

Quartet: egészség-ziveli, santé-zdroví

(Subjectiv festival-diary from Péter Jónás)

We were sitting in a wine-pub of Eger in the spring of 2006 with Laurent Maindon, a French theatre director. He arrived to lead a theatre master class with French students of the University of Eger, with the support of the twin regions Heves and Loire Atlantique. He was telling me his vision of an international travelling theatre festival. Theatre people often dream, that is their job. Thousands of dreams are being born daily in the theatres of the world, with wine, beers, cigarettes, before and after performances. Only a few survive the next morning, and even fewer will be realized. But in this wine-pub in the spring of 2006 I felt something, which made this dream more, as our daily bread from the theatre canteen, more as our daily dreaming to survive. Maybe this „more” can be characterized the best with the word „passion”.

Why should theatre people daily dream to survive? Max Reinhardt, the famous German director of the first half of the 20. century said once, that theatre people are the ones, who have not forgotten, that they still have their childhood in their pockets. That means, theatre people have not forgotten to play. The playing man, the homo ludens is the one, who has not forgotten, that he consists of body and soul. That our life is not only material, money, working, running. That theatre satisfies such elementary needs, without which we can not be entire, whole people. Theatre is an oasis in the desert of a materialistic world. The oasis is small, the desert is huge. In order to be able to believe, that the oasis is as big and as important, as the surrounding world of the desert, we must dream daily, again and again. And this can happen only with passion, if we would like to survive.

March 2009. Aleksandar Milosavljevic (Sasha), the drama director of the Serbian National theatre told the students of the Prague Theatre Academy, if we do not believe, that we can convince the audience to enter the theatre, because they will get there a „first aid” of the soul, than we can close our stages. He answered to the question, why does Quartet present contemporary problem-plays, that the theatre is the common thinking and common emotional trip of the creators and the spectators. The actors are speaking to and about the spectators, about their troubles, hapiness and pains – is there any other place of the world, where someone cares in such an extence about our human needs, about our entire, feeling and thinking human being?

We were preparing a public discussion with the politicians of our towns in a pub of Cheb during the festival. Now Laurent Maindon were speaking again with passion: if we do not find a common language with our politicians, if we do not convince them, that the theatre not only absorbs money, but in return it cures the state of soul and mind of the civils of the country, and makes the life-quality of the society better, than the theatre will disappear. The desert will swallow us.

We entered with troubled stomach the audience-room of the Cheb theatre few days before the opening of the festival, where a hundred of bored Czech teenagers were chewing their gums. My God, what shall we tell them? My God, how will they accept our contemporary plays? Laurent started to speak about the French play: it will be about violance – about scenes, which can happen with you as well on a dark street. What can give somebody the right to misuse his actual power and humiliate a foreign man’s soul and body? I continued: do you know alcoholics? Have you ever asked somebody, why is he drinking? Can you imagine, that somebody is drinking, because he can not stand the pain of his aimless existence? And suddenly we had a discussion. In a foreign town, with a hundred bored, chewing teenagers. At the end they did not want to let us go. Vow, one can discuss in the theatre, asked a fourteen year old girl in the foyer. It is only worth discussing in the theatre, said Zdenek Bartos, the leading director of the Cheb Theatre.

A journalist asked Zdenek by the opening of the festival: what would be his tip of the festival. This is not a contest – we try to create a common discussion with our performances, to supplement each other.

Hundreds of festivals are invented daily with wine, beers and cigarettes in the theatres of the world. Only a few of them find financial support. And only a few of the realized festivals find their real content. In Europe in 5 year periods always the same 20 star-directors and star-theatres are invited to everywhere, and the gentlemen divide the prizes among themselves. Here four little theatres put their treasures together. In dialogue and supplementing each other. With friendship and passion.

The festival is going on. The Czech public thanks every performance with huge applause. We are proud of each other. The four performances are four pearls. There is really something typical Serb, Czech, Hungarian and French in the shows. The Serbs are exploding with the power of the Balkan – blood, tears, heart, extasy. By the Czech slavic folk-poetry and the humour of Hrabal embraces Kafka. The French clothe Tarantino in the red colour of Artaud's cruel theatre. Our Alcoholics occupy the audience-room with the „huge hungarian soul”. And something is common in every performance: though we do not understand the languages, we understand each other. We do not need translation to understand – the homo ludens likes playing everywhere in the world.

We are sitting every night in the club of the Cheb Theatre. Czechs, Serbs, French, Hungarians. We learn to drink together: nazdroví, živeli, santé, egészséggedre. Our actress, Erika Nádasy has a big invention in the last night: egész-ziveli. Everybody repeats it, than Laurent Maindon replies: santé-zdroví. Suddenly the Czechs start singing something – we realize it: *Ég a város, ég a ház is...* (The town is burning, a house is burning...) In a few minutes we sing it altogether in troll, in four languages. And then someone starts the Internationale. We continue it standing, hand in hand, in four languages. Without any political overtone. Nobody thinks of any political party. Here are simply people, who understand: the world can become international in theatre.

Péter Jónás (Published in the Gárdonyi Diary /Gárdonyi Napló/, the magazine of the Gárdonyi Géza Színház, in June 2009)

MF DNES March 28, 2009

Foreigners Were Surprised That Cheb Keeps a Professional Theatre

People from theatres in France and Hungary were really surprised during the discussion that took place yesterday in Cheb. Foreign participants of the international theatre festival Quartet – Vision of Europe agreed that the idea of having a professional theatre with a regular company in such a small town is unimaginable in France as well as in Hungary.

