pour la survie d'un langage, presque en secret. J'ai failli être expulsé de la famille quinze ou vingt fois: beaucoup d'héroïne, des deuil, des casses. Quand je suis parti, j'ai passé un an à l'hôpital et puis j'ai trouvé un poste d'enseignant à l'École d'Art de Chicago. J'ai eu un peu de mal à supporter le monde universitaire et son jargon, moi qui avais toujours

pensé que l'art devait d'abord être un plaisir amusant. C'est le théâtre qui m'a ramené à New York, à travers un monologue de James Streib intitulé *How to Art*. Je l'ai joué à Chicago puis à Brooklyn au Combustive Arts Theatre, un nouveau lieu à Williamsburg. C'est à Brooklyn que l'on trouve aujourd'hui les lieux les plus intéressants pour le théâtre. À travers Koltes, j'ai achevé de me réconcilier avec l'idée que les textes n'étaient pas seulement des choses mortes. Tous les nouveaux auteurs américains qui valent la peine (Richard Maxwell, Marc Williams...) savent que le théâtre est affaire de musique et pas de sens. Raconter la même vieille blague sur un ton neuf. L'activité théâtrale à New York a changé. Dans les années 60 et 70, il y avait encore pas mal d'argent public. Puis les sources de financement se sont peu à peu taries. Aujourd'hui, j'ai l'impression que tout a été diminué, ratatiné. Même Richard Foreman fait des pièces plus courtes, »

Répondre par R.D.

Le théâtre non commercial en manque de moyens

54 000 dollars (moins de 90 000 euros), tel est le budget total de l'opération Koltes New York 2003, pour trois semaines de festival, quatre mises en scène, trois lectures, sept nouvelles traductions et un colloque. La somme donne une bonne idée du manque de moyens dont souffre le théâtre non commercial aux États-Unis. Elle a permis de financer la location du théâtre pour un mois (8 500 dollars), de payer les acteurs (de 800 à 1 000 dollars chacun), et de décaler un peu d'argent (de 5 000 à 10 000 dollars) pour chacune des quatre productions. Marion Schoevaert et Doris Mirescu, les organisatrices, avaient à l'origine évalué à 200 000 dollars le budget nécessaire. La quasi-totalité de la somme a été fournie par deux donateurs. «The Franco-American Fund for Performing Arts», un organisme financé conjointement par de l'argent public français (via le ministère des Affaires étrangères) et des donations privées américaines. Le fonds, initialement formé pour soutenir les arts plastiques (et où son nom emprunté à Marcel Duchamp), existe aujourd'hui aussi pour les arts de la scène. Un jury, composé à parité de personnalités françaises et américaines du monde du spectacle, est chargé de sélectionner les dossiers. Dix projets ont bénéficié en 2002 de l'appui d'Etant donné.

R.D.

Soho Think Tank Hosts a Koltès Festival

IN THE SIEGE ZONE

BY TOM SELLAR

KOLTÈS NEW YORK 2003

Ohio Theatre
68 Wooster Street 212-968-4844

The rumors from Paris are true: Bernard-Marie Koltès is among the most frequently produced playwrights in Europe today. Born in 1948 and dead (of AIDS) at the age of 41 in 1989, Koltès has been championed and staged by Patrice Chéreau, Heiner Müller, and Peter Stein, among others, who consider him an heir to Genet. But aside from a 1996 touring Chéreau production (in French) and a few isolated attempts, Koltès has largely been ignored in our more parochial precinct.

With "Koltès New York 2003," a festival of four productions with additional readings and symposia, this overlooked playwright finally gets a full-fledged welcome to the U.S. If we're discovering him a little later than the rest of the world, perhaps the timing could not be better: When have we more needed to hear from a dramatist preoccupied with the effects of colonialism and capitalism on the psyche? The son of a French general who fought against Algerian independence, Koltès quickly turned to themes of commerce, racism, violence, sexual desire, third-world exploitation, and psychological degradation. His plays are cascades of free-falling language—often in monologue—in which social and internal realms converge. In reflexive wordplay, thoughts bend back on themselves in characters' minds, pointing to logic's terrifying traps and tricks.

Undaunted, the organizers of "Koltès New York" have launched a deeply ambitious project, offering new stagings of his major works by young directors (in fresh American translations). It's rare to have such a well-focused collective effort downtown, and it may make a useful blueprint. Like Racine's tragedies (but funnier), each of these plays chases a line of oratory to unravel enigmas of power. *Battle of Black and Dogs*, perhaps the most narrative-driven work, was also the most successful at relating thought and action in this way; it shows the building blocks of xenophobia in the remote regions of society and the mind. Set in a French firm's sealed-off construction compound in sub-Saharan Africa, *Battle* centers on a conflict between Alboury, a local man determined to claim the body of a hired hand killed under murky circumstances, and Westerners terrified their crimes will be uncovered. Dangerous Ground Productions' director Doris Mirescu gracefully alternates a rugged naturalism with mystical intimations; her powerful cast includes Joan Jubbett and Leopold Lowe, and Eric Dean Scott is particularly fine as Cal, a young foreman whose paranoid desperation becomes the drama's compelling and despicable centrifuge.

