laboratory of our rehearsal space; and we come up with the fruits of our labour . . . but then it is opened up into the world.

She commented that this 'opening up' is not simply a matter of TPK's public performances, but also the programming of the Brave Festival, the work of its offshoots (such as the Brave Kids Project), and the MA programme led by Zubrzycki herself. 'It is a theatre of training,' she continued:

> Not just training a performer to be more agile, or to be able to sing better. It's a training . . . also of a vision. When someone comes to our workshops, Grzegorz very often says to them, 'Stop taking notes.' We always say to them at the end, 'You cannot take any of these exercises home.' Well, you can try . . . [but] unless you understand the complete principle, the essence of what we're trying to communicate, it's not possible to work [with TPK's exercises and method].

She added that she believed that TPK, through its overall artistic vision, had avoided the danger of its training becoming 'locked in form'; rather, she suggested, the training is a crucial part of their achieving the quality which enables them best to articulate their vision.

Gawin, noting that Bral had found himself transformed by a Grotowski performance, recalled his own dissatisfaction, as a young Englishman with Polish heritage, with his early experiences of theatre. 'Then I saw Gardzienice,' he commented, 'and I had a very powerful sense of an immediate recognition of something that was completely unknowable to me . . . but I intuitively opened to it.' That experience, that intuitive understanding of a theatre work, took him on a personal search for a theatre language which led, almost inexorably, to his becoming a member of TPK.

The observations made by members of the company, combined with very wide-ranging and animated questions and comments from the audience, made for an energized and fascinating conclusion to what was, by general acclaim, an excellent symposium.

Notes and References

1. Peter Brook, *With Grotowski: Theatre is Just a Form* (Wrocław: Grotowski Institute, 2009), p. 34.
2. Grzegorz Bral, quoted in Mark Brown, 'Poetry in Motion', *New Statesman*, 2 August 2007.
3. Such as Akhe, Derevo, Do Teatr (all from Russia), and Farm in the Cave (from the Czech Republic).
4. Grzegorz Bral, op. cit.

doi: 10.1017/S0266464X12000097

Ian Herbert

Directors Shine in Bucharest

Report on the National Theatre Festival in Bucharest, October–November 2011.

What is it that makes Romania such a nourisher of great directors? They've just lost another, the remarkable Liviu Ciulei, but lined up behind him are a phalanx of other great names, with new and exciting directors nudging at their back all the time. This was more than evident in this year's National Theatre Festival in Bucharest, where the work of Andrei Serban was picked out for special celebration, but that of many more names well known beyond the country's borders could be seen in ten crowded days. The other name to be officially celebrated was that of Anton Chekhov, with four of his plays and an adaptation on show, while Shakespeare also had five slots.

The Serban production that I caught on my five-day visit was the *Uncle Vanya* he directed for the Hungarian Theatre of Cluj back in 2007, when it won several prizes. It's a startling reading, with a very unconventional attitude to theatre space: the audience spent the first act sitting on the stage of the Odeon theatre while the performance took place at all levels of the auditorium, finishing with a serial tango that exposed the inner desires of all Chekhov's characters in a way no amount of Stanislavskian rooting around the subtext could have achieved. For the following three acts the audience were moved about, to be seated around various backstage areas where the rooms and outdoor settings of the play had been laid out.

It was a very physical, almost slapstick production, requiring great co-ordination from its cast as they negotiated rostra, ladders and the Odeon auditorium itself, all the more remarkable because they were playing in unfamiliar surroundings in roles that were in five cases doubled. The Elena we saw, Eniko Győgyjakab, was also playing Lena in the Gabor Tompa production for the same company of *Leonce and Lena*, which got a rather better reception in Bucharest than when I saw it in Sarajevo earlier. The Cluj Hungarians also appeared in another Serban production on show in this festival, the wonderful adaptation of Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* about which I have previously rhapsodized. This time *Vanya* was my festival favourite, with its air of fresh and fertile comic invention still intact after four years, as if it were being performed for the very first time.

Camus' *Caligula* is never a favourite with me, even after Michael Sheen's fine performance in the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X12000097 Published online by Cambridge University Press

recent Donmar staging. Nevertheless, its director in Bucharest, Laslo Bocsardi, managed to use a visually rich setting (by Joszef Bartha, costumes by Judith Dobre-Kóthay) and some strong performances to cover the wordy existentialist philosophizing that holds up the play's action. In particular his Caligula, Sorin Leoveanu, conveyed just the right mix of spoilt child and calculating catalyst of evil that the part requires, ably backed by the actors of the National Theatre of Craiova.

