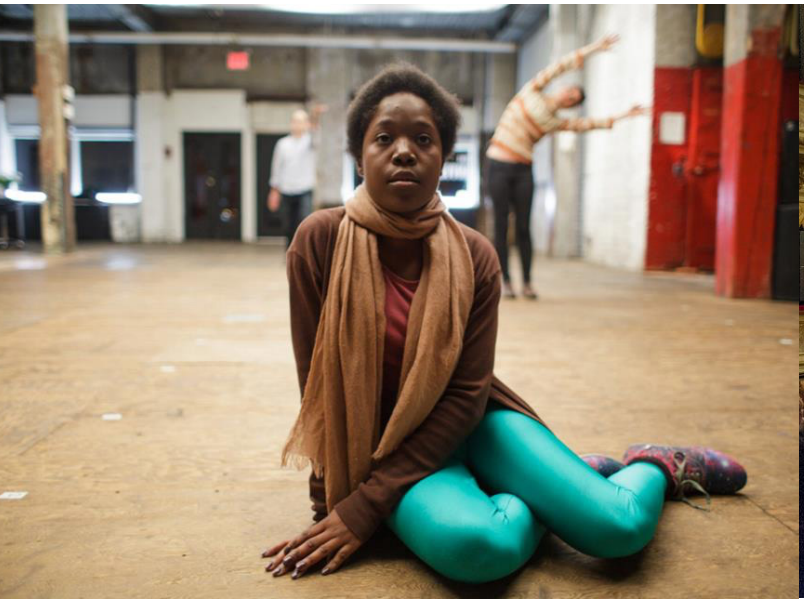
600 HIGHWAYMEN

ABOUT 600 HWM

Since 2009, **600 HIGHWAYMEN (Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone)** have been making live art that, through a variety of radical approaches, illuminates the inherent poignancy of people coming together. The work exists at the intersection of theater, dance, contemporary performance, and civic encounter.



HISTORY

Works since 2009: *The Fever, The Following Evening, Kasimir & Karoline, Manmade Earth, A Thousand Ways (Parts One, Two, Three), Employee of the Year*, *The Record, This Great Country*, *Everyone Was Chanting Your Name*, *Empire City*, and *This Time Tomorrow*. 600 HWM received an Obie Award in 2014, Zurich's ZKB Patronage Prize in 2015, and a Bessie Nomination for Outstanding Production of 2015. In 2016, Abigail & Michael were named artist fellows by the New York Foundation for the Arts.

Production history (selects): Under the Radar Festival (The Public Theater, NYC), Crossing the Line Festival (French Institute Alliance Française, NYC), On the Boards (Seattle), Wexner Center for the Arts (Columbus), River to River Festival (Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, NYC), Abrons Arts Center (NYC), The Invisible Dog Art Center (NYC), University Settlement (NYC), Fusebox Festival (Austin, Texas), Mount Tremper Arts Summer Festival (Mount Tremper, New York), Noorderzon Festival (Groningen, Netherlands), Festival Theaterformen (Hannover, Germany), Züricher Theater Spektakel (Zürich, Switzerland), Festival L'Esprit de Groupe (Parc de la Villette, Paris), and Les Spectacles Vivants (Centre Pompidou, Paris), Onassis Center (Athens, Greece), OzAsia (Australia), In Between Time (UK), Salzburg Festival (Austria), Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), NYUAD Arts Center (Abu Dhabi), and American Repertory Theater (Boston).

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PRESS QUOTES

“I wish to hear anything that 600 HIGHWAYMEN has to say … the company’s guilelessness is central to its beautiful art … 600 HIGHWAYMEN want to re-wire your theatregoing DNA, even if that means deadening your expectations until you fall asleep, wake up, and see and hear their world in a new way.”
- *The New Yorker*

"This simple but sublime production ... touches the deep wellsprings of our attraction to theater. In the course of just an hour, the audience’s immersion in this wordless dance- theater piece creates a feeling of quiet but intense intimacy, and even a shivery sense of reverence for the communal experience not just of theater, but of life itself."
–*The New York Times*

"Truly adventurous, assumption-busting thinking about what theater is and what it can be"
– *San Francisco Chronicle*

“Just when you think you might be getting a little cynical about the theatre … think about 600 HIGHWAYMEN.”

“Quietly shaking up American theatre since 2009." - *The Guardian*

“The term “experimental” tends to signal an ambition to flaunt difficulty and occlude meaning, but 600 highwaymen’s experiments with theatrical form are distinctly generous.”
- *The New Yorker*

“A new sphere of intimacy. I have never before felt anything like this during a live show. It was almost like a revelation – I kid you not.”
- *Culturebot*

“One of New York's best nontraditional companies." - *The New Yorker*

“Exploring the nature of being human, of being at all, moving and interacting with hundreds of others just like, but not quite like, us. To touch, to feel, to breathe, to see: it is an intense moment of being present and of being in this all together.” – *Exeunt Magazine*

The New York Times

Whose Last Show Is It, Anyway?

A meditation on mortality and renewal, "The Following Evening" presents mirror images of two married pairs of theater makers.

By Laura Collins-Hughes

Feb. 1, 2024

Ellen Maddow and Paul Zimet, both at right, collaborated with Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone on the new play "The Following Evening." Jeanette Spicer for The New York Times

Outside the big, tall windows of Ellen Maddow and Paul Zimet's Manhattan loft, in a former garment factory on Mercer Street in SoHo, is a slice of the New York skyline: up close, rooftops of old brick buildings, solid as can be; farther off, glass towers — taller, sleeker, colder, newer.

In a city forever in flux, Maddow, 75, and Zimet, 81, have stayed put for half a century, creating experimental theater in the skylighted boho oasis that cost $7,000 to buy in 1973, and where they raised their family.

Having arrived in the neighborhood when it was scary-scruffy, long before it went way upscale, they have remained stubbornly devoted to each other, and to their venerably niche downtown company, Talking Band, which turns 50 this year.

That kind of history can sound utopian from the outside. But misunderstanding is a risk they're taking, cautiously, with "The Following Evening," a new play in which they portray slightly fictionalized versions of themselves, in slightly fictionalized versions of their lives.

"Does this all sound romantic?" Zimet asks rhetorically in the show's prologue, where he reminisces about the past. "I really hope it doesn't."

And yet, how could it not? Maybe especially to younger New York theater artists like Abigail Browde, 42, and Michael Silverstone, 43, better known as the duo 600 Highwaymen. Creators of the inventive pandemic trilogy "A Thousand Ways," they have spent their careers navigating a theater landscape that lately has shifted unnervingly.

"The Following Evening," which they wrote and directed, is a meditation on mortality and renewal, art and evanescence, embrace and entanglement. Running through Feb. 18 at the Perelman Performing Arts Center, where Browde and Silverstone perform opposite Maddow and Zimet, it presents mirror images of two married pairs of theater makers. Scenes of dialogue are interspersed with stylized movement.

"In the beginning," Silverstone said, "Abby and I were really contemplating the intimacy of Paul and Ellen, really exploring physically a lot. Watching them work together, and making dances for them."

Maddow recalled: "They interviewed us a lot, too. There was one time where you had to do the whole story of your life while doing some movement that went on for about three hours. It was fun."

The couples share a rare commonality. Browde described it as "this very weird, dense overlap of what it means to be not only a theater artist in this specific lineage and community, but also to live in such a strange domestic experience," where there are "no hard edges" between work and life.

It was a Saturday afternoon in January at the loft, and they had just run through "The Following Evening" for a small invited audience that included two dogs — Maddow and Zimet's glossy Ava, ebullient in the front row, and Browde and Silverstone's tousled Pablo, lounging on cushions just offstage.

Afterward, as the four humans sat around the kitchen table, that experimental lineage was a bright thread through the conversation: when Zimet mentioned the reading he'd just done with Taylor Mac, Talking Band's old pal; or Browde noted that she'd taken the choreographer Annie-B Parson's class three times as an undergraduate at New York University; or Silverstone explained that he and Browde became interested in Zimet when he

Scenes from a performance: A rehearsal of the work, which is a collaboration between two theater-making couples a generation apart. Photographs by Jeanette Spicer for The New York Times

performed in a workshop of David Byrne's "Theater of the Mind" that they collaborated on, in 2017 on Governors Island.

Consciousness of that experimental, downtown tradition glimmers in "The Following Evening," too, as when Zimet refers to "Joe" — Joseph Chaikin, the founder of the influential Open Theater, where Maddow and Zimet met.

The play has been in progress since 2018, when Talking Band commissioned a work for Zimet and Maddow to perform. Back then, Browde said, she and Silverstone were feeling depleted, and a little jaded, after too many months on the road with their shows. So the impression they got, being in the room with Maddow and Zimet, struck them profoundly.

"These are people who have lived through multiple cycles of change in their lives, in their work, in the city," she said. "They aren't cynical. You don't feel that there's callous scar tissue. These are people who have a tremendous amount of hope, energy, optimism, and have all these shows planned out."

Indeed they have, with two more premieres coming up downtown: "Existentialism," directed by Anne Bogart, from Feb. 23-March 10 at La MaMa, and "Shimmer and Herringbone," in May at 122CC, a production that will also include Tina Shepard, the third founding member of Talking Band.

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It is, then, a bit misleading that the marketing copy for "The Following Evening" tugs at the heartstrings by calling the show "an intimate portrait of two artists creating what may be their final performance together," beneath a photo of Maddow and Zimet. That truly is an idea that has percolated through the show, but they don't identify with it.

"Every time you brought that up," Maddow said to Browde and Silverstone, not unkindly, "we'd say, 'Could you take that out? Because we don't want this to be our final show.' Don't even say that. It's like bad luck."

Talking Band, as it happens, sounds more sanguine about its future than do 600 Highwaymen. Browde and Silverstone are still bruised by what they said was the cancellation, by a major New York City theater, of a production of "The Following Evening" that was to have opened last April. (They are legally prohibited from naming the theater, they said.)

"The fact is, we have nothing lined up," Silverstone said. "We have no new work. We have nothing beyond this. When we started, we thought that we were making this piece about these two people who were making their final show, and yet it actually ended up being about us: Is this our final show?"

More narrowly, the question might be whether it is their last show made in New York. They are thinking of leaving Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, next year for a town in France that could be what Silverstone called "a next place of inspiration."

New York, in Browde's view, is "not doing great at holding on to theater artists," in part, she believes, because it no longer supports theatrical development as it once did.

"And, you know, we work in theater," she said. "So of course I think that things that are fleeting are beautiful, but also there's something lost when each generation just is like lemmings off the cliff."

For both couples, a lot of life has happened in the years that "The Following Evening" has been in process. Browde and Silverstone — symbiotic now, but genuine enemies, they say, when they were N.Y.U. undergrads — had a baby who has become a toddler; Maddow and Zimet gained three grandchildren; Zimet had a bicycle accident that worked its way into the show.

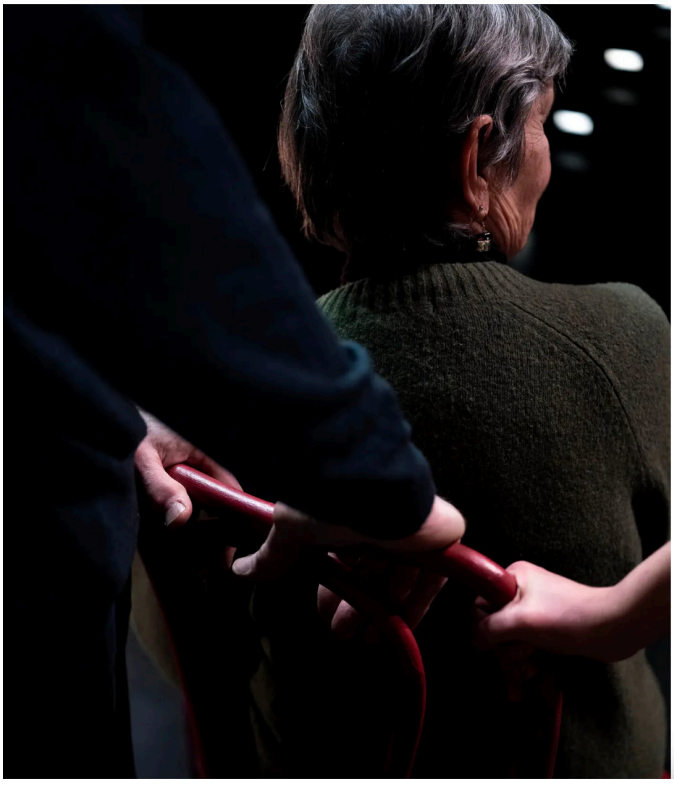
And the $500 million Perelman opened on the site of the World Trade Center — its dripping-with-wealth glamour as different as could be from the Talking Band aesthetic, but a form of regeneration anyway.

Zimet frets less about the health of the city and the theater than he does of the world, which he believes has grown dire. On his list of worries are "the end of democracy, the climate collapsing, what it's going to be like for our grandchildren."

But as he and Maddow prepare for their other show "Existentialism," he said, he takes comfort in a line from Sartre: "There may be more beautiful times, but this one is ours."

Maddow added: "It's the only one we're going to get."

A version of this article appears in print on Feb. 2, 2024, Section C, Page 1 of the New York edition with the headline: Couples Contemplate Mortality and Renewal. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe



THEATER REVIEW | FEB. 7, 2024

We're in This Together: *Bark of Millions* and *The Following Evening*

By Sara Holdren

There is — understandably, in this brutal and precarious moment, marked by seemingly daily occurrences of the "unprecedented" — a deep fascination with ancestry permeating much of our art. It's a multilayered fixation: With vast (and often vastly powerful) sections of the population blind to history, or in denial of it, or even engaged in an active war to make sure it stays buried, it's artists who grab the shovels and start digging, in search of both the sacred and the profane. Theater in recent months has felt intensely archaeological. How did we get here? Where did we come from? What, and whom — in our relentlessly linear, presentist mind-set — are we forgetting?

It may initially seem strange to put *The Following Evening*, the new show by 600 Highwaymen (the theater-makers Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone) in the same sentence as Bark of Millions. Where the latter is explosive and superabundant, the former is tender and contained — barely over an hour in length, just four bodies in street clothes and a few simple items on a small, largely unadorned stage. But that stage is every bit as charged with feeling, with curiosity and reflection and profound heartache, as Taylor Mac's. Browde and Silverstone are also dancing with their antecedents, but the marvelous twist is that here, the dance is literal. As two married experimental-theater artists who work together under a company banner and are entering their 40s, they've created a show for two married experimental-theater artists who are headed into their 80s.

The extraordinary devisers and performers Ellen Maddow and Paul Zimet — known collaboratively, along with Tina Shepard, as Talking Band — have been working in downtown New York theater for nearly as long as Browde and Silverstone have been alive. They were all (Maddow, Zimet, and Shepard) members of Joseph Chaikin's Open Theater, which now graces the syllabi for college courses in the American avant garde — along with the Living Theatre, the Wooster Group, the Performance Group, and Ontological-Hysteric, among other legends. These are the people, the companies, the epoch, that millennial theater-makers look back on with awe, often with mingled reverence and envy. *Rent was so cheap! The Village was, you know, actually the Village, man. Surely it was easier back then.*

The Following Evening gently dismantles this kind of tempting, simplistic nostalgia. With wry benevolence, it shines a light on the way in which every artist — no matter when, where, how old, or part of what moment or

movement — cycles between elation and doubt, boundless enthusiastic conviction and the abyss. "All I've ever done is this one thing in my life," says Maddow. "I'd like to think it was noble, not foolish." As she and Zimet crisscross the stage in a series of simple abstract movements — a deconstructed dance — they banter and reminisce, their voices minimally inflected and unsentimental, as if they're in their own kitchen the day after a show, sizing up the performance. The piece's title evokes this kind of creative eternal return: You make the thing, you share the thing, and the following evening you do it again, and then again, and again — and the evening after all that, when the thing is gone, you wonder if it meant any-

"We made a life — our whole life — in the theater," says Zimet, but "the plays are made entirely of snow." Maddow bustles through, eschewing any sense of drippy pathos with her brisk, almost chipper delivery: "Here we are. Again again again again, starting again starting again. You work so hard to make it great. And was it great? Who knows." We see her younger self, and Zimet's, inside and through them, moving into the sixth-floor loft on Mercer Street, on top of a garment factory, where they still live today. We hear them chatting about their neighbors and fretting over their work ("And after all that the Times doesn't come. And so now it's like did it even happen.") and testing new ideas and, sometimes, really getting on each other's nerves. "But why?" Zimet asks when Maddow walks in with a brown paper bag on her head and declares that this is how she thinks she should make her entrance. "Some things go unsaid!" she barks at him. "JUST BECAUSE. I don't want everything to be up for debate or able to be changed or tweaked. I don't want feedback. I don't want notes, I just want to have ideas and follow them!" (The exchange is already wonderful, and it's rendered brilliant when Maddow, in the middle of shouting at her partner, also shouts at their dog: "Ava, go lie down!")