To augment the music of Koltès's words, several directors chose to use original scores. *Battle of Black and Dogs* summons interior worlds with Michaël Attias's buzzing, sliding score for saxophone and percussion. In *The Solitude of Cotton Fields*, produced by In Parentheses, weaves Satoshi Takeishi's lush electronic textures into its shadowy landscape. Both composers serve their texts well. By contrast, *Roberto Zucco*, a sociopathic fantasia loosely based on a real-life 1970s serial killer, overembellishes at the expense of its core. Daniel Saffer, directing for the Witness Relocation company, imposes too many additional elements where he mainly needs to amplify the text's authentic voice. Economical Brechtian episodes are overloaded with pseudo-expressionistic movement, and post-



ROBERTO ZUCCO: A SOCIOPATHIC FANTASIA

punk songs blare in drawn-out transitions, preventing Zucco's estrangement from gathering scene-to-scene force.

Koltès's language is sometimes described as "architectural," and the directors have wisely embraced the charged quality of space in these plays, most of which are set in a zone somehow under siege. In Rotor Productions' *West Pier*, dodgy desperadoes enter and disappear into a mysterious waterfront warehouse; Jay Scheib, the production's adventurous director, spreads the chaos around the Ohio's cavernous wing spaces. A wooden mock house, radiating sickly fluorescent light, rotates and advances. As characters make business and sexual arrangements, they sometimes vanish into a curtained-off area, reappearing in disembodied form on surveillance monitors; we see what we can't, or aren't supposed to. *Damned* denizens dart between columns lining the stage, destabilizing the space in simultaneous sequences; Michael Sturm and Ryan Justesen do some virtuosic verbalizing as predator-victims. Though he rarely pauses to define individual relationships or to explore the linguistic arpeggios, Scheib nicely fulfills *West Pier*'s hallucination of capitalist excess, proving that Koltès's deal making can take an American shape.

In *The Solitude of Cotton Fields*, directed by Marion Schoevaert, builds on Anna Kiraly's imaginative design: Five translucent panels shed their covering to reveal different, fractured black-and-white perspectives on a single street corner, mirroring one of the pillars downstage and appearing in looped video. Initially we see each fragment in isolation, but together their lines form various diagonals, showing unexpected visual symmetries. The play presents a similar puzzle: A Client and a Dealer encounter one another, fatally, on a dark street; scenes travel back and forth from this event, dissecting every gesture, considering the meeting from psychological, political, and philosophical vantage points. Schoevaert has cast it as a martial arts match, with intensely focused seller and buyer (Shaun O'Neill and Terrence Bae) approaching and encircling each other in a constantly rearranged challenge. In *The Solitude of Cotton Fields* pries open Koltès's dense text with robust metaphors, though sometimes glossing over the language—an approach common to the festival stagings. Still, definitive interpretations can wait: These artists have succeeded in capturing Koltès's theatrical essence, offering an enormously rich introduction to his many dimensions. □



Coke-distress by László Deme

The Power of Darkness by Lev Tolstoy

Translation of Review by Aniko Szűcs

It is astonishing how the performance excludes Tolstoy's essentially Russian world. Although characters have Russian names, there is no trace of the 'moujik' milieu of the end of the 19th century in "The Power of Darkness. There is no "narodna scenario;" the performance depicts contemporary society instead of life in the old-time Russia. Jay Scheib American director and the Pont M_hely company with a few guest artists retain the play's original spirit, which once enhanced naturalism in André Antoine's and Otto Brahm's theatre, in the Théâtre Libre and Freie Bühne.

The contemporary interpretation manifests itself also in the externalities, as the audience may think, which is why the Coke bottles on the table are so conspicuous at first. And it is indeed surprising, when, after the performance during the feedback session, Péter Scherer actor recalls how remarkable he found when the director had explained them during the rehearsals that the date of the play's conception concurred with the establishment of the world-wide



popular Coca-Cola factory. So what's the deal? The everyday symbol of the famous or infamous bottle does not only refer to our modern day, but also to Tolstoy's; only, instead of representing a Russian reality, it represents an American one. The performance recedes from the past and the Russian flavors; instead, overseas motifs mingle with the desolated local housing estates, and surely we recognize the distress of our own lives on the stage and on the projections of stage actions. Although the intercultural references and multi-layers of the performance are ingenious, at certain moments there is too much of juggling on Trafó's stage.

sure: Anyutka plays a lot with the policeman's gun, and in the course of the play we get used to this so much, that when she collapses because of (perhaps her own) child's murder, when all secrets and lies are revealed, presumably this pistol will end the girl's disappointments. However, the gun does not go off, Anyutka does not commit suicide. And somehow this is even more terrible. *The power of darkness* will not cease with Nyikita's renitence.