In Ancenis, a little French town, they have a six years old theatre building but not a permanent professional company. “Our theatre has only six employees,” said Martine Charles, a vice-mayor of Ancenis. “The town provides the artists the theatre building as well as technical equipment for rehearsals and for the actual show,” Martine Charles explained. She said that the town contributes about 4 per cent out of its budget; the state gives less than one per cent.

Neither the theatre in Hungarian city of Eger can afford to have a professional company. “I admire Cheb to keep the professional theatre company, I do not understand how they can manage it,” said Zoltan Janos Szabo from the Hungarian Budapest Observatory Foundation that is specialized on financing culture.

The theatre in Cheb is, at the moment, the only professional theatre in the region. It is supported by The Region of Karlovy Vary (almost 600 000 CK), by the Ministry of Culture (more than one million) and also the town of Cheb that invests about 50 millions of CK for culture per year.

“West Bohemian Theatre simply belongs to Cheb; and I am glad that we manage to keep it, concerning the fact that its existence depends on 30 people elected to the town council,” said Jan

Svoboda, the mayor of Cheb. "The money given to the theatre returns to the town in many ways, and certainly there could be more of them," said Svoboda.

The lack of money affected the subsidy from the region. "This year, we are going to contribute only 570 000 CK, that is 30 000 less than in last years," said Eva Valjentova, a councilor for culture of the region. "It was a big mistake, to disestablish a professional company in Karlovy Vary, it is becoming obvious that is often impossible to fill up the theatre during host-shows," said Valjentova.

French Were Surprised By the Participation of Young Members of the Audience

A discussion about culture was a part of the international theatre festival

The most elaborate system of supporting culture can be found in France. That was clear from the public discussion that was organized at the very end of the international theatre festival Quartet – Vision of Europe.

"The towns subsidy the nearest local institutions," said Beatrice Morren from France. "Then there is a region, department and upper level that finance activities according to different criteria than the town. All the systems intersect and complement each other," she explained. But also France implements some cuts because of the world crisis. The representatives of France were surprised when they saw the auditorium of Cheb's theatre full of young people. According to Martina Stadl, another French representative, French actors have to try very hard and keep offering something new to be able to attract the audience. According to Janos Szabo from Hungary, it is impossible to have a theatre in towns of the size of Cheb. It would not survive. "The theatre is a bit unfortunate, since its existence depends on 30 people elected to the town council, and they had not always been satisfied," said Jan Svoboda, the mayor of Cheb. He said that also Cheb's company had a narrow squeak. But it is the only professional company in the region at the moment.

"It is necessary to follow the historical habits. The theatre simply belongs to Cheb, and since myself, the head of the town, is an amateur actor, the town will support it," said Svoboda.

Žurnal

March 25, 2009

Briefly

Cheb

Festival Quartet – Vision of Europe Has Just Started

On Monday March 23, a festival of contemporary drama of four European regional theatres (Czech Republic, France, Hungary and Serbia) started in Cheb. The festival that will run until March 28, offers many theatre performances, and also a rich additional program. The visitors can see concerts, exhibitions, film, specialty of each country, or discussions. All the events take place in the space of theatre, in Art movie theatre, in the gallery or in Jazz cafe.

MF DNES

Events

Theatre

The European Theatre Festival Has Started

Four regional European theatres (Serbia, Hungary, France and Cheb) create the performance of being European through the series of common workshops. Their present station is West Bohemian

Theatre in Cheb; and the workshops are accompanied by the festival Quartet – Vision of Europe. After the Hungarian day, all the companies will present their performances throughout the week until Saturday. The festival is accompanied by reading of plays and tasting of national cuisines.

MF DNES

March 24, 2009

Theatre Quatrefoil in Cheb

The international theatre project of four European theatres called Quartet offers interesting foreign theatre performances with Czech sur-titles, discussions with the artists, exhibitions and concerts. Today, the audience can visit the performance of the Serbian National theatre, or go to the public reading of a play, or see a Balkan improvisation, or meet the artists. To the picture, you can see a Czech actress Diana Tonikova along with Laurent Maindon, a French director, working on a new play.

14 dní

March 16, 2009

The International Theatre Festival Quartet Will Stop Also in Cheb.

A quatrefoil of theatres – French Theatre du Rictus, Serbian National Theatre Novi Sad, Gardonyi Geza Theatre in Eger and West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb – participate at the international project called Quartet – Vision of Europe that will take place in Cheb between March 23 and 28.

During the Hungarian afternoon, Tuesday, March 24, the performance of *The Alcoholics* by Andras Visky, a magic poetic play with very vivid figures and situation, will be on the program. Next day, the Serbians will offer *The Doll Ship* by Milena Markovic, a fresh, impressive, sometimes rough punk musical. And on Thursday, March 26, the audience will be taken by the French actors to *Asphalt Jungle* by Sylvain Levey, a play about anonymity, violence, subjugation and subordination, but also about irony, black humor and extravagance.

Company of Cheb will perform *Once Upon A Time* in Cheb (Friday, March 27) and the festival will be closed with a performance of *Legend of the Chalk Circle* (March 28).

After each performance, the audience can attend a discussion with artists; there is also an international actor's workshop on the program, as well as film projection, exhibition, lecture, public reading, and concerts. Hungarian violin player Agnes Kutas, Balkan Mamapapa band and French band Rearz will perform in the theatre club.

The project is supported by Program Culture EU.

14 dní

Theatre in Cheb Is a Curiosity

Almost ten per cent of the town budget goes to theatre and other cultural activities in Cheb. In others towns and cities in Europe it is much less. That was clear after the discussion about subvention of culture that was organized during the theatre festival Quartet – Vision of Europe. Theatres from Cheb, Hungarian Eger, Serbian Novi Sad and French Ancenis take part in this event.