"How amazing," says Zimet, wondering at a memory of an actor singing "Danny Boy" after putting drops in his eyes. "Real sadness from false tears." That slippery border between the real and the artificial is where The Following Evening lives and breathes: Just when we've spent long enough with Maddow and Zimet to be really immersed in their dialogue, to have begun to take them at their word and to see all this as memoir, the house lights pop up and Browde and Silverstone enter the stage. They've got some notes. They want Zimet to try a line differently. They want Maddow to move her arm in a different way. They're both self-effacing and authoritative — directors at work. The play becomes its own rehearsal, its structure, its very un-reality exposed. Gradually, the lines between rehearsal and performance — and between directors and performers — blur. All four artists are dancing together, carefully studying one another's movements, seeking, it seems, for a kind of discovery in unison. If our bodies do the same thing, what will pass between us? What will we learn of each other?

Browde and Silverstone have recently had a child, and, as the group re-creates a moment in rehearsal before the baby's birth, Zimet turns to Browde: "You'll be 40," he says. "I'll be 80." "And the baby will be zero," she replies. He pauses and smiles lightly. "I just got incredibly jealous. You guys have so much life ahead of you." "Oh. Isn't that funny?" says Browde, not happy, not sad. "I don't feel any of that."

There's a beautiful irony to *The Following Evening*, in that from its anti-romanticism, its embrace of the chaos and the mystery, emerges a deep hopefulness. Yes, you could once rent an apartment in Soho for a hundred bucks, but, as Zimet muses, "it isn't so clear-cut." Late in the show, Avi Amon's subtly stirring original music swells over the performers as they navigate back and forth across the stage, becoming almost inaudible in the crescendo. "Hello? Hello? Is there anybody? Anybody? Hello?" they call out repeatedly. Hamlet — as much a play about theater as about Danish royalty — begins with the same overwhelming question: Who's there? For artists of ephemera, whose life work is so much snow, it is the question. If "all of it goes, all of it vanishes," then, well, then what?

Then, 600 Highwaymen and Talking Band suggest, "you do it again." You keep wondering, you keep working, you experiment with making an entrance while wearing a paper bag. And if you're curious and generous and brave, somebody is there. And no age was the golden age and no moment is the last moment and only the simplest advice is ever of any use: "Shit takes time," says Zimet. "Life is long. Walk more."

The Following Evening is at PAC-NYC through February 18.

The New York Times

Strangers on a Phone, Theatrically Speaking

Social distance has left us rusty when it comes to connecting with strangers. The latest piece by 600 Highwaymen aims to help us practice — starting with a call.

By Laura Collins-Hughes

Nov. 11, 2020

Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone make up 600 Highwaymen, the theater troupe unspooling a related trio of shows under the title "A Thousand Ways." Lauren Lancaster for The New York Times

In the lockdown days of early spring, after they'd left New York City for their house in a village upstate, Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone — better known as the experimental theater duo 600 Highwaymen — were as eager as any other drama aficionados to dig into the bounty of archived productions that were suddenly, mercifully online.

It wasn't as much fun as expected.

"I'm sitting in my living room," Silverstone recalled by phone recently, "and I've got my dog in my lap and I'm watching this Peter Brook show, but something isn't right about this."

The not-rightness had nothing to do with Brook, the pioneering stage director, and everything to do with the nagging awareness — familiar to those of us who have struggled to adjust to screened theater — that the audience, so vital to the live dynamic, is superfluous to performances unfolding on camera.

"I don't feel —" Silverstone broke off.

"Needed," Browde supplied, because they are the kind of couple that finishes each other's sentences.

“Yeah,” he said. “I’m going to get up and, like, go get a cookie, and this thing is going to keep happening.”

But frustration can breed inspiration, in this case to refreshing effect. The latest I-dare-you show from 600 Highwaymen, “A Thousand Ways,” is a triptych whose first part, “A Phone Call,” is both a product of that digital alienation and the reason I wanted to speak with them.

Mark Russell, the director of the Under the Radar festival at the Public Theater, will present “A Phone Call” from Dec. 21 through Jan. 17, first as a prelude to the annual festival, then as a part of it — continuing a relationship that started when he presented 600 Highwaymen’s “The Record” in 2014.

“I always say that Under the Radar is about ‘Why make theater now?’” Russell said. “And they are sort of the prime example of that, because they make the theater moment. They crack it open to its essence. It’s surprising, it puts you off, it’s challenging, but when you walk away from one of those things, you will have feelings.”

It sounds odd to describe an hourlong telephone chat, which is what “A Phone Call” is, as a work of theater, and I’m not even sure that it qualifies. Yet the performance, which requires two anonymous strangers and one automated voice to guide them through a structured conversation, employs the tools of theater. And it achieves more goals of theater — telling stories, triggering imagination, nurturing empathy, fostering connection — than nearly any other show I have experienced since pre-pandemic days.

“All of our shows are always in some way about the body, and everything that comes with the body,” said Silverstone, who lives and works with Browde. Lauren Lancaster for The New York Times

There are actual stakes to it. As a confirmation email from the host venue warned before the call I took part in last month: “This experience is between you and one other person. It cannot occur without your presence.”

We are the performers, we are also the audience, and we could hardly be more necessary — or more socially distanced. I did “A Phone Call” by way of the Arts Center at N.Y.U. Abu Dhabi, matched with a

student ending her Saturday in her dorm there as I started mine in my apartment in Manhattan.

I didn't learn her name or much about her beyond what kind of a child she remembers being, growing up in India; a few details about her family; and which professor advised her, kindly, to fail more. But I do know the sound of her overcoming nervousness to hum a tune, because the electronic voice asked her to, and of her saying, "Spooky!" when it instructed us to turn out our lights. I got a sense, too, of what makes her laugh.

In this time of widespread social isolation and fragmentation, our compassion has gotten rusty. It is not nothing, then, to make even a momentary connection — to spend an hour revealing pieces of oneself and imagining the complexity of someone else's humanity.

The prompts in the script elicited only bits of us, but they were enough. Near the finish, our robotic guide (not a human but rather a computer-coded, feminine simulation) told us to ask each other, rhetorically: "Can you see me out there in the world?" Then: "Have I come into focus?"

My unspoken answer, more certain than I'd have expected, was yes. There is a person out there whom I will probably never meet, but because of that call I am quietly cheering her on.

Following the pandemic's arc

The most striking thing about "A Thousand Ways" — which is produced by ArKtype and is not yet complete; Browde and Silverstone are still making the third part — is how its progress follows the arc of the pandemic and our response to it.

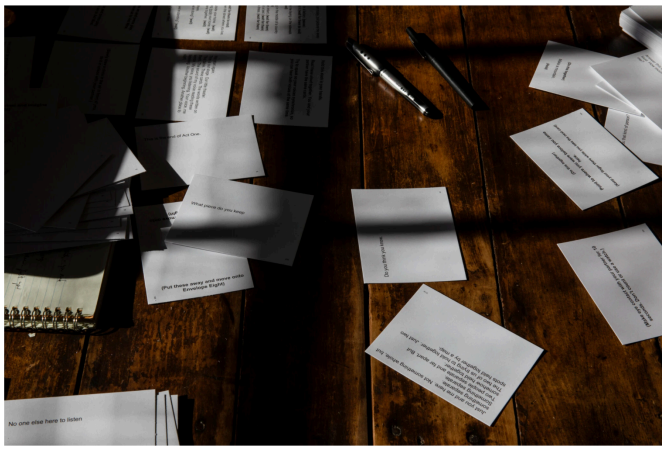
That first part (currently presented by Canadian Stage in Toronto, Arizona Arts Live in Tucson and the Singapore International Festival of Arts) is entirely distanced. As with online performance, people can get tickets to participate in "A Phone Call" from anywhere. In Browde's words, "You, the audience member, have to bring your own theater, you have to bring your own chair and you have to bring your own life."

Wolfram Sander and Lena Lappat meet with a pane of glass between them in the world premiere of the second part of the show, in Germany. Andres Greiner-Napp/Festival Theaterformen

The second part, "An Encounter" — which Russell hopes to present at the Public in January, if state regulations allow — takes place in person, but it, too, depends on the audience to enact it. Two strangers at a time, different pairs than in "A Phone Call," meet for 60 minutes at a table across a pane of plexiglass. With no audience to watch them, each follows prompts on a stack of index cards, but this part of the triptych is about looking, not listening. In a series of guided narratives, participants use visual information to imagine — the way we so often do with strangers — who the person on the other

side might be.

“An Encounter” premiered in July at the Festival Theaterformen in Germany, where pandemic adjustments — a glass barrier and having just a single pair do the piece at a time — allowed a show already planned for this summer to go on. There, people were allowed to remove their masks once they were behind the partition. The piece is now at On the Boards in Seattle, taking place indoors with participants masked throughout. The artistic director, Rachel Cook, said each stack of cards is set aside for 24 hours after a single performance before being reused.



Notecards with instructions to guide the in-person conversation between strangers that is the second part of the triptych. Lauren Lancaster for The New York Times

Only with its third part, “An Assembly,” will “A Thousand Ways” return — once it’s safe — to a more conventional form of theater involving a crowd. Because of the pandemic, it has no firm performance dates set anywhere, but Browde and Silverstone envision it as a gathering of about 80 people, sharing space, reading aloud. For 600 Highwaymen, the triptych’s time-wedded storytelling trajectory is new, and retrofitted. They were already working on “An Encounter” when the pandemic struck; the idea of complementing it with pieces at more extreme points on the social-distancing spectrum arose only when it was clear that there was no quick path back to live theater.

It is strange for them not to be present for performances of their work — to have, with part one, no control over crucial elements like a bad phone line or participants who just don’t click. Even with part two, they feel, as Silverstone put it, like a “visual artist who ships something to a museum.”

“All of our shows are always in some way about the body, and everything that comes with the body,” he said. “And there is a perverse thing going on with bodies right now, which is that they are ill: We are sick, and we are spreading it. And so I don’t know what that’s going to do for our work.”


It feels like a long time ago: Audience members carry an actor across the length of the stage in the 600 Highwaymen’s 2016 play “The Fever.” Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

“I’m thinking,” Browde said, “about another show of ours called ‘The Fever,’ where it’s performed by the audience and it’s 70 people in the room and you’re very close to one another — even moments of physical contact between audience members. I can’t even reconcile in my head what it would be like to ever get to do that show again.”

In the four years before the pandemic, 600 Highwaymen were on the road more often than not. When they headed upstate in March, they welcomed the break. And like so many people far from their families, they picked up the telephone.

“The phone is a way that I can hold my mother right now,” Silverstone said. “I can sit here on the couch, and I can look out the window, and I know she is halfway across the country and she is old and she is frail and she is scared, but I can listen to her voice and somehow in both of our fear, together, we can connect.”

In that old-fashioned method of communication, he and Browde recognized theatrical utility. It’s a form that suits their work much better than Zoom, which she said is “not as vulnerable of a space” as the phone, where you can “hear the moment when someone’s voice cracks, or the moment when they pause, even, and don’t say anything at all.”

In “A Phone Call,” the electronic voice asks us to imagine we’re together in a car that breaks down in the desert.

“We were having so much fun a minute ago,” it says.

As were we all, relatively, before the virus came and stopped so many things.

In the show, night falls, and someone makes a fire. We bed down under the stars and tell a story.

Like 600 Highwaymen in a pandemic, we use what simple tools we have. We make the best of it.

‘The Awesome Strangeness of Being Alive’
The plays of 600 Highwaymen.

Review: ‘The Fever’ Finds That Friendliness Can Be Contagious Jan. 5, 2017

Review: A Woman Grows Up in ‘Employee of the Year’ Jan. 12, 2016

An Assembly of Quietly Moving Parts Jan. 10, 2014

Willy Loman With an iPhone, Fit for the 21st Century July 12, 2013

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THE NEW YORKER

THE THEATRE NOVEMBER 2, 2020 ISSUE

EXPERIMENTS IN AUDIO THEATRE, RADICAL AND RETRO

"A Thousand Ways" and "Shipwreck" suggest a vast realm of possibility available to playwrights making new work in the COVID era.

By Alexandra Schwartz

October 26, 2020

Illustration by Raphaelle Macaron

"Look with thine ears," Lear tells poor blind Gloucester, and that is exactly what the rest of us should do now we know that the majority of New York theatres will not open their doors until, at the most optimistic guesstimate, the middle of next year. Zoom fatigue set in months ago, but audio is stepping into the breach to take us places that glazed screen-gazing can't. The eyes tend toward the literal, while what we only hear can bloom, the way a novel does, in the privacy of the mind, as is the case with two new productions—one radical, one retro—that use audio to light a path forward for performance in the covid era and beyond.

"A Thousand Ways" (produced by the Brooklyn-based ArKtype) was created by the duo Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, who go by the moniker 600 Highwaymen and are known for devising inventive, sincere theatre of a kind that makes urbane audiences fatted on cynicism feel wonder afresh. In "This Great Country," from 2012, seventeen performers, some experienced, some green, acted out scenes from "Death of a Salesman," transforming that classic into something rich and strange; "Employee of the Year," staged in 2014, had five girls under the age of eleven tell the story of one woman's adulthood. Browde and Silverstone, who are partners in life as well as in theatre, insist that they hate audience participation, which is a little like Elmer Fudd saying that he hates hunting wabbits. "The Fever," which premièred in New York in 2017, is described, by its creators, as "a public convergence," and involves much communal writhing and laying on of hands; people who attended the show describe it as if they had gone to an ordinary church service and left speaking in tongues.

The term "experimental" tends to signal an ambition to flaunt difficulty and occlude meaning, but 600 Highwaymen's experiments with theatrical form are distinctly generous. That is the case with "A Thousand Ways," which

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THE THEATRE NOVEMBER 2, 2020 ISSUE

EXPERIMENTS IN AUDIO THEATRE, RADICAL AND RETRO

takes a simple premise and turns it into magic. The piece is designed to be staged, ultimately, in three parts, the latter of which will involve physical encounters, safety permitting. Part 1 is being rolled out virtually, by fourteen theatres around the globe, from Toronto to Dublin to Singapore. It consists of an hour-long phone call between two strangers, mediated by a friendly female-sounding robot. I participated in a performance "at" Williams College, where my ticket confirmation came with instructions reminiscent of those you'd receive when pledging a secret society or delivering a ransom. At the stroke of eight, I was to call a number and be introduced to my partner; I should be in "a quiet, interruption-free indoor space," with a fully charged phone. (In fact, I used a landline. Have you heard of them? They're fantastic—no news alerts, and you can't lose hours of your life to Instagram.) And there my partner was—a male voice, nameless, as I was to him. We were asked, by the robot, to say hello, and then to decide which of us would be Person A and which Person B. This accomplished, we were prompted to describe, in simple, specific terms, aspects of the rooms we were in, and to put our hands on our cheeks, grounding ourselves in the physical.

It's amazing what a voice conveys, and what it doesn't. Person A, I decided right away, was a retiree who'd figured he might as well try something new. Wrong! Prompted by the robot, my partner revealed that he was born in 1988. I, meanwhile, was asked merely to say if I was alive then; he would never know that I was only a year older than he was. The deliberately asymmetrical titration of information is integral to the mystery and pleasure of "A Thousand Ways." It eliminates the polite "and you?" reflex. How novel, and relaxing, to give up conversational control—to feel interest without needing to perform it for the sake of social lubrication, to abandon the instinct to convince or entertain. I learned that my partner was gay and proud of it ("I do, in a very positive way, have limp wrists," he said, when asked to describe a physical mannerism), and that he was a painter. He learned that my ancestors, whom I was asked to describe in three words, were poor Ashkenazi Jews. He found out that I have never shot a gun, and that I know how to train a dog. (Well, sort of.) The robot asked A to tell me if he had inherited money; she asked me to describe a quality from childhood that I wished I could recover. What we were doing was dancing, using only our voices, learning each other's rhythms as the steps were called, the random and the banal grapevining with the profound.

There was a story, of a sort, woven through all this choreographed talk. The robot asked us to imagine that we were in a car that had broken down in a desert; by the end, we were camping together by a fire under the stars, disaster averted. Something here touched on the twee. Nonetheless, when the Person A in my own life walked through the door and accidentally destroyed my desert by turning on the lights, I waved him wildly out. I wanted to stay on that frequency, with that stranger, until we were severed by the robot's brusque "goodbye," leaving me with that best and rarest of feelings—wanting more.