Lev Tolstoy: *The Power of Darkness* (Pont Műhely in Trafó) Hungarian translation, dramaturgy: Anna Merényi, Set, Lights: Jeremy Morris, Assistant of director: Ken Roraback, Music: Albert Márkos, Video: Leah Gelpe, Director: Jay Scheib, Cast: László Keszég, Krisztina Urbanovits, Isabelle Lé, Erika Pereszlényi, Zsolt Viczei, Judit Pogány, Péter Scherer, Balázs Vajna

<http://www.szinhaz.net/index.php?id=286&cid=4952>



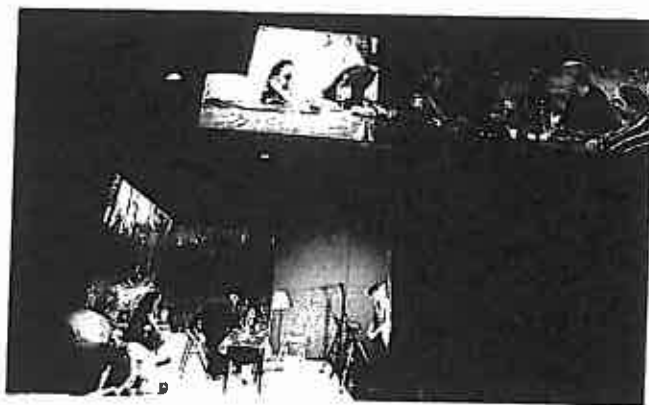
Kólanymoróság

Deme László

Lev Tolsztoj: A sötétség hatalma

Érdekes látni, ahogy Tolsztoj darabjának ízig-vérig orosz világát teljes egészében kirekeszti magából az előadás. Hiába van orosz nevük a szereplőknek, A sötétség hatalmában nyoma sem maradt a XIX. század végi muzsikmiliónak. Nincs „narodnaja szcena”, az előadás nem a hajdani orosz, hanem a mai élet kendőzellen ábrázolása. Jay Scheib amerikai rendező és a vendégművészekkel kiegészült Pont Műhely társulata megőrzi a darab eredeti szellemét, mely annak idején André Antoine és Otto Brahm színházában, a Théâtre Libre-ben és a Freie Bühneben a naturalizmus irányzatát erősítette.

Az aktualizálás külsőségeiben is megjelenik, gondolhatjuk nézőként, ezért szűnjék ki szinte a szemünket az asztalon elhelyezett piros címkés kólásüvegek. A meglepetés annál nagyobb lesz később, mikor az előadás után az alkotók és nézők közti beszélgetésen Scherer Péter elmeséli, mennyire emlékezetes maradt számára, mikor a próbák során a rendező felvilágosította őket, hogy a darab megírásának időpontja egybeesett a mára világszerte elterjedt Coca-Cola-cég alapításával. Hogy is van tehát? Hétköznapijaink közismert panelje, a híres vagy hírhedt üvegforma nem kizárólag saját korunkra, hanem Tolsztojéra is utal, csak éppen nem az orosz valóságra, hanem az amerikaira. Az előadás eltávolodik a múlttól és az orosz ízeiktől, helyette tengerentúli toposzok keverednek a hazai lakótelep sivárságával, miközben kétség sem fér hozzá, hogy a mi életünk mindennapi nyomorúságát látjuk a színpadi történetekben és a színpadi történetek kivetített videofelvételein. Az interkulturális és a jelentésrétegződés szellemes, de egyes pontokon elnagyolt bűvészmutatványa születik meg a Trafó színpadán.



Jelenet az előadásból Koncz Zsuzsa felvétele

A színpadi cselekményt Leah Gelpe rögzíti három videokamerán. Három nézőpont vetül a színpad feletti vászonra, új, emeleti proscéniumot nyitva meg. Az állványról vagy kézből felvett képek a média vizualitására vannak hangszerelve, nincsenek megkomponálva, mint egy játékfilm beállításai, hanem naturalisták, mint a kereskedelmi híradó bulvárszörnyűségei. A videó használata akkor válik be a legjobban, amikor egy színpadi mozzanatot mind a három kép kimerevít. Például amikor Matrjona a szatyrába rejti azt a poharat, amelyben a Pjotrt megmérgező ital volt. Pogány Judit kimerevített pillantása leleplezi a figurát, de leleplezi a színház és a mozgókép eltérő időkezelését is, hiszen Matrjona már újra a színen sűrög-forog, mintha mi sem történt volna, míg a mozdulatlan képben nagyon is sok minden sűrűsödik. Az esetek többségében azonban a kivetített jelenetek mégsem illeszkednek szervesen az előadásba. Talán érdemes feleleveníteni, hogy a korábban szintén a Trafó színpadán fellépő, szintén amerikai toposzokkal dolgozó The Big Art Group előadásában a videó használata azért rendeződött sokkal szorosabban a produkcióba, mert az ugyancsak három egymás mellé vetített kép átlépett a színpadi perspektíva rendjén, s a szín képét egy másik képpel kiegészítve a különös vizuális attrakció új terek és idők folyamatos érdeklődést fenntartó dimenzióit nyitotta meg. A jelen előadás esetében lehetne még

azzal magyarázni a videó jelenlétét, hogy egy család szappanoperába illő melodráájába nyerünk bepillantást, de ez a felfedezés egy idő után érdektelenségbe hullik. Sokszor elfelejt az ember a vászonra is figyelni, s amikor hirtelen mégis odakapja a tekintetét, inkább csak jólneveltségből teszi: ha már egyszer ott van, nézzük a mozgóképet is.