Actors belong to Cheb

Janos Szabo from the Budapest Observatory Foundation said that local budgets in Hungary gave between three to eight per cent. In France, the subsidy varies according to a region. "In our case, it is about four per cent," said Martine Charles, vice-mayor of Ancenis. Foreign participants of the discussion agreed that a permanent theatre company in the town of size of Cheb is very unique. "Theatre belongs to Cheb. Thirty members of the town council decide of its existence. They have always supported it so far," said Jan Svoboda, the mayor.

According to participants of the discussion, economic crisis has not influenced the subsidy of regional theatres. But- as Charles said – it will lie more with towns. In Cheb, the theatre is financed by town, region and state.

A part of the festival that will continue in the autumn in Hungary is also a workshop for actors. "I and my colleague Diana are the youngest here, and we jump into everything with spirit. Everyone else needs to rehearse more but at the same time, they often have more elaborate acting technique," said Vaclav Liska, a Czech participant of the workshop.

The French admired also the young audience in the theatre in Cheb. "We have to try very hard to attract them," said Charles.

MF DNES

March 24, 2009

Wednesday – Serbian Day

Jazz Cafe

Biljana Srbljanovic: Family Stories

Public reading of a Serbian play + an exhibition of site-specific project of Serbian set designer Dragan Stojcevski and his colleagues, tasting (Rakija), accompanied by music of Mamapapa band.

West Bohemian Theatre Cheb

Milena Markovic: Doll Ship

A show of a Serbian National Theatre Novi Sad

Studio d

Artists meet the audience.

Theatre Club

Mamapapa band

Balkan improvisations

Thursday – French Day

Cheb Museum

Florian Zeller: A Roundabout

Public reading of selected extracts from a new play + an exhibition of portraits by Sylvain Ristori, a French painter, tasting of French wines and delicatessen, accompanied by music of Rearz band.

West Bohemian Theatre Cheb

Sylvain Levey: Asphalt Jungle

A show of Theatre du Rictus

Studio d

Artists meet the audience.

Theatre Club

Concert of Rearz, a French band

Chebský deník

Monday, March 23, 2009

Project Quartet – Vision of Europe Starting Tomorrow in the Theatre

West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb invites for foreign theatre, music and gastronomy

West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb prepared an international project Quartet – Vision of Europe for this week. It is a theatre festival that travels through Europe. From Tuesday till Saturday, the hosts from Serbia, Hungary and France will introduce their rich program along with local artists.

“We prepared not only interesting performances with Czech sur-titles but also meetings and discussions with artists, exhibitions and concerts and tasting of local specialties and wines. We also offer public readings of four contemporary plays from all four countries. We would like the festival to “invade” the city. So some events will take place in the gallery of Cheb, in the museum, or the Jazz Cafe... Everyone is invited!” says Zdenek Bartos, artistic director of West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb.

Four European regions are represented by artists assembled around theatre scenes of different sizes: Serbian Nation Theatre Novi Sad comes from Serbia; Czech Republic is represented by local theatre - West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb, Hungary – Geza Gardonyi Színház from the spa town Eger, and also a French company of Theatre du Rictus. The audience in Cheb will see performances of contemporary plays from each country.

Quartet – Vision of Europe will culminate with a preparation of a common project with a participation of artist from all four countries. The director Simon Dominik and actors from Cheb, Diana Tonikova and Vaclav Liska, are participants from the Czech side. Partial results of their work will be presented on Saturday before noon, and the final show will return to Cheb next year. This issue of the festival will terminate with performances of the home theatre: original Western cabaret Once Upon a Time in Cheb (J. Jirku, M. Ljubkova) and new version of an old oriental legend about a fight for a baby Legend of the Chalk Circle (M. Ljubkova, Z. Bartos).

The entrance fee for each performance is 80 CK, reductions for elderly people and students is 40 CK. A pass for all five performances costs 250 CK. Accompanying events (readings, discussions, etc.) are free of charge.

The project Quartet – Vision of Europe was financed with the support of Program Culture EU. Partners of Quartet – Vision of Europe are following: Town of Cheb, Region Heves – Hungary, Alliance Francaise de Plzen, French Institute in Prague, and Hungarian Cultural Centre in Prague. *More info on pages 3 and 4 and at www.chebsky.denik.cz/quartet*

Chebský deník

Monday, March 23, 2009

Zdenek Bartos, Artistic Director of West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb, Says: It Is Not an Ordinary Theatre Festival

What is the main idea of the international project Quartet – Vision of Europe?

Meeting of regional theatres. But it is not an ordinary theatre festival. We wanted to present the newest plays of each country, and also organize more accompanying events along with the performances – public readings, discussions with artists, concerts, and also little culinary experiences with each country.

You chose Legend of the Chalk Circle and Once Upon A Time in Cheb as a local contribution.

Why?

Because we do not want to repeat always the same. We will prepare something new for Hungary as well. Once Upon A Time in Cheb is an original piece by Jan Jirku, it has a good “local” spirit; it is an entertaining show with big hyperbole, so it fits well the end of the festival. And Legend of the Chalk Circle should represent an original, modern approach towards a classic topic.

What is your personal Quartet tip?

My tip? I am interested in Hungarian show because they are coming with a brand new piece (it opened a month ago), and I liked the French show already in Novi Das... But I think the concerts will be also worth seeing – for instance Hungarian violin player Agnes Kutas, or Rearz, a band that comes from Bretagne and plays a kind of “Celtic Rock” music. And by the way, it may sound showy but I think our shows are also not that bad.

