

European Festival Research Project research workshop in Moscow

FESTIVALS OF THEATRES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

hosted by the Big Break festival and Theatre Praktika
Moscow, 30 October - 1 November, 2008

Report by Nathalia Prosuntsova

Edited by Dragan Klaic and Christopher Maughan

Summary

The EFRP research workshop in Moscow, hosted by Praktika theatre within the framework of the Big Break festival, focused on festivals of theatre for children and young audiences. The two days were subdivided into three sessions, with Russian and European participants offering 14 presentations, followed by intensive discussion. The participants focused on festival programming and the search for new audiences and outlined possible avenues for further research.

PARTICIPANTS:

Dragan Klaic , Netherlands	Chair of European Festival Research Project, Amsterdam; Visiting Professor, Central European University, Budapest
Eduard Boyakov , Russia	Artistic Director of Praktika Theatre and Big Break Festival
Wolfgang Schneider , Germany	Professor of Hildesheim University, President of World ASSITEJ
Gerhard Verfaillie , Belgium	Artistic Director of KROKUSFESTIVAL, Hasselt
Dennis Meyer , Netherlands	Artistic Director of Het Lab, Utrecht
Brigitte Dethier , Germany	Artistic Director of Junges Ensemble Stuttgart Theatre and “Schöne Aussicht” Festival
Paul Harman , United Kingdom	Honorary Life President of ASSITEJ UK, Member of the Executive Committee of ASSITEJ International 2008 – 2011, Artistic Director of MYPT, Liverpool and CTC, Darlington 1978 – 2008, Director of Takeoff Festival 1989 – 2008
Ellen Bianchini , United Kingdom	Artistic Director of The Spark Children’s Art Festival
Shona Powell , United Kingdom	Director of Lakeside Arts Centre, Nottingham University
Michael Ramlose , Denmark	Playwright, Director of CARAVANEN International Festival of Theatre for Children
Marina Medkova , Russia	Executive Secretary of Russian ASSITEJ centre
Olga Perevezentseva , Russia	Project Coordinator of Russian ASSITEJ centre
Oleg Loevskiy , Russia	Director of Real Theatre Festival, Deputy Director of Yekaterinburg Theatre for Young Audiences
Marina Kornakova , Russia	Director of the “Harlequin” National Award and Festival of Theatre Art For Children
Ekaterina Dmitriyevskaya , Russia	Theatre critic
Andrey Luchin , Russia	Director of Obraztsov Puppet Theatre
Ksenia Brailovskaya , Russia	Sociologist, Demos Center for Information and Research on Public Interest Issues, Moscow
Asmik Novikova , Russia	Sociologist, Demos Center for Information and Research on Public Interest Issues, Moscow

MODERATOR: Dragan Klaic

October 31

MORNING SESSION

Opening the session, Dragan Klaic thanked Eduard Boyakov, artistic director of Praktika theatre and founder of the Big Break festival for kindly hosting the EFRP workshop and noted that Praktika had become a unique organization, producing wonderful productions, directors and actors.

Wolfgang Schneider: Theatre festivals for young audiences

Wolfgang Schneider presented a general overview of the subject and singled out different types and models of existing festivals, invoking examples from Europe, Asia and Africa. He named international festivals and national and regional ones and festivals that are created to present a specific country to the citizens of another (e.g. Russia in Berlin, 1993). He also mentioned festivals that are especially important for the European community (Small Size, Epicentre, Nordic Meeting).

Festivals must decide, according to Schneider, who is their target audience - children, young people, teachers, media? He indicated that theatre for children and theatre for young audiences are not one and the same thing. Teachers should also be considered a very important audience because they act as gate-keepers for the young. Nevertheless, no theatre can escape the need to ensure some sort of political legitimisation. Another vital question concerns the judgment of a festival, which offers different options and can be done by a special group of children involved into the process, by a special jury (but what criteria should they use?) or by several curators. Schneider suggested that a programming festival should be regarded as a challenge: whoever runs a festival has to decide if it is meant for fashionable shows or for risky productions which are impossible or difficult to create and present as part of a year round programme. Festivals could be seen as a potential evaluation forum, aiming to judge qualities of performances. Such a forum offers a possibility for a special discussion and debate on artistic standards.

In conclusion Schneider brought up three individual experiences of different festival models:

- Basket of Culture (Israel), which receives money from the government and lasts only 1 day;
- European Schoolyard Stories — a new kind of festival, held from about 6 pm to midnight;
- Transeurope in Hildesheim (where Schneider himself teaches) — a festival which lasts a week and is regarded as a part of a university educational process.

Marina Medkova: Festivals of Theatre for Children in Russia. State of Affairs. Introductory Remarks

Marina Medkova spoke about the newly realised second edition of the Russian Festival Guide that was first published by the Theatre Union of the Russian Federation (STU RF) in 2006. The Guide comprises data assembled by the Scena magazine as well as contributions from Oleg Loyevsky, Vladimir Micharin and others. The authors also made use of Internet resources. STU supports a great number of festivals and its representatives sought to find out which address children and to identify the criteria for funding. Medkova presented an overview of the history and development for 16 festivals of theatre for children which engage professional theatre companies (excluding puppet theatres).

Only 2 of the 16 festivals take place in cities with less than half a million population and 14 of the 16 are run in the European part of Russia. Festivals of theatre for young audiences constitute only 7% of all the festivals in the Russian Federation. Theatres for young audiences (those that are established professionally and are recognized as such by legislation) account for only 10% of the overall number of theatre companies in the country. Still the number of productions for children in Russian theatres exceeds all the rest.