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This Time It's Personal: 600 Highwaymen's Intimate 'A Thousand Ways'

The acclaimed company has built a tripartite show about the space between us in which we must do a lot of the connecting.

BY GEMMA WILSON

Why am I telling this total stranger about my tattoo?

I'm a fairly private person, but in my first 30 minutes on the phone with this woman, I've told her details of my childhood, my bedroom furniture, and greatest grief. I know about the birth of her son, the art in her office, her sense of self. Another half-hour later, she's gone.

The stage for "A Thousand Ways" at On the Boards

After a year of isolation and Zoom art fatigue, the feeling of Brooklyn theatre company 600 Highwaymen's *A Thousand Ways, Part One: A Phone Call* was revelatory, an antidote to the exhausting, never-ending quarantine question: "How are you?"

"At first, we thought we were going to make a conversation between strangers," said Michael Silverstone (he/him), who, with Abigail Browde (she/her), comprises 600 Highwaymen. But conversation, in turned out, wasn't what they needed. "Conversation pulls us into behavioral mannerisms that are about politeness, and how we're socialized to engage with someone," Browde said. That getting-to-know-you, first-date chit-chat—what's your name? what do you do?—keeps things pretty surface level.

"Connection is kind of an overused term," Silverstone said. "But if I'm starting to understand who you are, what you care about, what you're looking at, what you're thinking about, what you come from—if you can connect the dots of those details, you can start to create a connection."

So sitting on my bed in Seattle, I called an Arizona phone number—I'd booked my ticket through Arizona Arts Live, in Tucson—and was connected to my anonymous partner, wherever she may have been.

Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone of 600 Highwaymen.

I was A, she was B. Guided by automated, recorded voice prompts, we answered routine but revealing questions and completed simple, shared tasks, like counting. Later, as our auto-guide moved us from question-and-answer into a narrative, we rode together down a desert highway. I could see us so clearly in my mind. Then, we hung up.

A Thousand Ways is, per its official description, "a triptych of encounters between strangers." Part One: the phone call. In *Part Two: An Encounter*, two people sit across from one another at a table, separated by plexiglass, and follow instructions provided on a series of notecards. When the time safely comes, *Part Three: An Assembly* will gather participants in a theatre en masse.

In much of their work, 600 Highwaymen pull off the magic trick of capitalizing on, but not exploiting, the intimacy of strangers. With gentle but clear guidance, built on unsentimental honesty and un-self-conscious rigor, people who normally despise audience participation become convinced. And though theatre is fundamentally about pretending, 600 Highwaymen seems uninterested in pretending that the form's more arbitrary rules matter. As the world reopens and we reacquaint ourselves with each other, as humans and artist-audiences, that guidance feels like exactly what we need.
Browde and Silverstone met in college and began making work together as 600 Highwaymen in 2009, the same year they got married. They've since toured their shows around the world, and critical praise from major outlets up to and including *The New York Times* has followed.

When talking about theatre, they're scrupulously non-prescriptive, constantly reiterating that they don't have answers or solutions—they're just following their own curiosities.

Those curiosities eddy around ideas of collectivity and spectatorship, of dissolving arbitrary lines between artist and audience, "professional" and non. *Employee of the Year* starred 9- and 10-year-old girls, who stayed with the show until their early teenage years. The wordless dance-theatre piece *The Record* starred 45 ordinary people, of all ages, cast anew in every city in which the show opened.

Prompt cards for "A Thousand Ways" at On the Boards.

In *The Fever*, audience and performer were almost indistinguishable, seated arm-to-arm in chairs arranged in a large square on the stage before rising to build the show together.

In early 2020, Browde and Silverstone were already workshopping the show that would become *Part Two: An Encounter*, as they grappled with American anxieties about ideological division, exacerbated by a stressful election year. In it, two strangers sit at a table, seeing each other across a distance but not losing sight of that distance.

"We're not trying to pretend there's harmony between us," Silverstone explained. "We actually want to frame the fact that we *don't* see eye to eye, that we're sharing this furniture and this room, and we are not together in any way, "shape or form. We can pretend to be for an hour, but the truth is, we know we will always see things differently. When COVID-19 hit and human contact vanished, it was *A Thousand Ways*'s executive producer Thomas O. Kriegsmann who saw a path forward. "Tommy was the one who had a sober sense of how long this was going to last," Silverstone said. "And he's the one who helped us structure the idea of a triptych, of a project that could actually guide audiences from this moment of isolation to this moment of togetherness."

Dramaturg Andrew Kircher and line producer Cynthia J. Tong soon rounded out the Thousand Ways team. "We spent all summer online with each other, and held on," said Silverstone. With Kircher, he said, they'd stay up until 2 a.m. talking through scripts and thinking through the three-show arc. Tong handled the mechanics of getting each show up and running. "She makes the whole thing happen," he said.

Kriegsmann started calling previous 600 Highwaymen presenters to gauge interest in joining forces; early co-commissioners included Stanford Live, NYU Abu Dhabi, and On the Boards in Seattle. "We were all in this moment of freefall when the lockdown happened—like, whoa, is our art form extinct?" Browde said. "And Tommy had this perspective into the institutions, that they were also like, *What do we do?* He saw that there's a mutuality here. We all need each other."

For On the Boards artistic director Rachel Cook (she/her), the shows were an easy yes. "This idea of longing for a connection, it seemed like the right moment to try something like this out," said Cook.

Part One was built in part in response to missing the liveness of regular human encounters, and the Zoom theatre of early quarantine wasn't helping. "We were feeling like, *Gosh, I'm really not needed here as a viewer*," Browde said. Talking on the phone took on an unexpected potency. "It still somehow felt embodied, because it wasn't asking me to play this game of pretend, where I'm looking into a camera and we're pretending to see each other—because we're not," she said.

In hindsight, it seems obvious that telephone calls facilitated connection across a vast distance—that's literally the point of phones—but Browde and Silverstone were still shocked at how far-flung their callers have been. "In this moment, we're both completely bound to our place, but [place] is also very vaporous," Silverstone said. "It threw us for a loop in an incredible way."

The numbers are indeed incredible. For On the Boards' February 2021 presentation of *Part One: A Phone Call*, Cook told me, 58 percent of participants were first-time ticket buyers (typically somewhere between five and 15 percent), and 73 percent were from 25 miles or more outside of Seattle. "We had people from Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, England, Hong Kong, Iceland, and Mexico," Cook said. "I get a little bit utopic, like, *This is how theatre is connecting us across the world*."

The show's individual connections also create a sense of responsibility to another person. In thousands of calls to date, Silverstone can't recall anyone ever calling it quits and hanging up.

For these historically hands-on artists, letting go has been a challenge. They keep close tabs on shows via box office reports and a feedback hotline they set up for participants to share their experiences. Otherwise, there's no record that these experiences even happened.

Since its American premiere at On the Boards last September, *Part One* has since been presented by theatre companies from Arkansas to Abu Dhabi. But *Part Two* has opened piecemeal, for obvious safety and logistical reasons. I caught it during its March 4-14 run at Seattle's On the Boards. A few weeks after my phone call, I sat across from a masked stranger in a pool of light on the company's mainstage. Plexiglass and a stack of notecards with words and actions separated us. We read our cards and undertook simple collaborative tasks. Later, we became storytellers, spinning a tale about attending a party in winter and slipping on ice in too-fancy shoes.

My experience of *A Thousand Ways* so far has been the inverse of all too many theatrical experiences: While I was very literally told what to do, I never felt like I was told what to think. Sitting in a theatre again after so long, during Part Two, I thought about the ways we extend unspoken kindness, the way we follow rules or don't, how we follow and lead. I cried, not because the show led me there but because it met me where I was. Being really looked at by someone else can be excruciating, and this has been a hard year.

According to Browde and Silverstone, building these shows on the fly in collaboration with so many theatres has been a beautiful, surprising reminder of what it's like to like to just turn off the lights and make a show together. Or not quite together: Plans are for *Part Three* to premiere at the Singapore International Festival of the Arts in May (a U.S. premiere remains TBD), but without 600 Highwaymen present. "The process of making Part Three that has us written out of the experience is probably the greatest thing that could possibly be, even though we don't know how the hell we're gonna do it," Silverstone said.

For this company, the art is all in the crafting of instructions; when these instructions are built, the rest is up to us.

"Our hope is that the project is fully created by the people doing it," said Silverstone. "We're always interested in taking risks in our shows, something where we're like, *Oh my God, I can't believe we're doing that*," he said. "This show feels to me like it's taking that idea all the way, which is like, taking audience members, putting them into a theatre together—and then walking out the door."

Gemma Wilson (she/her) is a contributing editor to *American Theatre*.

At On the Boards, a play in which you and a stranger meet satisfies a pandemic-specific thirst for fresh intimacy

Nov. 11, 2020 at 6 am | *Updated Nov. 11, 2020 at 12:31 pm*

By Brendan Kiley
Seattle Times features reporter

Theater review

'A Thousand Ways Part Two: An Encounter'

By 600 Highwaymen. Through Nov. 22; On the Boards, 100 W. Roy St., Seattle; $20-$35; 206-217-9886, ontheboards.org


"A Thousand Ways Part Two: An Encounter." (Sara Ann Davidson)

A plain wood table, with two wood chairs, stands on an otherwise bare stage in an empty theater. The only sound is the low thunder of the HVAC system. In the middle of the table, a plexiglass divider.

At the bottom of the divider, a slot cut for a stack of notecards within easy reach from either side of the table. On each card, an arrow points to either person A or person B, indicating who should draw next.

Two strangers (wearing masks) enter the theater, sit, size each other up. We are the performers and the audience. The strangers begin drawing cards, each of which gives us text to speak, yes-or-no questions to ask, or actions to take. "A Thousand Ways Part Two: An Encounter," at On the Boards, begins.

In the stripped-down theater, "Part Two," by experimental, New York-based theater company 600 Highwaymen, looks stark and forbidding at first — are we waiting for Godot? — but quickly turns toward something softer and more delicately strange.

We are getting to know each other through the questions: Have you ever had to wear a uniform? (Me, yes.) Have you ever scaled a fence? (Yes.) Baked a cake? (No.) Rewired a lamp? (Yes.) Been in the room when a baby is born? (No.) Have you ever slept next to a weapon? (Yes.) Do you know how to drive a stick shift? (Yes.)

Each of us has automatically registered a few identifying details about the other. My partner knows my apparent age, apparent race, sense of style (or lack thereof), the texture of my voice.

What does the sum of all this information tell her about me? What doesn't it tell? How much can we really know about each other, anyway? As one set of cards instructs me to ask my partner: "I wonder if you can find a little space between what you know of me, what I tell you and what you imagine?"

If all this sounds dangerously gooey, "Part Two" might surprise you — the experience is sometimes awkward, sometimes unexpectedly tender, cleverly scripted to ease us into vulnerability and disarm our more cynical defenses. (And let's be real: 2020 has been a bitter, heavy year. If one of Seattle's first in-person theater experiences since the pandemic errs a little toward the gooey, I forgive it.)

The three-part performances of "A Thousand Ways" are taking place all around the world (Singapore, Dublin, Abu Dhabi, Seattle) over a period of months: "Part One" happened in September, between strangers on the phone; "Part Three" is under construction, something involving a full audience once we cross the threshold into a post-pandemic world.

Though it had some early, pre-COVID test runs, "A Thousand Ways" quenches a pandemic-specific thirst: fresh intimacy with unfamiliar faces and voices. It demonstrates that, if we can sharpen our attention, there's no such thing as small talk. Look carefully enough, and even the way someone responds to "have you ever played a slot machine?" (a furrowed brow, then yelp of laughter, as if the idea were absurd) reveals something deeper about the answerer.

The most memorable intimacies of "Part Two" come in those off-script flashes: Two of us reaching for a card at the same time, catching the surprise in each other's eyes, or laughing as we touched through the plexiglass, trying to follow the cards' directions to make impossible shapes with our hands. (We made an "X" and a mountain no problem — I don't want to spoil the curveballs that come next.)

The duo 600 Highwaymen (Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone) plays with fracturing expectations and what pops out between the cracks. "This Great Country" (2012) staged Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" with a bunch of actors and barely-actors in an Austin bingo hall and then an abandoned Manhattan shopping mall. In "Empire City" (2011), five actors changed roles every night to perform a recorded conversation between an older Long Island couple.

An earlier version of this project was called "A Thousand Ways to Listen" (which gives you a hint about what Browde and Silverstone are after), but the 2020 iteration is linked to the trajectory of the pandemic itself. "Part One," in September, was a similar exercise between two strangers (yes-or-no questions; imagining ourselves elsewhere, like in a broken-down car in the desert; us counting together), but even more socially distanced — it happened over the phone.

"A Thousand Ways Part Three: An Assembly" promises, once it's epidemiologically safe, to bring us all together for the mysterious final act — for those of us who've ventured through the weird phone call and the in-person awkwardness.

We'll still be newly hatched from the isolations of lockdown, but will share a common wavelength from spending time in the "Thousand Ways" paradox. We'll all have learned to nurture a fragile kind of intimacy with strangers while being reminded that other people are galaxies we'll never fully understand.

Brendan Kiley: *bkiley@seattletimes.com; Brendan Kiley is a Seattle Times features reporter.*

The New York Times

THEATER

Review: Strangers in an Audience, Healing One Another; ‘The Fever’ Finds That Friendliness Can Be Contagious

UNDER THE RADAR 2017: THE FEVER | NYT Critics' Pick | Off Broadway, Experimental/Perf. Art, Play | 1 hr. and 15 min. | Closing Date: January 15, 2017

Public Theater - LuEsther Hall, 425 Lafayette St. | 212-967-7555

By CHARLES ISHERWOOD JAN. 5, 2017

Credit Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

We often pay lip service to the idea that theater is a sort of secular communal rite, but the description applies precisely to “The Fever,” a lovely, haunting meditation on human connection, and disconnection, created by the innovative company 600 Highwaymen, and presented in the Under the Radar festival at the Public Theater.

Written and directed by Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone (600 Highwaymen is their nom de theater), in collaboration with Brandon Wolcott, Emil Abramyan and Eric Southern, the production intimately but unfussily incorporates audience members, who are ranged around a central playing space in rectangular formation.

There is just one row of seating, and the chairs are nestled closely together, so that you’re literally rubbing elbows with your neighbor, and the lights remain on for most of the 75-minute running time.

The show begins with Ms. Browde and Mr. Silverstone, casually dressed and seated among the audience, describing a party hosted by a woman named Marianne. Volunteers stand to represent Marianne and some of her guests, although for the most part the audience members do not speak.

The description of the party is fairly mundane (“Someone left their car lights on, and the battery went dead”), but an afterglow of unexpected emotional camaraderie lingers. As Ms. Browde says at one point: “And when we were outside, you said to me: ‘Wouldn’t it be nice if it was only us. Just these people here at this party. If we were the only ones. Wouldn’t it be just perfect.’”

Credit Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

What follows is more abstract, but plays upon the idea of friendly interaction among comparative strangers. Another performer, Tommer Peterson, the oldest, with gray hair and spectacles, rises and invites audience members to join him, and then to catch him as he falls, to rearrange his arms as he lies on the ground, to help him get up. It’s a simple but moving image of sympathetic feeling between strangers, and a poetic evocation of our mostly unspoken — and un-called-upon — dependence on one another.

Much of show is made up of exchanges that could almost be described as the kind of “mixer games” made to foster fellowship among colleagues at corporate retreats.

I know: shudder!

But in “The Fever,” they are infused with a humble physical — and literary — poetry that scrapes away synthetic sentimentality. I never had the feeling that we were about to be asked to sing a chorus of “Kumbaya.” In some of the exchanges, the audience volunteers wordlessly, and without apparent instruction, to mimic the simple movement of the actors. These actions are performed with such an unforced naturalness that you realize that we all possess a natural, physical instinct — and an ability — to communicate with one another, to connect. We just aren’t in the habit of using it, except among a small circle of intimates.

At one point, I found myself thinking of my subway ride to the theater and how we all sat in the same proximity with one another as the audience members did at the show. But of course on the subway you sit as if in a walled-off cell from the person just an inch away from you, and God forbid you should inadvertently catch someone’s eye.

Like their equally wonderful “The Record” at this festival two years ago, “The Fever” seeks to break down those unseen walls we all put up around us, to acknowledge that we are all here. Together. Now.

Chicago Tribune

SEPTEMBER 8, 2017, 1:30 PM

‘The Fever’ at the MCA is audience participation gone rogue

By **Chris Jones**
Chicago Tribune

If you dislike the threat of audience participation — and I am not sure I have ever met any adult who feels otherwise, when sober — then what I am about to describe might well sound like a voluntary descent into the seventh circle of hell, even before your sins deliver you there.