Chebský deník

Monday, March 23, 2009

Hungarian Day

Andreas Visky:

Alcoholics

Eve is an alcoholic. She might be an actress but she has not got a role for years. And she probably also lost her child. But nobody can say for sure.

“Alcoholics” is a magic, poetic play with very vivid characters and situations about looking for faith, and shows that even hopeless things can be solved with humor.

Tuesday, March 24, 7.15 pm in West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb

Serbian Day

Milena Markovic:

Doll Ship

Sometimes rough punk musical (directed by Anna Tomovic) Doll Ship works with classic fairy-tale involutions and characters that confront the main character. The main hero, a girl looking for her own ways of living, is constantly changing throughout the course of seven different stories that grow from each other and comment themselves in a very funny way.

Wednesday, March 25, 7 pm in West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb

French Day

Sylvain Levey:

Asphalt Jungle

Anonymity, brutality, subjugation and subordination... but also irony, black humor and extravagance. Who are all these people who play games with others? Could have the girl had a different fate? Where does the reality end – and the fantasy start? Solitary figures look for themselves. A kaleidoscope between poetry and rough reality, between road movie and city western.

Thursday, March 26, 7 pm in West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb

Czech Day:

J. Jirku, M. Ljubkova: Once Upon A Time in Cheb

Comedy western cabaret written about Cheb and for Cheb!

A young teacher is coming to town to take care of the heritage after his grandmother. Someone tries to shoot him already at the train station... What comes next? Crazy roundabout of unbelievable situation and exclusive songs!

Friday, March 27, 7 pm in West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb

Closing Day

Z. Bartos, M. Ljubkova: Legend of the Chalk Circle

Old story of a fight between two women – and the argued object is a child. The story appeared already in the Bible, in the old Chinese literature, and in a famous version of Brecht. This adaptation reflects the modern concept of motherhood. The story takes place in Armenia and this locality also influenced the music.

Friday, March 27, 7 pm in West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb

Chebský deník

March 23, 2009

Page 3

The Theatre Festival Is Beginning Tomorrow

Each performance takes a look at European culture and accompanying events

Theatre festival Quartet – Vision of Europe that takes place in Cheb is beginning tomorrow. The audience will see theatres from Cheb, Serbia, Hungary, and France.

While performance will take place in the theatre building, some events will be held in Gallery 4, Jazz Café, and Club d.

It is already the second edition of the festival; the first one took place in October in Serbia.

Tuesday, March 24, belongs to Hungary, Wednesday, March 25, to Serbia, Thursday, March 26 is a French day, and the end of Friday will be run by Cheb actors.

“It is not simply an official festival, many accompanying events are also prepared – either of visual arts, music or culinary ones,” said Zdenek Bartos, the artistic director of Cheb theatre. “There will also be different discussions with authors of lectures, and so on,” said Bartos.

The non-official start of the festival will take place tonight at 8 pm in Art Movie Theatre with a projection of a film called *Ishka and Her Journey*. “It is some kind of a starter of the festival,” said Bartos.

French company will present two one-act plays under the supervision of Sylvain Levey. “It is a young contemporary playwright, he is thirty five years old,” said Laurent Maindon, a founder of the French group, about the playwright. “He is very often staged now in France.”

“Both texts deal with a look on the European society, Western middle class respectively,” he said about the play. “It comes from the fact that European middle class can be identified with its fears and fright. It is a bit of dark vision but it does not exclude some kind of a humor, although a black one. The main text brings four characters on the stage, and the one-act play is based on a situation when two characters make the third one to hit the fourth one.”

As he added, this situation can be found anywhere. “For instance, in the kindergarten among the kids, or among managers of a big company, or on the street in Cheb in the evening. There is something very universal in this text,” said this French director and founder of the company.

According to Bartos, the audience has a lot to look forward to.

Complete program of the festival can be found at page 4.

14 dní

March 30, 2009

Quartet Made Its Way to Cheb

A finale of the festival of four theatres from four countries was an experimental workshop

How important it is to support culture in regions. That was one of the discussed topic during the international (not only) theatre festival Quartet – Vision of Europe that took place in West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb on March 23-28. Four theatres took part in it – beside the home theatre also Serbian National Theatre from Novi Sad, Theatre Geza Gardonyi Szinhaz from a Hungarian spa town Eger, and French company Theatre du Rictus from Nantes.

They have something to present

“The aim of the festival is to demonstrate that even theatres off the big centers have something to offer. And therefore almost all the performances presented at every festival edition are premiere shows of contemporary plays from each country,” said Lauren Maindon, festival founder.

Actors about integration

The finale of the festival, that presented – beside theatre performances – also public readings, exhibitions, concerts or tasting of local specialties and wines, was an experimental workshop Utopia with a participation of actors from all four theatres.

The festival came to Cheb from Novi Sad where it took place last autumn. The theatres will meet again in October in Eger, Hungary. The last meeting will be held in March 2010 in Ancenis, France.

A2 6/2009

Culture Tips

Theatre

Quartet – Vision of Europe

Czech Republic, West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb respectively, Hungary, Serbia and France united in one theatre project – Quartet – Vision of Europe. During this edition in West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb, the following pieces will be presented: Andras Visky’s Alcoholics by Hungarian Geza Gardonyi Szinhaz from Eger; Milena Markovic’s Doll Ship by Serbian National Theatre Novi Sad; Sylvain Levey’s Asphalt Jungle by French Theatre du Rictus. The festival will be closed with Legend of the Chalk Circle by host theatre. Film projection, public readings, concerts, regional specialties and wines tasting, exhibitions, lectures and discussions are also part of the festival program. Town hall in Cheb will host a public discussion “Why and how to finance regional culture” with participation of Czech, Serbian, Hungarian and French regional politicians.