The number of theatre companies for young audiences is important because they serve as a starting point for most festivals of theatre for children. Today such festivals are experiencing a rapid growth: in 2007, five new festivals appeared while in the previous 6 years on average one new festival appeared each year.

Medkova summarised the post-perestroika development in three distinct phases:

- 1) The “romantic” period that appeared as a response to a crisis in the field of theatre for young audiences and sought to introduce Russian theatre for children into an international context. Between 1989 and 1999 five new festivals appeared. Some of them attempted to integrate Russian theatre for children into the international context while others aimed at forming domestic artistic strategies. Two festivals from this period still exist today (Tsar-skazka /King Fairy-Tale, Veliky Novgorod, and Zolotaya Repka/Golden Turnip, Samara).
- 2) The “youth” period. Theatre for young audiences increasingly included “adult” productions within the repertoire. Three new festivals addressed teenagers and young audiences, and not children. Festivals can become successful if they find an opportunity to get connected with the European professional and artistic community (e.g. the Raduga Rainbow Festival which offered a very good international programme).
- 3) Medkova metaphorically described the next stage of festivals development in Russia as “those who lost their way”. The teenagers whom theatres for young audiences used to regard as their primary audience grew up while no new generation of artists became involved in the theatre activities. The main aim of the National award and festival of theatre art for children Harlequin (Saint-Petersburg) was to gather all the positive examples of theatre for young audiences and to attract governmental attention to the sphere of theatre for children.

Speaking about the developmental tendencies of today’s festivals of theatre for children Marina Medkova mentioned that 2007 brought a boom of such festivals. Recently established festivals such as Gavrosh and Big Break tended to operate on a different platform - outside the infrastructure of theatre companies for the young audiences. Both festivals proclaimed the

festival as an occasion of festivity for children and parents alike. Children who come to theatre today must have their attention and interest nurtured as they will grow up so it is a primary task of theatres and producing companies to involve them within the theatrical process, to gain their attention and develop their life-long commitment to live theatre by taking account of the artistic experience and background of such young audiences.

Olga Perevezentseva: Festival Map of Russia (types of festivals and their structure)

Olga Perevezentseva, Medkova's colleague from ASSITEJ Russia, stated that today the majority of existing festivals (11 out of 16) in Russia are organized by theatre companies for young audiences. It is natural to expect the festivals of theatre for young audiences to evolve on the basis of theatre companies for young audiences; nevertheless, other theatres and producers massively interfered within the process in the last years. A festival of theatre for young audiences based on a theatre company specialized for the same audience makes use of its own venue and staff; it works as an extension of a theatre company's regular activity, serving the general mission of the company, not as a separate event with aims of its own. Contrary to that, new festivals outside of the existing infrastructure of the theatre companies for children and young audiences, (over 50% among the festivals initiated since 2004) tend to have a clear concept and a new style of management and give a new vector to festivals' development.

Today most theatres for young audiences switch their audience and programmes in order to attract more adults, becoming therefore similar to the repertoire-based drama theatres, with inevitable effects on the programmes of the festivals. Most festivals are biennial, only six of the festivals are held every year (mostly those which appeared recently). The biennial frequency is connected with the programming problems and lack of resources. For the same reason more than half of the festivals remain national or regional, while a successful festival surely needs international participation and recognition and should involve the professional community. Half of the festivals offer a special programme aimed at theatre professionals, distinct from the programme for the general public; the others (mostly older ones) offer only one programme. Most festivals last a week, though some festival run for up to ten days. Longer festivals are organized for the audience, shorter ones for theatre professionals. The most intensive festivals' activity is concentrated in three months, April, September, October with their respective dates often overlapping which creates additional programming difficulties. At the same time, this shared time frame indicates opportunities for closer cooperation between the festivals and their festival participants and signals that the festivals need to review their roles in a broader context.

Asmik Novikova and Ksenia Brailovskaya, Demos Centre for Information and Research on Public Interest Issues, Moscow: Case-study of the Samara festival of theatre for children and youth 2008. Impact on the local community

This research was commissioned by the Russian Theatre Union (STD). The research was aimed at studying the festival's impact on the local community. They chose the strategy of a sociological case-study as it provided the researchers with a full range of sociological techniques and methods.

The researchers identified the "affected areas" of the festival, then studied the impacts of the festival in those specific areas, especially on the local community. A concept of the local community was constructed within the field research stage of the project. One can say that the "affected areas" contributed to the formation of the local community influenced by the festival.

The festival programme included 14 productions, and 17 performances. Most of the productions were small scale. This is perhaps a small volume productions for a week-long festival but the

existing problems in theatre for children account for this fact. The festival had only limited resources which made it impossible to involve a larger number of spectators into the festival activities. The main aim was to show professionals a variety of productions for children and point to the potential perspectives and opportunities within this segment of theatre.

The festival also comprised a professional creative laboratory for young playwrights and directors who were to create a production for young audiences within three days. This kind of laboratory helped young theatre professionals to recognize theatre for children as a vast and inspiring sphere for creative work.

The festival programme also included a 3-day long conference, entitled «Theatre-mediator-audience» that aimed to initiate a dialogue about theatre for young audiences and create a platform which would seek to solve some of the existing problems. Local officials, professionals and teachers took part in the discussions and workshops within the conference. For example, an extensive discussion dealt with the question of whether theatre is an art for everyone or more for those who can understand it and appreciate its value. Novikova and Brailovskaya believe that it is essential to answer this question because otherwise it may turn out that professionals in the field of theatre for young audiences, officials and school teachers would be working in opposite directions.

