

SZÍNHÁZ



HUNGARIAN LETTER OF NEWS

30 March 2023

Dear Friends,

I am sending this Hungarian Letter of News with a very heavy heart.

Reporter **Noémi Herczog** pulls together multiple threads that confirm what I heard in Budapest last fall: we are seeing an Extinction Level Event for the independent theatre in Hungary.

When I was in Budapest last November, two colleagues with reliable perches each concluded that this vibrant community wouldn't last more than three years.

A toxic cocktail:

- the Orbán government taking over the entire cultural, educational, and media sectors
- Covid is playing havoc with the whole country and all public assemblies
- antisemitism, homophobia, racism, and general demonization of "the other" are now open, and even more strident
- the War in Ukraine is igniting a huge increase in energy costs. Theatres in the capital and countryside are closing for months (along with schools, libraries, and cultural centers).

Two weeks ago, I was sent a litany about the end of Hungarian independent theatre soon-to-be published in *Theater der Zeit* in Berlin. I'm afraid the die has been cast.

I urge you to reach out to friends and colleagues in theatre communities facing similar realities. Let them know they are not alone. And that we are all journeying to find new ways of sharing theatre's power.

In solidarity,

Philip
CITD founder & director

PS: Last night, I saw the final preview of János Szász' production of Angels In America, Part 1: Millennium Approaches at Arena Stage in Washington. It's a wonder.

Here is Peter Marks' feature in last Sunday's Washington Post.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/theater-dance/2023/03/24/janos-szasz-arena-angels-kushner/>



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- **THE NEXT GENERATION**: NOÉMI SZÁNTUSZ, ZSÓFIA REBEKA KOZMA, TÓZSA MIKOLT, KLAUDIA GARDENŐ, ORSOLYA FODOR, HANNA CSERI



Noémi Herczog (1986, Budapest) is a Budapest (Hungary) and Cluj (Romania) -based critic, editor, university lecturer. Editor of the Hungarian theatre journal, SZÍNHÁZ (www.szinhasz.net), and has a theatre column at the cultural-political weekly *Élet és Irodalom* (www.es.hu). She is faculty member at Babes-Bolyai University (BBTE), Cluj. Between 2013-2020 she taught at the University of Theatre and Film, Budapest (SZFE), and in 2022 at the Freeszfe Foundation. 'In 2019 she had a Lecture Tour in the US on Subversive Humor and Theatricality in Contemporary Hungary (New York - TMU - Segal Center; Boston - Arts Emerson, Howlround; Baltimore - CITD public, Towson University; Washington - Wilson Center.) Co-curator of *dunaPart - Hungarian Showcase of Contemporary Performing Arts* (2015, 2017, 2019), artistic advisor of Péter Halász Award for contemporary theatre and experimentation. Awards: Tamás Bécsy-award for theatre research (2022) and Éva F. Virág-award for cultural journalism (2023). She is the editor of the collected plays by the "Mohácsi-brothers" (János and István Mohácsi, 2017), co-editor of the essay-collection "*Theatre and Society*" (2018) and is author of the book: "*Shut up! Theatre Criticism of Denunciation in Cold War Hungary*" (2022).

The Manifesto of the Independent Performing Arts Alliance

Urgent Call on Government to Reverse Culture Funding Cuts Immediately

We, members of the Independent Performing Arts Alliance, demand that the government of Hungary immediately reverse the 34 billion HUF (**91 million EUR**) cut on cultural funding of non-certified performing arts organizations and independent arts organizations. We demand that in the next 5 years the government spend at least as much Budget money on funding the above mentioned organizations as it does spend on football!

We know that culture is way more than entertainment only or a luxury that only few can afford. Our culture is the soul of our country. It preserves our identity, and it gives us the opportunity to retell lessons from the past so all of us, including our descendants, can learn from them. Whether we live in a tiny village or in the capital city that celebrates its sesquicentennial jubilee this year; whether we live in a villa on the hills of Buda or in the poverty rows of Ormánság in the South of Hungary, we share our culture. Our culture is our national identity.



Crisis Forum in Trafó – House of Contemporary Arts

In Hungary if one happens to live in a small settlement in the countryside, they will find that there is no post office, no library, no art gallery, no shop, no pub, no doctor, no teacher, and no priest. Not even in the next village anymore. Living in the capital, one can also sense despair as community life is shrinking. Our theatres and our companies are in trouble. Musicians, dancers, writers, teachers are in trouble.

In Hungary when it comes to decision making the independent artist community is deliberately not consulted, we are not given any chance to negotiate. On the contrary, the government simply declare that there is no funds. Apparently, there is no funds for grants, subsidies, libraries, exhibition spaces, theatres, music ensembles, festivals or even to give a fair pay raise to teachers.

As part of its international communication the Hungarian government never forget to stress out that they spend more on culture than any other European government. This is a lie for fact. Not only because the vast majority of the funds are spent on investment and not to support arts and cultural life in general. But also because the actors who please the government get unaccounted funds without the quality of their products being monitored by any regulatory bodies or without assessing the size of their target audience. The independent sector in Hungary is getting an even more ridiculous 500 million HUF (1.3 million EUR) state subsidy this year, which replaces the already record low 800 million HUF (2.1 million EUR) from last year. In the meantime, the

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The members of the Independent Performing Arts Alliance are calling for unity and collective action. We call on teachers, nursery staff, filmmakers, journalists, stigmatized civilians, sacked postmen, doctors made redundant, students fighting for educational freedom and anyone who has suffered any kind of disadvantage over the recent years thanks to the policies of the Hungarian

government.

After all, none of us is just a budget line. Neither are our cultural institutes. Our culture is the cornerstone of our national identity and we are here to protect it.

The End of an Era

Independent Theatre can Disappear from Hungary

At the time I submit the present issue of Hungarian Letter of News, there is a consensus among the members and supporters of the Hungarian independent sphere that if there is going to be no change about the cut of the state subsidies, independent theatre as a sector is going to vanish from Hungary. The fatal move by the Hungarian government was to cut support for independent performers by 41%, a decision which, if left unchanged, will effectively lead to the disappearance of the field. Two long-established companies, The Symptoms and Proton Theatre have already announced that they will stop operating at the end of the season. 35 billion HUF (96-97 million USD) has been stolen from culture to pour three times as much (!) into the bottomless barrel for sporting activities. The Hungarian government claims the crisis is because of the war, but in fact it is because of inapt economic policy.

In their call, the members of the Independent Performing Arts Alliance claim that the performing arts sector is facing challenges unprecedented in the last 20 years. Practically a whole cultural scene is being abolished: ensembles closing down, productions falling through, films left unready, venues closing. Our readers may have already been informed about the immediate background history of the process: the independent field has been recently decimated, as actors have moved abroad, due to war-induced inflation, which is particularly high in Hungary, and about the abolition of the so-called 'TAO', a form of financing (which has been preserved in sport – for more on this, see Hungarian Letter of News, 2019/November). The latest step in this process was, when the government abolished the preferential tax system for mainly freelance intellectuals in the summer of 2022. Zita RIHAY-KOVÁCS, lawyer and former Executive Secretary of the Independent Performing Arts Alliance wrote in the journal Színház that the so-called 'KATA Act' (1 November 2012) had drawbacks, but many have argued that its abolition (15 July 2022) was intended to disempower freelance intellectuals, who were existentially independent of the state sector and often critical of



György Szabó -
the founding managing
director of Trafó

the government¹.