West Bohemian Theatre

(Divadelni namesti 10, Cheb)

Since Monday, March 23, till Saturday, March 28.

Vltava

01/2009

Quartet – Vision of Europe

International European Theatre Project, March 24-28, 2009, Cheb

West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb is a member of an international project of co-operation of four European theatres “Quartet – Vision of Europe”. The core of the whole project is presentation of performances of plays from each country, in every participating town, during five days festival. Quartet – Vision of Europe culminates with a rehearsal of a common project with a participation of artists from all companies. “It is an actors workshop; a couple of actors from each country, under the supervision of a French director Laurent Maindon. They search for a common language. Two

Hungarians, two Czechs, two Serbians, two French actors work on a form that reflects co-existence of contemporary Europeans – while everyone speaks a different language. A dramaturge from each country assists as well. A partial result will be presented to the audience during one open session. We will continue in France, June 2009,” says Zdenek Bartos, artistic director of West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb.

Four European regions are represented by theatre companies of different size and status: Serbia – Serbian National Theatre Novi Sad, Czech Republic – West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb, Hungary – Theatre Geza Gardonyi Szinhaz from the spa town Eger, and French company Theatre du Rictus that work in Theatre Quartier Libre in Ancenis (region Loire-Atlantique, close to Nantes). During two years, there will be a festival in each of these towns.

Present host of the project (from March 24) is West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb. “We prepared not only interesting foreign performances with Czech sur-titles, but also discussions with the artists, exhibitions, concerts, culinary specialties and wines of each region tasting, and also public readings of contemporary plays from all countries. All this not only in our theatre building, since we want the festival to “invade” the town, some events will take place in gallery of Cheb, museum or Jazz Cafe, “ says Zdenek Bartos.

During the festival, every participating theatre will present a staging of a local contemporary playwright. An important part of Quartet – Vision of Europe is above mentioned actor workshop. Its Czech participants are Simon Dominik, a director, and Diana Tonikova and Vaclav Liska, actors from Cheb theatre. Partial results of their work will be presented as work in progress at every edition of the festival, and the final piece will be demonstrated in every participating theatre at the very end of the project.

Once Upon A Time in Cheb and *Legend of the Chalk Circle* will be the Czech contribution to the program.

RESPEKT, March 16-22, 2009

To Do Something Extra

Theatre in Cheb is looking for ways how to attract town council more than football.

Preparations terminate and excitement culminates. At the end of March, theatre in Cheb might not be called “regional” only with a pejorative hint. At this time, another part of a unique project will take place – *Quartet – Vision of Europe*. This event should inspire theatres that are much closer to the centre of Czech culture than this Western part of the republic.

We have the meaning

“To have a theatre with a permanent company in the town of Cheb size (32 000 inhabitants), that is above standard. So the fight for the existence, fight for a valuable program is much more tough than in bigger towns and cities. We need to have results, no failures. And one has to do something more, to attract attention from Plzen or even Prague,” says Milos Ruzicka, managing director of theatre in Cheb.

Interest of the audience is one thing but the theatre can not survive out of the incomes from the box office. The theatre is established by the town of Cheb, and therefore the theatre relies on the subsidy from the town council and the region. Local council has asked the question, whether to keep a professional company at all, several times. The last time was when the town did not have enough sources to keep the local football team in the Czech first league. The company of sixteen actors, two guest artists and the artistic director must prove their meaning in front of the local politicians all the time – and they do it through their activities.

A high quality repertoire of classics as well as outstanding pieces by contemporary Czech and foreign playwrights (Pirandello, Shakespeare, Goldoni, Capek, Stoppard, Havel, Topol, and Kohout) are complemented by family performances - fairytales for kids. But they also organize “big

theatre Fridays” – special evenings on selected topics. The last one, in February, was prepared by a journalist Martin Homan and it dealt with Western Africa and Ghana. The space of Studio d was completely sold out. According to the artistic director Zdenek Bartos, the small stage (60 seats) is usually full, the bigger one (180 seats) is more than half-full.

The ideal situation happened with *Lonely West* by Martin McDonagh, an Irish playwright. “We wanted to have the last performance but the audience was extremely interested in more runs. We had to add some performances,” says Bartos about the success of fully sold auditorium. And besides, the West Bohemian Theatre travels around Czech towns and cities and performs at foreign festivals. They have been to Germany, Poland, thanks to *Quartet – Vision of Europe* also in Serbia and theatre fans will soon see them in Hungary and France.

The idea of platform for mutual presentation of theatre and culture of several European regions came from the colleagues from Hungarian spa town Eger where Cheb theatre performed at the festival of monodrama two years ago. The artists from Cheb agreed, and they were soon joined by companies from France and Serbia. When they applied for the European Commission subsidy in the program called Culture 2007-2013, they probably did not expect how generous the Brussels officers will be. The project obtained an amount of 200 000 euro; and the theatres divided this money according to their needs.

Artistic mobility

Therefore a theatre experiment could be started, and the team was following: Serbian National Theatre from Novi Sad, French company Theatre du Rictus from Ancenis (the region of Loire-Atlantique), Theatre Geza Gardonyi Szinhaz from Hungarian town Eger, and the company from Cheb. What is the exceptionality of such kind of projects, besides a simple option of local audience to see foreign shows?