The main aim of the festival was to demonstrate the value of the sphere of theatre for children to the theatre professionals; also to draw the attention of local authorities, school representatives and professionals to this body of work more than a general audience. Novikova and Brailovskaya concluded that Zolotaya Repka 2008 managed to fulfill those objectives. But overall the festival failed to affect the local community in general because its PR efforts were not directed at involving all potential audiences.

Ekaterina Dmitriyevskaya: Festivals of theatre for children in Russia. Programming issues

Ekaterina Dmitriyevskaya enumerated a number of existing problems connected with festival programming and sought to sketch the background of the current situation. According to her, festivals of theatre for children often engage productions that are unsuitable for children and evoke absolutely no response from younger audiences. This is a consequence of the absence of the artistic director as an institution in the Russian festival tradition (though Oleg Loyevsky and Eduard Boyakov can be regarded as exceptions). Too often festival's programme is formed on the basis of a friend's advice or just by hearsay. Even if the productions are selected by the watching of video recordings, it is seldom possible to get a realistic impression. The experience of going to the regions to see the productions in person is unique and limited to the Golden Mask festival.

The problems of programming a festival go beyond finances. Dmitriyevskaya suggested that a festival programme should be reduced in quantity for the sake of the quality. A positive example of a festival set around one production is provided by VAT theatre production, presented at the Raduga festival. Dmitriyevskaya also brought up the positive example of the Kolonsak (Foal) Festival (Bashkortastan) where all the productions were funded by the Ministry of Culture. One of the main problems of contemporary Russian theatre festivals is that productions are not connected to time and space, productions aimed for children do not include enough vision and fantasy, and theatre festivals have no model that covers the festival itself and the pre- and post-production activities.

Andrey Luchin: State support of the theatre for young audiences

Andrey Luchin spoke of the support provided by the state to the theatre for young audiences. He used to work for the state authorities and is now a director of Obraztsov Puppet Theatre, one of the most well-known puppet-theatres in Russia.

The citizens of a state are one of the most important sources for its development; the prosperity of a country largely depends upon the social layer of people with high personal development and creative skills. Art plays an important role in forming the character, it is vital to introduce a child to art as early as possible. Luchin underlined that when speaking about state policy one always speaks about financing. Unfortunately, culture is traditionally underfunded. Nevertheless, Luchin stressed the positive side of the interaction between the theatre and the state. The leading theatre companies for the young audiences are state-financed (Russian Academic Youth Theatre, S.V. Obraztsov State Academic Puppet Theatre, N.I. Satz Moscow Children's Theatre). Moreover, over one third of all Russian theatre festivals are also funded by the state. Luchin also mentioned important programming problems — the older the child is, the fewer productions there are to fit his or her age. The situation changed in 2007, when the state gave theatre for young audiences an annual support of 150 million roubles (eur 4,28 million) via STD. A forum of professionals in this field was also held. The state advocated the idea of creating more state-supported theatres.

Festivals should be creating new productions while today we often see the same productions at different festivals. Budget supported commissions (when the government orders productions on a specific topic and pays for it) could become one of the methods to enlarge the repertoire. Nevertheless, the ways of placing such an order are still to be developed. Being a former state official Luchin indicated that the state supports a lot of theatres – perhaps it would be better to support fewer theatres but on a larger scale. In spite of general underfunding, in recent years state support has risen significantly.

DISCUSSION

Dragan Klaić underlined that since 1999 one could observe a considerable change of situation in the field of Russian theatre: new models appeared as well as new initiatives outside Moscow and Saint-Petersburg.

Eduard Boyakov mentioned that the current situation demands reflexion. He stressed that the international participants of the Round Table could help Russian participants to recognize the role of festivals in Russia and their peculiarities as well as to evaluate the options for becoming more involved in the European context. The number of festivals in Russia is constantly increasing as well as state support for them. Moreover, some festivals have found other funding sources. Still, the situation of theatre for children is changing for the worse: there are no new projects while the socio-cultural context is changing, becoming even more unfavourable. In order to preserve theatre for children as a unique institution one should be aware of the general context. Ekaterina Dmitriyevskaya pointed out the most important problems: the absence of artistic directors while Brailovskaya and Novikova stressed the problem of repertoire. Boyakov is still one of the youngest artistic directors in Russia, their average age is over 60.

In the context of an artistic crisis, Dennis Meyer indicated that it was an international problem. He wondered whether some kind of critical theatre should be created in society. Klaić answered that theatre is a precious, critical medium in a cultural production dominated by the cultural industry. As such, theatre has been pushed into a very small niche.

Schneider stressed the absence of criteria for the term “festival” itself. He insisted that there should exist some definite criteria to identify the notion. One of the presentations described a “festival” as a group of people who work together all the year round and possess a certain vision

– this could be one of the criteria. A festival should provide theatre professionals with an opportunity to exchange ideas.

Klaic agreed with Schneider, saying that certain standards should be set up. But there exists no unanimous view on the way they should be formulated while nowadays we encounter a vast variety of the usage of the term festival.

AFTERNOON SESSION

Paul Harman: Festivals for development

Paul Harman gave an overview of the way Britain deals with theatre for children and young audiences. Harman humorously characterized his native country as islands on the edge of the world, the birthplace of Shakespeare and a hard place for theatre for young audiences. In the UK, arts for children is a low priority for the government and no official body monitors the quantity or regulates the quality of theatre for children. Among the strengths of the British situation Harman mentioned that UK theatres do not need to tour abroad to be successful, they can gain commercial success in their own country. British schools are open to theatrical activities and 80% of British school-children have a chance to see a performance at school each year.

