

PICNIC IN DARK HELSINKI?

DOUBLE AGENTS TRYING TO MAINTAIN CHAOS...

“...Take us for example. Here today in this interview Jukka and I play the roles of a producer and a festival director...”

A: I would like us to speak about how it all started and where you are heading, as well as talking about to be part of an international theatre scene.

H: Should we talk about the stages? The first lasted from 1996 when we started until 2000 and the festival then. Now we are finishing the second stage.

E: If we try not to get it like a post-script. For me, the festival and the network are too different things. There is the network that should be kept very informal and very open, more like an anti-organisation. To maintain a kind of chaos.

Then we have the festival, that wasn't the point of the network from the start, but is a quite natural outcome of the work that we have done. I think that Helsinki needs a theatre festival. This is also why we have put so much effort in organising these festivals.

If we go back to the crash of the Soviet Union, when things started to move in this region. The Baltic countries were geographically nearby, but mentally far away: it was hard to go there and hard to meet people outside the official organisations. Cities were closed. In the mid 90's things changed and it was possible to go there and see what kind of theatre was made. And so we went. First without any financial backing, just to make friends with people. Soon we found out that there were really interesting theatre lives in cities like Tallinn, Riga, Vilnius... Since we were theatre makers ourselves and not representing any organisation, we could meet with people without any expectations. Quite soon we came to meet the right people, the ones that then were starting off. Now many of them are internationally famous. They have made an artistic and also in some case a commercial success. And at the same time left the economical level at which we are working.

This organisation is a generation thing, as we grow older and become more established we change. But I would like to keep Baltic Circle as an open and informal network concentrating on phenomena that are now starting to happen. We are looking for people that are on the edge of something – whether they are young or old.

H: For me it looks like that the network

H: The network is not working. It just is.

E: It is an open house, a house with open doors. Those who want can go there.

H: It is a meeting point. The meetings happen often during festivals, not only the Baltic Circle festival but also the Homo Novus festival in Riga, Baltoscandal in Estonia, the New Drama Action festival in Lithuania, the Baltiski Dom festival in St.Petersburg where we have organised big seminars for our – network.

E: I feel like a double agent. On the one hand we have the grants and the funding, so we need names and a structure, on the other hand we have the living fluid of creative theatre making. The point for us is to work against the kind of heavy organisations that the festivals tend to become.

H: That is the paradox of the producer.

E: Yes. I see theatre in society as a kind of surface between an invisible mental sphere and a concrete physical sphere where things get flesh and become concrete. Theatre should be testing the political truth in society. Therefore every society tends to restrict theatre in some respect. There is ambivalence: supporting and restricting at the same time. Working in this double field of ambivalence is very interesting and it is also what we are doing. On one hand

Theatre is a small unit thing. Handmade.

in the future is different from the festival. People are coming and going. Although it started like a Baltic region thing it is expanding. Now we have some friends from Ukraine, Armenia, Montenegro, Croatia. People in Italy have been interested in this area as well. The network is fluid.

A: Network is great, but it always puzzles me when talking about networks, that what do they do, or do they actively do anything?

we organise ourselves and build structures around the phenomena. The structures start to direct what we do, how we see things, and guide our awareness of what happens.

H: I have noticed during the last 10 years that it is very easy to agree with Erik's artistic points of views.

A: The paradox is also created by the structures that funding depends.

