

# **Fifty Years of difference - when do we start to learn from each other?**

## **Short summary of the European Theatre project (English translation)**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The European theatre project "Fifty Years Difference" has been developed together with partners of five European countries and Poland during the first part of the year 2000. Performances have taken place in six European countries during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2000. The performance places were: Monterotondo, Amsterdam, Stendal, Beetzendorf, Potsdam, Luton, Paris, Wroclaw, Halle, Weimar and Wittenberg.

The ensemble consisted of 23 young and old actors, professional and amateurs, of six nations. Their age ranged from 16 to 79 years. The languages used in the performance were German, English, Polish, French, Italian, and Dutch and Portuguese.

"Fifty Years Difference" became a journey through the last 50 years of the countries involved. By the intercultural exchange of the generations the project was instrumental in the awareness of historical and cultural correlations on a European level.

### **2.2. Theme and Preparation of the Project**

In the old times, it was quite normal that grandparents could keep on living in their own family or that young people looked for adults as their mentors. The decay of the family structures put them apart and make them forget about their past. Nowadays, youngsters and seniors do not fit into the production system. Therefore, they are not respected, their voice is not taken seriously. they get isolated and start developing stereotyped ideas about each other.

In case we want to reactivate the connections between these two generations, we have to ask the following questions: What do the young generations have to do with the stories of their grandparents? Why should elderly people be interested in their grandchildren's present life? Or what and how can they learn from each other?

These questions were asked during the rehearsal period in each country. The groups researched the development of their societies in their own countries during the last fifty years: the terror of Second World War and its consequences, the Cold War, the anti-democratic Governments, as well as today's Racism and Neo Nazism. The sources came out of Literature, but mostly testimonies and relatives stories from the War and post-war times. We also used the artists personal experiences. From these sometimes-very-hard experiences twenty young and old performers developed a unique show which has never seen in Europe before.

### **2.3. The Development of the Piece**

In Velletri / Italy we were working six days on the preparation of the performance. A plenty of material had been prepared until then. The actors contributed their ideas and stories which had been collected in advance.

The director Rodolfo Garcia evaluated the different scenes and after they had been accepted by everybody we started to work on the dramatic arrangement. Many proposals were eliminated. It was perfect democracy. During the discussions was decided which scenes should become part of the show and which should be removed.

The Spanish director Rodolfo showed an excellent talent to integrate the ensemble. The work of the ensemble was extraordinary: controlled and kind in the way they treated one another, full of respect, playful, very professional without stress or conflicts. Fourteen scenes were prepared, singled out and rehearsed.



3000 spectators in six European countries saw the performance and took part in the discussions. The age of the audience was most of time mixed, young and old people. In Amsterdam there were only old people, in Weimar also. In the other places in Germany there were more young people who attended the performance.

Continuously the spectacle was improved. Before every show there were corrections and completions during the rehearsals in order to adapt it to the varying experiences and technical conditions. Regardless of the language barriers the show was clear and understandable. There was a lot of pantomime, movement and theatrical actions which didn't require text. After every performance discussions took place. A repeated question was why we were presenting facts and incidents without offering solutions for problems. Problems referred to themes like Nazism, racism, intolerance. Emphasis was laid on the given situation where theatre directs the attention on problems and that the spectator takes home the realization of an imperfect world in order to change things in his own surroundings. The most interesting discussions took place in schools at Potsdam, Halle, Weimar, Wroclaw and Wittenberg.

## 2.4. Participants of the Project

For them it was the exchange of ideas, it was the occasion of getting to know one another, getting to know mutual cultures. No one knew each other before and now the friendships have started and it was wonderful. 23 persons taking part in the project took home with themselves a new image of the countries about which they had known little before. In a direct contact many details could be transmitted about participants' country, history, problems of the contemporary times.

For the "old" actors it was the test of the physical strength. Everybody had to travel through six European countries within three weeks. They had to work 12 hours daily and more. For the "young" actors it was the test, to find the right way of communication with the "old ones", to give the respect. The way of working together was for everybody new. It was a great challenge, because everybody had to be all the time actively and had to think constantly for the project. Everybody had a 100% presence on stage. The actors were in same time also authors, what is quite different from the way of working in a professional theatre process. Everybody had constantly to improvise, to develop the scenes and to fulfil the task to have a direct contact with the audience.

Around 100 people in six countries were additionally involved besides the 23 active members of the project. They were responsible for research, organisation, as testimonies, or as artistic directors.

Here are two voices of members of the project as an example: Both of them did not know each other before. They got big friends until today:

Jacek Graca, 16 years old, Wroclaw, Poland

**"Also I have to say that in the end of the tour I didn't see the difference between young and old people in this project - for example, when I spoke with Henryk (72) I felt that he is 16 like me."**

Henryk Teichert, 72 years old, Wroclaw, Poland

**"The participation in the project was the test of my physical strength as well as the opportunities so much different from working in a professional theatre: improvisation, direct contact with the spectator as well as the contact with the youths."**