In this situation, the independent's Association organized a so-called 'Crisis Forum' in Trafó - House of Contemporary Arts. Their motivation was to raise awareness about the emergency and to initiate a dialogue about possible solutions. To make it clear to the decision-makers that "their unprepared, abrupt decisions are adversely affecting the entire performing arts sector, and the entire Hungarian culture and society – they wrote. "The cuts in the cultural sector affect the whole sector and put the jobs of thousands at risk. If there is no change, the future for the workers in the independent field will be disastrous, with companies closing, performances cancelled, jobs and theatres closing, and no space for the creators of the field to work."

Independent theatres (currently around 5,000 people work in this field) are the most export-oriented and innovative segment of Hungarian theatre. This is due to the fact that these 'grassroots' are free from a series of obligations that public theatres have to comply with, on the other hand, they do not receive the normative state subsidies that public theatres are entitled to in a post-socialist state such as Hungary, but finance their operations through annual tenders, which were also essentially state-funded. The latter statement needs to be elaborated, as recently independents have been receiving an increasing percentage of their budget from foreign subsidies. These groups are mainly financed from three hats: operating subsidies; the TAO surplus subsidy introduced after the abolition of the TAO and lastly by the National Cultural Fund's grants (NKA) – sort of, the funds of the Hungarian equivalent of 'National Endowment for the Arts'. The current system of theatre funding in Hungary distinguishes between qualified (national and priority) and non-qualified groups, the latter including independents in the so-called "other" category. Zoltán NAGY, president of the Independent Performing Arts Alliance, said: "In this area, the average amount of state funding per seat is no more than 3,000 HUF (8 USD), compared to 10,000-30,000 HUF (27-82 USD) per seat for nationally rated theatres. This is particularly true for creative workshops and theatre education companies working with various disadvantaged groups."²

Although the situation of the area has never been settled, to put it mildly, in 2009 the theatre law finally guaranteed a ten percent subsidy to independent companies of the amount spent on public theatres. Then, in 2010, when Fidesz was elected, this guarantee was removed from the law without a single word of justification. As György SZABÓ, the founding managing director of Trafó put it, "In 2011, their support was halved. Since then, the innovative area has received essentially the same amount. Since then, the accumulative inflation has been 78%. That means that the subsidy then should stand at 178 HUF (0,49 USD) today, if it were 100 HUF (0,27 USD) then. But

¹ <https://szinhaz.net/2022/07/18/rihay-kovacs-zita-makrancos-kata/>

² https://24.hu/kultura/2023/02/28/fuggetlen-szinhazak-tamogatasi-rendszer-bezaras-csak-janos-atrrium-kulturpolitika/?fbclid=IwAR2efZXC�Qy2iY_0DkzEGQB-Y7eJYHZgKwcZVayb1YHajjePYKEtC5lml4&fs=e&s=cl

now it is down to 59 HUF (0,16 USD)."

What makes the situation unmanageable at the moment is that not only operating grants are missing, but the National Cultural Fund - 'NKA' is also late with the payments for the year 2022, which it promises for the second quarter, with no news about a spring call for proposals. This means that at least half a year's funding is gone. At the Crisis Forum, Gergő TALLÓ, President of Múhely Foundation outlined the main problems, such as the fact that the budget of the above-mentioned additional support program (ex-TAO) has been reduced from 37 billion HUF (102 USD) to 4 billion (12 USD) in 4 years, and that no call for proposals has been published. There is no information on the coverage of the 20% entry cultural wage subsidy for independents decided by the Government, nor on how to apply for it. No call for tenders for priority artistic objectives has been launched (no funds yet). The Deputy State Secretary for culture has resigned (his successor is on good terms with the predecessor).

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**The key word is
"uncertainty" – 'Not
with a bang but a
whimper'
(T. S. Eliot)**

In response to a request from the independent portal 24.hu, the Government responded cynically "The budgetary difficulties caused by the misguided Brussels sanctions affect all players in the cultural sector. The Hungarian government is doing its utmost to preserve security, jobs, livelihoods and the conditions for a normal life for the Hungarian people." ³ To give an idea of the amount of money missing from the field, a Hungarian historical film recently received a 1.2

billion HUF grant (3 USD), which was subsequently doubled. The cost of the independent theatre area, largely centered around Budapest, would be 1.4 billion HUF (3 USD).

However, as Réka SZABÓ, the founder and artistic director of the closing Symptoms says: "But there is an even more soul-destroying process than the lack of money: the bad mood of the community: unprofessional, distrustful, unpredictable, demoralizing, disintegrating. (...) The fact that a 15 HUF (0,041 USD) bill is just as bureaucratic as a 75-million-euro bill (205 890 USD) ruins the lives of those who are unlikely to issue a 75-million-euro bill. And while we are administering and photocopying and signing, everyone forgets about quality, about content. We have to constantly prove that we are creating value, not stealing, cheating, lying. (...) Those who create and run the funding system know nothing about us. And in the meantime, the area is rotting."⁴

³https://24.hu/kultura/2023/02/28/fuggetlen-szin hazak-tamogatasi-rendszer-bezaras-csak-janos-atrium-kulturpolitika/?fbclid=IwAR2efZXCNUy2iY_0DkzEGQB-Y7eJYHZgKwcZVayb1YHajjePYKEtC5lmI4&fs=e&s=cl

⁴ <https://revizoronline.com/hu/cikk/10023/www.nka.hu>

The protest of independent artists joins the strike actions by teachers and the protests by health workers in Hungary. The independent theatre director, Béla PINTÉR gave a speech at one of the teacher's protests presenting a dystopian vision about a fictive Hungary in 2043, where students – as he says – no longer protest for their teachers, but denounce them. The 52 year-old artist concluded with the sarcastic sentences: "I am grateful that I can celebrate my 72nd birthday and that I am still fit enough to deliver newspaper to 8,000 people a month, here, in Karlsruhe, where I have been living now for 15 years. Good night, Karlsruhe! Good night, Hungary!"⁵⁶

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"It's over. The Art Ensemble has gone cold. Whether this is frost death or a hibernation, we'll see once spring comes."

Réka SZABÓ

The closing of The Symptoms is symptomatic – wrote the editor-in-chief of the art portal MŰ, Gergely NAGY, as it marks how state stops funding the non-loyal from now on. Réka SZABÓ quoted T. S. ELIOT in her open letter announcing the slow and silent end of the 20-year-old ensemble, The Symptoms. In their press release, the subject of which was "The Symptoms - The End", Réka SZABÓ has stated, among other things, that she does "not want to be a leader, an employer in a situation where it is impossible to take responsibility."

"It's over. The Art Ensemble has gone cold. Whether this is frost death or a hibernation, we'll see once spring comes. Over the years, I have become full of bitterness, frustration and self-blame because I was no longer able to function well, I was exhausted, I had reached the bottom of the pit. Now I'm on my way up. I need to open up space within myself, around myself. I can't, I don't want to continue the windmill struggle of running the company on a day-to-day basis under these circumstances." (...)