H: We are doing this like a piece of art. We take risks. Putting 80 freelancers together to work during three months and tell them that we haven't decided



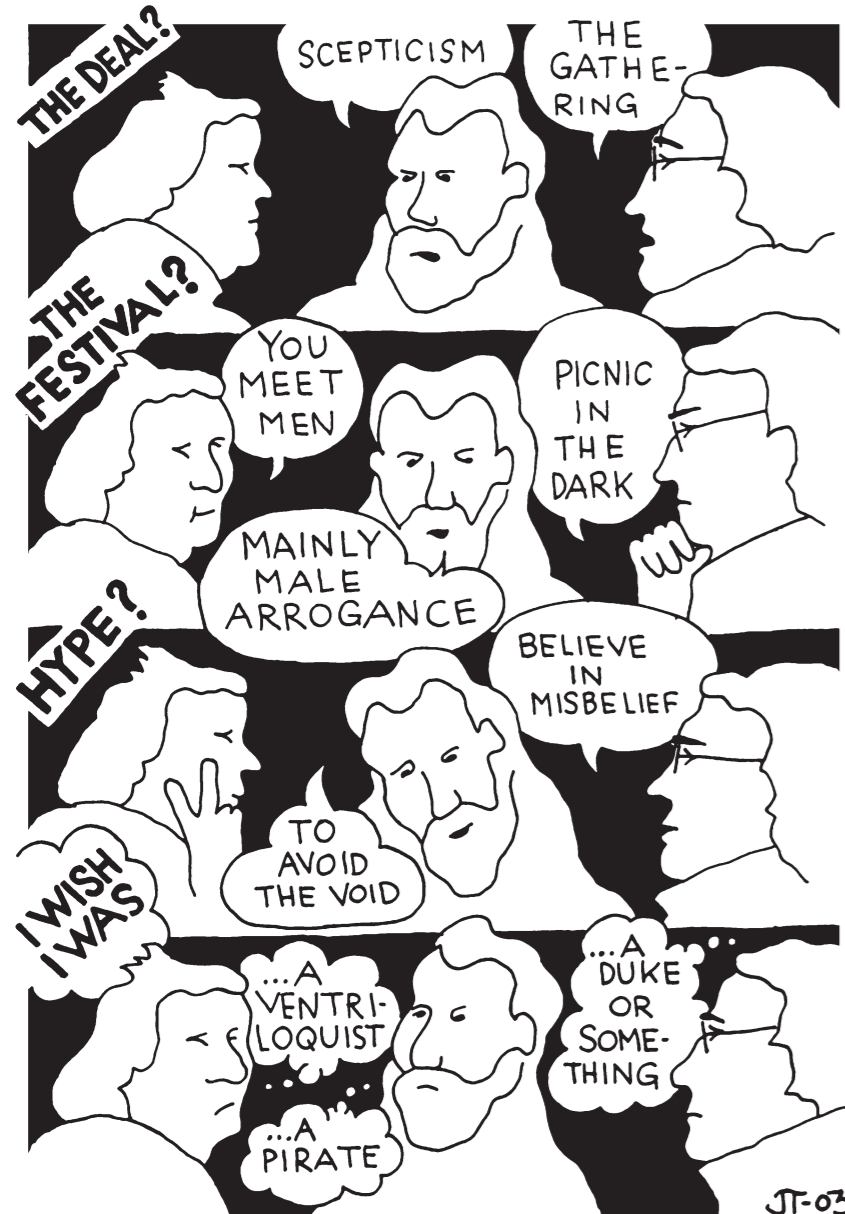
E = ERIK SÖDERBLOM *theatre director & artistic director*

H = JUKKA HYTTI *producer*

A = ANNIKA TUDEER *editor*

E & H started the Baltic Circle project in 1996.

Written by Annika Tudeer | Photos: Krista Keltanen | Strip: Jaakko Toijanniemi



the festival programme yet? The latest premier of a guest performance was a few weeks ago in Sweden.

E: This is what this festival is compared to most others. We are not going to performance shops to buy, then trying to sell them to someone else. From the start we are a group of theatre makers. The basic is the meeting of theatre makers. It is a picnic in dark Helsinki.

A: Do you have a theme for this picnic-festival?