“Mobility of theatre artists, their exchange and mutual co-operation within European context does not support only creativity but it also fulfills the objective of the EU concerning cultural understanding, intercultural dialogue. Compared with other states, the Czech theatre is still a beginner on this field. Therefore it is very good that such a traveling festival with Czech participation has originated,” says Pavla Petrova, a manager of Theatre Institute. And Milos Ruzicka adds: “We joined the project to confirm our reputation of a theatre staging interesting and also new plays.” And that is, in a way, some kind of Cheb tradition. The theatre founded in 1961 staged the best plays in Czechoslovakia of the seventies, the period of president Husak. That was also thanks to the directors and playwrights that were banned in Prague at that time: Jan Grossman, Evald Schorm, Lubos Pistorius, or Ivan Klima.

The period of restrictions is gone as well as barbed wires that designated the iron curtain few meters behind Cheb. And therefore the inhabitants of the former town of “sleepless customs officers” can enjoy March 26, the French Day, and two pieces by contemporary French playwrights. First of all it will be a reading of Florian Zeller’s *Roundabout*, and then a performance of *Asphalt Jungle* by Sylvain Levey. Previous days – Hungarian and Serbian – have the same concept. The project will be closed with two performances of West Bohemian Theatre – *Once Upon A Time in Cheb* by Jan Jirku and Marta Ljubkova, and by *Legend of the Calk Circle* by Ljubkova and Zdenek Bartos, the artistic director of the theatre.

Everything started in Novi Sad, Serbia, where the festival took place last autumn. Baton of organization will travel from Cheb to Eger, that will host *Quartet – Vision of Europe* in October. The whole project will close last year in Ancenis. But as Bartos says, it is not always the same performances.

Every theatre comes with an actual play that is on. Actors from Cheb played *Conspirators* by Vaclav Havel in Novi Sad. Besides, the festival will culminate with a performance done with participation of artists from all four companies. Two Hungarians, two Serbians, two French and two Czechs are searching for the common language in it.

Laurent Maindon, a French director who leads these rehearsals, says: “It is actor workshop; the actors try to reflect the co-existence of nowadays Europeans using minimal verbal means.” The

English is forbidden on the stage on purposely, so everyone has to use his or her own language, and the gestures and mime help them to react to common situation. For instance in a hotel, in train, coffee- house.”

Diana Tonikova, an actress, describes what it is like: “We do not know exactly where it is going to head. At the moment, we are in a phase of searching for options how to perform certain – may be conflicting – situation that can for instance happen to French and Hungarian or Serbian and a Czech person.” Therefore only a partial results will be presented to the audience in Cheb, the final version of the experiment will be presented next season in France.

Brussels must be enough

Except for the Serbian National Theatre, that is a colossus of three companies (ballet, drama, opera), 680 employees and a gigantic stage and auditorium and is supported by state, all three remaining theatres are very similar as far the number of actors, smaller auditoriums and stages and constant quest for subsidy, are concerned.

But the experience is different in every single country. The French company does not have its own building, they have to rent the space for a limited period of time or travel around France, but still they comfortably live out of state grants and subsidies. Cheb theatre got the smallest money out of the European grant: only 25 000 euro. “We had our own fund but the town helped as well,” says the managing director Ruzicka. Transport to Novi Sad was for instance covered from the money the theatre received from the town council - the town council ordered and paid a show for schools. “Regardless the European grant, Hungarians and French got extra subsidy from the state. That is absolutely impossible here. When you obtain money for artistic activity from Brussels in this country, the state does not help at all,” adds Zdenek Bartos, and his voice reveals no surprise at all.

Divadelní noviny

Europeans Coexist In a Skyscraper,

says Laurent Maindon, a French director

A director, playwright and an artistic director of Theatre du Rictus, Laurent Maindon will visit Czech Republic at the end of March. He will participate at the second part of the international festival Quartet – Vision of Europe in Cheb. The project was founded by Maindon and Hungarian dramaturge Peter Jonas from Eger. Four European theatres participate on it: Serbian National Theatre from Novi Sad, Hungarian theatre Geza Gardonyi Szinhaz from Eger, West Bohemian Theatre from Cheb and Maindon´s company Theatre du Rictus that operates in a theatre building Quartier Libre in Ancenis. The aim of the festival is to prove that even theatres out of big cultural centers can have a meaning crossing the region. The festival presents plays by contemporary playwrights of each participating countries, and they are often word premieres.

You founded the festival Quartet – Vision of Europe together with Hungarian dramaturge Peter Jonas. Where did this idea come from?

Everything started when I was directing a play Vitellius by Hungarian playwright Andras Forgach. This way I met Hungarian theatre Geza Gardonyi Szinhaz in Eger. I saw all their shows, than they came to France and saw our shows. Then I came back to Eger for two residencies. And that was the time when the idea of the festival was born. But the original idea was different; we wanted to present several interpretations of the same play.

Which one?

We were thinking of Buchner´s Woyzeck.

Why did you think of any co-operation at all?

We found it important to initiate exchanges of artistic groups, to confront our experience and to present different sides of European cultures through theatre. We wanted to create a common international theatre network. Nevertheless, we changed the style of the project throughout the course of meetings. Now we want a unique event. We do not desire to have just another festival for “devoted ones”.

First part of Vision of Europe took place last year at the turn of October and November in Serbia.

Are you satisfied?

We were endlessly happy that our building, that had been started two and a half years ago, was finished. The meeting was a celebration of theatre that we could share with very vivid audience. Obviously, there are always things to improve. But what you can not improve that is not human. We definitely do not want to rest on our laurels.