Figyelemre méltóbb Jeremy Morris színpadi terének használata. A nézőtérbe ékelt fészkerben, a közönség elől elrejtve történik a csecsemőgyilkosság. A fészker mögött játszódnak az eredetiben udvari jelenetek, de udvar helyett padlószőnyeggel burkolt előszoba ez, ahová oldalról bejárati ajtó is nyílik. A szőnyeg mögött a színpad hosszának egyik felében egy konyha és nappali kereszteződéséből létrejött helyiség látható. Itt zajlik a szappanopera, az itt játszódó jeleneteket vetítik ki. A színpad másik felében Márkos Albert ül, és elektromos gitár húrjain keltett disszonáns hangzatokkal fest alá egy-egy jelenetet, de ezt a teret a szereplők is használják különféle járásokhoz. Minden keveredik mindennel, zsúfolt léttér jön létre, ahol jól érvényesül a darab feszült légköre.

A melodramai történetet „Tolsztoj valóságos esetre alapozza”. Mérgezés, megcsalás, pénzsóvárság, gyerekgyilkosság és bűnbánat – hogy csak néhány motívumot említsünk. Mindenki kicsinyes, rosszindulatú vagy csak rossz életű. Kisserű és nyomorúságos élet rajzolódik ki az előadásból, amely hol groteszk és kacagtató, hol torokszorítóan tárgyilagos.

A színészi játék impresszionisztikus és lényegre törő, a mához igazított dialógusok szinte improvizatív jelleggel hangzanak el. A Pont Műhely társulata egységesen mesterkéletlen gesztusokkal ad egy-egy jellemző figurát. A Matrjonát játszó Pogány Judit és Akim szerepében Scherer Péter árnyaltabb játékot hoz. Ahogy Scherer Péter a nejlonszatyrot szorongatja, suta megszólalásai, vagy ahogyan felveszi papucsát, s így lép az idegen házba, tökéletesen kifejezik az ügyefogyott erkölcsprédikátor súlytalanságát: megalázott, eltiport és a pesti utcákon gyakran felbukkanó figurát formál. Pogány Judit valamennyi jelenete briliáns etűd, amikor színen van, kisajátítja a nézőtér figyelmét. Matrjonája nem gonosz, csak alamuszi, megtanulta, hogyan kell életben maradni és a gyereke jussát kikaparni – ugyancsak ismerős. Ahogyan a nappali-konyha falát borító, életnagyságú őzeket erdei környezetben ábrázoló tapéta is, amely számtalan lakótelep nappaliját burkolta az 1980-as években, talán ma is. „Őzike” egyébként van a szereplők közt is: a tízéves Anyutkát játszó Isabelle Lé. Kedves, lírai teremtmény a hétköznapi szörnyek közt, de bár a színész tánchoshoz illő mozdulatai, megiramodásai vagy átöltöztetésének megjelenítésénél. Ez talán még inkább az Egyesült Államokra jellemző toposz, ahogyan a napszemüveges rendőr (Vajna Balázs) is. Tolsztoj eredeti darabjában nem szerepel rendőr, de a rendező ebben a szerepben vonta össze Marina férje, a Szomszédasszony és a Leánynéző paraszt alakját. A figura többször is különös közjátékba keveredik Anyutkával. A lány a nappaliban sikít, mire a rendőr berohan a szobába, és tüzelni kezd a tapéta-őzekre. Halvány utalás sincs arra, mindez miért történik, de hátborzongató. Kettejük viszonya egyébként tisztázatlan, sejtelem szintjén az is felmerülhet, hogy egészen közel állnak egymáshoz. Bármilyen is köztük, Anyutka sokszor játszik a rendőr pisztolyával, s annyira hozzánő a darab folyamán, hogy amikor egyre inkább összeomlik a (lehet, hogy saját) csecsemő(jének) elpusztítása miatt, amikor már minden eltitkolt és félrehazudott aljasság napvilágra kerül, feltételezhető, hogy ez a pisztoly vet majd véget a lány csalódásainak. A pisztoly mégsem sül el, Anyutka nem lesz öngyilkos. Ez valahogy még szörnyűbb. A sötétség hatalma nem szűnt meg Nyikita bűnbánatával.

