



This year's series of feature interviews in *Plays International & Europe* focuses on European women in the theatre. Intended to be a response to and a continuation of the #MeToo movement, this series highlights the issues experienced by the female theatre practitioner. Negative effects range from the psychological where the woman feels harassed or has self-imposed limits in respect to professional achievement, to very real discrepancies in terms of job advancement and salary. But there can also be positive effects – for example, being chosen for a position of authority because of the growing awareness of gender discrimination and a willingness to counteract it. Also, perhaps, overcoming barriers to being a woman who is professionally successful might be seen as a challenge.

Karin Becker told me that, as a soon-to-be executive artistic director of the Constance state theatre, she would never abdicate from her responsibility to be the theatre's supreme decision-making authority. All the same she expects to manage her theatre on the principle of mutual respect and tolerance. Humanistic dilemmas are reflected in the themes of the plays that are produced on stage but so often, she implies, a completely different story plays backstage. She claims she refuses to perpetuate certain customs of authoritarianism that permit the belittlement of creative staff members of a (German) theatre.

Synergy is a curious creator of meaning. Interestingly, on the surface Karin Becker's assertions coincide with signs that, at least in Germany, former power structures are being publically questioned. The recent dethroning of Daniel Barenboim, internationally revered music conductor of Berlin's Staatsoper and Staatskapelle, was a news item not much more than a week after I interviewed Karin Becker. Barenboim is accused of insulting and intimidating his musicians to the point of making them physically ill. According to the radio station *Deutschlandfunk* (21 February), timpanist Willie Hilgers accused Barenboim of bullying and told the press he was looking forward to the time when a director treats the performers as equals, eye to eye – even when mistakes have been made.

The question is, once we deconstruct the "great artist" image – that chauvinistic idea of the driven genius who can justifiable sacrifice any number of human creatures underfoot (most often women) in the search for the artistic ideal we so admire, what happens? Are we left with (artistic) mediocrity? Or was the great artist, wrapped in the solipsism of superiority, not so great after all?

Or have we framed the question incorrectly? Is it time to revamp the whole value system by which art is judged, or to not even actively pursue the ideology of radical change, but to just let it happen as new personalities, including the female personality, come to the forefront of organizations that deal with theatre, performance, and the multifarious arts that contribute to the dramatic arts?

Well, the question is valid, and maybe it is high time to allow new personalities to dominate the arts, but there is still the bitter truth to handle. The back story of the evolution of the Karin Becker interview you will be reading in this issue indicates that pressure to not stand out – to conform – still exerts its influence. Becker reneged on the very statements concerning her experience of inequality in the workplace that she had

discussed with me during the interview. In order to publish the interview at all, I was required to expurgate those statements. This self-censorship, coming from the very person whose courage I had intended the interview to be a celebration of, indicates to what an extent the long shadow of fear is still operative. I can only conclude that the desire to implement new ideas of participatory egalitarianism and to actively discard harmful authoritarian traditions (harmful to the free exchange of ideas and the honest expression of opinions and thoughts) is one matter, and that confidence that these ideas can be implemented is quite another matter.

Again, a second synergetic development popped up in this issue. Excitingly, Marina Davydova, editor-in-chief of the quarterly Russian theatre magazine *Teatr*, agrees to provide *Plays International & Europe* with a smattering of Russian language articles to include, in translation, in our magazine. The first set of articles from *Teatr* is in this Spring 2019 issue under the title *The Savage Art of Forgetting*. We offer you the article by Vera Pilgun on the nearly forgotten Russian theatre practitioner Igor Terentiev. He was fascinated by *zaum* poetry, with its emphasis on sound symbolism. And then, for this same issue, Oleno Netto submitted an article from Brazil on the theatre practitioner Denise Stoklos. Interestingly, her performance method – which she calls Essential Theatre – focuses on deconstruction of language into its sound elements; she is particularly interested in introducing multiple languages – what can be called "foreign" sounds – into her performances.

Is this synergy pure coincidence...or is the fact that by chance two articles on performance that eschews logic an indication of a new shift in the artistic paradigm away from theatrical language as political and documentary and more in the direction of a resurgent form of absurdism? NOoooooo ooRrr. YeeeeeSSSSsss Only time will reveal the answer to this question.

**Dana Rufolo**

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