Czechs performed Havel's Conspirators (directed by Filip Nuckolls) in Serbia. How did you like it?

I can not judge a performance played in Czech with Serbian sur-titles; I must have missed many things. Nevertheless, I made one observation – the way of directing actors looked very different from our way. Underneath I felt burlesque and clownery.

How much are Czech plays and Czech theatres known in France?

Not much. Someone erudite in theatre would probably speak about Vaclav Havel or Milan Kundera. Some devoted ones might remember Pavel Kohout. As far as directors are concerned, some specialists would name Otomar Krejca.... And that is about it. Unfortunately, we must admit that Czech, Hungarian or Serbian culture are not very well know among wider French, or even European audience. It is like Europeans coexist in a big skyscraper where anonymity nourishes unfamiliarity with others – or even ignorance. And it is not that theatre is a tower of Babel where everyone speaks different language! There is not such handicap in sports. So it is up to us, European artists, to cross these prejudices and barriers.

Quartet means four different countries, four different theatres, four different performances. Do they have something in common?

The common point is that they all draw from the contemporary plays of their nations.

Can you trace some kind of “national character” in them?

When we closely look at them, we find out that culture of every country bears certain specific characteristics. That is good. Our project does not desire to unify all differences, for the contrary, it tries to present and value them. I would be very dangerous to dissolve all cultures in one – like in Orwell's novel 1984.

What differences can you see, and what causes them?

Indisputably, we all belong to one family. The differences rise from cultural patterns that are inherited from generation to generation. They are very much influenced by social and political systems that influence our aesthetic choice and taste in the long-term. Therefore there is a big difference between ex-East-European socialistic countries and so-called West. On the other hand, I am pretty sure that there is less differences between a Serbian director and a Hungarian actor, than between a French businessman and a French bricklayer.

Your company Theatre du Rictus was founded ten years ago. What was your intention when you founded it?

I founded the theatre company with my friend Yann Josso because we wanted freedom for work. We wanted – and we still want to stage contemporary texts and to search forms to interpret them, to avoid dogmas that reign in our theatres. It is very difficult for a theatre company to survive these days because there are too many barriers, especially financial ones. Theatre companies in France

work like little firms. Unfortunately I have to say that these days are not very friendly to cultural and art business. There we have to unite more than any time before. Artists of all countries, let us unite! And mainly: let us not remain just among ourselves.

You will present two texts in Chev – Julie, Chain of Events and Too Early End, and Pastime Hilariously Funny – by a young playwright Sylvain Levey. How does he fit in your concept?

I think Levey does not fit any concept at all. I do not follow any concept. But I was impressed by his text that appeared in drama competition, I was in a jury. His texts are very passionate and rough, without any conciliatory view on our society. Plus they have a specific form and topics. I immediately desired to work on them.

What kind of text attracts you as a director?

Almost every text I directed were dealing with the same question – the theme of power. But my choice varies. At the beginning of my career, I was attracted by plays with very “thick” text, intellectual pieces, for instance Heiner Mueller. I still admire them but I feel less attracted by them as a director. Nowadays, I tend to do more complex texts that picture a human being in his or her furious and also gentle self.

What is (or should be) the message of theatre today?

Theatre offers (or at least should offer) a unique, special, specific look at the world. It does not matter whether it is lightened, entertaining, or cruel and raw, political or apolitical. The main point is to create a living, sensual, emotional, sometimes even painful and tearful contact with the world. To confront the audience with this world and discuss with him or her. Me personally, I prefer theatre of communication to theatre of consumption. For instance, in our festival performance of Asphalt Jungle, they speak about making violence into something banal. The members of the audience are shocked – in a good and bad way – because they appear too close to what is happening. The same scene – even with more violence - would be perceived much less powerfully in the movie theatre. There is no preclusive treatment in theatre. Theatre is an operation of a living organism without anesthesia.

Does the theatre have its place in nowadays world?

Questions about meaning and role of the theatre are important questions of every period, including our times. There is a lot of hypocrisy in these matters in France. On one hand, we finance the culture; on the other hand, the culture territory is more and more occupied by commercial culture. It is harder and harder to ask after the place of the theatre among other visual media, and at some places that make decision about culture, it is even less adequate. Is the theatre on its way to end? Let me use a paraphrase of Heiner Mueller to answer this: If the theatre lacks viciousness, dentists will appear in the audience.

Laurent Maindon, a director and playwright, was born in 1964 in Nantes. He runs a theatre company Theatre du Rictus. He founded it with Yann Josso, an actor, in 1996. It is a small production group that has been settled for two years in the building of Theatre Quartier Libre in Ancenis.

Maindon specializes on staging plays from the second half of the 20th century, for instance by Heiner Mueller (Landscape With Argonauts, Despoiled Shore, Quartet, Medea Material), Samuel Beckett (Endgame, First Love), Armand Llamas (Gustav Is Not Modern), Edward Bond (The War Plays), and Sylvain Levey’s two one-act plays (as Asphalt Jungle). But he does not stay out of burlesque of the 19th century: he did What Do the Red Fish Dream About? after two texts by George Feydeau. He is a member of the jury of Prix d’exriture dramatique de Guearande (Playwrights Award).

A2 10/2009

We Have To Lumber Politicians with Theatre

With Zdenek Bartos about regional culture

West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb has succeeded in European competition and got subsidy to organize three years festival Quartet. Therefore the door towards grants from the ministry of culture was closed. We talked with the artistic director of the theatre about subsidies for regional culture, local politicians and Hungarian theatre law.