If you are the kind of person who breaks out in a cold sweat when a performer asks you to join them, then you’ll be thinking that the piece installed this weekend in the theater at the Museum of Contemporary Art, as infected by the experimental desires of a New York theater company known as 600 Highwaymen, is aptly titled. It’s called “The Fever.”

But you know ...

"The Fever," from New York-based 600 Highwaymen at the MCA Chicago Stage this weekend, features unavoidable audience participation. (Maria Baranova photo)

It’s a fascinating piece of work. Elliptical and not for all tastes, I grant you (I was sitting next to a naysayer; you are unlikely to be on the fence). But what “The Fever” does is explore the age-old relationship between performer and audience with an intensity and focus that is quite unlike anything I ever have seen. And if you ever have fantasized about heading into some downtown studio and losing yourself in a kind of ritualistic communal storytelling for a few minutes, then “The Fever" will raise your aspirational temperature, all right.

This is a piece easy for a critic to ruin. So I’ll keep it skeletal, which matches the gestalt of the piece. You enter the theater and head to the stage, where you sit on a chair around the periphery. There are actors among you (including Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, the hip duo behind 600 Highwaymen), but, for much of the next 75 minutes, it will not be evident where or who they are.

You will participate in the telling of a story; it involves a woman and a party but it ranges far from there. When I say “you will participate,” I don’t mean that you will need to be lucky enough to get asked to volunteer. I mean “you will participate.” It is unavoidable, unless, I suppose, you spend your time rebelling against the will of the group. Which would be an act of participation in and of itself.

Everyone is all-in and, therefore, the boundaries between the transmitters and the receivers dissolve before your eyes. No one is asked to do anything embarrassing or confessional or even difficult — although the most moving moment at Thursday night’s show came when a gentleman with limited mobility revealed himself to be determined to play his part. The evening stopped for a moment and we all shared his challenges and his achievements. It was quite profound. I won’t ever forget it.

The result of all of this is that you become conscious of your fellow audience members, in all their diversity, in an intense way. You similarly become conscious of your role in the group: you watch and are watched. I’d further note that this show makes you feel like you are getting a window into your fellow audience members’ personalities. I saw one guy’s emotions writ large. I made up several biographies.

But one of the tricks to this piece — which was originally commissioned by The Public Theater in New York and that 600 Highwaymen have meticulously prepared, scripted and executed — is that the atmosphere remains warm and inclusive and the communal acts are kept emblematic, physically simple and emotionally non-specific. It is in part an experiment in human behavior, I suppose. And if you’re interested in the social sciences, your head will likely go there.

But my mind — and heart — ranged more around my relationship to this particular story, which is deftly penned so that you can imprint your own memory, dreams and fears on that in which you are being asked to play a part. And — even more intensely — the show struck me as intensely moralistic. It argues for collective responsibility in an age of increased isolation. Frankly, I was shocked at how resistant I was to really dealing with other people in a theater, where I always prefer to be left alone. If a hurricane were headed here, that tendency would not be good. This show would be.

So there you go. If you’re reading and thinking, “what’s he babbling on about,” then the Cubs have some crucial games this weekend and no one will make you pick up a bat or a ball or even make you care if you ever get back, Cracker Jack.

They won’t even notice.

But at the MCA? Well. You’ll see everyone and they’ll think about you, in all your fevered glory.

theguardian

Theatre

The Record: 45 Bristolians stage a silent act of resistance

Cult US theatre group 600 Highwaymen are putting on their first UK show with a gang of strangers who have rehearsed individually and never met each other

by Matt Trueman | Monday 6 February 2017

When they take the stage this week, the cast of The Record will meet each other for the first time. The 45 Bristolians taking part don't know one another's names. They'll be strangers sharing a stage, just as they share a city. Part of Bristol's In Between Time festival, The Record is the first show that 600 Highwaymen have brought to Britain, but Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone have been quietly shaking up American theatre since 2009. The New Yorker critic Hilton Als has piled on the praise: "I wish to hear anything that 600 Highwaymen has to say."

Sometimes, they don't say anything at all. The Record is a wordless piece, an hour-long movement score for group performance. Sometimes the performers stand alone, striking a pose. Sometimes they band together and pick up one another's actions.

The Record is rehearsed individually. Over a month, each participant works one-on-one with Browde and Silverstone. They get their own script, a personal score, and their own technical rehearsal. "They never meet each other," explains Silverstone. "Even when they show up to perform, they only sit in a circle backstage. Then they step on stage together and it happens." All these pieces, all these people, slot together into a show.

That's not The Record's USP though, he insists, nor what it's about. "It's just the way we choose to work, like preferring one-on-one conversations to group chats."

The Record takes its time, very deliberately. Those on stage are silent and, mostly, still. "It's about giving people permission to really stare," says Silverstone. "We feel that's important." The show is designed to change the way we see others, not at a glance, but in depth. "I think the piece is most successful if we can rewire the audience's time signature," Browde adds. "Our engagement with one another."

Watching a recording of a New York performance, I felt I understood diversity a little more precisely. Here was a stage filled by performers of different races, ages, sizes, shapes and genders. A stage of individuals, but also a group. Performed so soon after Women's marches and anti-Trump protests worldwide, it might seem like an act of resistance. Browde takes that thought in. "A lot of the things that are particularly problematic about Trump's America are about invisibility or erasure, not seeing or acknowledging this group of people. To be whoever you are and to be on a stage or on a podium, that's an act of resistance."

"It's scary," he says, "Standing there, facing the audience or what you imagine the audience to be, what you think they see in you, what you think they're looking at." A lot of 600 Highwaymen's work in rehearsal is about getting comfortable with that vulnerability – not getting over it, but being open to it. "We're all here, all looking at one another. We're all in this together. How are we going to handle each other? How are we going to meet each other?"

Their show The Fever, which premiered at the Under the Radar festival in New York in January, takes the idea a step further. It invites the audience to step up and take part, there and then. "What if we really are all in this together?" wonders Silverstone. "What if we have to be?"

That's 600 Highwaymen all over. Browde and Silverstone had both worked in traditional theatre before collaborating. "The insularity of that world was very apparent to us," says Browde. "We made a lot of choices early on about working against the insider-ness of theatre – not wanting to work with our friends or people who spoke the same language as us." Instead, they'd use theatre to bring people together.

The politics is in the process – "refusing to operate within a set model" – as much as the end result. When they started out, the company set up in the basement of a church in Brooklyn. "If we weren't seeking anyone's permission, we could write all the rules: who we were working with, what we were making, where we were making it." Browde's words recall that old hypothetical question: if theatre had never existed, if you were starting from scratch, what would it look like? How would it work?

It's a question of ownership. Who gets to stand on stage? Who is theatre for? Their version of Death of a Salesman, This Great Country, cast men and women of all ages and races as Willy Loman, America's everyman. His wife was played by six women, from pre-teens to pensioners. It was put on in a rundown bingo hall in Texas. "We didn't really know what we were doing," Browde admits. "We started with the people in the room." This year, they'll do the same in Salzburg for Ödon von Horvath's Kasimir and Karoline. It's giving a state-of-the-nation play back to the nation, somehow; handing a play over to the people.

Some describe such casts as "non-performers" but 600 Highwaymen reject the term, mostly because to be involved is to perform. Silverstone pulls a face: "What does it even mean to be a non-performer?" (Ditto: non-professional.) "Our hackles go up because it's a way of reducing something," Browde continues. "It says: 'Not this, this is amateur, this is other. We're on the stage of the Bristol Old Vic, but, yeah, that's not actually theatre.' Well … why not?"

THE NEW YORKER

THE THEATRE | OCTOBER 20, 2014 ISSUE

BODY POLITIC

600 Highwaymen's unusual casting, and its sincere theatre.

BY HILTON ALS

Just when you think you might be getting a little cynical about the theatre—all those stars in so many vanity productions—think about 600 Highwaymen. Founded in Brooklyn, in 2009, by the vibrant and open young theatre artists Michael Silverstone and Abigail Browde, the company produced, in the dull summer of 2013, one of the more exciting things I'd seen that year: "This Great Country," their reimagining of Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman." The piece featured seventeen performers, some of whom had professional experience, and some of whom did not. (I was particularly struck by the Texas-based adolescent Ashley Kaye Johnson; her sense of space, timing, and theatricality reminded me of a very young Gwen Verdon.) Using silence and choreographed movement to underscore lines that were spoken directly to the audience, Silverstone and Browde's cast included teen-agers and women of a certain age, all playing Willy Loman's sad wife, as well as male and female artists of color playing Loman and one of his disquieted sons. In so doing, Silverstone and Browde went past gender-blind and color-blind casting to emphasize the heart of their enterprise: humans interacting with one another, within a world of well-orchestrated joy and thought, to see what might happen.

600 Highwaymen lacks, blissfully, the too-cool-for-school, droopy-jeans irony that affects so many of its contemporaries. The performers are not embarrassed by feeling, and therefore make us less ashamed of our own. The company's new piece, "Employee of the Year" (Oct. 15-16, part of French Institute Alliance Française's "Crossing the Line" festival), stars five girls under the age of eleven in a story about rebirth. The protagonist's house burns down; so begins her journey in search of home and community. With music by the impressive David Cale, the show promises one thing for sure: a story filled with bodies that are inseparable from the poetry of politics. ♦

Hilton Als became a staff writer at *The New Yorker* in October, 1994, and a theatre critic in 2002.

The New York Times
October 17, 2014
Weekend Arts

4 THEATER REVIEW

To tell a woman's life, a cast of girls. BY CHARLES ISHERWOOD

Cleaving to a Young Girl's Yearning and Seeking

SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

In movement and song, girls tell a story from childhood through old age in "Employee of the Year," a production of 600 Highwaymen that is part of the Crossing the Line Festival, at Gould Hall.

"I'm 45."
"I'm 54."
"I'm 62 now."
"I'm 71."

The years of a woman's life flit by like leaves blown in a stiff breeze in "Employee of the Year," an original and affecting theater work from the inventive company 600 Highwaymen that has made its New York premiere as part of the Crossing the Line Festival, at Gould Hall. (The two-performance run ended on Thursday night.) What's most striking about this simple but fresh-feeling piece is less the content than the form in which it is presented, or rather the performers who present it. Although the narrator describes her life from the age of 3 to the age of 80, all five of the actors who tell her story are 9 and 10.

CHARLES ISHERWOOD
THEATER REVIEW

The fragmentary first-person narrative, written by Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, who also directed the production, begins with the protagonist's earliest memories: of standing in her yard at 3 and suddenly yearning for her mother, and, later, of playing with her mother, at 7, in the park.

"She is throwing this kite in the air, and we are running and laughing so much that I tumble into the grass," says Rachel Dostal, who narrates the early section of the story with a clear, almost affectless delivery that will be matched by all the accomplished performers.

Ten years pass suddenly — while telling us the story, the performers move pointedly around the large white square of carpet that is the set — and J., as the narrator calls herself, is 17 and going out on a date. But an innocent night out ends in tragedy, when J. returns home to find that her house has burned down, and her mother has died in the fire. More disorienting still, when Rick and Donna, friends of her mother's, come to take J. to live with them, she learns that in fact she was adopted.

They are silent when she asks who her real mother was. "Donna and Rick are telling me they believe in honesty, but they say nothing else," J. says. At her new house, she notices a photo of a girl who looks just like her. On the back are the words: "Lynn's house, Boulder, Colo." Later she overhears Donna telling Rick, "We made a promise, we're not shipping her off to Lynn."

J. stealthily packs her bag that very night, steals a fistful of cash from Donna's purse and sets out to find this mysterious Lynn, who, she is convinced in the turbulence of her broken 17-year-old heart, must be her mother. The story takes several more surprising turns, as it is passed from Ms. Dostal to the other narrators: Stella Lapidus, Alice Chastain-Levy, Violet Newman and Candela Cubria.

The switching of the narrators, which happens suddenly, at random points in the story, underscores the emotional keynote of "Employee of the Year." While J. keeps changing and growing, eventually acquiring a boyfriend and a job, and bearing her own child, she nevertheless somehow remains trapped in her girlhood, yearning obsessively for the return of her lost mother.

It's as if by tracking down her birth mother, she can somehow resurrect her real mother and rewrite her life story, erasing the tragedy of her youth.

As they narrate the story of J.'s lifelong — quite literally — search, the performers move around the stage and strike simple poses, stretching a single arm out to the side, lying on the ground, or occasionally grouping together and running back and forth, in fits of giggles. (Similar movement was the focus of the company's wonderful wordless show, "The Record," seen at Under the Radar in January.)

These minimalist, dancelike moves infuse the piece with an odd, frolicsome energy that keeps it from growing too static. So do the songs peppering the narrative, sung a cappella. Composed by David Cale, the noted solo performer and composer ("Floyd and Clea Under the Western Sky," "A Likely Story"), they are touching and often funny, simply composed, and woven deftly into the narrative.

Only in the last section does "Employee of the Year" break through its intentionally distancing, deadpan style. Ms. Cubria, the final narrator, steps outside the story and introduces herself by name, and then sings a touching, mournful song, "Will I Remember?," which ruminates on the way memory rearranges and reorders experience, keeping things we'd think we'd like to throw away, losing passages that seemed to mean so much at the time.

"Life is a mystery," Ms. Cubria sings. "I guess Madonna was right."

Employee of the Year

Written and directed by Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone; original songs by David Cale; designed by Jessica Pabst and Eric Southern; production manager, Eben Hoffer; assistant director/company manager, Lauren Z. Adleman; vocal coach, Dane Terry. A 600 Highwaymen production, Shelley Carter, producing associate; presented by the French Institute Alliance Française as part of the Crossing the Line 2014 festival; Lili Chopra, Simon Dove and Gideon Lester, curators. At Gould Hall, 55 East 59th Street, Manhattan; 800-982-2787, fiaf.org. Running time: 1 hour 20 minutes.

WITH: Rachel Dostal, Stella Lapidus, Alice Chastain-Levy, Violet Newman and Candela Cubria.

The New York Times

THEATER | THEATER REVIEW

An Assembly of Quietly Moving Parts

‘The Record’ Creates Intimacy Without Words

NYT Critics' Pick

By CHARLES ISHERWOOD JAN. 10, 2014

Aaron Adlam-Ferguson, center, in "The Record," at the Public Theater.
Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

The stars of “The Record” — all 45 of them — do not really do much. They stand stock still on a bare stage, strike some funny poses then walk around a bit. They do a little running, too, and assemble in groups and sometimes stretch out on the floor. Just now and then, one will extend a hand to touch another, or a young woman will fall backward into a man’s arms, in a moment of connection that registers with soft surprise.

And yet this simple but sublime production from the troupe called 600 Highwaymen, part of the Under the Radar festival at the Public Theater, touches the deep wellsprings of our attraction to theater. In the course of just an hour, the audience’s immersion in this wordless dance-theater piece creates a feeling of quiet but intense intimacy, and even a shivery sense of reverence for the communal experience not just of theater, but of life itself.

Directed by Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, “The Record” sounds pancake flat when its mundane details are described. On a wide expanse of unvarnished wood, under a white canvas through which light falls gently — moving from bright to dim to brighter, suggesting clouds slowly moving across the sun — a collection of people gathers and disperses. First, just one man enters, walks to a precise point on the platform, stands still for a minute or so then slowly turns and bends his knees, lifting his arms at the same time.

He’s later joined by a companion, then a few more. The performers are dressed in everyday clothing, presumably their own, as if they’ve just been pulled off the street and hustled into the theater: jeans and sweaters, leggings and boots, the odd hipster hat. One grizzled-looking old fellow wears a headset for the duration. For the most part, the performers do not acknowledge one another’s presence, although sometimes they move in tandem. Slowly, they will step forward a few paces at the same time, or put their fists up in a vaguely pugilistic stance or wave their arms gently in the air.

Time ticks by. In the background, Fjola Evans saws mournfully away on a cello that’s electronically amplified, while Brandon Wolcott, who composed the music with Emil Abramyan (a snippet of Piatti’s Caprice No. 2 is included), fiddles away at a MacBook Pro, presiding over the progress of the ambient noises — a chorus of murmurs, some rhythmic thumping, an occasional symphonic crescendo — that supply a kind of sonic dance floor for the movement taking place in front of them. (CONT.)

The New York Times

As they enact their quirky little rituals, the men, women and children onstage — the age range looks roughly from 5 to 65 — almost always rest their gaze on the audience. It takes a while for the oddity of this to register, since they look upon us with a blankness almost cleansed of emotion. Perhaps there is a little benevolence flickering in the eyes of one, a studied curiosity in another. They are contemplating us, as we are contemplating them.