Lev Tolsztoj: A sötétség hatalma (Pont Műhely a Trafóban)

Magyar szöveg, dramaturgia: Merényi Anna.

Díszlet, fény: Jeremy Morris.

Rendezőasszisztens: Ken Roraback.

Zene: Márkos Albert.

Videó: Leah Gelpe.

Rendező: Jay Scheib.

Szereplők: Keszég László, Urbanovits Krisztina, Isabelle Lé, Pereszlényi Erika, Viczei Zsolt, Pogány Judit, Scherer Péter, Vajna Balázs.

<http://www.szinhaz.net/index.php?id=286&cid=4952>



TOP TIP

<http://www.toptipp.hu/szinhaz/alternativ.htm>



A SÖTÉTSÉG HATALMA
Műhely Trafó 2005

Jay Scheib Pont

The Power of Darkness Jay Scheib Pont Műhely Trafó 2005

Translation of Review by Aniko Szűcs

Finally a production, in which the video is not simply an empty device only to cover transitions, but a meaningful component of the performance. The main location where the plot takes place, which we can rarely watch directly, now can be observed permanently from three different angles. The directions and angles of the cameras vary, and they establish a dynamic counterpoint to the actions of the outer space. Jay Scheib's Tolstoy-adaptation, language modernization is unique and masterly, the directing is condensed and smooth – a real revelation!!! The music – though minimal – is emphatic indeed; Albert Márkos plays only a guitar, while the Mistress of the video is Leah Gelpe with an unlimited sense of action.

The director's casting is excellent and bold. Isabelle Lé is just perfect, Erika Pereszlenyi is conspicuously good, and finally Krisztina Urbanovits also have a chance to reveal her extraordinarily colorful personality. Judit Pogány performs with the usual excellence, and the one who is the most unforgettable in this performance is Péter Scherer. He grew 20 years older by using only internal acting devices: the benevolent naivety, the wisdom behind the ineptitude of this old pal counterpoints the marshland of this reprobate infamy. Scherer more and more often surprises me with his fantastic acting: in Krétakör's public reading he performed a whole life sitting on a stool; his outcry then was just as soul-stirringly cathartic as his close-up in this performance in the moment of the horrifying moments of the dramatic revelation.

This remarkable performance has to remain on repertoire. We hope that we can see it in the fall again. It is a must-see for every contemporary-theatre friend and contemporary theatre-friend!!!!

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A SÖTÉTSÉG HATALMA
Műhely Trafó 2005

Jay Scheib Pont

Végre értelmes alkalmazását láthattuk az egyidejű video-technikának, amelyet általában az üresjáratok leplezésére használnak. A cselekmény fütere, amelyet elég ritkán szemlélhetünk közvetlenül, három nézőpontból is állandó megfigyelés alatt tartható. A kamerák beállítása, látószöge változó, dinamikus ellenpontját képezve a külső játéktér akcióinak. **Jay Scheib** Tolsztoj-adaptálása, jelenetezése, nyelvi aktualizálása mesteri, eredeti, rendezése összefogott, gördülékeny, igazi reveláció !!! Minimális, annál hangsúlyosabb a zene: egyszál gerjesztett gitáron **Márkos Albert**, a videó úrnője pedig a korlátlan akció-készségű **Leah Gelpe**. Kitűnően és merészen választott szereplőket a rendező. **Isabelle Lé** telitalálat, feltűnően jó **Pereszlényi Erika**, végre **Urbanovits Krisztina** is megmutathatta markánsan sokszínű egyéniségét. **Pogány Judit** a tüle meg szokott csúcsformát produkálta, a felejthetetlen ebben az előadásban azonban **Scherer Péter**. 20 évet öregedett, kizárólag berül építkezni, színészi eszközökkel: a jószándékú naivitás, az együgyűségében bölcs apóka figuráját állítva kontrasztként a haszonleső, elvetemült gonoszság mocsarában. Mostanság egyre-másra lép meg fantasztikus alakításokkal: a Krétakör Felolvasószínházában egy sámlin ülve játszott el egy teljes életet, sírása ugyanúgy felkavaróan katartikus volt, mint mostani, dermedt premier planja, a drámai felismerés szörnyű pillanatában. Muszáj ezt a nagyszerű előadást valahogy műsoron tartani, reméljük, üsszel újra műsorra kerül, minden kortárszínház-barátnak és kortárs színházbarátnak látnia kell !!!