E: One of the main reasons to arrange this festival is to find out what its theme will be. The themes of the festival will show us the themes of theatre of today. One theme will surely be that of changing borderlines. All these walls in society that crushed in the last decade. We will see how this reflects on theatre. The former political borders between east and west are not there. The genre borders are not there anymore, theatre mingles with dance, cinema and vice-versa. Even the border between what you could call life and theatre is blurred. Life becomes a set of stagings. This is a theme at the festival. How the phenomenon of theatre today is changing and moving in an interesting way away from theatre. Take us for example. Here today in this interview Jukka and I play the roles of a producer and a festival director. This is also theatre - you have to fulfil the act of a theatre maker in the face of publicity. This is another ambivalence.

A: You are talking about society as a spectacle, where the public sphere is a stage and everyday life is more or less a staging. How do you see the political aspect of this theatricalisation of society?

If you think about the trinity: church, society and the companies. There was a time when the church was to support society and take care of the weak. Now society has the same role in relation to the companies. Society is there to sanctify the companies and clean away the wrecks – the unemployed and the sick. But the real political power is hiding itself in the companies. In companies you may vote if you have shares.

Without shares you have no right to vote. The new democracies are the democracies of the owners, of those who have, but not of those who do not have.

The state does not have real power anymore. Companies have their own flags; they pay in options or in shares, which really is the currency of the company. At the same the currency of the national country is either not there anymore, or a mere technical matter.

H: This reverts back to older times. This kind of community in a company is like the feudal system. They are more vulnerable and therefore build fortresses.

E: We live in feudal states, with cities build around the fortresses of commerce, led by chief executive-owners - the dukes of today. If you are inside you are safe. Outside there is no law at all. You are inside if you have a job. If you drop out you are lawless.

H: The state is so connected to the business companies and the global economy, so the state is demanding the third sector to take more responsibility.

A: This is quite different from the 70's or the 80's when you could pinpoint power structures in society. Today, because of global economy, relations and structures are not graspable. Somehow this also reflects back in the making of theatre and the structures governing theatre.

E: As I suppose we'll see in this festival also. Attempts to find out were the power hides, who or what is really ruling us.

Theatre is a small unit thing. Handmade. And at the end a very cheap art form, compared to many others. Basically it is people gathering in a room to hear a story. This festival is there for people for whom theatre is a way of constructing and making their world visible. Whether they are audience or theatre makers. Theatre is not just the building. Theatre is a way of looking at things, of relating to things. With the crush of the genre borders we see this theatrical and carnivalistic way of relating to the world spreading out from the theatre into related art forms – an example of that are the fictional documentary films shown in the festival. Theatre is an attitude towards life.

A: I would like to go back to what Erik said about the need of personification in the art scene. On one hand you need a visible official persona to embody your artistic ideas – you are a commodity. On the other hand we have invisible networks that are needed in order to promote the ideas that this persona-commodity is bringing forward. So we are operating in a world where visibility is connected to visible personas, but behind them are invisible and anonymous networks. Where one prominent feature is that they consist of these individuals.

E: Internet is that. The anonymity is also a shelter for a new kind of power and a new kind of democracy. People start to think in a new way. The official truth that we are presented with is clearly seen as theatre. Everybody knows that television news is a format. The format is ruling everything that is shown of the world. A collage. Where is the truth? It hides somewhere.

A: What about theatres in this global market? They are rather bound to smaller communities. What about collaborating across borders interculturally and transnationally?

H: Transnationality or internationality in a work cannot be a self-value. I have seen so many artificial co-productions, where the main thing has been to collect people together and then collect money. We try to avoid this kind of international co-production.

E: Things must happen organically. The reason cannot be that you have to have three countries or five countries or whatever to get EU-support. This is part of the ambivalence I was talking about. I see these kind of EU rules as a vehicle by the establishment to make

theatre rather not happen.

H: So we have to fight against these kinds of structures and use them at the same time.

E: Let us put it this way: Jukka has been hard at work to collect money for a party. To be honest – what I really would like the festival to be is a one-week party. That somebody else is paying for.

H: And my task is then to make the report look like as if there hasn't been a party at all.