The spirit of The Symptoms lives on, and may one day be incarnated again. But this season marks the end of an era, a farewell to this repertoire and 20 years. The last three or four years, plagued by a culture war, have been a prolonged farewell. It has taken many years for Tünet to become a

⁵ The whole speech:

<https://www.facebook.com/PinterBelaesTarsulata/posts/pfbid02HdkBpAVi3xmHpwUDsdHeiQi7PJHjLBpRCkx6xLKw4WF7NNWGqYnbtrLzE85ZsBPul>

⁶https://www.viszont.hu/2023/02/01/pinter-bela-emigrat-es-ujzagihordo-lesz-karlsruheban/?fbclid=IwAR1DbBLAwZAKSCwv0e96RaNUwQDYTqLq_wEOTlw3xrhfBf_y4uk2jJKfBqg

company, and accordingly it will take many years to die out.”

The other company announcing a closedown is Proton Theatre, the most internationally known independent theatre company in Hungary, founded in 2009 by Dóra BŰKI and director Kornél MUNDRUCZÓ. They have also announced the suspension of their work with the end of the season, as their applications for additional funding for the year 2022 and for the creation of a new production had not been accepted for almost a year, just like others’. This financial uncertainty, combined with the economic and energy crisis has forced the company to shut down. Dóra BŰKI, like Réka SZABÓ, stressed the uncertainty factor: it was never possible to plan ahead, at most for a year.⁷

It Takes Courage to Face this Interview with Réka Szabó

Excerpts from the Special Edition of I SZÍNHÁZ’S Podcast by Anita Gócza⁸

Obviously, this letter did not come out of the blue, and some of your performances also already dealt with the impossibility of independent existence.

Réka Szabó: It is measurable in years that we have come to this conclusion, indeed, we have tried to process and analyse the situation in our shows also. The letter was written 2-3 weeks after the decision was made. Since I sent it, I've been on a very intense emotional rollercoaster, and I wasn't even sure that this would be news in today's Hungary.

Was that really a question?

R. Sz: Yes, because there are so many bad news today, there is so much wrong with the world.

If it wasn't for the financial circumstances - do you think that you would close down?

R. Sz: After 20 years, it is logical to ask whether it is time to change anyway. In our shows we have been dealing with this problem constantly, *The Symptoms* is an autobiographic piece, dealing with the situation of the ensemble and the whole independent sphere... Then came our last piece, *Nothing personal*, in which the focus was on my personal psychological state. I don't know what would have happened if we had lived in a wonderful country, but I became convinced that the state has a responsibility to its citizens. These shows are about how we are in is the environment, at the cultural government creates for the independent sector. (...)

⁷ <https://szinhaz.online/nem-biztos-hogy-lesz-folytatas-leall-a-proton-szinhaz/>

⁸ <https://open.spotify.com/show/4GDKNvdARKE73iqNvLWt?si=7ad0795408ff4a8b&nd=1>

Obviously this is the time for mourning, but do you also feel excitement?



Réka SZABÓ – photo: Eszter GORDON

R. Sz: I am not the leader of a group anymore, I don't know who I am, but yes, this situation is also exciting. Also, many people affirmed to me that they know that this will not be the end of my creative life. (...) I have no idea what will happen, but I think this decision was inevitable. A few more months, and we'll say goodbye at Trafó. Now an organizational form is ending,

my daily windmill fight as a company manager. It takes courage to face this, but it gives us the opportunity to develop new things organically. This is where we are and where the world is. At the time of the regime change in 1989 we thought that we would turn the world around but it didn't happen.

You have a degree in mathematics. Has it occurred to you that your own creative period is over and you concentrate on the field of math instead?

R. Sz: It absolutely came up, but I want to try to go abroad instead. Even so I don't have invitations yet, because the atmosphere in this country is ruining me. I don't see the urge in the Hungarian society to shape itself. Of course, the government may go away one day, but not because society is facing the situation and wants to understand itself. I don't see any hope in Hungary.

University Life – Immobilized

Erasmus Plus Embargo and Political Takeover of the Doctoral School (Academy of Theatre and Film)

Our readers may know about the recent ErasmusPlus-scandal, which is linked to the outsourcing of universities in Hungary. The European Union suspended Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programs and funding for universities that are under the auspices of foundations. We have written

in several of our newsletters about the politically motivated process of how the autonomy of the universities has been taken in Hungary by outsourcing them to seemingly private foundations (*for more information please check the Hungarian Letter of News, 2022/February*), but in short, the universities remained under state funding, but this funding was made conditional: universities have to operate under foundations, the function of which was to fill the boards of trustees with senior politicians linked to the government. Despite the fact that it was clear from the beginning that this process fundamentally violated the autonomy of universities, no scandal or protest has been made in any cases of the transformations. The only exception was the University of Theatre and Film (SZFE).

However, at the moment the EU stated to stop ErasmusPlus programs at such universities. Hungarian Government has sent a delegation to Brussels to negotiate and seems prepared to acknowledge the conflict of interest of high-level politicians among the boards of trustees. So far, however, they only found a conflict of interest at the ministerial level, although it is at least a concern for all politicians. More to that, it is evident that only pro-government people can be selected for such boards.



György KARSAI. Photo: Gergely TÚRY

As it is stated in Alisa SOLOMON's exceptional article, the University of Theatre and Film was an exception to the general apathy, with its students and the faculty at the small university resisting the government as long as they could. Finally the vast majority of students and faculty left the university.⁹ The heads of the doctoral school, György KARSAI and Magdolna JÁKFALVI wanted to stay at SZFE until their students' graduation at the Doctoral School. But in August 2022, Zoltán RÁTÓTI, the rector of the university dismissed KARSAI from the board of the SZFE doctoral school, half a year before KARSAI's retirement.¹⁰ KARSAI had been teaching at the Faculty of Theatre Arts since 1996 and officially headed the doctoral school since 2014. Now he was suspended with immediate effect and without giving reasons. Subsequently, on 2 September 2022,

⁹ <https://theatermagazine.org/web-features/article/learning-republic-solomon-hungary-2022>

¹⁰ <https://24.hu/kultura/2022/08/26/ratoti-zoltan-karsai-gyorgy-szfe-felmondas/>

all members of the Habilitation Committee of the Doctoral School resigned.¹¹ The reason given for their action was that the head of the Habilitation Committee, Professor Magdolna JÁKFALVI, was also recalled from her position as chair of the committee without any justification, and replaced by Géza BALÁZS, a linguist and ethnographer, who does not meet the formal requirements of the position.

In mid-February 2023, a brand new Doctoral Council and Habilitation Committee were voted. The merged body (Doctoral School, Habilitation Committee) is headed by Géza BALÁZS. Among the members are the director of the National Theatre and the cultural-political position holder of Hungarian theatre, Attila VIDNYÁNSZKY, chairman of the board of trustees of the SZFE, and Csaba KÁEL, director of MŰPA. Neither of them has a doctorate – nor any academic degree. The University's response to this problem is that 'the highest artistic state prizes, the Kossuth Prize, the Jászai Prize, are the prerequisites for teaching at a university'. The law had previously stipulated that an academic degree was required to run a doctoral school, a rule that was amended by the Hungarian government just before the transformation of the SZFE's Doctoral School.

Up to the Cloud! – Let's Go Virtual!

Online Switch of SZÍNHÁZ Magazine

SZÍNHÁZ is a 55-year-old theatre monthly, founded in 1968, and is currently the theatre journal in Hungary with the longest tradition. For more than ten years, the journal has been running its online and print editions synchronically, with the same editorial staff but with different content. The present newsletter¹² has been published since 2017 by CITD, when I wrote the first issue in February. Moving online is a worldwide trend, but in this case there are political reasons too.