ARTS

THEATER REVIEW

A \$^%^*@!& Good Show

"Power of Darkness" is Sexy and Convincing

By Jessica O. Young

Dramashop
Power of Darkness
Kresge Little Theatre
 April 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 8 p.m.
 \$8 general, \$6 students/seniors
Written by Leo Tolstoy
Directed by Jay Scheib
Starring James Dai G, Jessica Hinel '05,
Arshan Gailus '06

Among the dozens of shows I've seen at MIT, "Power of Darkness" stands alone. Presented by the MIT Dramashop, and directed by Jay Scheib, the Tolstoy play tells a story of good people making really, really bad decisions. Leo Tolstoy wrote this late nineteenth

century play after interviewing two individuals who were later incarcerated for the crimes depicted in "Power of Darkness." The play was banned in Russia, but opened on Broadway in 1920 for over 85 performances. Afterwards, it disappeared for a while. Banned most likely because of its importance to the Naturalism movement, the play depicts a family torn apart by the enticing suitor, Nikitia (James Dai G). Once a single bad decision is made, the effects become exponential, and the family soon finds themselves trapped in inescapable misery.

Scheib's "Power of Darkness" is thoroughly sexy. Ordinary words are filled with life through a physical and dramatic interpretation of the script. Also, cast members work very well with each other, and each

line is delivered with care. Because of these things, the entire play comes off as intense and powerful.

Little Kresge is hardly recognizable under the auspices of Scheib. The stage is covered in an eye-popping blue carpet, and the set is creative, original, and full of surprises — a flipping couch, a faucet with running water, and a working coffee maker. What makes the set so remarkable, though, is how the characters interact with it. Within the first ten minutes of the show, main characters Nikitia and Anisya (Jessica E. Hinel '04) find themselves tumbling across the stage and into walls during a disturbingly realistic fight. At the same time, live videos reveal what is going on in another section of the stage. Similar camera-work is used cleverly throughout the play.

The acting is, without a doubt, the best I have seen in a long time. Faces I recognized from campus became virtually indistinguishable as the actors assumed their roles. When a coughing and hacking Peter (Arshan J. Gailus '06) slowly dies, it is a challenge to separate reality from the stage.

Gailus is so convincing in his role that I was tempted to run to the stage and help him myself. Likewise, Hinel is absolutely compelling in her role as a passionate, and then pained, wife. Overall, every character is crazy in an addictive way, making the entire play fascinating.

This is, for lack of a better phrase, a physical show. Things are thrown around — soda cans, tables, and people. There is always something happening on the stage, and some emotion being stirred in the audience. Scheib explains that he and his cast were, "One hundred percent in pursuit of the author's intentions." At the same time, some characters' parts were split to create more roles, and some lines are said at the same time, or in a different language. These techniques, among others, keep the audience wanting more, without ever knowing what to expect.

Scheib will bring "Power of Darkness" to Budapest this summer. Even if you can make it then, see it this Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday. You just might find me in the audience for a second viewing.

CONCERT REVIEW

Corigliano Quartet Impresses Even Anti-Chamber Listeners

Talented and Enjoyable String Quartet Plays Less Enjoyable Pieces

By Minyoung Jang

Corigliano String Quartet
Kresge Auditorium
 April 9, 2004, 8 p.m.

I've never been a big fan of chamber music and ensembles, but perhaps that's because I've been hearing less-skilled players. After hearing the Corigliano String Quartet, I wasn't exactly a convert, but I certainly walked away with new knowledge that chamber music can be impressive in its own way.

The string quartet began with Mozart's

they once again dazzled the audience with their cohesive style. All four performers were playing to the same internal tempo without stumbling and managed to keep it light with clean fast runs. Despite their musicianship, their performance of Mozart's "String Quartet in E Flat Major" failed to fully capture my attention; after a while, it simply felt like similar passages were being repeated over and over again.

After the tranquil monotony of Mozart, I was rather excited to hear some untraditional chords and pronounced syncopation opening

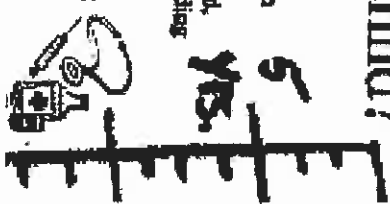
Waggoner's Third String Quartet neither "Incandescent" nor "Sensual," as the first and second movements, respectively, were marked. "Frenzied" would have been a more accurate description.

Thankfully, the Corigliano String Quartet closed the night with Mendelssohn's "String Quartet in D Major, Op. 44, No. 1," a piece that displayed the players' musicianship as well as being much more entertaining for the listener. The first movement was marked by good phrasing and I was especially impressed by the fact that the organ seemed to be able to allow

How Do You Measure the Growth of A Child?

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Visiting Director Stages 'Lorenzaccio'

By LUY X. HUANG
CRIMSON STAFF WRITER

He was known as "Lorenzo the devil" in sixteenth-century Florence, the hedonistic favorite of the Duke Alessandro de Medici, his cousin and eventual assassin. Never predictable, mostly because he was perpetually drunk and always irreverent, he became a symbol of Florentine decadence, a worthy complement to the depravity of Alessandro himself.

No one could have guessed that precisely three centuries later Alfred de Musset, France's Shakespeare and George Sand's hopeless lover, would transform Lorenzo's story into tragic farce. And even then, no one could have expected that two centuries after that, Lorenzo himself would be transformed—into a skinny, pale, 21st-century girl, with springs in her legs and melancholy eyes.