Theatre in the UK in general and theatre for young audiences in particular can be regarded as separate from the rest of Europe, especially in style and repertoire. Nevertheless, Britain turns out to be a pioneer in some areas of theatre for young audiences (e.g. theatre in education). Britain today can boast a number of festivals of different models which take place in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Festivals in the UK have an opportunity to borrow different models from other European festivals. Still, not all of them can fit the British reality (e.g. having an open-air tent festival like in Vancouver can turn out to be problematic because of the rainy British summer).

Harman claimed that since 1987 theatre in the UK had undergone significant development due to the influence of festivals: British playwrights are now famous all over the world, UK theatres participate in international projects while theatre for young audiences has seen a remarkable rise in quantity and funding. Theatre for young audiences in Great Britain has developed a strong partnership with schools and a great experience of working at a small scale in order to reach every child. Harman concluded that this sphere of life in Britain has a sustainable future.

DISCUSSION

Dennis Meyer wondered whether Harman supposed that there were still some artistic shortcomings in British theatre for young audiences? Harman stressed that British companies had a great success in delivering theatre for children, and yet the process of their artistic development has been limited. There is a considerable gap between the commercial sector and the small sector with public support.

Schneider was interested whether British theatre companies received invitations from abroad, whether there they had an experience of translating and staging foreign plays. Harman indicated that in terms of foreign influence, British theatre for young audiences proved to be extremely conservative. It was difficult to find common links between a festival for theatre professionals and the one for the vast audience.

Boyakov was astonished by the outreach of the British theatres for young audiences (140 000

spectators a week!). Harman explained that theatre for young audiences in Great Britain was mainly dominated by small-scale performances, presented in the school-halls which were not necessarily worse in quality than traditional performances.

Meyer also wondered whether this situation was specific for the field of theatre for children or whether it refers to British theatre as a whole. Harman brought up the statistics that 50% of the British population goes to the theatre every year. And still, the government fears that theatre might evolve into an art for the elites.

Ellen Bianchini agreed with Harman that there is a strong demand for venues by the companies. While children gain a lot from seeing quality work at school, it is not enough. Financial resources, opportunities to perform abroad and external research remain limited.

Speaking about cultural diversity, Harman mentioned that Great Britain was at a very primitive stage of inter-cultural relations while the country itself is subdivided into a great number of cultural regions.

Medkova indicated that Harman's experience was especially important for the Russian theatre community as there exists no experience in performing in unconventional small-scale spaces, including classrooms and school halls.

Answering Klaic's request to clarify the issue of democracy at the festivals, whether it was pluralism or something else, Harman indicated that though festivals were supposed to create the atmosphere of absolute freedom, no festival managed to present the full palette of colours as any curator tends to select the programme according to his or her own taste.

Michael Ramlose added that it would be more precise to call modern festivals a "showcase". Speaking about the choice between such concepts as "theatre in education" (as mentioned by Harman) and "theatre for education", Boyakov advocated that one should opt for the third variant – "theatre IS education" which would serve as a more precise definition for the aims and prospects of a children's festival. He agreed with Schneider that theatre should be considered as art. Still answering whether one should choose democracy or a number of criteria, Boyakov considered theatre as totalitarianism and aristocracy.

Bianchini stated that the position of the British theatres for young audiences is improving, there is a growing demand of the audience and promoters to bring in new international work.

Oleg Loyevsky: Current situation in Russian festivals of theatre for children. Festival as part of theatre activities

Oleg Loyevsky talked about the history and background of Russian festivals of theatre for young audiences. The number of festivals is growing while the artistic level of productions stays the same.

In the Soviet times, there were only two festivals of theatre for children. Rep theatre companies for young audiences (TYA) used to stage productions for children along with a great number of productions for adults, made to satisfy director's ambitions. Soviet Union gave no chance to the small-scale theatre, all the venues were too large for their more intimate experiences.

After Minifest festival in Rostov in 1989, festival fever overcame the whole country. Realny Teatr (Real theatre) was launched in Ekaterinburg in 1990. The main problem was that productions for the festival programme were mainly chosen by hearsay while the programme

was constructed on the basis of TYA principle (productions for children were combined with a number of those for teenagers and adults). In the end Loyevsky decided upon selecting the programme himself. Today Realny Teatr has turned into a festival that aims at collecting a programme mainly for adults.

Loyevsky supposed that there were two reasons for a festival appearing in TYA (as most festivals in Russia did): either a prosperous theatre decides to raise its status through a festival or a bad theatre company seeks to improve its reputation and create an impression that it is moving ahead and becoming better.

Loyevsky believes that today festivals of a classical model have no positive influence on the theatre for young audiences while they serve the ambitions of individual theatres and do not search for a new festival style. Loyevsky assumes that a festival should include productions that reflect topics that are especially acute for society at this time. Today, it is not enough to have a festival only with a series of productions shown, a special programme is needed. For example, Zolotaya Repka (Golden Turnip) festival functions as a festival-laboratory. According to Loyevsky, new festival forms should evolve; for example, a festival created as a gift to the city, or a festival with different productions of the same piece.

DISCUSSION

Answering Gerhard Verfaillie's question Loyevsky mentioned that the main aim of Russian theatre for children had always been to prevent the child from disturbing his parents. It still remained that way. One of the main problems in Russia was lack of information on international opportunities for development (workshops, conferences etc.) which are certainly to be stimulated. Medkova pointed out that the situation was rapidly improving. Loyevsky was happy to draw the attention of the participants to the process of decentralization which allowed different regional centers (and not only Moscow) to bring in/present international productions.