The other major production on my mixed menu of Romanian theatre was a much lauded show from the National Theatre in Sibiu, Silviu Purcarete's staging of a farcical comedy by Ion Luca Caragiale, the country's most revered playwright, under the title *Carnival Scenes*. There was a near riot outside the Opera, where it was performed, as hundreds of would-be spectators fought to get in. Those that did pass security gave the show a long standing ovation. I'm afraid I was less impressed. True, I was not helped by the fact that the surtitles that would have brought out much of the comedy were barely readable. But what the eye took in was a wilfully ugly set, much of its unnecessary furniture brought on and off from a truck that backed on to the stage to open the show, remaining there to disgorge actors, extras and a small band that persisted in playing one mournful song at every opportunity throughout the play. This was the background to a cluster of woefully overindulgent performances from a group of actors whose every shouted line or telegraphed gesture said 'Look at me, I'm being funny.' It made a sharp contrast to the performances in Serban's *Vanya*, also more energetic than that play usually demands, but constantly giving us a new stimulus to rethink 'traditional' Chekhov with every pratfall.

Radu Pencilescu, now over eighty, is another legend in Romanian theatre, so it was good to see him still re-examining the canon in what was termed a 'study' of *Macbeth*. Intended as a workshop production for young actors, it nonetheless featured Ion Caramitru and Valeria Seciu, two of the country's finest performers, as the murderous couple. The result was a strangely muted performance, lacking in magic, mystery or the macabre, with a group of comic witches offering the only energy, albeit misplaced, to a slow evening.

Far more interesting was the take of Mihai Manutiu, another big name, on Shakespeare's moor in *Othello and His Beloved Desdemona*. With the aid of Peter Uray's choreography he gave us a short meditation in words and movement on the love, jealousy, and death at the core of the play, producing some striking images (such as a whole stage full of silk pillows) along the way. His blacked-up Othello would cause squirming among English audiences, as would the emphasis on some of Iago's most racially offensive descriptions of his commander, but this production from the tiny M Studio of Sfantu Gheorghe had much to commend it, including yet another appearance from Elena/Lena.

The senior company from Sfantu Gheorghe were directed by Radu Afrim (now in his forties but still an *enfant terrible*) in *First You're Born* by the Danish actress Line Knutzon. If Afrim's enjoyable offering last year, *Herr Paul*, was a zany charade, it at least brought sense to its own weird world, something lacking in Knutzon's completely off-the-wall play, which ventures way beyond absurdism. Yet its damaged characters and disconnected incidents came together, as so often in Afrim's imaginative, oddball productions, to bring both laughter and even the occasional lump in the throat.

Two efficient small-scale shows that I caught were the work of directors I'd not met before. Peter Kerek's *Nine Degrees in Paris* was an interesting attempt to marry theatre and cinema, with a live actress, Alina Berzunteanu, commenting on and complementing the actions of her character, a woman about to turn her back on her family, as she appeared simultaneously on a sumptuously shot film. Theodor Christian Popescu's production of *The Method* by the Catalan playwright Jordi Galceran was surprisingly conventional for a director known for his work with the in-yer-face school, but its intensive, *Huis Clos*-like grilling of four candidates for a top job was very well acted by his Nottara Theatre cast, keeping the audience on the edge of their seats with multiple twists that almost turned it into a thriller.

Finally, in *Ticked Off* a young director, Alexandru Mihail, still doing his MFA at Yale, presented the work of an even younger writer, Gabriel Pintilei. It's a very black comedy set in territory somewhere between *Outnumbered* and *The Royle Family*, with an everyday Romanian working-class couple and their three children going through a typical day of increasingly bizarre revelations. Out-of work Father beats his children and is having an affair; Mother has cancer; older brother is experimenting with drugs and gambling; pubescent daughter wants to know what sex is like; and the ten-year-old youngest, with a talent for eavesdropping in their cramped flat, is the gleeful transmitter of most of this news to his horrified household. His is a stand-out performance among a whole ensemble of disgustingly well played roles.

And still I missed productions by Alexandru Dabija, Alexandru Darie, Victor Ioan Frunza, Alexander Hausvater, Alexandru Tocilescu . . .

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X12000097 Published online by Cambridge University Press