The steady gaze of strangers is, at the theater as in life, initially unsettling. Think of a ride on the subway, and how studiously we avoid looking into our fellow travelers' eyes, as if to meet another's gaze would somehow be an invasion of privacy. (In a marvelous phrase, the playwright Sarah Ruhl once called a subway car "a tomb for people's eyes.") This piece collapses that distance: We are here, the performers' unflinching looks tell us, and you are here, too. What can we make of this?

Directed by Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, "The Record," at the Public, wordlessly calls attention to the theatrical experience and the interactions among performers and audience. Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

In its unhurried way, "The Record" makes something wonderful and beautiful of it. The show alerts us to the awesome strangeness, and the utter ordinariness, too, of being alive in the here and now. As we watch the performers watching us, we are startled into an awareness of the moment-by-moment progress of life, and reminded that this awareness is a rare experience. While we study the men and women onstage, we are also awakened to the news — that's how it feels, really, since you don't often wander around pondering these things — that we are sharing the gift of life with millions of other souls, all but a few handfuls unknown to us, never to be known to us.

When, as the show moved toward a conclusion, the great mass of performers began to leave the auditorium in groups, I have to confess I found myself shaken by a confused mixture of loss and joy — and reminded sadly that while loss is inevitable, joy can be elusive. Like theater, life is transitory: a few poses, a few walks, a rest here and there, some meaningful connections, many more missed ones. And then we all have to leave the auditorium.

The Record

By 600 Highwaymen; directed by Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone; music by Brandon Wolcott with Emil Abramyan; design by Chris Morris and Eric Southern; production manager, Chris Batstone; assistant director, Cassandra Sachs-Michaels; creative technology by Federico Rodriguez; associate producer, Andrew Kircher; festival production manager, Jon Grenay; festival stage manager, Ruth Sternberg. Presented by the Public Theater, Oskar Eustis, artistic director; Patrick Willingham, executive director; Mark Russell and Meiyin Wang, festival co-directors; as part of the Under the Radar festival. At the Public Theater, 425 Lafayette Street, at Astor Place, East Village; 212-967-7555; undertheradarfestival.com. Through Saturday. Running time: 1 hour.

A version of this review appears in print on January 14, 2014, on page C1 of the New York edition with the headline: An Assembly of Quietly Moving Parts. Order Reprints|Today's Paper|Subscribe

ARTFORUM

PERFORMANCE – 10.13.2014

Girls, Interrupted

Jennifer Krasinski | PERMALINK: http://artforum.com/slant/id=48621

ANY GOOD STORY has another stowed somewhere inside of it. A young girl is pushed out into the world without warning, before she is ready. Motherless, fatherless, and without a home, she is unprotected from the elements, from threat and harm, and must find her own way to the end of her life. This is the story of J, the heroine of 600 HIGHWAYMEN's *Employee of the Year*, a humble, epic tale performed by five girls, all between the ages of nine and ten. Over the course of the performance Candela Cubria, Rachel Dostal, Stella Lapidus, Alice Chastain Levy, and Violet Newman take turns playing J, narrating the character's life in the first-person present as though the events are unfolding right in front of them: J's home burning down, her escape from her hometown, the birth of her son, her inevitable aging. The girls also sing plaintive songs written for them by performer/composer David Cale, sending their voices up and over the action as though hovering above. What is haunting about *Employee of the Year*—what gives the show its nuanced and shifting gravity—is that just beneath its surface is an elegy of sorts for this very fleeting moment of the young performers' lives.

***Employee of the Year*, 2014.** Rehearsal view, April 7, 2014. Photo: Maria Baranova.

600 HIGHWAYMEN are writers/directors Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, who are also husband and wife. I first saw *Employee of the Year* in early August at Mount Tremper Arts, where I had the opportunity to watch the rehearsal process but little chance to ask questions. I met with the directors again in late September as they were revising and rehearsing the show for its New York premiere as part of the French Institute Alliance Française's Crossing the Line festival. "It started with the journey myth," Browde explained, noting that it was, unexpectedly, a reading by Elmore Leonard that helped to shape how they decided upon the girls' distinct performance style, which seems almost as though they're telegraphing their lines from elsewhere. "He read an excerpt from *Get Shorty*, and the way he read the dialogue was so unaffected and simple and beautiful, but clear," she said. "He just

heard the story as he was telling it." I asked why they cast young girls to tell the story of J. "Because these are the people who should tell this story that's all about transformation," Silverstone said. "They're pre-puberty," Browde added. "They're just about to change—to become the adults they will be for the duration."

The word the directors never use—and never even seem to think about—is *tween*. Yet against the larger backdrop of American consumer culture, it's hard to ignore how these young women in the role of tweens are the ne plus ultra of built-in obsolescence. In "consumer evolution" terms, tweens have been the youngest target audience to be encumbered with their very own celebrities, network shows, mall tours and more, and the tabloids are replete with stories of what becomes of a child star. (Even the Ivory Tower makes use of the figure of the young girl. See the recent American chic-ing of Tiqqun's 1999 work of heady pulp, *Preliminary Materials For a Theory of the Young-Girl*, which peddles the poor things to exhaustion for their metaphorical value.) If Disney, which defined the tween demographic in the early 1990s, seeks to empower young girls through modes of purchase, *Employee of the Year* relies on a wholly different economy.

Whether working with trained or untrained actors, Silverstone and Browde have always rejected the schooled polish of the so-called professional—"the shellac," as Browde calls it—in favor of encouraging a certain slippage between performer and character. "I don't think you would hear the story without these girls," Silverstone tells me, and I almost jokingly ask him which story he's referring to: J's or a fictionalized projection of the girls' own. As we finish our conversation, the three of us walk together to their rehearsal space. The girls soon arrive, chatting about their weekends, and Browde calls them over to stand in a circle. They stretch, giggle, and repeat a line that begins "I wish to wish the wish you wish." For a quick second, I think they're practicing a bit of new dialogue—something tricky and rhythmic to play inside the "I" of J–until I realize it's just a tongue-twister. They're warming up for rehearsal—getting ready to get started.

— *Jennifer Krasinski*

600 HIGHWAYMEN's Employee of the Year *will run Wednesday October 15 and Thursday October 16 as part of the French Institute Alliance Française's Crossing the Line festival.*

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MAGAZINE REVIEWS FEATURES PERFORMANCE NEW YORK CITY PODCASTS ABOUT EXEUNT

REVIEWS • NYC • OFF-BROADWAY Published 8 January 2017

Review: The Fever at The Public Theater

PUBLIC THEATER · 4TH - 15TH JANUARY 2017

Molly Grogan reviews 600 Highwaymen's invitation to be together.

MOLLY GROGAN

Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone have the piercing eyes, determined step and insistent voices of illuminés, people possessed by an inner light. If you catch their gaze during The Fever, where they sit among the audience that encircles the stage, you will certainly find yourself drawn into their vision, taken by the hand, and led into a silent dance in the middle of that circle. Others may join you. You might catch a falling body, or help others pass one high above your heads. You might stand tightly together. You might run and others may follow you. You might begin to feel part of the nameless, purely-and-simply-human community that Browde and Silverstone, theater artists who go by the name 600 Highwaymen, build slowly from a thread of story and a faith-healer's way of getting people to trust them no matter what they do.

This young couple wears its own faith on its sleeve: a faith in people, in humankind, in humanly minded people who hold each other up and make it possible to bear or celebrate what life brings. The company's presenting partners include two Protestant churches, and 600 Highwaymen's shows are probably the closest you can come to experiencing communion, however you want to define it, in the downtown theater scene. The Fever is the company's third work to be presented at Under the Radar, following The Record (2014) and Employee of the Year (2016). Back in 2014, Meiyin Wang, UTR's co-director, described the company for me as "actually under the radar" but three years later the festival seems to be under Browde and Silverstone's spell, which is earning them invitations from around the country and Europe now as well. Their success may not be of Biblical proportions, but it is remarkable for a company that proposes togetherness in the place of cool.

It sounds so simple, even hokey. On the contrary, their work is bold and daring in the sense that what they propose runs counter to the rule of the day, where nothing currently seems sure, not even the values of our democracy, where the pressure to succeed is more intense than ever, when criticism, shaming, and misinformation are so easy to spread with a Tweet. Browde and Silverstone's answer to that, in The Fever, is to throw us a party, where people are just happy to see each other, everyone has a good time, and no one is left out. They invite us into a family that nurtures each other in the most basic and profound ways. They show us a community where neighbors come out into the street to offer help and to remind each other that they are there. And they get us off our chairs to see each other and support each other, literally, as a physical act, and in this way to connect with a hard-wired respect we share as humans for each other's presence.

This is theater in its original sense, as a ritual that taps the sacred and the profane, the essence of human existence. There's nothing to intellectualize, only a feeling that builds in intensity. You either go with it or you don't but you can never just stay in your seat. The premise might make some people uncomfortable, although it didn't seem to pose a problem at the performance I attended, where a few spectators were almost overzealous participants, with one in particular throwing in some dramatic flourishes and once even trying to direct the action herself.

I don't think Browde and Silverstone minded, however. Perhaps that woman caught the "fever" the show alludes to, or rather creates: the irresistible vitality of being alive in community. If that is 600 Highwaymen's mission, their moment – at this precise juncture in our country's life – has arrived. But the most wondrous thing of all is that it feels as if these illuminés always knew it would.

THE NEW YORKER

JULY 15, 2013

THE THEATRE: "THIS GREAT COUNTRY"

POSTED BY HILTON ALS

One of the great pleasures that live theatre can impart is the sense that the thing you're watching is the thing you didn't know you were missing until you saw it. Last night, I watched Ashley Kaye Johnson in "This Great Country," an intellectually big, fecund piece with dance interludes that its creators describe as a response to "Death of a Salesman"—a play I find unremarkable in its description of male heterosexual exhaustion. But having had the experience of watching Johnson, I wish to see her in anything, and I wish to hear anything that 600 Highwaymen has to say.

While Johnson, a long-haired, open-faced Texas-based adolescent with a free sense of movement, played a variety of roles in a fluorescent-lit, emptied-out space on the South Street Seaport's Pier 17—one could see, beyond the ugly room's smeary glass walls, water taxis coming and going in the rain; all the boats looked like fantastic, oversized insects—I thought of a star I'd missed all along, the late Gwen Verdon, and how much Johnson reminded me of her.

Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone founded 600 Highwaymen in 2009. Based in Brooklyn, New York the company's guilelessness is central to its beautiful art: Browde and Silverstone are as excited by the process of what can happen in a given space as the audience and performers are. Here, as in most of their work, Browde and Silverstone cast professional and non-professional actors alike. After the show, Silverstone told me that they conduct casting calls in a variety of ways—newspaper ads, the Internet—and audition whoever turns up.

Like David Cromer's brilliant reimagining of Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," in 2009, "This Great Country" is surprising and good because of what it does with Miller's literalness as a dramatist: it cuts right through it. Browde and Silverstone accomplish this by breaking the script down into narrative essentials—that is, by mostly using the language that moves the plot forward, as in a soap opera—and having the actors intone their lines with a great deal of heat but relatively little emotion. The dichotomy between the two—living the lines emotionally while not necessarily expressing that emotion in all the traditional ways—will probably strike some audience members as boring, but I think that's the point. 600 Highwaymen want to re-wire your theatregoing DNA, even if that means deadening your expectations until you fall asleep, wake up, and see and hear their world in a new way.

Johnson herself embodies all of those ideas. With her erect posture and emotional and physical precision, she radiates a clarity of emotion and purpose that matches the best writing, and direction: sure and unself-conscious, steady in its joy.

Photograph: Maria Baranova/600 Highwaymen.

THEATERKRANT
RECENSIES
20 August 2015
http://www.theaterkrant.nl/recensie/employee-the-year/

Vijf meisjes op een levenslange zoektocht

★★★★☆

Hoe breng je het levensverhaal van een tachtigjarige vrouw op het toneel? De voor de hand liggende oplossing is een monoloog door een oudere actrice, maar het New Yorkse theatergezelschap 600 Highwaymen doet niet aan voor de hand liggend. Dat bewezen ze vorig jaar al op Noorderzon met The Record, een woordloze voorstellingen met vijftig 'gewone' Groningers. Dit jaar zijn ze terug en gaan nog een stap verder. In Employee of the Year zijn het vijf elfjarige meisjes die alle aandacht opeisen.

Het verhaal is eenvoudig en wordt met grote sprongen chronologisch verteld. In de openingsscène maken we kennis met de driejarige J. Zij is opeens haar moeder kwijt, meteen gevolgd door een vrolijke herinnering van de zevenjarige J. aan een middag in het park vol rennen en lachen. Daarna is ze zeventien en keert terug van een date. Ze treft een uitgebrand huis en haar moeder is dood.

Het is het begin van een levenslange zoektocht, want al snel leert ze dat ze is geadopteerd en dat haar nieuwe ouders haar echte moeder voor haar verborgen willen houden. Wat volgt, is een zoektocht door Amerika, waarbij we J., om de beurt gespeeld door een van de meisjes, zien als 25, 30, 54, 62 en 71 jaar oud. Haar 'odyssee' blijft steevast dezelfde, maar tegelijkertijd leeft J. ook een normaal leven. Ze heeft verschillende baantjes, krijgt een vriend en zelfs een kind; wordt volwassen. Haar zoon vindt het eerst spannend om eindeloos bij vreemden aan de deur te kloppen op zoek naar die mysterieuze moeder, geeft het uiteindelijk op. Maar J. zoekt door.

Tegen het einde van de voorstelling doorbreekt een van de meisjes de vierde wand en stelt zich voor aan het publiek met haar eigen naam, Candela Cubria. 'Na dit optreden zal mijn moeder komen. We hebben een lange reis terug voor de boeg.' Ze vertelt dat ze waarschijnlijk in de auto in slaap zal vallen, maar eenmaal thuis niet zal kunnen slapen omdat ze aan de voorstelling denkt. Wat zal ik me als zestigjarige herinneren van deze plek? Deze voorstelling? Welke gezichten zal ik onthouden, wat zal ik allemaal vergeten? Ze zingt: 'Maybe this tune here will linger, or maybe I'm wrong. Maybe you'll recall my face, as I sang you this song. Will you remember my face, when I sang you this song?'

De scène heeft een ontwapenende schoonheid en wordt gevolgd door de vijf meisjes die giechelend rennen en dansen over het toneel. Ze weerspiegelen het begin van de voorstelling en tonen op dat moment ook hun echte leeftijd. Het einde, waarbij de inmiddels tachtigjarige J. eindelijk haar moeder vindt, is onthutsend, want meer dan een lege kamer treft ze niet: 'This is what you could say about my life. There was a lot of blindness.'

De hele voorstelling is wars van realisme, de gebaren blijven eenvoudig maar gestileerd, het speelvlak niet meer dan een wit tapijt. Meer is ook niet nodig. Want door jonge meisjes als protagonisten maakt Employee of the Year op indrukwekkende wijze een mensenleven invoelbaar. Wat is puur, wat is triviaal? Wat blijft uiteindelijk over?

Five girls on a lifelong search

How do you bring to the stage the life story of an eighty-year-old woman? The obvious solution would be a monologue performed by an aging actrice - but New York City theatre company 600 Highwaymen doesn't do obvious. They already proved this fact at last year's edition of Noorderzon by performing The Record, a wordless production featuring fifty 'normal' Groningen locals. They are back again this year and taking things a step further still. In Employee of the Year, it's a group of five eleven-year-old girls that becomes the center of attention. ...Towards the end of the play, one of the girls breaks the fourth wall by introducing herself to the audience while using her own name - Candela Cubria...."What will I remember when I'm sixty years old?" ...

It is a scene of disarming beauty, which is followed by the five girls giggling as they run and dance across the stage. It is a moment that reflects the start of the play and in which the girls display their real age. The finale is a disconcerting one as, though J. does eventually manage to find her mother, all she comes across is an empty room. [...]

The entire production is averse to realism; the gestures remain simple but stylized, the stage nothing more than a white carpet. Nothing more is needed. It is by handing the role of protagonist to young girls that Employee of the Year strikingly succeeds in making a human life comprehensible. What is pure; what is trivial? What will remain in the end?

deVolkskrant 24 August 2015

Vijf 11-jarige meisjes weten op Noorderzon ***wonderbaarlijk knap*** *het turbulente leven op te roepen van een Amerikaanse vrouw.*

Foto Maria Baranova

Noorderzon
Theater/dans/film

Employee of the Year door 600 Highwaymen
★★★★★
An Elegy to the Medium of Film door Lundahl & Seitl
★★★★☆
Host door Eisa Jocson
★★☆☆☆

22/8, Groningen. Noorderzon duurt t/m 30/8.