Joy Scheib, the Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club's (HRDC) current visiting director, knew that *Lorenzaccio* had to be a period piece, using dining Chinese restaurants, pineapple bras and

silken heels as emblems of the current time period.

Scheib stages *Lorenzaccio* from a 1993 translation by Paul Schmidt, who didn't always take de Musset literally, but nevertheless ended up being faithful to him. *Lorenzaccio* was meant to be kept contemporary, whether that meant seeing the chaos of Renaissance Florence in 1830s Paris or 21st-century America. What Scheib didn't know, right up until the show was cast, was that the scandalous *Lorenzaccio* would wear bras.

Scheib says he firmly believes in "tailoring characters to actors, even if it means not knowing the gender of the lead until auditions are over. So Lorenzo became Kate Walker '06.

Once the cast was assembled, he proceeded to turn his actors into people. Over a period of three days, he trained them in the art of verisimilitude, of thinking in character when their character stood idly on-stage, of moving spontaneously and sometimes wildly, but always naturally. The goal was to be articulate with

gesture.

"It changes how I look at scenes," said Carla M. Borras '05, whose Maurizio, chief of the Florentine police, momentarily quits the emergency assembly after the Duke's death to grab a beer.

"[Joy] works trying to find behavioral gestures and then amplifying them in weird ways," explained Benjamin D. Margo '04, whose dual roles—Catholic conspirator and president of the HRDC—are sometimes conflicted. "It all sounds so stupid—I'm peeing on trash cans and taking off my shirt and lifting weights." (Margo's corrupt Cardinal confesses to the Duke's lover while sitting on a toilet.)

If nothing else, this peopling of the stage is useful for Scheib, who often directs by walking on stage and joining the scene. The action continues, but suddenly Scheib has become a member of the crowd, sneering at Lorenzo, running after the mob, pulling up a chair

Please see LORENZACCIO, page B-3



THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS: Joy Scheib, this year's visiting director for the Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club, leads students in a production of *Lorenzaccio* on the Loeb Mainstage.

Visiting Director Brings 'Lorenzaccio' to Mainstage

LORENZACCIO, from page B-1

in the Happy Garden Chinese Restaurant (a hotbed of Republican agitation against the powerful Medici). It's as though once de Musset's exaggerated characters have figured out who they are, Scheib can calmly walk into their midst, already in character himself.

Scheib is a graduate of Columbia's theater program and spent most of his professional life in Europe. In Salzburg he directed a show that used the text of Herman Melville and the music of Bruce Springsteen. In Budapest, he explored the work of Tennessee Williams. A

former student of Robert Woodruff, the artistic director of the American Repertory Theater, he is at Harvard to re-invent the Visiting Director Program, the ambitious undertaking of Margo and the HRDC to give students the chance to work with professional directors.

"We wanted somebody who was prepared to come into a student environment and shake things up and go nuts," said Margo, who is also a Crimson editor. The HRDC Board was most excited by Scheib, who presented, among other ideas, Schmidt's gritty translation of *Lorenzaccio* and a vague hint of the theatrical use of "multimedia."

"We wanted somebody who [would] shake things up and go nuts."

—Benjamin D. Margo '04-'05

The result was the welcome collaboration of another professional, Leah Gelpy, who specializes in sound and video design, and who made possible the

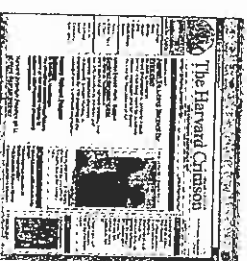
first video live-feed the Loeb Mainstage has ever seen. In addition to the Chinese restaurant and the pasty-colored American ranch house that comprise the set, a large video screen hangs over stage left, streaming out scenes from the interior of the house. Margo notes dryly that Scheib's proposal of de Musset's Florence also "didn't say ranch house."

Scheib had to tailor *Lorenzaccio* not only to the cast but to the stage. Alfred de Musset never intended *Lorenzaccio*'s five acts to be staged, and the speed of the play, the warped, cinematic quality that has dressed up the tragedy as a farce, can't wait for conventional set changes.

The video camera lets the set remain fixed, and the action to move from room to room. It also lets the audience "see around corners," an idea that Scheib takes very seriously.

Lorenzo never mourns for the decay of Florence, despite the fact that, in murdering the Duke, she does what all the whining Republicans and hopeless eccles never dared. His madness—her madness—comes not out of dogma but out of an intense aversion to boredom. "Maybe I'll be honest again," she says, "and I won't find it boring."

—Staff writer Lily X. Huang can be reached at lhuang@fas.harvard.edu.