Our vision for the future SZÍNHÁZ is online, but **the profile of the online paper (currently under construction) will integrate the former print and online publications.** The plan is to integrate the two and come out with a website that can integrate both the profile of the former print paper, similarly to *Critical Stages* coming out with bigger context thematic blocks (just like we used to do in print). And in parallel to preserve the online SZÍNHÁZ (*szinhaz.net*) with quick to read reviews, interviews substituted with podcasts, etc.

It is telling, that when I write this letter of news there is no independent print theatre press in Hungary anymore (except for one journal published 4 times a year). Three print theatre magazines used to exist after the regime shift: *Ellenfény* was last published in March 2019, its website has not

¹¹ Lóránt Stóhr, Tamás Almási, Gábor Gelencsér, Zsolt Győrei, Péter Huszti, Csaba Pléh, Dorka Porogi, József Tillmann, György Karsai.

¹² <https://www.citd.us/hln-issues>

been updated for 2-3 years, *Critikai Lapok* is there on the market with delayed publications, but it is March now when I finish this newsletter and it has not been published yet this year. SZÍNHÁZ used to be published ten times a year (with a double issue in the summer) while its website was

operating the whole year. The print has already closed down once in 2016 due to funding anomalies. The current editorial team has been in place since 2015, initially under the editorship of Andrea TOMPA, and now as a collective editorial team.

In the last issue of the journal we also proudly admitted that SZÍNHÁZ would have ceased to exist a long time ago without foreign support: 'If it hadn't been for the selfless and committed support of a

foreign supporter (this is why we had to indicate in the newspaper that we are a foreign-supported NGO until the Civil Act was repealed), who always took the cause of Hungarian theatre and our miserable fate to heart, the printed SZÍNHÁZ would have been finished long ago. This is another thing: it is both uplifting and disappointing to see that part of the donations come from the West – not Soros, but we would be glad to have him too! – is keeping the Hungarian theatre press alive.'

The Last Print Issue – Let's Meet Online!

The last print issue has been dedicated to the memory of the paper, featuring memoirs and interviews with all the surviving members of the editorial team. We have published documents including the notes by the former editor-in-chief, Tamás KOLTAI, or the excerpts of the general assembly of the Theatre Arts Association from 1973.

The commemorative blocks are introduced by Katalin TRENCSÉNYI's wide-ranging essay on the past, present and possible future of theatre criticism, illustrated with a selection of the 55-year-old paper's covers. TRENCSÉNYI's motto is borrowed from Octavio ROCA: 'Socrates strongly condemned the unreflective life, saying that it was not worth living. But is



The collective editorial board of the journal SZÍNHÁZ. From top left to right: Kinga BOROS, Noémi HERCZOG, Roland KELEMEN, Csaba KRÁLL, Zsófia MOLNÁR, Andrea RÁDAI.



an unreflective dance performance worth watching? And is it worth dancing it?' - and begins her essay by quoting the undeservedly dismissed scientist, KARSAI: „'Theory is not at all alien to the theatre. The contemplation, perception and further contemplation of phenomena are not only directed towards the same thing – performance – but the two words (theory and theatre) stem from the same root. The ancient Greek verb *theaomai*, meaning 'to contemplate, to see', 'emphasizes the purpose of looking', explains György KARSAI. Thus, the word refers to the basic form of cognition in which 'with the help of our eyes we perceive a part of the world, we get to know it, we learn from it.' The word *theoros* was used by the Greeks to describe the spectator, before whose understanding gaze the performance took place in the theatre. While the word *theoria* meant at once contemplation, reflection, contemplation, and the spectacle itself, the things seen.'"

TRENCSENYI concludes by expressing the hope that the challenge facing criticism will depend on the ongoing redefinition of criticism itself: 'The profession must redefine its role and purpose, to whom, for what purpose and how it wants to speak. I myself prefer to rely on the two questions that, according to English theatre legend, Ian Rickson, the director of the London Royal Court (1998-2006), asked each time: What is a play? Who are we today? Nowadays, I might modify these questions in this way: What is theatre? Who are we today?'"

Never Again!

The 14th Anniversary of the Roma Murders in Hungary

Commemoration was held at the Independent Theatre's venue, Füszi, to remember the 14th anniversary of the Roma serial murders, e.g. the murder of the five-year-old Roma boy Robika CSORBA and his father Róbert CSORBA in 2009, a trauma that still has not yet been processed in Hungary at the social level. Yet this national trauma has inspired several artistic endeavors.

Fourteen months after the murders, the Independent Theatre Hungary reflected on the horrific events in its production

Tollfosztás (Feather Dusting)¹³. At the talk in Füszi, the director, Rodrigó BALOGH talked about the piece while his dramaturg, Márton ILLÉS moderated the event. The dramaturg of another



Th Feather Picking. Photo: Róbert MALY

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/events/721904506071956>

production, Anna HÁRS was also invited to the occasion from the verbatim theatre group PanoDrama, which group came out with the verbatim performance Szórol szóra (Word for Word) under the leadership of Anna LENGYEL (1969-2021) not so much after Feather Dusting, and this piece also dealt with the Roma murders. The third participant in the round table discussion was Eszter HAJDÚ, who shot a film about the trial process in her documentary *Ítélet Magyarországon* (Judgement in Hungary).



Word for Word. Photo: Zsuzsa KONCZ

All the participants expressed shock about how few artists and people from the media were interested in this topic. Yet for these artists it was evident that the majority of society has a responsibility for these murders and we have to face this responsibility, which is why they wanted to deal with the memory of the murders in their work. Eszter HAJDÚ says she came from a Holocaust survivor family and this gave her the drive for investigating social injustices, she made this film for the majority of society. Anna HÁRS mentioned how the founder of PanoDráma, Anna LENGYEL was also enraged about the fact that we don't talk about the Roma-murders. Anna HÁRS also mentioned how much their scope became more personal after creating interviews with the survivors, whose relatives were killed and during the trials they were treated often without respect.

Unlike the two other productions, Feather Dusting is a fiction based on real events. Rodrigó BALOGH explained how he was rejected by Hungarian theatre

institutions with this topic, when he came up for the first time with the idea to create a performance about this material. Finally, his partners came from the film. It was very clear to him from the very beginning that he wanted to work with young people instead of adults playing the kids as victims.

The ethical questions of editing the documentary material and protecting the dignity of the victims and also how the materials collected can be researched were also discussed. Yet the most important question seemed to be how can an artistic project induce change? Is it the personal stories of the victims, that bring an unknown layer of society closer to us? Can we reduce the distance between groups of society this way?

What is the role of art with recent and painful traumatic issues? Can we really count on the social role of theatre today? It was evident that these artists believe in such power of theatre yet the

members of PanoDrama also explained why they travelled to the city in the north of Hungary (Miskolc) and other places where students could watch their production, not just the audience of the contemporary art venue in the capital. Rordigó BALOGH explained how he thinks that theatre has a role in social memory. This is why they played the piece at one of the towns affected. This way Feather Dusting could work as the means for processing trauma first hand. They showed the work in the local culture house where kids asked them about where the toilet was. It was quite telling, that they had never been to this place. Their questioning about where the loo was shows it quite clearly, how in that town the Roma community was not involved into the cultural and social institutions. Feather Dusting brought the first occasion for them to enter the threshold of the place, transforming it into the house of the whole community, where all cultures of the nation are represented.