In Groningen spreekt ook de ingenieuze filminstallatie van Lundahl & Seitl tot de verbeelding.

Kun je echt in iemands hoofd, huid of leven kruipen? Drie voorstellingen op festival Noorderzon proberen het, verschillend, en met andere kunstdisciplines. Het Zweedse echtpaar Christer Lundahl en Martina Seitl (beeldend kunstenaar en choreografe) verleidt de toeschouwer met een ingenieuze filminstallatie, 3D-brillen en spaarzaam fysiek contact om in het spoor van een onbekende man te dwalen door een surrealistisch bos en Bruegels schilderijen, en te zien wat hij ziet. Dat lukt, zelfs, of juist, op de vierkante meter in het pikkedonker. Met een beroep op verbeeldingskracht, zwetend handcontact en fluisterstemmen, meen je echt zijn hond te zien snuffelen en met je voeten in de rivier voor zijn huis te staan. Zien is duidelijk iets anders dan kijken.

De Filipijnse danseres en choreografe Eisa Jocson kruipt in *Host* in de huid van vrouwen die in Japan 'affectieve arbeid' verrichten: met zang en dans in zakenbars voor gastvrouw spelen. Langzaam pelt ze kimono's en bodystockings af. Maar de trage ontkleedpartij brengt ons door haar harde blik en weinig geraffineerde choreografie niet werkelijk dichter bij het hybride vermaak van Filipijnse verleiding en Japanse mores, hoe makkelijk we haar getrainde lichaam op de zilverkleurige catwalk ook zouden kunnen aanraken. Jocson zegt niets. Helaas blijft *Host* even weinigzeggend.

Vijf 11-jarige meisjes daarentegen weten in *Employee of the Year* wonderbaarlijk knap met zang, tekst en handbewegingen het complete leven op te roepen van Jane. Zij is een Amerikaanse vrouw die bij een brand haar (vermeende) moeder verliest en gaandeweg haar gewone leven opoffert aan een verbeten zoektocht naar haar biologische moeder, tot ze op haar 80ste op een vergeelde foto stuit in de supermarkt van Employee of the Year.

Het piepjonge vijftal vertelt, zingt en loopt in een ontroerende canon. Ze strekken hun handen uit naar denkbeeldige, ontbrekende intimi. Het gapende gat dat ze daarmee omhelzen, wordt een schrijnende metafoor voor Janes gemis. Maar omdat in hun motoriek en stemmen kinderlijk optimisme blijft doorschemeren, wordt de voorstelling nergens melodramatisch. De ontroering slaat toe wanneer ze hulp zoeken bij zang, om zich hopelijk later zelf te herinneren dat ze als New Yorkse doorsneekinderen in Groningen groot applaus haalden.

Annette Embrechts

Five 11-year-old girls deliver an admirable performance at Noorderzon, as they evoke the turbulent life of an American woman.

In Employee of the Year, five 11-year-old girls - by using just words, singing and hand gestures - admirably succeed to evoke the entire life of Jane. She is an American woman who, after having at a young age suffered the loss of her (supposed) mother in a fire, gradually sacrifices her regular life in favor of a dour search for her biological mother - a search that lasts until the moment she stumbles across a supermarket's yellowed Employee of the Year photo at the age of 80.

The extremely youthful set of five movingly speaks, sings and walks in canon, each stretching out their hands towards imaginary, absent intimates. The gaping hole that is being embraced becomes a poignant metaphor for Jane's want. It is thanks to the fact that a childlike optimism shines through the girls' voices and motion that the performance never becomes melodramatic. Emotion truly kicks in though when a song breaks out that partly serves to ensure that these regular New York kids will remember the day they got a big hand in Groningen.

deVolkskrant

The Medium of Interaction

45 volunteers from Groningen participate in *The Record*, but only meet each other at the premiere. Like pawns on a chessboard.

by Janita Naaijer | August 21, 2014

Rob Blaauw (49) is standing in the rehearsal space at the Prinsentheater, Groningen. He's looking concentrated at the directors, Michael Silverstone and Abigail Browde. "Are you ready, Rob?", asks the latter. Blaauw nods. He's standing still for a few seconds and then at various points in the rehearsal room, he performs actions that, by their slowly and flowing character, are reminiscent most of tai chi. Blaauw is stepping forward and then backwards again; he slaps his knees and throws his arms in the air, dropping them slowly until his fingertips reach the ground.

The movements are simple. But the frequency and its location on stage is clearly requiring a great mental effort. After fifteen minutes sweat is beading on his forehead. A meaningful silent arises when the director suggests to re-start for the third time. Blaauw, who entered the room earlier that evening as a roguish and robust man. And now, in all his attempts to do well, he becomes slightly childlike and vulnerable. It's emotionally palpable.

That vulnerability is precisely the thing for this American director-couple, Silverstone (32) and Browde (33), who formed 600 HIGHWAYMEN in 2009. Besides Blaauw they've cast 44 other local participants from Groningen for their performance of *The Record*. Aged from 10 years up to 82. It's their goal to present them to the audience as authentic as they are. To achieve that, they're giving the amateur cast a very complex choreography that needs a total focus. It's impossible for the actors to think about how they are presenting themselves on stage while executing this task. And, to top it off, each performer rehearses on their own with Silverstone and Browde. The actors meet each other for the first time on stage at the premiere. It gives an extra tension to perform and react with each other - making the experience as spontaneous as it can be.

deVolkskrant

(cont)

"Taking part of *The Record* is being a pawn on a chessboard", sais John Jansen (82), the oldest volunteer. "But I only know the movements that I have to perform on that chessboard. I have no idea where the other volunteers will be. What kind of movements will they make? Will they touch me with that movement?"

That was the case at the premiere of *The Record* in New York last January – the performance was an absolute hit. The 45 American cast performed their 61 minutes speechless choreography. A hand that while in rehearsals was extended out was, in performance, held by another hand. Some actors made their planned steps and then realized they were suddenly looking straight into the eyes of a stranger beside them.

"*The Record* is simple but sublime" wrote *The New York Times* who emphasized in their review that players often stared at the audience while performing their routine actions. "How often do we act in daily life like we don't see other people whilst meeting each other's gaze because it's seen as an invasion of privacy?" asked the reviewer to himself. "*The Record* breaks with that distance. 'We are here,' says the cast with their imperturbable gaze, 'and you are also here. What can we make of that?'"

Blaauw finishes his final set of movements. There are two more rehearsals before the premiere in the Groninger Stadsschouwburg Theater where the audience will be fully lit. A motley company of 45 men and women will be standing on stage. A group of regular people who differ strongly but are committed to the same: to the joint execution of a difficult routine. They're simply a part of a whole.

For Browde and Silverstone, *The Record* is a metaphor on life itself - how pretentious that may sound. Browde: "We want the audience to think about what it means to live together with millions of other people who resemble us but at the same time differ from us on so many ways. So everyday there is a search on new ways to interact." "Who are those 45 actors?" says Silverstone "and who are we – the audience and the cast – together? *The Record* is in both ways an epic and an ordinary encounter. We create a heavy loaded collision in which the attendees have to deal with in their own way."

The Record can be seen on 27/8 until 29/8 at the Stadsschouwburg Groningen. The premiere is already sold out. €14.00

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

NY CULTURE | July 9, 2013,

"Death of a Salesman" Comes to South Street Seaport

A New, Post-Recession Take on a "Sacred Text"

By JACKIE BISCHOF

As tales of America and its ideals go, few resonate through the annals of theater and literature quite like Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman." It seems we're always ready for a new production: Last year's Broadway revival earned two Tony Awards among seven nominations. Now, the experimental theater company 600 Highwaymen will attempt to make the play even more accessible for New Yorkers, staging its new interpretation in a vacant storefront in a busy Manhattan mall with six diverse actors stepping into the shoes of the iconically disillusioned main character, salesman Willy Loman.

On Wednesday, the company's production, titled "This Great Country," will begin a four-day run inside a shuttered clothing store at Pier 17, the mall in the South Street Seaport, as part of the ongoing annual River to River festival. Company directors Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone have stripped the production of props, lighting and elaborate costumes, using a diverse cast in the hope of making the Lomans' story accessible to a wide range of people.

The waterfront setting notwithstanding, the most unusual aspect of this production may be its radical divergence from traditional productions of "Salesman." But Ms. Browde said she isn't concerned about people's response to such an extensive reinvention of "a sacred text."

"I don't know that [I] worried about people being upset that we broke the play," she said. "Maybe part of it is that I don't feel like I exist in an artistic community that is precious about those sorts of things—breaking and reinvention."

Inspired by a road trip across America during which they encountered the impact of the recession on small towns, Ms. Browde, who is 31, and Mr. Silverstone, 32, decided to tackle one of America's beloved fables, which deals with timeless ideas of identity, disillusionment and the struggle of individuals to achieve their version of the "American dream."

"We wanted to do this really old story in a very new way," said Mr. Silverstone. "We know the play really well and we've seen it a bunch, but it never felt as immediate as it should. It always felt nostalgic."

The husband-and-wife team, based in Brooklyn, started 600 Highwaymen in 2009 and prepared the play during a residency in Austin, Texas, last year, staging it in a 4,000-square-foot bingo hall for a sold-out four-night run.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

(continued)

This week's performance will take place in a vacant storefront in the Pier 17 mall, which escaped heavy damage during superstorm Sandy thanks to its elevation above the East River. (Some surrounding businesses, including the South Street Seaport Museum, were not as fortunate. The mall, which was built in

the 1980s and acquired by the Howard Hughes Corporation in 2010, is set for a major renovation that's expected to be complete in 2015.)

Through floor-to-ceiling windows behind the performing space, visitors can be seen strolling down the pier. The location, said Ms. Browde, "had a strong correlation with the story. You walk through a shopping mall and it's very much alive and active, buzzing with consumption and consumerism."

The storefront's barren interior, however, added another parallel to "a story about the effects of consumerism on a family," she said.

The location was secured by Andrew Horwitz of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, which sources vacant real estate for community use, among other functions. The storefront was vacant beginning in late spring, and LMCC moved in shortly thereafter. Mr. Horwitz said he looked at several spaces, including empty offices near Wall Street, but went with the Seaport storefront in an area that he said has had to "ride the waves" of the economy in recent decades.

"The location was a good size, [and] it being essentially empty retail space, has resonated with the work," he said. A backdrop of Brooklyn across the East River "situates it in New York in a really special way."

The cast of 17 ranges in age from around 7 to 70, with four male and two female actors of different backgrounds stepping into the role of Willy Loman at various points during the play. Choreographed dances are worked into the performance. The set comprises almost no props, and most of the costumes belong to the actors.

Derek Kolluri, 31, a theater-company owner from Austin who performed with the show in Texas, plays Willy Loman's son, Biff, a role that explores the pressures of expectations set by a family and by society. (He's also one of the six actors stepping into the shoes of Willy.) The son of an Indian father and an American mother of German descent, Mr. Kolluri acknowledged that he doesn't fit the traditional mold of Biff. "But that doesn't mean that people like me or that look like me or that organize their lives the way I organize my life aren't feeling the way Biff felt," he said.

The play's costume designer, Ásta Bennie Hostetter, agreed that 600 Highwaymen has taken a transcendent tale and made it even more relevant to modern times. "The basic thesis of this production is that Willy Loman is not just a salesman; Willy Loman is us all," she said. "The third Willy Loman is a woman, the second Willy Loman is a gentleman who has a rather thick Korean accent. It pushes the argument further than most dare to in terms of saying, 'We are all able to empathize with this man, we are all in this position.'

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
July 10, 2013
METROPOLIS

Q&A: Designing Costumes for a Stripped-Down Production

By Jackie Bischof

"This Great Country," 600 Highwaymen's interpretation of "Death of a Salesman," playing now at the River to River festival, is a bare bones production stripped of lighting, props and located in a vacant retail store.

Actors also largely wear their own clothing.

Costume designer Ásta Bennie Hostetter spoke with the Journal about working on a production where the actor's personal wardrobes comprise 70% of the costumes.

Jason Andrew for The Wall Street Journal
Ásta Bennie Hostetter, costume designer for the "This Great Country," sorts through the production's costumes inside the back room of a closed retail store at Pier 17 in the South Street Seaport.

An edited interview follows.

WSJ: *Is it challenging as a designer to work with a production that has so few costumes?*

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
July 10, 2013

The truth is that while [about] 70% of the clothes are the actor's own clothes, there's still a lot of crafting to that. I love it, I think it's great. It's a great expression of why I want to do costume design. I can imagine for some costume designers it would be challenging because for some people the sense of the art is like, "I say it's a black blazer and jeans and that's what you're going to wear."

WSJ: *Why use regular clothes rather than costumes?*

[Directors Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone] are not the only theater makers who are interested in using clothes instead of costumes. I noticed that there's a trend among hipper, more avant-garde directors to say the clothes are being done by Ásta rather than the "costumes" because the word costume has accrued such sort of bad vibes. Some people are hesitant to use the word costume. In a way it parallels an interest in theater with doing site-specific work rather than create building flats and scenery [but instead] finding a site that resonates a certain truth you've discovered. Rather than doing "Death of a Salesman" in a fabricated reality, why not locate that reality within human beings who are around, who are here? But as much as we are working with clothes they actually own and wear, there are superficial formal concerns like, "That really bright orange shirt is really bright."

Jason Andrew for The Wall Street Journal
The cast of "This Great Country" practiced a choreographed scene during rehearsals for the play, which will run this week as part of the River to River festival.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
July 10, 2013

WSJ: *Six different actors step into the main role of Willy Loman throughout the production. Why not use some consistent clothing elements to help the audience with this transition?*

It's something we've been wrestling with up until last minute. To me in design there's always a clarification in theater between making something clear and telling the audience what to feel. We have this in movies all the time: Is the story compelling or is it manipulative? From my perspective, the staging is very clear about when Willy changes from being embodied by a middle-aged African American man to an Asian man.

The basic thesis of this production is that Willy Loman is not just a salesman, Willy Loman is us all. [People] have done theater productions that reflect that sentiment but there's a kind of boldness about their argument that I think is really refreshing. The third Willy Loman is a woman; the second Willy Loman is a gentleman who has a rather thick Korean accent. It pushes the argument further than most dare to in terms of saying, "We are all able to empathize with this man, we are all in this position." The audience and judgment will tell if we should've tied that together more clearly.

WSJ: *Sometimes the clothes have to fade away for the production to work.*

A lot of theater sits on division of labor and hierarchy of expertise. "I'm the costume designer and I'm going to tell you, it just doesn't work in the red shirt." I love that the active questions are that we understand that this is this character.

When I was a younger designer it felt like we have to get this costume to explain everything and then you walk around this world and think, "I don't know anything about you." I mean I do, we're both taking each other in. We all have inviable souls and then we have clothes. Theater shouldn't somehow be making it easier, presuming you're dumber than you are in the world.

http://blogs.wsj.com/metropolis/2013/07/10/qa-designing-costumes-for-a-stripped-down-production/

The Art of Conversation

At Austin's Fusebox Festival, talking with strangers is de rigueur

BY ELIZA BENT

600 Highwaymen's *This Great Country* was staged at a bingo hall at the 2012 Fusebox Festival.

WILL HOLLIS PHOTOGRAPHY

SOMETIMES IT SEEMS THAT IN THE ARTS THERE are two certainties: death and festivals. That's one impression I took away from a recent visit to the festival-obsessed South Texas city of Austin, where South by Southwest (SXSW), a massive 25-year-old music event that has grown to encompass film and technology, garners worldwide attention every spring. SXSW was over by the time I arrived in late April but no fewer than seven other fêtes were simmering: the Moontower Comedy & Oddity Fest, Austin Food and Wine festival, Austin Reggae Festival, Austin Psych Fest (celebrating psychedelic music), Texas Community Music Festival, Capital City Salsa Festival and No Pants Day Austin. While I kept my pants on, I took part in yet another jollification: Fusebox, a 12-day performance marathon featuring an abundance of hybrid work—theatre, music, film and a line-up of culinary events called "Digestible Feats."

In a city of so many festivals, why have another? On the opening page of Fusebox's program booklet, a 155-page pocket compendium, festival artistic director Ron Berry responds conscientiously to devil's advocates: "What sorts of things can festivals do that other events can't do? What can our festival do that other festivals can't or aren't doing? How can we leverage the mechanism of 'festival' to discover new things about our city and the world?" he inquires in Socratic fashion.

This open kind of inquiry is a good indication of what Fusebox is all about: experimentation, conversation and innovation. "We encourage artists to break things," Berry ventures. "Not just to do weird shit—which I like, too—but get at something more vital and alive." His opening notes also include advice on speaking with strangers: "Please do this."