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The Harvard Crimson

ArtsMonday

Schriebs' 'Lorenzaccio' Scores

Visiting director oversees the best Mainstage show in years

Lorenzaccio
Loeb Mainstage, November 10-12
Directed by Jay Schriebs
Executive produced by Anne M. Walker '04
Produced by Jess M. Matthews and Christopher E. Patton '04



Patrick d. Blanchfield on theater

Thus far, the semester has been a prodigiously productive one for Harvard theater. However, the Harvard Radcliffe Dramatic Club's incredible production of Alfred de Musset's *Lorenzaccio*, which went up this weekend on the Loeb Mainstage, is far more than simply this season's showcase piece: kinetic, elegant and held together by visiting director Jay Schriebs' tremendous sense of style, *Lorenzaccio* is easily the best piece of theater that the Mainstage has seen in years.

The principal kudos are due to the accomplished Schriebs, whose ability to orchestrate multiple points of action and complicated shifts in blocking is well-nigh incredible. The play's lengthy first scene, in which the duke and his courtiers crouch and otherwise make drunken hell, is absolutely enthralling, and Schriebs' constant ability to maintain plenty of plausible onstage activity never flags. Not surprisingly, the play's simplest scene—a dialogue which two characters conduct entirely on their knees on an otherwise empty stage—is the play's weakest point.

Reviewing *Lorenzaccio*'s acting is difficult, because Musset's characters have been elided into each other in the script's adaptation by Paul Schmidt (who also pulled translation duties). In other words, the show is deliberately (and rightly, from a thematic point of view) presented with a staging that blurs the lines spoken by the show's large cast.

Nonetheless, certain members of the generally excellent cast stand out. Kate H. Walker '06, as *Lorenzaccio*, is a trifle too slight at times, but in general she's suitably complex and keeps her motivations obscure; she's at her best when her character is at her

most dissonant, and in a frenzied monologue as she prepares to assassinate her cousin, the duke, Adam G. Zalik '07, as Duke Alessandro himself, is dynamically silky, capricious and otherwise tyrannical. Ben D. Margo '04 is extremely funny as the scheming Cardinal Salvaterra Ciboy, his interactions with the Marchese Rucellai Ciboy (Olga V. Fedorikhina '03) are a real highlight. Emily V.W. Galvin '04, as the aging patriot Filippa Strozzi, projects a stoic grandeur even in her moments of most intense suffering.

"Animated by Schriebs' supreme sense of action, Lorenzaccio is a persuasive winner."

fering, while her rather misguided son Piero (Nick J. O'Donovan) seethes and rages with persuasive intensity. Strozzi's two daughters, Luisa (Alexa L.M. von Tobel '06) and Priora (Brita R. Lipcz '05) both act well; von Tobel, acrobatic and emotively melodramatic, is uniquely hilarious. Dan Wilner, as the rather quiet Cardinal Valori, also turns in a solid performance.

Lorenzaccio's expansive set design, courtesy of Andrew D. Boch '03, is fantastic. His set is concretely evocative of real-world urban decay (the party cups littering the chunks of prebabe house that dominate the stage give the setting a sort of frat-house feel) and yet still very surreal; the building crew have put considerable effort into this set, and it shows. It also combines with high-end costuming by Gail Palsson '04 to create an ambience that is all the more plausible for its anachronism.

The ART's massive video screen, which is being increasingly integrated into Repertory productions, is put to fabulous use by

Leah Gelpi, Schriebs' collaborator and *Lorenzaccio*'s Sound and Video Designer. In a perfect solution to the problem of the set's complicated division of interior and exterior spaces, a pair of on-stage cameras send live footage of various scenes directly to the screen. Issues of form aside, this makes for moments of tremendous dramatic power—intense moments of dialogue and close-ups on actor's faces are quite gripping—and images of considerable beauty (such as a lengthy shot of the dead Strozzi daughter's hand).

Granted, *Lorenzaccio* isn't perfect. It features perhaps too much running around for no apparent reason, and its random, excessive bits of physicality (I don't think there's any character in the play who doesn't push all of the others at some point) can occasionally seem poorly executed. Readings of the play looking for a rigid message or in-depth treatment of themes on a level beyond the atmospheric might have further qualms. Indeed, Scott R. Wilson '04, *Lorenzaccio*'s dramaturge, should never, ever be allowed to write a playbill's notes again; his program assertion that directorial decisions to "collide" characters reveals "a careful (Foucauldian) attention to the fluidity of conceptions of gender and sexuality in the Renaissance and their relevance for today" is just silly—if such mindless pseudo-academic regurgitation is really what's behind some of this play's more attractively ambiguous bits, then it's best to keep quiet about it.

Taken overall, however, *Lorenzaccio* is subtle even in its moments of seeming heavy-handedness—on, rather, it's heavy-handed in a professional, evocative and functionally dramatic way. Animated by Schriebs' supreme sense of action, *Lorenzaccio* is a persuasive winner, an earnest effort at presenting its audience with complicated, challenging theater.

—Crimson Arts Critic Patrick D. Blanchfield
can be reached at blanchp@fas.harvard.edu.

GALVINZING: EMILY V.W. GALVIN '04 appears in Jay Schriebs' production of *Lorenzaccio*.