Meyer wondered whether it was obligatory to subdivide festivals into those for children and for adults or whether one could create a uniform festival for audiences of different ages. Loyevsky answered that one could certainly choose the uniform festival model and then perhaps go back to the former subdivision. Meyer was also interested what selection system Loyevsky found most convenient for forming the festival programme. Loyevsky was definitely against the collective form of responsibility. As for other selection methods, he found it possible for one person to select the whole programme. He also mentioned the example of four curators of different professions (actor, director, producer and critic) selecting a production of their choice - which proved to be a positive experience as each of the selectors could properly account for their own choice.

The director of the Urengoi festival suggested that the Big Break festival could perhaps bring its programme into the regions just like the Golden Mask does. Boyakov responded that the Big Break was still in the process of development and was not ready to introduce new projects.

Michael Ramlose: CARAVANEN'08 ASSITEJ International Festival

Michael Ramlose used the example of Caravanen, a biennial Danish touring festival to present the idea of festival as celebration (which is closely intertwined with the further presentation by Brigitte Dethier).

Caravanen is a biennial touring festival that lasts for 2 weeks and covers only provincial locations. The viewing of the performances is free of charge which encourages the invited

guests to come and provides a full house for the actors. A lot of attention is paid to the social life during the festival: the participants have a host to help them solve any problems that may arise and are welcome to use every festival activity to socialize, communicate, share their working experience and find common ground. The festival provides its guests with a number of workshops, symposiums and a barbecue. While Caravanen is a touring festival, it encourages the guests to enjoy tourism around the places where productions come to be presented. Ramlose stressed that the opening and the closing events were also extremely important for the overall festival framework. All the activities and efforts aim to create a special festival spirit and turn the festival into not only a working occasion but a unique celebration as well.

Brigitte Dethier: Festival Means Celebration!

Brigitte Dethier advocated ideas close to those expressed by Ramlose in the previous presentation. She used the examples of the festival *Schöne Aussicht* in Stuttgart to present the idea of a festival as a celebration and as a festive event. *Schöne Aussicht* festival is a one-week event that aims at creating a balanced programme, based on both proved methods and innovative experiments.

According to Dethier, a festival is a celebration for different groups of people — for the performing artists, for a specialized public, for the local audience or for theatre colleagues. Every audience has its own expectations and the festival should live up to them. The festival encourages the audience to keep an interest in international productions, and at the same time it encourages the professionals to share their experience with each other. The atmosphere of celebration is supported by a genuine attention and immense care provided by the actors of the home company while the programme is made by the artistic director who is involved all the year round.

DISCUSSION

Ramlose added that Caravanen was supported by the regional authorities who were interested in organizing cultural activities on the territory of the region.

Answering Schneider question on the pre- and post-production organization of Caravanen Ramlose characterized the festival as a cooperation of three regional festivals.

Meyer raised the question of translation models that are used to provide the audience with the opportunity to understand the performance. Dethier argued that theatre was more than a language and children often pay more attention to the general aesthetics of the production. She also explained that international productions help to identify new communities that have remained invisible (e.g. large Korean audience attending a production from Korea at the Stuttgart festival). Ramlose also described the pattern of dividing a production into several parts and making pauses in order to describe the plot to the audience. Dethier mentioned a possibility of holding a conversation with the audience after the production.

Schneider characterized contemporary European festivals as ones with extremely strict limitations and selection criteria. Meyer described Asian festivals (for example, the one in Isfahan, Iran) as very undemanding in the process of selection and willing to accept any production they are offered.

Loyevsky summed up the most important idea of the discussion characterizing it as the hedonistic approach to festivals. New festivals appear but they often fail to formulate their tasks in a clear way. Asian festivals show a great ambition to expand but they also have some

problems with setting exact aims. Still, Loyevsky believes that one should cooperate with such festivals, accepting their and introducing one's own criteria. He is sure that the hedonistic approach is impossible in the context of the theatre in Russia. If we consider post-production discussion and criticism as part of the festival process, it becomes impossible for the actors and directors whose work is being discussed in public to exercise a purely “festive” approach.

Gerhard Verfaillie mentioned social and cultural diversification in the festival productions. If people do not pay for the entrance, they are less critically-minded. Ramlose hopes that festival audiences in this case are formed both of people who wanted to come but could not afford it and of those who could pay but wanted to come in any case.

Klaic also spoke about the taboos in children's theatre and was interested whether festivals were capable of breaking some taboos.

NOVEMBER 1

MORNING SESSION

Wolfgang Schneider: Summary of the previous session

At the beginning of the morning session Wolfgang Schneider summed up the most important points of the previous discussion, subdividing them into several headings and offering an outline for further discussion.

- 1) **Participation, diversity, education.** Schneider underlined that background for theatre activity and its philosophy were very important. He quoted Boyakov saying that the answer for the question whether we should use “theatre in education” or “theatre for education” is that “theatre *is* education”.
- 2) **Festivals: principles, standards, criteria.** In the previous sessions the participants of the research workshop had an extensive discussion on what characteristics and special traits should a festival possess in order to be called a “festival” in its own right.
- 3) **Evaluation: aims, focus, instruments.** Schneider expressed his appreciation of the Russian perspective. Still the question is what one could do with this evaluation and what instruments could be used to complete it.
- 4) **Exchange: interests, conditions, outcome.** A festival is always a programme of exchange. Does a festival last only 10 days or do any processes take place before and after it? Is there more to it than the festival itself?
- 5) **Showcase, special programme, laboratory.** Whenever a festival takes place, there are always professionals from other regions or countries gathered, interested in inviting a production to a festival of their own. But a festival is not limited to a number of productions, it always includes other activities, such as workshops or laboratories.
- 6) **Identification, transparency, clarification.** Identification of the whole process, of the artistic selection and of the idea behind the whole structure is extremely important for any festival. Before starting up a festival its organizers should clarify which audience they want to address – artists, children, teachers?
- 7) **Concept, networking, policy.** A festival could become something more than we identify with this notion today. Perhaps some big European festivals could cooperate in order to present new productions. Under “networking” Schneider understands a broader notion than cooperation. With a European network one could find a production in other regions, not necessarily in the local one. According to Schneider, festivals are in a great need of support policy – an issue which brings us back to participation, diversity and education.