A Refreshing Venue: Örkény Theatre

Kristóf Kelemen: The Window of the Nation – Tom Waits, William S. Burroughs and Kathleen Brennan: The Blck Rider - Péter Kárpáti: Saturn's Ring

Kristóf Kelemen: The Window of the Nation

Soon after the Madách Square Rally organized by Örkény and Katona theatres in 2019,¹⁴ these theatres are sustained by the local authority of Budapest instead of ministry ownership. The reason behind the change is that their artistic independence had been threatened by the state. So along with Radnóti and Trafó, their ownership changed and so did their budget, as Budapest with an oppositional leadership is a very poor authority under the Fidesz government.

And still: Örkény is in excellent condition today and has had several important performances recently. *The Widow of the Nation* is one of the theatre's most important pieces, as it was written for the theatre's request and it was also the first time for the young director to work in the theatre. The play is the author-director's third work to address the recent past. Among the previous such pieces we have to mention *Observers*, which won the Péter Halász Award and ran for a long time in the Trafó repertoire.

The newest play, which has since been published by SZÍNHÁZ was written by the director based on documents. Kristóf KELEMEN was asked by the theatre's artistic director, Pál MÁCSAI, to adapt Mária VÁSÁRHELYI's book *Valahogy megvagyunk - Snagovi emlékkönyv* (Somehow We Are - Snagov Memoir), published in 2019. In this book, the author reports on her own memories and on documents of their detention in Romania, where she was imprisoned as a young child after the

¹⁴ <https://hungarytoday.hu/theater-bill-hungary-thousands-protest/>

1956 revolution with her family, and with the members of the former prime minister, Imre NAGY's circle and their relatives. They were in exile for 2 years in Snagov, Romania.

But the author has chosen a different path. Kristóf KELEMEN wrote the roles for the company's actors, but he starts the play with the subtitle "This is pure fiction. This is not reality. (Reality? What are we even talking about?) What comes is the cracks of history. Private affairs, family silences. Traces of past loves." Two things are immediately apparent: 1) this is not a historical drama, 2) the author has a sense for irony, and 3) this play is going to be a historical under-view and a female perspective through the fictional narration of an important yet unexplored story about recent past.

In *The Widow of the Nation* the images of great historical icons of national memory are turned inside out. Not only by presenting to us women icons instead of men, but also by presenting two of them: in this play, the innocently executed political martyr, the national hero, has two widows: the 'official' one (the ex-wife), and the 'mistress'. (Not to mention the third one, who doesn't even appear on the scene, but is supposed to be the 'true love').

The play uses a tested strategy: speaking from a personal perspective about an era that we are used to hearing only about as a public affair. It is also a drama of mistrust, not trusting politics, a world in which the *performativity* of politics, the *spectacle* before the public, casts a false light on the characters. **It's a play about a very theatrical problem indeed: about how to perform reality authentically on stage.** Because of its mistrust of theatricality, of the theatrical representation of politics, the play immediately creates mistrust against itself, a mistrust towards theatrical representation. The play urges us not to take seriously what the actors are talking about, and by this maneuver they invite us to constant attention and critical perspective.

As one of the play's knowledgeable readers, the dramaturg Judit GARAI asks in her foreword to the play, published in our magazine, 'where does the author's distrust of representative portrayals about big politics and public affairs come from?' As an answer, GARAI rightly points to one of the less public characters in the play, the character of Máté BORSI-BALOGH, the son of a widow. The



BORSI-BALOGH and Anikó FÜR. Photo: Judit HORVÁTH

son, whose mother has never spoken of her story, which has been an overwhelming trauma for the family of the two of them. A son, who, like the nation, neither did know about the 'other woman' and who, being unable to come to terms with what happened, becomes the victim of a transgenerational trauma and silence. Right until the coming out, which is a cathartic point in the play.

Kristóf KELEMEN looks back at the personal stories of the "mothers" from the point of view of a young boy, from the perspective of the 'son', and tries to understand his own present by investigating the stories of the parents, the mothers', the generation of the 60s. His play contains important female roles for Anikó FÜR above all, but the author also reflects on the fact that the

“

It's a play about a very theatrical problem indeed: about how to perform reality authentically on stage death or a hibernation, we'll see once spring comes.”

female perspective in this case is the story of two women whose lives were both centered around the man they loved. That is why, at the end, the question is asked whether it could have been otherwise? Zita SCHNÁBEL's witty set wraps the entire stage and auditorium in a provocative, green velvet, even the number of the chairs can only be found if you put extra effort into it. Just how the critical view of the past and reality will never show itself to us without extra effort on our side.

Our readers may know about the recent ErasmusPlus-scandal, which is linked to the outsourcing of universities in Hungary. The

European Union suspended Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programs and funding for universities that are under the auspices of foundations. We have written in several of our newsletters about the politically motivated process of how the autonomy of the universities has been taken in Hungary by outsourcing them to seemingly private foundations (*for more information please check the Hungarian Letter of News, 2022/February*), but in short, the universities remained under state funding, but this funding was made conditional: universities have to operate under foundations, the function of which was to fill the boards of trustees with senior politicians linked to the government. Despite the fact that it was clear from the beginning that this process fundamentally violated the autonomy of universities, no scandal or protest has been made in any cases of the transformations. The only exception was the University of Theatre and Film (SZFE).

Tom WAITS, William S. BURROUGHS and Kathleen BRENNAN: The Black Rider Directed by Csaba POLGÁR

Tom Waits, William S. Burroughs and Kathleen Brennan's *The Black Rider* was first performed in

Hungary by Tamás ASCHER in a staged concert, partly fulfilling a decade-long wish, only partly because it was a staged version of a play that had just been lifted from a ten-year performance ban. The cast at the National Theatre of the time was superb, with Juli BÁSTI, János KULKA, Piroska MOLNÁR, Frigyes HOLLÓSI, Roland RÁBA among others, all of them in face paint of a horror comedy.

At the Örkény, Csaba POLGÁR has now created an enjoyable entertainment theatre production from the material, during which the company's actors showcase their singing and caricature skills, and also two guests have joined the company for the occasion. Nóra Dia TAKÁCS is frenetic in the role of the Devil, while Zoltán FRIEDENTHAL shines as Berthram. The songs are in English, since no translation was possible, but the translator of the prose parts was the poet Péter ZÁVADA, who wrote great puns, and the lyrics also evoke the drug theme of the play. The set design is the work of Lili IZSÁK, who worked with visual design trainees from the Hungarian University of Fine Arts. The production is also an important example of how a theatre, squeezed by the war and the government, can produce a spectacular performance from a non-existing budget.



Nóra Dia TAKÁCS and Máté BORSI-BALOGH. Photo: Judit HORVÁTH

Péter KÁRPÁTI: Ring of Saturn

The Studio of the Örkény Theatre has recently become a real experimental venue, providing a hiding space for the most important artists of the independent scene and offering them a safe space. In addition to one of the most important premieres of the season so far, e.g. Ildikó

GÁSPÁR's *Solness*, this season's directors include great independent theatre makers, such as Péter KÁRPÁTI and Ádám FEKETE.