E: You can also see this festival as a one week on performance.

A: With you Erik as director.

E: Hopefully a surrealistic one.

A: So, what is going to happen after this?

E: After the festival? The future you mean?

H: We have some plans. But let's do this festival first. And hope we will survive.

E: And Helsinki needs a theatre festival.

“This is what this festival is compared to most others. We are not going to performance shops to buy, then trying to sell them to someone else...”

UNEMPLOYED, DRUNK & COMPLETELY LOST

The season's new productions reveal the real Finnish life

I went to see three different performances, which had a premiere this fall: **Hamlet** by Ryhmäteatteri, **Unnecessary People** by KOM-teatteri and **Close calls and Helping Hands** (also known as Comedy Blues) by Q-teatteri. All these plays have very much in common, despite of a fact that Hamlet has been written over a 400 years ago, and the other two are new plays.

KOM-theatre's UNNECESSARY PEOPLE deals with domestic violence, and the very common problem in almost all western countries: unemployment. A man loses his job and starts to feel useless, depressed. He doesn't know any other way to release his feelings than violence. Another man is a teacher, who has in turn too much work and responsibilities, and he starts to spice up his life by cheating his wife with a young girl.

All the people in this play are lost with themselves. No matter what the reasons are, everybody is unhappy and unable to deal with one's negative feelings. They feel hopeless, useless and unnecessary. The dominating theme is fear. A wife is afraid of her husband, a husband is afraid of himself and his own actions. The teacher is kind of afraid of the whole world.

In **CLOSE CALLS AND HELPING HANDS** people feel just as lost with themselves. But if in Unnecessary People the characters were still trying to live a normal life, here they have reached the rock bottom. In this play we meet alcoholics and drop-outs who are struggling with mental problems. They are trying to find comfort from the religious choir, where they literally sing their troubles away. But is singing and Jesus enough to save oneself?

In **Mika Myllyaho's** version of **HAMLET** the main ideas are fear, revenge and anger.

Mutual to the other plays is also an idea, that we are so small in this chaotic world, and the society is trying to steal our identity and personality by making us just the parts of the machine. If one loses his job, like the man in Unnecessary People, he is no longer a part of the machine. That leads quickly to the situation that one feels nothing but a load to the society.

Fear is a way to control people and the world. Today is full of things to be afraid of, like terrorism, war, disease, and different kind of environmental catastrophes. Media feeds up those fears. The pulse of the world is fast, and all kind of different pressures are filling up our lives. No wonder why so many people feel lost and hopeless, and don't know how to get along with themselves, their relationships and the whole chaotic world.

Theatre is a mirror that reflects all these things which are going on in the society. I think that those three plays don't exaggerate when they describe today's Finland. Of course the life isn't that way with everybody, but they show an example of what have happened to some people, and what could happen to you too. Especially Unnecessary People is more like a documentary, than a play.

I think there are several reasons why these kinds of plays have to be made. They can open your eyes to realize how good your own life is. They are also a way to discuss about injustices of society. And if nothing else, in a good old Aristotelian way: they are a way to experience pity and sympathy for the characters and that way to cleanse those feelings.

These three plays don't leave you feeling totally depressed. Behind everything you can always see a glimpse of hope. But by seeing the plays you can experience all kind of negative feelings, and when you leave the theater, you have a change to feel clean and empty, in a good way.

Written by Susa Nokelainen

Ryhmäteatteri: HAMLET
Directed by Mika Myllyaho
KOM-teatteri: UNNECESSARY PEOPLE
Directed by Reko Lundán
Q-teatteri: CLOSE CALLS AND HELPING HANDS
Directed by Esa Kirkkopelto



Jani Volanen as Hamlet in Ryhmäteatteri's HAMLET-150 bpm | PHOTO: Pirje Mykkänen

'A STORY ABOUT THE WORLD WHERE HEARTS BEAT 150 TIMES IN A MINUTE.'