DISCUSSION

Klaic draw the attention of the participants to the tension that exists between the teachers in the audience and the actors and sometimes comes out as mutual irritation and resentment of the artists to complete some educational tasks. For their part some educators find it a challenge to accept originality and boldness of some performers. According to Klaic, this kind of tension is specific for festivals of children’s theatre.

Harman supposed that such tension is a specifically European one. In other theatre communities around the world people do not recognize this kind of tension. Dethier stressed that theatre professionals should always keep their audience in mind.

Loyevsky specified some key problems of theatre for young audiences: while the school is interested in educating a person who will fit the society, theatre is interested in educating a person with an artistic vision. One should remember that the most favourite children’s characters

are immoral and abuse social order. Any festival should be based on this kind of tension and even provoke it.

Meyer agreed with the existence of a tension but argued that one should recognize positive qualities of the festivals, such as choice of subjects and new forms.

Boyakov claimed that theatre should be a place of complete freedom and theatre for children could be much more interdisciplinary than theatre for adults. Theatre festivals for adults must be formal (a ballet festival, a historical one etc.) while a festivals for children could be free of such constraints.

Verfaillie asserted that the audiences should be considered in plural because children come to the theatre with their parents, grandparents or teachers.

Marina Kornakova: National Award and Festival of Theatre Art for Children “Harlequin”: idea and practice

Marina Kornakova discussed theatre festivals for young audiences using the example of Harlequin, a festival she is currently running. While Oleg Loyevsky spoke about two reasons for the appearance of a festival on the basis of a theatre company, Kornakova argued that none of them could apply to Harlequin since Zazerkalye theatre, which served as a starting ground for the Harlequin festival in 2004, could neither be regarded as a failure nor did it nominate its own productions in order to pick up some festival award itself. The festival aimed at solving the crisis in the theatre for children. There were no nominations for the best production for children. The founders of the Harlequin festival considered the field of drama and musical productions for children to be especially problematic. The target audience were children age 5-9. The main task of Harlequin festival is to find artists capable of staging quality productions for children. The national award for the best production of the festival includes a money grant for the creation of a new production for the young audiences.

The theatre seeks to differentiate its own team and the festival staff. The festival hires a number of people (e.g. the expert council and the jury do not involve any people from the festival company). The expert council makes use of video-recordings and personal experiences to choose the competitive programme of the festival. The jury defines the winners of the national award “Harlequin” and awards other participants of the festival. The working year of Harlequin is very much similar to that of the Golden Mask festival. As soon as the festival is over, a new information letter which concerns the participation conditions of the following year is sent to all professional theatre companies, except the puppet companies.

Kornakova explained that the Harlequin festival used various jury models - juries of critics, of theatre experts, of teachers and children’s jury that act simultaneously) and worked on integrating different dimensions of the special programme into the main one. The organizers of the festival have extensive plans to show the best Russian festival productions for children around the country (“Harlequin’s Echo”) and to bring international productions for the youngest public, those under three years for an out-of-competition programme (a project called “Manejik” – a Russian word which is used to name both a small circus arena and a children’s play den).

DISCUSSION

Dmitriyevskaya was sure that Harlequin creates a unique atmosphere of trust that surrounds the child. According to her, the main problem of the festivals is fundraising. Medkova added that there is a problem if people cannot work only for the festival all the year round because they

have a job to do in their company, as in the case of Harlequin. Boyakov argued the key problem in the case of Harlequin is lack of vision and of an organization structure, a discrepancy between the proclaimed aims and the real possibilities of the festival. According to Boyakov, a connection of a festival with a theatre company and venue where it is based is a great advantage for the festival and not a drawback. Theatre is a ready-made producing structure. Harlequin is trapped between two opposite vectors: on the one hand, it is formulated as a creative festival, on the other hand, its organizers want to achieve national status. It is either a creative festival or a national award. Theatre for children needs a creative impulse. If the government is ready to help theatre for children as an institution and not theatres for children, it should definitely support Harlequin. Meyer recognized the same issues in the Netherlands, he claimed that it was important for a festival to choose a particular goal. Klaic concluded that Kornakova's presentation managed to highlight the inner tension that existed within the festival.

Gerhard Verfaillie: Family Festival. Dance Festival

Verfaillie gave an overview of the Krokus festival which is held in the Flemish part of Belgium. Besides the festival, there is a regular weekend programme of almost 40 performances for children and young audiences throughout the year. The Krokus festival managed to evolve from a regional festival to a full-scale international one. The festival is based in a receptive house – a system created for touring companies which get money from the government and do not have their own theatre houses where they can perform for a long period of time. In every town such companies are hosted in a cultural centre where they perform and then move on to another destination. According to Verfaillie, one of the most vivid shortcomings of the modern theatre for children is that the audience of a definite production is almost always limited to a close group of people chosen according to their age, sex and cultural peculiarities. This kind of approach makes the actors from the very first rehearsal to imagine only 6-year-old boys in the audience. He assumed that the plot of any production should provoke recognition. Education is mainly focused on putting “exclamation marks” while it would be more productive to use “question marks”.