But the *Ring of Saturn* is not only important because of the director, but also because it brings together for the first time in a long while two great actors from Árpád SCHILLING's memorable *Kréta Kör* (Chalk Circle): Zsolt NAGY and Annamária LÁNG, SCHILLING's Treplev and Nina. Annamária LÁNG is currently a company member of the Burgtheater in Vienna, constantly commuting between Vienna and Budapest. In Hungary, she has been seen mostly in productions of the Proton Theatre, but since the recent events, she has not performed. At the Örkény Studio, however, a new performance has been produced with the collaboration of the author-director Péter KÁRPÁTI and his dramaturg Zsófia VARGA, his former student at the dramaturgy department of the University of Theatre and Film. The piece was created and written by them, based on the improvisations of participants.



Annamária LÁNG and Zsolt NAGY. Photo: Judit HORVÁTH

The performance has the characteristics of Péter KÁRPÁTI's performances, a method of play-development that uses improvisations of the scenes, KÁRPÁTI's own so-called "reality simulation" technique, which also results in a special style of acting that is very close to the civilian presence. In a dramaturgical sense, it is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a leap between imagination and reality, incorporating the actors' statements and interviews and transforming them

into fiction, yet also playing with the actors' public image. Annamária LÁNG, for example, has repeatedly declared in interviews that she used to drive home from Vienna at night after performances, and during a long conversation with reporter Márton GULYÁS on *Partizán*, one of the most important independent opposition YouTube channels, she reflected on the fact that this is actually a very dangerous business. In another youtube show, Zsolt NAGY came out with his alcohol problem, very common among actors today, but mostly hidden, yet he talked about this

openly, as well as his struggle with it. All of these public stories are incorporated into the performance, as is the legendary past shared by all those present, the Chalk Circle troupe, a reference through the motif of the band 'Ring of Saturn'.

Nationalism and what Hungarian Theatre Responds

**Diorama Group: Diorama with Hungarians - Trafó - Tamás FODOR:
Daguerreotype - Studio K - Péter FÁBIÁN: Barguzin, Ciróka, Kecskemét**

László SZABÓ, communications consultant of the National Theatre and secretary of the Hungarian Theatre Society recently declared, that "The best thing in the world is to be Hungarian!". This policy for culture, as populist as it sounds is just one of the many blatant examples of the Hungarian government's nationalist-populist demagoguery, which of course also manifests itself in cultural policy and in the over-support of Hungarian historical films, etc.¹⁵ But how does Hungarian theatre respond to this?

**Diorama Group: Diorama with Hungarians -
Trafó**

directed by Lili Raubinek

**by Petrik KELEMEN Rozi MÁKÓ, Luca
PETRÁNYI, Lili RAUBINEK, János R. SZABÓ,
Viktor SZERI**

Diorama with Hungarians is an interdisciplinary performance by young artists with very different artistic backgrounds and disciplines. The members of the group work on the axis of dance - performing arts - music - photography and visual arts. The performance is structured in such a way that each of its units is organized by a different artist, each in some way seeking authentic and contemporary, personal ways towards national symbols and emblems, reducing the monumental, propagandistic formats of politics to human scale. The whole performance is held together by the young theatre director, **Lili RAUBINEK**. The national flag and the Hungarian-popular custom of pig slaughtering all appear, but not in the usual empty form, exploited by politics, but in an autobiographical (personal) framing narrated by the participants.



Luca PETRÁNYI, Viktor SZERI, Lili RAUBINEK, Petrik KELEMEN, János R. SZABÓ. Photo: Menyhért HIVESSY

¹⁵ <https://telex.hu/belfold/2020/10/01/libernyak-politika-liberalis-orban-viktor-szo-eredete>

My favorite scene of the performance is when **János R. SZABÓ**, a photographer tells us the story of a pig slaughter in a small village in Eastern Hungary, not emphasizing the macho toughness of this folk custom, as for example the Hungarian Prime Minister used to do with the same topic, but with showing all its communal intimacy, bringing this personal experience closer to those who have perhaps never participated in such an event and perhaps do not plan to do so. And in the next scene, we all move around in Trafó, holding each other's shoulders. The aim of *Diorama with Hungarians* is to use these mostly empty yet equally familiar symbols to create a sense of community via national, urban, folk motifs, between the people present at Trafó that evening, whether they are Hungarian or not.

PETŐFI-ANNIVERSARY

Péter FÁBIÁN: Barguzin (Ciróka Puppet Theatre, Kecskemét) and Tamás FODOR – András SZEREDÁS: Daguerreotype (Studio K - Budapest)



Melike BALLAG and Katalin HOMMONAL Photos

Perhaps the most canonical (also considered 'national') poet in Hungarian literature, Sándor PETŐFI, was a nineteenth-century poet who died in the Hungarian freedom fight in 1849. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth, the Hungarian government dedicated the year 2023 as a 'Petőfi year', with the unpleasant consequence that everything in theatre must (also) be connected to Petőfi. Even the calls for proposals for theatre education programs (traditionally dealing with social issues of contemporary reality) could be chosen in 2022 only from the works of four canonical (dead) authors (one of them being Petőfi himself) or

else, the topic of the 'family' was also possible.¹⁶ It is no wonder that in 2023, Sándor Petőfi will be seen in theatres everywhere, as this is what Hungarian government pays for. But when a young generation keeps hearing that you are "unpatriotic Liberians", they are forced to take a closer look at the concept of "nation" and to start thinking about what the word "Hungarian" actually means, beyond the slogans.

In Kecskemét, **Péter FÁBIÁN's Barguzin** is a theatrical production dedicated to a parody of the myth about Petőfi, according to which Petőfi did not really die in 1849, but was sent to Russia and ended his life in Barguzin. This myth has been parodied by several poets in the past, also an

¹⁶ <https://nka.hu/kiemelt-kategoriak/archivum/palyazati-felhivasok/muveszeti-fotematikaju-allando-kollegiumok-palyazati-felhivasok/szinhazmuveszet-220926/>

anthology has been published on the subject, poet Ákos SZILÁGYI has also dedicated a persona to the poetry of "Sándor POST-PETŐFI", and in 2011 the Mohácsi-brothers also worked with this urban-mythical motif. In Péter Fábri's production, this urban legend serves as a parodic tool for archaism, at the same time it is about the preservation of diverse cultures and languages, and thus about the love of poetry in one's mother tongue.

We can see dead puppet-corpses of soldiers on stage in the first scene of **Daguerreotype in Stúdió K**. Are these corpses of soldiers who died in the 1948-49 revolution in which age the play takes place? Or are they corpses of Ukranian soldiers today?



Tamás Fodor. Photo: Gyula KINCSES

The production directed by **Tamás FODOR** leaves both interpretations open. At the end the text (written by **András SZEREDÁS** and **Tamás FODOR**) also makes the other layer of the contemporary reading explicit. While in between, the piece itself is about the widow of the national poet, Sándor PETŐFI, about her literary career motivations and how she can survive in the Hungarian society in the 19th century as a woman without the famous husband. The production focuses on the woman aspect of the 'PETŐFI-narrative', introducing to us this unknown woman through the usage of puppets (designed by **Ilona NÉMETH**) and via two brilliant actresses, **Melitta PALLAGI** and **Katalin HOMONNAI** supported by the wonderful **Lajos SPILÁK**. The director, **Tamás FODOR** celebrated his 80th birthday last year. He was an

underground artist before 1989 and a politician and an artist after 1989, the founder of Stúdió K Theatre. In 2022 he has been awarded an honorary 'independent Kossuth-award' (the highest rank state prize for artists in Hungary) by professionals of contemporary Hungarian theatre. The prize has been given to supplement the official one which he would well deserve, but which version he will probably never get from Fidesz, as in this system it only goes to loyal artists in contemporary Hungary with very few exceptions.