What happened with the financing of Quartet – Vision of Europe?

There was no difficult situation. We received a European grant, four theatres all together, and we divided it according our needs. We had problems to finance the second half so our budget is the lowest one, 25 000 euro. Nobody gave us the second half so we had to pay it out of our back-up. We applied at the Region of Karlovy Vary but they dramatically reduced all their culture and other subsidies for this year – they have to pay health care fees, etc. So even our usual subsidy was 30 000 CK lower. And the Ministry of Culture has its special fund to support project with foreign partners but with one exception: Program Culture of the EU. If you get money from here, you are not eligible to obtain anything from the Czech Ministry of Culture. It is special criteria that automatically exclude this kind of applicants. The town council helped us in different ways: for instance they ordered a performance and paid us very highly, therefore we could cover transport to Serbia. We hope for the same this year. Since this is three years project, we hope in different little financial helps from the town council, and we do not have to finance everything immediately. We are a semi-budgetary organization; we have a budget for a calendar year. Last year has been closed, this year the burden is the biggest because the festival took place in Cheb in March, and we are going to France next year.

Do you feel being punished for your success?

It is a kind of paradox. People from Eger were very surprised, since Hungarian Ministry of Culture highly supports everyone who gets some money somewhere else. Here it is simply a different matter: if you obtain money from Europe, do what you can. Nobody realizes that every grant is only a part of the total budget.

How did your foreign partners react?

We had to calm everyone down and made them sure that everything would go according to our plans, that we would cover it somehow out of our back-up. And so far it seems we will manage. But this year we have remarkably less money so at the end there will not be enough bonuses for our employees... What we have to cover is in fact a budget of a big show but fortunately we do not have to reduce our plan of new performances.

Does not this experience discourage you from another foreign project?

We would go for it next time again. Regions and towns often do not know what they are doing. They say in advance: we already have a festival in Karlovy Vary, and amateur theatres also have their own festival – they do not know exactly what is going on. At the moment you actually do the festival, they see it has a meaning that people come, foreigners arrive to Cheb; there were excellent shows, Eger and Cheb mayors made a partnership. They feel the town opened, take a new breath, and that is a great publicity for the town and the region. And they say, why not, and may be they give something next time. Or may be they do not, of course. I think one has to “bite the bullet”, do your plan and hope that something will change next time. Part of the project is an attempt to lumber them with the project. Therefore regional politicians from Hungary and France came, to see what is going on. Therefore there was a public discussion about financing regional culture at the town hall.

And representatives of the town will go with us to Hungary and France. They will see what is going on that the project needs money and has its meaning. And next time they may support it.

What was the discussion at the town hall about?

It was sharing experiences. In fact we informed each other about the ways of financing theatres in each country. We organize the discussion to emphasize the fact regional culture must be financed, and that this is happening also in France, Serbia, or Hungary. French and Hungarians admired the existence of a professional theatre in Cheb. Regional journalists wrote about it: the theatre in Cheb is rarity; foreigners were surprised there is a theatre in Cheb... They turn it to the fact the theatre in Cheb is an abnormality and something extravagant. But there are other towns comparable to Cheb in the Czech Republic: Pribram, Cesky Tesin, Uherske Hradiste, Sumperk, and they all have a professional theatre. And there are bigger towns without it, for instance Decin. It is connected with tradition, regional needs. At the moment, we are the only professional theatre in the Region of Karlovy Vary – after Karlovy Vary had successfully devastated its own theatre. And our politicians found out how it worked for instance in Hungary where they have – since April 1 – the new theatre law. While us, we have no theatre law after twenty years of freedom, and none is being prepared.

What should the ideal model of financing regional theatre look like?

I find the Hungarian model interesting: region and town share the subsidy. While in the Czech Republic, it is the town that bears the biggest burden of regional culture. Except for the theatre in Jihlava that is a semi-budgetary organization of the region. Towns have to cover everything, with little support from the regions, but theatres travel within the whole region and even over its border. The situation is more confusing now because some theatres are semi-budget organizations and some of them have been transformed and they are public benefit organizations with a town as the major holder. It is more complicated. But we would like to have bigger support from the regional. Regional councilor for culture Eva Valjentova said during the discussion that the region realized we were the only professional theatre in the region, and they definitely would support us. But at the same time, she said the subsidy would be deducted by 30 000 CK. There is no guarantee; one has to apply for the subsidy every single year. The Ministry of Culture has quite fair rules for grants, the region not, and I do not see why. When you see what the region of Karlovy Vary supports, and what it does not... The town helps us but that could be tragically changed after the local elections. The subsidy from the Ministry of Culture gets higher according to number of our shows performed out of the region and the Czech Republic. But there was no premium for the money from Brussels. If there was for some kind of a theatre law, I think it may help.

Number of the local audience is also important. Do you have to fight for the audience?

Audience in Cheb is still the poser for me. But I can not complain that the people do not come or do not understand our performances. They got used to theatre-going but it is a run for long distance. Obviously we have to try to address a wide range of audience. We create a plan for every season very carefully, concerning actors as well as plays. It would need a long discussion since a social composition of ex-Sudetenland, what about the local social cohesion, how the locals perceive their roots – and theatre is connected with all this. At the beginning, we had to face certain contempt: it is the lowest category; people want to come and see only theatres from Prague, etc. Even though there is still a group of snobs that will come only to see faces they know from the TV. Recently, university students did a research for the theatre, they addressed about seven hundred people, and seventy per cent out of them think that our performances are perfectly comparable with the imported ones. I believe it has a sense to do theatre in such a distant region, and try to create something here.