Theatre should be multi-aged (e.g. 4+ means that anyone older than 4 is admitted). Verfaillie presumed that while speaking about the audience, one should particularly stress the family structures (e.g. a concept of a family festival). One should not underestimate both the influence mothers have on their children (in Belgium and the Netherlands it is extremely high) and the way children can correct their mothers' views. Theatre should make use of an ambassador system - when mothers and children bring their friends, whereas teachers in their free time can bring their pupils whose parents do tend to take them to theatre activities. The festival is in search of new ways to create a “family level” (e.g. birthday parties during the festival).

The main problem in the dance theatre (dance companies, individual choreographers and dancers) is the absence of post-production (no interaction nor discussion). It is especially problematic in the field of contemporary dance because there is no historical background for it in Flanders and children often fail to explain what it is (however, they know what ballet or street-dance are).

Being a biennial festival, the Krokus festival will take place again in 2009. It will host only international productions and a programme of master-classes and workshops.

DISCUSSION

Harman claimed that there is a distinction between the creation of work and its distribution. In the Western part of Europe there is an acknowledged touring tradition. When a child comes to the theatre with its parents, this is important for the development of their relationship, thus

theatre is not central in this case. At performances in schools children perceive very complicated pieces because they are used to concentrate in this atmosphere.

Klaic underlined that the traditional family idea (mother, father and two children) had changed and occurs less frequently in the demography. Theatre becomes a privileged place and develops opportunities for an integration dialogue and various ambassador schemes are very important for the process.

Dethier described a scheme in Stuttgart where aged people without own grandchildren took children to the theatre which initiated new friendships between children and older people. With the help of discussions held before and after the performance theatre could become a meeting point.

Schneider wondered whether it was really the duty of the theatre to organize all those things. He was interested in the perspective of the integration dialogue and the question of the artistic point of the festival.

Dethier asserted that theatre should be at the centre of all the activity. Boyakov considered the mixed audience (children and parents watching a performance together) to be the best one. The repertoire problem is not limited to the area covered by Verfaillie's presentation. Often adults kill the children's desire to take up some activity (e.g. dance).

Dethier claimed that the main aim of her festival's activity is to create a challenge in order to develop art and prove that the audience could follow theatre professionals in their aspirations.

Shona Powell and Ellen Bianchini: A Catalytic Festival? Can an International Children's Theatre Festival Bring about a Change in the National Repertoire?

Shona Powell and Ellen Bianchini chose a number of examples of British festivals to prove that a festival could and should be a catalyst to introduce change into the national repertoire. Powell and Bianchini indicated several inseparable elements of a real festival – celebration, intensity, new and collective experiences. As Harman had already given a detailed review of the current situation in the British theatre for children, Powell and Bianchini only mentioned a few core tendencies, such as rapid growth of children's theatre over the recent 10-20 years and an increased public attention to this sphere as well as a significant growth in investment.

Powell and Bianchini chose several festival models which could be found in the UK to show the variety of approaches as well as their positive and negative sides. According to Powell and Bianchini, while approaches depend on political and local context, the common key catalyst is international work – bringing together artists from different cultural traditions. As an example of the so-called «hands-on» approach, they brought up the subject of East Midlands Children's Theatre Consortium which was founded by three diverse regional organizations (an arts centre, a regional dance agency and a children's art festival), sharing an aspiration to bring international dance productions to the region. A network of regional promoters clearly indicated that a festival could really work as a catalyst for change in the repertoire.

Another approach (the «hands-off» one) is by the Imagine festival (Edinburgh). Imagine's art development programme for Scottish actors, directors, writers, designers, choreographers is funded by the Scottish Arts Council and is now a key part of its activity. Unlike the previous example, Imagine does not commission work. It actively creates funded opportunities for ideas and collaborations.

Baboró International Arts Festival for Children (Galway), although with less funding than Imagine, has developed a similar brokerage tactic to change the way Irish artists approach creating work for children, supported by an annual research programme which explores how young audiences respond to theatre performances. The programme of The Belfast Children's Festival, presented by Young at Art, has stronger connections with the community arts sector of the city and the social change agenda than either Imagine or Baboro. Young at Art engage with local artists through their Open Space discussion forum that takes place each year, focusing on different aspects of children's arts (e.g. bilingualism, family audiences, developing theatre).

Powell and Bianchini concluded that irrespective of the approach each festival plays a key role in stimulating the development of children's theatre at a national level. The degree to which this happens depends on permutations in the local funding and social context. Generally speaking, the catalyst for change is a role that festivals must, by definition, take upon themselves.

DISCUSSION

Boyakov concentrated on the title question: is it possible to change the national repertoire? If it is possible in England - then Russian theatre professionals could succeed as well. Harman indicated that they had some advantages in England due to the fact that theatre is closely connected with education. Klaić added that although festivals could not cooperate much with each other, they could cooperate with other kinds of organizations in order to instigate change.

Dennis Meyer: Sliding back to fairy-tales and second-rate artists in the youth theatre? The need for a new European network to reinforce the artistic development of the youth theatre

Dennis Meyer in his presentation provided an overview of the current situation in the Netherlands in the theatre for young audiences and introduced an idea of a new European network, aiming to solve the existing problems in this field.

Festivals of theatre for children in the Netherlands have a respected name and an established history. Nevertheless, very few theatre professionals and companies from the Netherlands are interested in going to perform abroad. Meyer considered that this could be connected with the change in the theatre in the Netherlands, in Dutch society at large and a lack of international curiosity or touring fatigue. Meyer presumed that the new generation of theatre makers, formed within different institutions, festivals and local networks, should find its own place in the European context. However, this is impossible without key figures who could work not only for a festival of their own but for the European festival on the whole. Such a network is extremely important today, it could prove to play an indispensable role in strengthening the overall theatre infrastructure. According to Meyer, the importance for such a new international network lies in the fact that all theatres that pursue an experimental path to address the real issues of contemporary life work under the pressure of commercial entertainment and cultural industry. The danger is that without mutual reinforcement on an international scale, theatre for children may slide into mediocrity and a conventional presentation of the reality.