TALKING TO STRANGERS MAY SOUND LIKE A deceptively simple suggestion. But so often at festivals, where colleagues from across the country and the globe catch up with each other and jockey for limited amounts of networking time, regular chitchat can be hard to come by. At these pressure-cookers, artists gather in one corner, presenters talk amongst themselves, and festival staffs, exhausted from long days of work, do their best to remain standing. For younger artists—not to mention audiences—this who's-talking-to-whom vibe can be rather isolating. But Fusebox manages to avoid this problem. With its mishmash of theatre, music, film and culinary programming, Fusebox attracts swaths of humanity keen on communicating across disciplinary borders.

Playwright Sibyl Kempson, who presented *River of Gruel: The Requirement(s) of Narrow Approach(es)* as part of Fusebox's developmental "Machine Shop" series (more on that later), describes the ambience: "Everyone stands in the dirt eating snow cones and hashing it out until very late at night." She points out how chatter at the festival hub—a raft of picnic tables on a craggy lawn beside an enormous empty warehouse, where bands played late into the night—"manages to cut through the mumbo-jumbo of posturing and one-upmanship and glad-handing and 'hate-partying' I've felt at other festivals. There is a feeling of real friendship and love about Fusebox. You really get to know other humans."

She's not just waxing poetic. True exchange was a major goal when Berry and a few colleagues began Fusebox in 2004. These founders wanted to address two primary concerns. "It felt like there was a lack of conversation between different art forms—even while running my own venue, conversations about art could be pretty siloed," Berry says. Fusebox, he figured,

would create a platform for dialogue about various art forms and their relationships to each other—and not just feel-good exchange vis-à-vis interdisciplinary work, but tough talk, too, especially during a series of art-focused meetings dubbed "Chewing the Fat."

The Fusebox team was also interested in addressing the fact that while a lot of energy and momentum was being poured into Austin's artistic scene, the majority of local work wasn't traveling outside of the city (with the exception of a few groups like the 17-year-old Rude Mechanicals, which has found a place on national and international touring circuits). "Sometimes amazing things can happen in a vacuum," Berry allows. "But for the long-term health and growth of any community, you also want to be engaging with the world of ideas beyond, and see what's happening elsewhere."

Fusebox's current model imports U.S.-made and international work to Austin while also featuring shows and installations by local artists. The promise of such a balance attracts such artists as New York City–based Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, who presented *This Great Country*, an adaptation of *Death of a Salesman*, in this year's Machine Shop series. "Having a mix of people keeps the festival focused on an even dialogue between foreign and local artists, as opposed to a hierarchy of out-of-towners swooping in to instruct the local-yokels in 'how to make art,'" notes Browde. Their company, 600 Highwaymen, held six weeks of auditions in Austin to gather local performers for *This Great Country*. The show premiered in the still-functioning Lucky Lady Bingo Hall, just off Interstate-35, which cuts vertically through the city.

SHILPA BAKRE

Adam Sultan, created by Steve Moore and Physical Plant, with Caroline Reck and Adam Sultan.

"One gets the feeling that Ron [Berry] curates on impulse, and that he's looking more at the spirit and heart of how artists are conducting themselves and engaging with their work, as opposed to just the aesthetics of the work itself," Browde observes. She says Berry and his team—managing director Brad Carlin and producing director Natalie George—were unfazed when she and Silverstone asked if they could present *This Great Country* at a bingo hall. "They have a laid-back, thumbs-up approach," adds Browde. "They generally say yes first and then figure details out later, an attitude that sadly has become increasingly rare in producing structures."

Her partner Silverstone declares, "Fusebox is the only festival I know that has the guts to program eating and drinking as a performance event." The "Digestible Feats" component of the festival, curated by Hank Cathey, pairs food and performance with curious combinations of artists—for example, an afternoon event on the patio of the city's Whole Foods mother ship led by composer Graham Reynolds and chef Sonya Coté. As Coté presented a vegan feast of unexpected flavors—who knew pickled radish with strawberries could be so tasty?—Reynolds played experimental piano music.

At that sensory picnic I sat beside Jenny Larson, artistic director of Austin's Salvage Vanguard Theater. Later, I attended a "Digestible Feats" collaboration at Larson's own theatre: *Sweet Betrayal* combined live painting by Kaci Beeler, text layered on cards and walls by writer David Fruchter, and four flavorful confections by pastry chef Jodi

As Real as a Rodeo

Performers in 600 Highwaymen's *THE RECORD* meet for the first time in performance.
MARIA BARANOVA

SOME ARTISTS START PROJECTS BASED ON A SHORT story, a novel or a newspaper clipping. But for Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, the artistic directors of Brooklyn-based theatre group 600 Highwaymen, their starting point was *liveness*. Their show *THE RECORD*, which bows Jan 8–19 at the Public Theater as part of the Under the Radar festival (see page 80), takes the notion of liveness to an extreme.

"There's an open-air rodeo in a small town in Texas that Abby and I go to and think about theatre," says Silverstone. "Before the bull comes out of chute, the crowd swells and it's beautiful. Literally, people move forward on the edge of their seat, and then they're sitting straight up with their eyes transfixed. They're just a few steps away from holding hands, it seems. I'm addicted to that feeling, and I want to feel it every day." Silverstone and Browde began to wonder if they could make that feeling of rodeo aliveness happen more and more in rehearsal and performance. "How can we wake up this encounter—both for ourselves and for an audience?" Silverstone asks.

THE RECORD, which premiered at the Invisible Dog Art Center in Brooklyn last year, features a cast of 35 performers who receive specific physical instructions, but never actually rehearse together. Rehearsals unfold one-on-one between performer and the artistic directors over a six-week period of time. "It's a huge math problem," Silverstone admits with a laugh, "but incredibly satisfying." Though Browde and Silverstone work with a number of the same actors for the showing this month, the duo has changed roles around to keep the idea of a first encounter pure. "We want to make sure we keep the show as alive as possible, night to night," says Silverstone.

Browde likens the show to living portraiture. The experience is "about organizing physical bodies in space and how much drama is inherent in the simple, present body of a performer—in giving the audience permission to stare quietly and deeply at someone's unadjusted face." To that end, the choreography provides audiences permission to engage in voyeurism, "and at the same time, works to eliminate a boundary between the spectator and the performer."

An original score by Brandon Wolcott accompanies the movement, but there is no text. Says Silverstone, "In a way, not having text means we can get closer to the heart of something." —*Eliza Bent*

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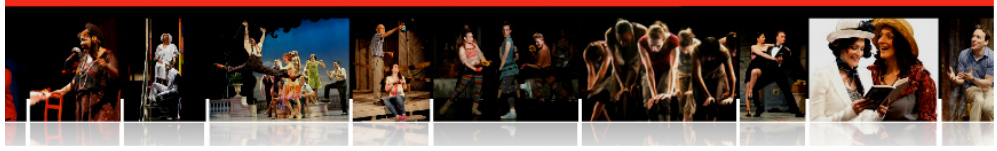

Let's Cast the Woman at the Laundromat

600 HIGHWAYMEN Find Actors in Unconventional Places

by Eliza Bent

When they're looking for actors, Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, the couple and co-artistic directors behind the Brooklyn-based theatre company 600 Highwaymen, travel far beyond a typical audition room. They see potential actors everywhere.

For four years, the duo has blended amateurs with professional actors to perform in such formally inventive shows as *This Time Tomorrow*, which unfolded in a church basement and relied on improvisation and charades; *Empire City*, a piece based on a recorded interview between an aging couple in which actors traded characters; and *This Great Country*, an adaptation of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* which took place in a 4,000 square foot bingo parlor.

For *Everyone Was Chanting Your Name*, which runs at Abrons Arts Center May 9-19, Browde and Silverstone have assembled a cast of eight people spanning six decades.

Asked how his company finds its actors, Silverstone says, "We approach people on the street, ask for recommendations from friends, and use Craigslist. We've cast former co-workers from day jobs. We're using the community to cast, but our process isn't exactly democratic or therapeutic."

Browde concurs, adding that while 600 Highwaymen has a social awareness, their use of community is not meant as a radical theatrical gesture. "It's as though people started referring to work as 'community-based theatre' when the casting isn't made up of 20 and 30 year olds with head shots and bleached teeth!" she jokes. This doesn't mean 600 Highwaymen excludes dashing twenty-somethings—just that they're shown in a broader context. For Browde and Silverstone, having the right group of performers even supersedes the story.

For instance, *Everyone Was Chanting Your Name* began as an investigation of *Oedipus Rex*, but as rehearsals drew near, the couple realized they wanted to use text specifically tailored to their chosen performers. "We began to wonder if we could create a fictional biography," says Silverstone, who adds that only about 10 percent of the resulting text in the show is true to the performers' lives.

Everyone Was Chanting Your Name, which Browde and Silverstone co-wrote and directed, now offers a series of micro-narratives, and the audience learns quotidian details about the lives of the performers. "It's kind of about how people present their personalities," Browde says. "And about how people deal with being alive," Silverstone adds, before he and Browde sing Sondheim's "Being Alive" in unison.

"With us there's no pretending the audience isn't there," says Silverstone. "We are doing this show *in* this room, *by* these people, *on* this day, and *for* this audience."

Browde adds, "In a way, it's a living portraiture. Over the course of the show, the relationship between the performers and audience changes. The performers admit to standing in front of an audience, which can feel more true than," she adopts an old timey theatre voice, "'Hey friend, come into my kitchen for a chat.' So we feel like what we're making is a truer stab at realism because there is a truer sense of the room."

—

Eliza Bent *is a journalist, playwright, and performer living in Brooklyn*

The New York Times

May 13, 2013 | THEATER REVIEW

A Little Improvisation Punctuates the Mundane

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO

If the words “audience participation” make you queasy, then “Everyone Was Chanting Your Name” probably isn’t for you. The lights are up at the Abrons Arts Center, and the rectangular seating arrangement is small enough to mean that everyone has a front-row seat: there’s nowhere to hide in this latest production by the rising young theater company 600 Highwaymen.

That said, this is charming participation, affording viewers a chance to do things like introduce, by way of renaming, the people sitting next to them. (I decided that my date should be called Venezuela.) One of the most resonant moments at Thursday’s roughly 75-minute show, written and directed by Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, came when the performer Matthew Scott Butterfield asked a string of direct and disarming questions to a random audience member, who happened to be Mark Russell, artistic director of the Under the Radar festival.

Mr. Russell’s unscripted responses, delivered without missing a beat, lent a simple and loaded poetry to the rhythmic back and forth, making it seem like a true exchange with the quietly commanding Mr. Butterfield. “What are TVs for?”

“To tell us things.” “Where do boats go in the nighttime?”

“Out to sea.”

Mr. Russell, of course, is an old pro at theater — unlike many of the eight actors of various ages, ethnicities and stage experience in “Everyone,” which also features a chorus. (Rick Burkhardt is the production’s composer.) After establishing contact with their audience, the performers turned to one another, talking among themselves about matters big (death), small (smelly feet) and somewhere in between (existential hiking experiences).

“I was still at work and I got a call,” Susan Karpman said, answering the young Stayna Alexandre’s questions about the circumstances of her husband’s death. “I haven’t ever been able to know how they reached me, and I think about that a lot.”

The actors furrowed their brows with interest as they listened to one another, switching their positions throughout the white-walled space in precisely choreographed blocking. They were dressed in street clothes, another way of announcing, “We are ordinary people, talking of the stuff of everyone’s life.”

In delivery and affect these individuals reminded me a bit too much of Richard Maxwell’s New York City Players, without achieving the formal, deeply earned heft and finesse of Mr. Maxwell’s explorations. The result was that some of these cast members came uncomfortably close to being found objects, seemingly meant to fascinate in their unpolished state.

People *are* endlessly fascinating. But somewhere the earnestness of “Everyone” begins to hollow out. You can, by protesting too little, protest too much.

<THE L MAGAZINE>

We're All Performing *This Time Tomorrow*

by Benjamin Sutton | November 04, 2010 THEATER » THEATER REVIEWS

By 7:45pm on Tuesday night an unusually large crowd had assembled at the lovely Blue Marble Ice Cream shop on Underhill Avenue in Prospect Heights. The hot chocolate-sippers and ice cream-scoopers spilled out from the small space onto the sidewalk, the one spot of activity on an otherwise quiet residential block on this chilly fall evening. "I hope the performance starts here," said one of a small crowd of drama students milling around a bench. "What do you mean," asked another in the group, indicating the ice cream shop with a nod, "isn't the show happening here?" "No, it's in that church," responded her friend, pointing at the looming form of the Duryea Presbyterian Church across the street on the corner of Sterling Place. "Didn't you read the email?"

In the absence of a conventional box office or venue, all reservations for *This Time Tomorrow* (through November 13) are made online, and attendees are instructed via email to congregate at Blue Marble for complimentary hot chocolate before being lead into the dramatic church across the street, and from there taken by co-directors Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone into its basement. In that low-ceilinged space, four rows of seats are set on risers before curtains. Those seated in the front row, as I was, are so close that their knees touch the curtains, giving the impression that it is we who are onstage, and that they will pull back to reveal an expectant audience. When co-directors Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone do open the curtains we see a large, fairly typical church basement, with vinyl floors, fluorescent lights, some folding tables and chairs placed at random along with a few stray balloons and garlands, as though there'd been a bake sale that morning. It's a space with a surprising amount of character.

There's only one performer in the expansive space at first, Paola di Tolla, and she's looking at the audience intently, assuming a series of torturous, tense poses, arms stretched, up on her toes, face grimacing, looking towards us in expectation of some reaction that we're unable to provide. This will be a recurring motif in our interactions with di Tolla, and to a lesser degree her cast-mates, trying to react appropriately to her expectant looks. This is most overt later on during a brief game of charades, when the bulk of the production's few, random lines are spoken by the befuddled audience: "Twister! Hurdle! Loop! Lasso!" Whatever she's trying to convey, we never get it, although notions of looping and cycles of repetition are certainly pertinent to the performance. Shortly after the curtains are pulled back Ben Beckley and Dan Cozzens join di Tolla, the former emerging from an adjacent bathroom, the other from a door labeled "Boiler Room" at the far end of the basement. Their ensuing, almost wordless performance, equal parts dance, mime, clown and physical comedy, evolves in cycles of repetition and difference.

There are passages when all three actors seem to pursue their individual ideas or impulses—as when Beckley carries a teetering book rack across the space, dropping volume after volume. Other times two or all of them are taken by the same notion, and what could be best described as a coordinated dance ensues, as if all three bodies were responding to a single mind. A series of rhythmic cycles, with the actors repeating movements and sounds in time to each other like a three-person human beatbox, have all the drive and clarity of very deliberate choreography. **The piece's grueling physicality evokes dance as well, with the trio running through the space, moving furniture, pulling themselves along the floor, compulsively reiterating gestures as if to test their stamina. But the emphasis on making the audience acutely self-aware is distinctly theatrical.**

Whether at the far end of the basement, or right next to us, the actors—at least when not consumed by some single-minded and indecipherable purpose—seem to be testing us, gauging how we react, or whether we do so correctly. This re-emphasizes the sense that we're performing as well, trying to provide the right response to crack their strange code. **The constant exchange of deep, intense stares between actors and audience gives the very physical and funny marathon performance immense profundity. Though it demands a great deal from performers and spectators, *This Time Tomorrow* gives it back in spades.**

The New York Times

Unusual Antics Unfold in a Church Basement

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO
Published: November 14, 2010

Ruby Washington / NY Times

"This Time Tomorrow" a site-specific performance in a community room

Topped with a dollop of thick whipped cream, the luxurious hot chocolate at Blue Marble Ice Cream in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, is an event in itself. As opening acts go, it's hard to beat — a point clearly not lost on Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, the directors of "This Time Tomorrow." **The site-specific performance was inspired by, created and shown in the Duryea Presbyterian Church's basement; ticketholders were instructed to gather at Blue Marble**, around the corner, where each received a free drink.

Deliciousness aside, the hot chocolate set the homey tone and sense of place and community that were played with and explored in "This Time Tomorrow," which ended over the weekend. After that opener the audience was led through the church and deposited in a tiny seating area (the stage itself), where curtains were pulled back to reveal a modest, linoleum-tiled space, littered with typical community-room objects: metal folding chairs and tables, a few balloons and crepe-paper streamers, a tray set up for drinks.

And there was another object: Paola Di Tolla, staring wild-eyed back at us, her face puckered and her body hunched and tightly held. Soon enough it became apparent that her efforts were for our benefit, as if she were desperately trying to entertain important, easily dissatisfied guests, whose mood she couldn't quite gauge.