"With fear you rule the world"
says Mika Myllyaho, the director of William Shakespeare's Hamlet.

Written by Karoliina Kuosmanen, based on director Mika Myllyaho's interview on 11th Nov, 2003

- Fear is a weapon, the one with which you get people, even humankind on your side, it is the instrument by which we are being controlled. With fear you rule the world, says **Mika Myllyaho**, the director of William Shakespeare's Hamlet.

In Hamlet you can see fragments and feelings connected in the nowadays situation. It is a world of c control.

- In the end, the fear is probably in it that as long as we are not being bombed, we go and destroy the other civilisations; it does not matter as long as we are safe. All the time people are being intimidated that soon again the bomb will burst, that sort of gives the mandate to destroy a little bit more in somewhere else, says Myllyaho.

Hamlet's scenery is very interesting and unique. The set is dominated by a catwalk, a metaphor of power. The people who are in power want to show oneself on it – power does not exist if it is not to be seen. There are also cameras and televisions on the stage, the atmosphere is a sort of claustrophobic. Everybody is being watched so 'that the society would be more safe'. On the other hand, the cameras reveal to the audience the action that takes place outside the stage; thus the inner world is in the middle of everything.

When we watch the play's gravediggers holding the skulls – to be or not to be – on the screen, in the same way as we watch bones from the news every evening. The border between reality and fiction blurs and the image turns into ironic. Television is a tool, through which we see the thematic of revenge, in the play as in the real life.

There's a lot of whispering and calculations in the court. In Shakespeare's world the possession happens through conspiracy. One has to know more in order to have the power; knowledge is power. The sovereign wants to control everybody, yet also he is being controlled. The control actually creates more insecurity.

- The controlling of people increases, it develops all the time, soon eyes are being scanned, we lose our identity, more and more they get into our skin, in some point we all have a bar code, and we become machine items which are needed just to do something.

FINNISH DRAMA ON THE ROAD TO CONQUERING THE WORLD

It is more than likely that Finnish drama will invade international stages on a vast scale in the coming years. Theatres will fight over who gets the rights to the latest play whenever new Finnish drama comes out. Every scene and line will be snatched fresh from the author's hands. And as soon as the playwright has got a word down on paper, it will be instantly translated into numerous languages and accompanied by chants of joy. In a triumphal procession the Finnish play will be carried to all corners of the world with a smile on its face, since joy shared is always joy doubled. But this world invasion will, by no means, be warlike conquest. On the contrary, because as Finnish texts are ravishing the crowds abroad, there will also be international drama from far and near flooding onto Finnish stages like bright spring streams gleaming in sunlight. "How on earth could we have been so simple" will the abundantly praised and awarded plays say to themselves whilst staring into the sunset in some beautiful corner of Europe, "to have thought that drama is in some way...or in any way could...or even in the least possible way... be confined to any geographical, let alone linguistic boundaries!"

There is still some way to go, however, to this serene sunset scenery. We must be brave, yet humble and wipe those airborne castles away for a while. We must start from the very beginning.

Juha Jokela's MOBILE HORROR which gained wide success in Finland is a comedy about a small IT firm's fight for survival in the world of mergers after the burst of the dot-com bubble.

Tuomas Timonen is one of Finnish drama's freshest and most productive voices in recent years. **ELÄMÄNMÄKI** is a historical drama about the illnesses and cures of our time.

Minna Harjunieni's KYMEN TAJU depicts life in a Finnish small town which has a big paper factory, a wide river and which is far from everything, yet closer to America than to Europe.

This vanguard of Finnish dramatist will set out on their international conquest from Q-teatteri's small stage, Puoli-Q, on a most unexpected moment; on Sunday morning at 11 a.m. The public readings of these Finnish plays will, of course, be given in English, since that's the lingo we all know. And why that is, I wonder?