DISCUSSION

Boyakov offered some conclusions: the current system needs to be changed. The existing problems are not limited to the territory of Russia, they can be regarded as international. Theatre for children can and must become a contemporary art phenomenon, so the whole vision of it is to be changed.

Schneider suggested that one should identify what new engagements should be introduced into

the festival structure (new audiences or new aesthetics) and what should be preserved from the traditional models.

Answering Medkova's question on the prospects of development for festivals in the Netherlands Meyer claimed that festivals were not necessary for further development of theatre. It would be enough to have a director, an actor and some venues. Meyer also underlined that in the Netherlands, theatre and audience have been developing separately as two distinct realms. Now they are moving towards a reunion – not only in terms of feedback during the performance but also in terms of the processes that take place before and after the performance. In order to provide adequate theatre production for young audiences one should define what kind of audience they address and to take into account the intercultural issues.

FINAL DISCUSSION

Klaic raised the question what possible research should be initiated both in Russia and on the European level?

The sociologists (Novikova and Brailovskaya) claimed in their research in Samara that they obtained data that proved the appearance of completely new audiences in the theatre for children (new types of children and teenagers). In order to understand theatre it is especially important to identify what kind of audiences it attracts.

Loyevsky mentioned that one of the most important engagements was to offer more theatre for children up to age 5, when theatre aims to introduce new unknown coordinates. At this stage of development children learn the language of theatre they will use later.

Answering Kornakova's question on the methods used while questioning children, the sociologists enumerated expert interviews, in-depth interviews and using a children's psychologist as a moderator for the discussion. It is important to formulate the questions in a proper way so as to make it possible to decipher the children's reactions and use them in the survey. Perhaps it would be useful to compare two case-studies, one of a successful festival and one that was a failure. It would help to find out the reasons that determine success and failure. Powell suggested that environment should be taken into consideration, irrespective of the quality of the presented work.

Meyer stressed that for him a general research on audiences was important but not something that is specific to festivals. A festival creates a special situation which is based on festivity and celebration. Meyer also hoped that Dutch festivals could invite more productions in foreign languages.

Schneider returned to the networking policies. He suggested research into the different ways that theatre is presented to children. According to Schneider, networking is crucial for the understanding of development and of where one's personal place is. Research, facts and figures are needed in order to find out whether theatre professionals should develop new festivals, standards and criteria.

Dragan Klaic stressed the importance of re-examining needs, opportunities and values of public theatre in Europe in general, in the face of an advancing, more professional and increasingly sophisticated and diverse commercial theatre.

Participants thanked Eduard Boyakov, and the Praktika and Big Break teams for their hospitality and excellent organisation of the research workshop.

European Festival Research Project (EFRP)

The European Festival Research Project is an international, interdisciplinary consortium, focused on the dynamics of artistic festivals today and seeking to understand the current explosion of festivals and its implications and perspectives.

EFRP started as an informal research platform, defined its research model and approach in Brussels in May 2004, held a researchers' meeting at the Divadelna Nitra Festival in September 2005 and another one at De Montfort University in Leicester in March 2006, following a one-day conference for British festival operators, supported by Arts Council England. In May 2006 EFRP became a research consortium, consisting of the Budapest Observatory, De Montfort University, Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, Leiden University and University Paris 8, with the support of European Festival Association and Art Council England, and was joined in 2008 by the the Leeds Metropolitan University.

An EFRP research workshop on sustainability of the festivals was held in Le Mans, hosted by the FranceFestivals in November 2006. A Round Table with CIRCLE network of cultural policy research on the Festival Policy of Public Authorities was held in Barcelona on 19-20 October 2007, resulting in the recommendations to the public authorities on festival funding. In April 2008 City of Helsinki Culture Department hosted an EFRP research workshop on the urban impact of the artistic festivals and a workshop on the festivals of theatre for children was held on October 31-November 1, 2008 in Moscow, hosted by the Theatre Praktika and Big Break festival. The next planned event is a symposium in Novi Sad, Serbia (28-31 May, 2009), organized with Sterijino Pozorje and IATC; and other thematic meetings are under negotiation.

EFRP seeks to create a critical mass of research papers, studies, publications and debates in order to produce some tentative conclusions, trends, and recommendations to festival operators, public authorities as subsidy givers and potential sponsors. An edited book on festival politics, programming and governance and a book of interviews with prominent festival directors will be produced in 2009/10.

European Festival Association is publishing all EFRP materials on its website <http://www.efaaef.org/efahome/efrp.cfm>. Since 2004 EFRP has been supported by Flemish Ministry of Culture, Arts Council England and European Cultural Foundation and seeks further funding for research, events and publication opportunities.

Researchers across Europe, including graduate students writing their PhD and MA theses, are most welcome to join the EFRP with their research papers on particular strategic issues, comparative analysis and longitudinal studies about the transformation of specific festivals. Contact the EFRP Chair Dr. Dragan Klaić, Leiden University (draganklaic@gmail.com) or the EFRP Coordinator Christopher Maughan, Arts Management, Faculty of Humanities, De Montfort University, Clephan Building, The Gateway, Leicester LE1 9BH, UK. Tel: +44 116 250 6131, Fax: +44 116 257 7265, E-mail: ccm@dmu.ac.uk

January 2009