Collaborative Theater Forum in Debrecen Manifesto of the Independent Performing Arts Alliance

SZÍVHANG Ensemble: IT COULD BE DIFFERENT and KÁVA: OUR SCHOOL

A conference on collaborative (or 'community') theatre was held at the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen in Eastern Hungary. This branch of applied theatre has been relatively popular among theatre education and applied theatre companies recently, but rarely can also be found in certain public theatres/production houses (Örkény, MU in Budapest). The conference collected all the professionals of the field who came out with a collaborative production in 2021/2022. **Most probably it was the last such occasion, as the political takeover of the applied theatre field is happening right now: in 2023 the Déryné Program connected to Attila VIDNYÁNSZKY started its own giga applied theatre program completely neglecting all the applied theatre professionals and artists who have so far been working at the field.**¹⁷

At the conference, the Csokonai also presented its first own collaborative theatre production, *Abraham*, featuring local civilians. KÁVA Theatre Education Company also presented the film version of their production "*Aziskoláját!*" (*Our School*), featuring teachers as experts in the Rimini Protocoll-sense.¹⁸ The performance was particularly relevant, as the teachers' had already gone on strike at the time of its opening night protesting against the scandalously low salaries, work conditions and the extent of centralization. "Even before the cost of living crisis, Hungarian teachers felt underpaid, earning approximately €520-560 per month after more than a decade on the job. In comparison, the average price of an apartment in Budapest is €400-600."¹⁹ The government's answer to the teachers was the random dismissal of some of the protesters, and most recently the Ministry is preparing to terminate the civil service status of teachers.²⁰ Teachers in the performance played fictional scenes from stories they had told in rehearsals and these were written into dramatic format

¹⁷ <https://szinhaz.online/kultup-belenosz-a-kulturaba-cimmel-inditott-programot-kozepiskolasoknak-a-deryne-program/?fbclid=IwAR1leCgCiD5dhB83ev3pgIKNk1JMIzxn0wwQeOuUJUDG20jlceuaJW861exU>

¹⁸ <https://kavaszhaz.hu/citizen-theatre/>

¹⁹ <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/12/09/strikes-sackings-and-soaring-prices-teacher-anger-rages-in-hungary>

²⁰ https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/20230303/megszuntetne-a-pedagogusok-kozalkalmazotti-jogviszonyat-a-belugyminiszterium-600790?fbclid=IwAR0vEdsCYYuZaXDkaNbreIzEocGy_oBposy6ur4BhGyCUUfEboHikzklKzo

by Júlia RÓBERT, although the scenes were evidently not far from reality. In these scenes (director: András SEREGLEI), the teachers were typically forced to fight for their students and for their own pedagogical sovereignty at the mercy of their superiors and the central authorities.



Eszter PADOS, Anett LAKATOS, Róza SZABÓ. Fotó: Gabriella CSOSZÓ

PADOS, and assistant director Lilla PROICS. Readers of our newsletter have already met them in case of *Long Live Regina!* (*Hungarian Letter of News*, 2017/November), and in their third performance they worked again with director Edit Romankovics, but also with new members.

Originally the members of Szívhang wanted to work together with Roma and non-Roma locals from Szomolya, but when the Roma participants arrived, the others stayed away as a reaction. This in itself inspired the participants for what to talk about. The process consisted of sociodrama workshops, a six-month preparatory phase, and finally a performance, *Long Live Regina!*, in which Roma women talked about their traumas due to childbirth and the Hungarian health system, racism and so on. The only professional and only non-Roma theatre participant was actress Lilla SÁROSDI, a member of the former Krétakör theatre, who played most of the roles from the majority society.

In their third performance, the company has kept the theme (systemic problems of health care and giving birth), but this time with a set that evokes the hospital environment. An even bigger change is, that this time the old participants are joined by new members, Roma men, a non-Roma woman and a birth activist (Renáta BÁDER, Andrea Polgár CSÖRGŐNÉ, Barbara HORVÁTH, Róbert HORVÁTH, Rita HORVÁTH, Zsanett HORVÁTH, Ildikó JUHACSEK, Szonja KÁDÁR, Anett

The most important performance in the program at Debrecen, which included round tables, screenings and presentations, was a recent show by the Szívhang Company (Heartbeat). Szívhang is an ensemble formed in Szomolya, a segregated, northern town of Hungary. The initiators of the project are theatre-makers from Budapest, director Edit ROMANKOVICS, sociodrama experts Kata HORVÁTH and Eszter

LAKATOS, Marianna LAKATOS, Rudolf LAKATOS, Róza SZABÓ, Natália SZITAI), and also by the company's background workers (Romankovics, Horváth and Proics). As they are all equally amateurs in the acting sense, despite the fact that the latter participants are theatre professionals (directors, researchers and a critic), the civilian character of their stage presence becomes the theatrical expression of solidarity and shared responsibility with the people of Szomolya. The performance is regularly performed locally, for local communities and also regularly at the Trafó in Budapest.

New Venues

FüSzi, STEREO Művház, Golem

Recently, a number of community spaces have opened in independent theatre areas thanks to community donations. In September 2022, FüSzi, the first base of the Independent Theatre Budapest, an Independent Roma Cultural Square, opened in Budapest, close to Trafó. The aim of the space is to give young Roma and non-Roma artists the opportunity to meet, develop and create together. Since last September, Independent Theatre has been channeling its educational activities here, with the aim of turning young people into, as they say, "successful artists, trainers, professionals in different fields and active citizens. Our mission is to create a sustainable, independent and open environment where groups are free to create, present performances, organise workshops. FüSzi aims to bring culture to those who currently have no access to it." FüSzi currently



Photo: Bálint BUDAI

hosts Independent Theatre's series of talks on the past and will be the venue for the premiere of Rodrigo Balogh's punk opera, *Birds of Decay*, in March.

STEREO Művház

(Culture House) is the new cultural workshop and community space of the 8th district in Budapest. It is the base of Martin BOROSS' theatre company STEREO Akt. The name

(művház) alludes the name of the state-run cultural spaces before the regime change, a popular

abbreviation for community centers. As they write, "The Művház is a socially and communally engaged cultural arena, a contemporary, 21st century art house.

An incubation and meeting space, where we will create a rehearsal space and community office for those who want a welcoming and inspiring environment for their creative or community work. We welcome primarily performing arts creative processes, but we also want to provide a home for any vision with a focus on contemporary culture and community." The first project to take place will be the cross-genre **STEREO10 Festival** in the first half of May, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the company, and where 10 community-organizing initiatives by companies/creators/ NGOs will have the opportunity to be part of the festival with their program. As they write, "To celebrate this anniversary, we have decided to open a new chapter, focusing on collaboration, solidarity and the power of sharing, along with our core values of contemporary (theatre) art, participation and community."