Written by Jukka Heinänen
director of the Finnish Public Reading 23.11. at 11 a.m., Puoli-Q

"How on earth could we have been so simple to have thought that drama is in some way... or in any way could... or even in the least possible way... be confined to any geographical, let alone linguistic boundaries!"

- I have wanted to correctly analyse fear and those role models which we have. For example Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are young and successful, they do not have own identity, they are completely being bossed around. And how the royal couple, King Claudius and Queen Gertrud are monumental and archetype like our real rulers.

The Hamlet's world is eternal, it speaks about the odd and the endless cruelty of man. In our world we find a lot of people like Claudius, who by killing his brother gets everything but ends up with nothing. Cold business men who make thousands of people unemployed... Do they hunger for power and success so much that they do not any longer see the results of their actions?

Even though the play may seem hilarious, it is pessimistic. Myllyaho's Hamlet proceeds in such tempo that you do not even realize that everyone will disappear somewhere in the world of television. The end is silence.

When people are afraid, their beat is hectic – 150 bpm. That is the pulse of our society.



Leo Revino in Q-teatteri's CLOSE CALLS AND HELPING HANDS | PHOTO: Janja Ahola

www.Q-teatteri.fi

BALTIC CIRCLE

THE BALTIC CIRCLE FESTIVAL NEWSLETTER #1

THE STORY OF KASPAR HAUSER
JAUVAIS RIGAS TEATRIS (LAT)
24.11. 19:00 – Aleksanterin teatteri

AXIS OF EVIL
TEATER TRIBUNALEN (SWE)
25.11. 14:00 & 19:00 – Mediatekka Lume

THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
JAUVAIS RIGAS TEATRIS (LAT)
25.11. 19:00 – Aleksanterin teatteri

DADA
KALEIDOSKOP TEATRET (DEN)
25.+26.11. 19:30 – Q-teatteri

BLUE MOON:
AN EXPERIMENT TO PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF SOUL
PLASMA & TRANSEUROPA FESTIVAL (SUI/GER/AUT/NOR)
26.11. 19:00 + 27.11. 15:00 & 19:00 – Kokoteatteri

SEX IN THE WARZONE
KATE PENDRY & BIT TEATERGARASJEN (GBR/NOR)
27.11. 19:30 – teatteri Takomo

SWAN LAKE
VON KRAHLI TEATER (EST)
28.+29.11. 19:00 – Mediatekka Lume

ARABIAN NIGHT
NEW DRAMA ACTION FESTIVAL & CEZARIO GRUPE (LIT)
28.+29.11. 19:30 – Q-teatteri

TAXI DRIVERS
VON KRAHLI TEATER & BALTIC CIRCLE (EST/FIN)
28.+29.+30.11. 19:00 + 29.11. 15:00 – Kokoteatteri

PEEPSHOW MARILYN:
GENTLEMEN PREFER DEAD BLONDES
KATE PENDRY & BIT TEATERGARASJEN (GBR/NOR)
29.11. 16:00-20:00, Tuurikatu 16c

FINNISH CASE A SHOWCASE OF FINNISH THEATRE
PUBLIC READINGS NEW DRAMA FROM THE BALTIC SEA REGION
THEATRE PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION KEN REVOLDS
CLUBS+DISCUSSIONS+FILMS+VIDEOS
21.11. – 30.11. 2003 HELSINKI

THE NEWSLETTER comes out four times during the festival: FRI 21.11. | MON 24.11. | WED 26.11. | FRI 28.11.2003
The Newsletter can be found at all venues and at Hotel Helka, Pohjoinen Rautatiekatu 23. The stories can also be read at www.Q-teatteri.fi

THE NEWSLETTER STAFF: Erik Söderblom, editor-in-chief | Johanna Ropponen, editor | Annika Tudeer, contributor | Mikko-Oskari Koski, contributor
Karoliina Kuosmanen, contributor | Susa Nokelainen, contributor | Maria Lyytinen, translator | Patrik Pesoniuss, graphic designer | Matti Väisänen, www-updating

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