Golem Theatre

Thirdly, the **Golem Theatre** is a Jewish theatre in Budapest, which, according to its own credo, is first and foremost a theatre, second it is Jewish, and third, it is „from” and „at” Budapest. Their shows are aimed not only at the Jewish society but at Hungarian society as a whole, and most recently they have established their own base in Budapest, where, in addition to



STEREO Culture House

Gólem's own productions, they also present works by the former K2, now Apertura Company (among others), one of the last young independent theatre companies. They have a contract with the 7th district, Budapest to use the new building for 10 years.

March Tours – Sweden and Italy

ILDIKÓ GÁSPÁR – GÖTEBORG STADTSTEATER; KRISTÓF KELEMEN, BENCE GYÖRGY PÁLINKÁS – CONTRAR, STOCKHOLM; KRISZTA SZÉKELY – TEATRO STABILE TORINO

Recent tours include two trips to Sweden. One of them is related to Kristóf KELEMEN who has reported in his newsletter that their cast (Angéla EKE, Katalin HOMMONAI, Kristóf KELEMEN, Márton KRISTÓF, Bence György PÁLINKÁS) was on their way to Stockholm in March where they played the post-fact documentary play, the [Hungarian Acacia](#). Bence György PÁLINKÁS and Kristóf KELEMEN, the creators of this show got this invitation from a new theatre venue, [Conträr](#). After Germany, Switzerland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Romania, Greece and the United States they presented this political-botanical satire about Hungary's most patriotic tree to the Swedish audience. Kelemen also reported to have won a scholarship to participate in the [International Forum](#) at Berliner Theatertreffen between 10-28 May 2023, where participants will watch performances, attend artist talks and workshops.



Hungarian Acacia-cast. Left to right: Bence György Pálinkás, Angéla Eke, Márton Kristóf, Katalin Hommonai, Kristóf Kelemen.

Kriszta SZÉKELY's *Richard III*. opens in Teatro Stabile Torino, the adaptation has been made by Ármin SZABÓ-SZÉKELY, while the leading role is played by Paolo PIEROBON, the director's former Vanya. Székely is a permanent member of Katona József Theatre Budapest.

The second tour to Sweden in March is related to the theatre director Ildikó GÁSPÁR, who made her first appearance at the Göteborg Stadtsteatern. She worked on Camus's *Caligula* and chose an actress for the role of Caligula: Andrea



Ildikó GÁSPÁR. Photo: Judit HORVÁTH



Kriszta SZÉKELY. Photo: Annamária KAZIMIR

Edwards. This time she worked with Hungarian artists for the background work: music by Lili Flóra MATISZ, visuals by Lili IZSÁK, costumes: Luca SZABADOS, choreographer: Veronika SZABÓ (*who also has her own directing practice, but prefers to work with collaborative methods*), lighting designer: Tamás BÁNYAI, video designer: András JUHÁSZ (who was already involved in the production *Death Rode Out of Persia* – sidenote to the visitors to the dunaPart Hungarian Platform 2019). Ildikó GÁSPÁR starts her 2nd work in Riga this May, staging Ferenc MOLNÁR's *Liliom*.



Andrea Edwards, Hans Brorson. Foto: Ola Kjelbye

The Next Generation

NOÉMI SZÁNTUSZ, ZSÓFIA REBEKA KOZMA, TÓZSA MIKOLT, KLAUDIA GARDENÖ, ORSOLYA FODOR, HANNA CSERI

It gave some hope in March 2023, that the Trafó House of Contemporary Art hosted the Next Festival, a festival dedicated to the next generation of theatre makers. That was the month when the drastic withdrawal of funds from the independent theatre sector was revealed. While Trafó also hosted the Crisis Forum, initiated by members of the Independent Performing Arts Alliance, it was also the hub, that, in this seemingly hopeless situation, organized a festival to draw attention to the experimental theatre of the future. Some of the young artists below were

there, others were not, but they are also connected to Trafó in a way. I commend them all to the attention of the international community.



Noémi SZÁNTUSZ in The Big Duck-show. Photo: Róbert RÉVÉSZ

Noémi SZÁNTUSZ is a performer, educated at the Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania and at Freeszfe in Budapest, Hungary. She studied acting in Cluj and performance art at freeszfe. In her performance *The Big Duck-show*, she mixes the roles of a Szekler girl and a performer from the big city in an

autobiographical performance about the social expectations women face when looking for a partner, and invites her audience to a frenetic wedding, where she even chooses her future husband (she didn't succeed). In her second performance *Because it would be so boring without me*, she has moved a whole drawing school to the Trafó (led by Balázs FISCHER, András MOHÁCSI) and the audience is made to pose as models for the artists: it is a question, how is the protagonist here, is it us, the models, or the unknown artists, the experts, drawing us? If we are open to talk, we can get to know these people. "Are we interested in the other person's story, are we listening?" asks the performance, which somehow, just like *The Big Duck-show*, tries to make us to make connections.

Zsófia Rebeka KOZMA is a performer who has completed the first performance training in freeszfe. Her exam work *Present Imperfect* was a one-person autobiographical performance in which she told the story of her own failures. Her most recent work, *Shmita*, is a reflection on the possibilities of a year of rest. As she writes about the show, "Every seven years, in the Torah year 'Shmita' - which in Hebrew means letting go - the Torah says that the land must be left fallow and cultivation is forbidden." The performance is a 7X7 minute improvisational collaboration between dancers, musician, light, video and audience.

Mikólt TÓZSA also graduated in the first performance class of freeszfe. Her first performance, *God, Homeland, Kitchen*, was an autobiographical piece about what it is like to be a young woman in Hungary in the 2020s. The performance is built around a visual dramaturgy, with Tózsa

auctioning off the objects left in her home after a break-up in the first, overwhelming scene, and later even Viktor Orbán speaks on women's issues in Hungary. In her other experimental performance *It's a MATCH - or will be - maybe*, TÓZSA reflects on the ambivalent relationship between loneliness and relationship dependency. "The event is a blind date with the audience, a counterpoint to online encounters, an opportunity - not with romantic intentions - for real encounters."



Zsófia Rebeca KOZMA in *Present Imperfect*. Photo: Olga KOCSI

Orsolya FODOR is a puppet director from SZFE, currently studying at the performance class of freeszfe. She has created in-class-performances and a sensitizing show on autism in Trafó, *Clapping the Bell*. It is based on interviews and discussions.

Klaudia GARDENÖ is a theatre director who feels at home in both Hungarian and Swedish culture and is interested in new directions in dramaturgy. She tried herself out in urban walks,

when she guided her audience through an app, she made a traditional performance of a classical Hungarian drama by István Örkény, but she chose a piece by the author with a dramaturgy that is not quite familiar. She also directed Attila KOMÁN's play, *The Journeys of K*, in which, instead of the realist tradition, we follow the story of a bag of cocaine (played by Zsombor



Mikolt TÓZSA in *God Home Kitchen*. Photo: Olga KOCSI

KÖVESI), who welcomes the audience as a presenter, has stand-up etudes and travels from South America to Hungary.

Hanna CSERI's first major production, based on Ladislav Fuks' *Mr Mundstock*, is a Holocaust puppet show that is not without a certain form of humor. In addition to adult puppet theatre productions, she has also directed for the big stage, with her most successful work based on Ulrich Hub's *The Last Lamb* at the Budapest Puppet Theatre. Her specialty, besides her unique sense of humor, is that she often composes the music for her performances.

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