She was eventually joined by Ben Beckley and Dan Cozzens (the three helped create the show), and the antics continued as they tried on one trick after another, their bodies lunging and skittering through the room during a muscular hour of physical gags.

Ms. Di Tolla tried out charades, miming strange happenings that her audience failed to grasp. (Perhaps the words weren't even real.) The three took up folding chairs and played at being matadors, unfurling the pieces of furniture as if they were capes.

Mr. Cozzens and Mr. Beckley took turns with a thick, foppish wig, the sort a balding Ken doll might have gone for. The Heart ballad "Alone" made a brief appearance, courtesy of a discovered boom box.

Still, moments here and there, including a rhythmic, nonverbal song that drew the audience into its creation and mutation, suggested **Ms. Browde and Mr. Silverstone might have some more delicate tricks up their sleeves.**

The New York Times

July 12, 2013 | THEATER REVIEW

Willy Loman With an iPhone, Fit for the 21st Century

'This Great Country' Modernizes 'Death of a Salesman'

By ERIC GRODE

This Great Country Stacey J. Dotson, left, with Lucy Kaminsky and Taaseen Khan, foreground, in this 600 HIGHWAYMEN production at Pier 17 Storefront, South Street Seaport.

Well, that's one way to make sure attention is paid.

In "This Great Country," a nervy transmogrification of "Death of a Salesman" by the Brooklyn group 600 Highwaymen, Willy Loman has swapped his groaning sample cases for a Whitman's sampler of modish experimental-theater tropes. And while these dips into various aesthetics may make you wish for a full stylistic immersion in one or the other, the approach unearths its share of insights along the way. Willy may be old for his time, but there's some life in the guy yet.

Whether you prefer your downtown theater in the form of Nature Theater of Oklahoma's ungainly chic or Richard Maxwell's flat-affect confrontations, the production's creators, Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, have you covered. Ditto, the gestural,

(continued)

naturalism-be-damned choreography favored by the likes of Steven Hoggett. (But no audience participation, still another trend, and one that played a big role in the troupe's most recent piece, "Everyone Was Chanting Your Name.")

Arthur Miller's text has been slashed to 100 minutes and shifted to the present day: Willy's boss is now distracted by an iPhone instead of a wire recorder. But the most intriguing innovation in the show, in a vacant South Street Seaport retail space as part of the River to River Festival, comes in the multiple casting of several pivotal roles.

Not content to depict Willy Loman as Everyman, Ms. Browde and Mr. Silverstone have splintered him into many a man — and a few women — within the 17-member cast arrayed around the sparse, window-lined set. (Gavin Price, Asta Bennie Hostetter and Eric Southern are credited with the design.) No fewer than six of those performers have a go at the contradictory Willy, from the prideful Lori E. Parquet to the baffled Michael Etheridge, and a wonderful bit of casting near the end spells out the Loman family's continuing woes with devastating simplicity.

(The space, incidentally, provides one of the starker parallels with Miller's Depression-era setting; if this prime chunk of waterfront space is cheap enough for a theater company to be able to afford it, rents ain't what they used to be.)

The mix-and-match approach inevitably leads the cast, which includes several preteenagers, into some stylistic cul-de-sacs. Mr. Maxwell's deadpan aesthetic is particularly delicate to maintain, and as "This Great Country" switches into full-volume melodrama, the earlier, more stilted sequences feel less like an earned worldview and more like an affectation.

But in shedding light on "Salesman" from so many directions all at once, Ms. Browde and Mr. Silverstone were bound to catch a few unflattering angles along with the occasional dazzling one. 600 Highwaymen is on to something here, even if it's a few things too many.

"This Great Country" continues through Saturday at Pier 17 Storefront, South Street Seaport; (212) 219-9401, rivertorivernyc.com. Performances are full, but there will be a first come first served standby line.

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CULTUREBOT
MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE

THE MYSTERY OF COMMON INSPIRATION

Joost Ramaer | September 16, 2014

Right after the opening of the third and last performance of 600 HIGHWAYMEN's *The Record* in the Dutch city of Groningen, on Friday August 29, a woman in the audience got the giggles. She succumbed when the first player appeared on stage, a tall and thin young man with long hair tied in a bun on top of his head, who quietly adopted a tai chi-like pose. The woman, probably a relative or close friend of the player, just could not stop. Her giggling went on for what felt like minutes. 'Sorry!,' she exclaimed at one point, very audibly.
It was the sort of incident that usually causes palpable embarrassment and irritation in a theater audience. Not this time. The player simply smiled back at the woman, in a totally relaxed and natural way. The other viewers reacted with soft, liberating laughter, and that was that. The show continued without another hitch.

The player's improvised intervention could be termed 'professional'. Problem is, he wasn't. For *The Record*, Michael Silverstone and Abby Browde, the maker couple behind 600 HIGHWAYMEN, recruit 45 'ordinary' people from the town where the show is staged. First, 45 New Yorkers, for the first showing in January of this year, during the festival Under the Radar. Then, 45 Groningers, for the summer festival Noorderzon in the north of the Netherlands. Later editions are being prepared in Paris and Hannover.

Browde and Silverstone rehearse their non-professional players thoroughly, and individually. Only on the opening night do they first play together as an ensemble. They don't speak or sing, just move, accompanied by live music. They walk from A to B to C and back, run in circles, bend, sit, lie down, touch hands, put an arm around each other's shoulder. All according to a meticulous choreography that becomes more and more complicated as more and more players come on stage. Still, all these 'amateurs' milling around rarely miss a beat. The hard work they've put in on Silverstone's and Browde's behest shows in every detail of their behaviour. The way they put down their feet and start their movements. Their presence and self-assuredness, whether they are simply standing somewhere or staring intently at their audience.

As a viewer, you marvel at the ability of the players, all the more so because you are constantly aware of their 'amateur' status. But that same status also allows you to feel a very special bond with them. They are 'just like you' and vice versa, like professional actors never can be. The result is not just a powerful emotional experience, like

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any really good theater show offers. *The Record* also reinvents and reinvigorates live theater. The show rewrites the code of understanding between players and viewers. They become equals within a new sphere of intimacy. I have never before felt anything like this during a live show. It was almost like a revelation – I kid you not.

In their work, Browde and Silverstone strive to do away with fiction, and with the 'fourth wall' between actor and audience. During a public talk I had with them at Noorderzon, they told how they got the idea for *The Record* during *This Great Country*, their 2012-2013 radical reworking of Arthur Miller's classic *Death of a Salesman*. In this earlier show, they allowed their players to occasionally, and very publicly, on stage, withdraw from their character and Miller's text. Abby and Michael are no heavy-handed theoreticians; they speak lightly, almost playfully, about their goals and inventions.

Maybe that is their secret. During the past three or four decades, theater has allowed its defining characteristic, its very liveness, to grow slowly into an ever heavier burden. Fictional drama seemed to be so much better served by the camera, either for tv or the cinema, with all its companions: editing, animation, photo-shopping, 3D, Imax, Dolby sense-surround sound. The much more constricted stage repertoire of costumes, whigs, fake moustaches and bellies started to look sad and silly. Theater's defensive response – to give film- and tv-stars the leading roles on Broadway and West End – only served to underscore its obsolescence.

Now, this unequal battle is being turned around and taken back to Hollywood. By 600 HIGHWAYMEN, and by many other independent, irreverent, innovative and very internationally minded theater makers from all the continents save Antarctica. Their playgrounds range from living rooms in Buenos Aires to well-established venues like Groningen's Stadsschouwburg and New York's Public Theatre. Their main sponsors are festivals like Noorderzon in Groningen, Under the Radar and Crossing the Line in New York, PuSh in Vancouver and Fusebox in Austin, Texas, among many others. They may seem small, with their 30,000 to 150,000 visitors, and theater ticket sales of 5,000 to 25,000 per edition. But they are growing fast, unlike most of the 'traditional' theater. And they attract a growing number of Hollywood heavies, who want to learn new trades and get in touch with new audiences.

Thus, at Noorderzon this year, I saw famous West Coast DJ Kid Koala and production designer K.K. Barrett, Oscar-nominee for his work on *Her*, mingling with the crowd at the festival's backstage in the open air. No 300-page riders here; Barrett and the Kid were enjoying the same simple but nutritious meals as the 850 volunteers who form the backbone of Noorderzon. They were there for *Nufonia Must Fall Live*, an elaborate stage version of a 350-page cartoon book Kid Koala published in 2003. The story is retold by puppeteers working twelve miniature sets on stage, filmed live in black and white, then projected onto a big screen, accompanied by live music from the Kid himself and The Afiara Quartet.

CULTUREBOT
MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE

THE MYSTERY OF COMMON INSPIRATION

Joost Ramaer | September 16, 2014

Kid Koala still loves his DJ work, he explained during my public talk with him. But he also wants 'more than just make drunken people dance'. For Barrett and him, their complicated new live show was all about learning, about exploring new ideas and new venues, about reaching out to people they'd never served before. It would be impossible for them to do that in their usual settings, where the stakes, financial and otherwise, are so much higher. Here, the much smaller scale and lower cost hurdle of live theater compared to film suddenly becomes an advantage. And it's a two-way bargain. During the talk, the audience reveled in their unrestricted access to the Kid. The members ranged from erudite film buffs to local Kid Koala-punters, who wanted to know every detail about his scratching technique.

The accessibility of the actors has always been a very special secret of live theater. After the show, you just wait for them to come down and have a drink at the bar, and you can have a chat. But festivals are temporary pressure cookers that greatly increase your curiosity and urge to belong, to participate in and enjoy this collective experience. This magic works equally well for actors and audience, in my experience. Maybe that explains why festivals are such fertile breeding grounds for the new and the unexpected, for the stuff that reinvents and reinvigorates theater. There is simply so much feverish and spontaneous communication going on. They offer a very special level of inspiration, of which intimacy, between crowd and performers, forms an essential part.

Another thing that strikes me about festivals is what I would like to call the Mystery of Common Inspiration. Also present at Noorderzon 2014 was Argentinian maker Mariano Pensotti. With a play, *Cineastas*, and an installation, *El Paraiso*. Both are very clever, intricate games with screen and stage, with film and theater. Pensotti lives and works in Buenos Aires. Although his shows tour the world extensively, he had never heard of 600 HIGHWAYMEN, he told me during my public talk with him, let alone met Abby Browde and Michael Silverstone. Still, Pensotti came up with much the same ideas, although he translates them in a different way because he comes from a very different cultural background. *Cineastas* follows four film makers as they each are in the process of making a film. The play shows how their personal lives are influenced by these films, not just the other way around. Only live theater could convey this message – Pensotti, too, is thumbing his nose at Hollywood. Almost literally: he is just as relaxed and playful as Browde and Silverstone are. No present day Bertolt Brechts here.

In recent years we have seen cinema being overtaken by television. Series like *Orange is the New Black*, *House of Cards*, *Mad Men*, *The Wire*, *The Sopranos*, *Homeland*, *Downton Abbey* and*Breaking Bad* seem so much more interesting and in tune with our times than what Hollywood has to offer. But only to a degree. Film remains film, whether it lasts ninety minutes in cinema or six seasons at home. It simply cannot touch the intimacy, immediacy and intensity of live shows like *Cineastas* and *The Record*.

THEATERKRANT

THE RECORD – 600 HIGHWAYMEN
Noorderzon Performing Arts Festival
5 stars:

An ode to humankind

by Luuk Verpaalen, | 27th of august 2014

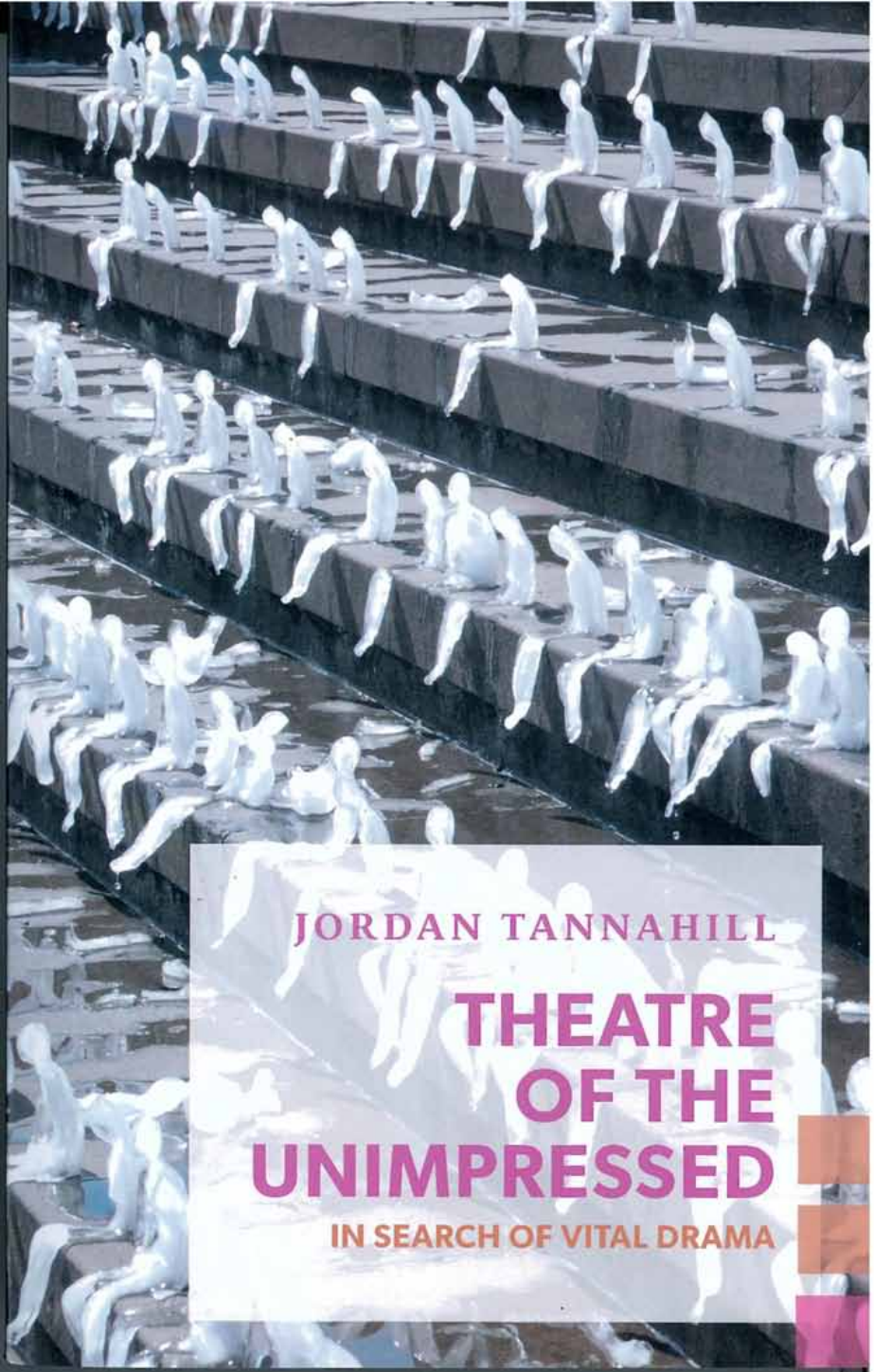
It seems impossible: forty-five people join together for the first time to perform the premiere of a show for an audience. I was witness to that miracle. With growing amazement and marvel, I saw a great company (consisting of amateurs from our daily lives) smoothly performing choreography, with a natural quality that suggests years of stage experience.

Two theatremakers from New York are responsible for this miracle: Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, who have been the co-directors of 600 HIGHWAYMEN for the last five years. 600 HIGHWAYMEN makes performances that work with people who do not have professional stage backgrounds and (most importantly) who have never met prior to the performance. In this way, they're bringing people together in a way that happens everyday: unprepared, as if by chance. Browde and Silverstone are giving the concept of "live" a whole new significance.

The Record was partly inspired by the work of Rineke Dijkstra, the Dutch photographer who makes portraits of people with a similar kind of compassion. And the connection is apparent. The same kind of love for 'the ordinary people' radiates throughout the performance. A cross-section of society is created: children, teens, people in their forties and sixties — they're all there. All in their daily garb. From navel sweater to pullovers — in shorts and dresses, t-shirts or jackets.

In everyday life, you mindlessly would have walked past such a cavalcade, but theatrical magic happens when this is given a life on the stage. Despite the size of the company, you will continue seeing unique individuals, if only because you are aware of the fact that they don't know each other and never shared this room before. How is this possible? How do they not manage to bump into each other? And how do they know how to find each other if they have some particular part to perform *together*?

The Record is an unique ode to mankind and what mankind is capable of, individually or as a collective. Like an exercise in concentration, the performance begins with silence and one man on an immense stage. Gradually, more people join. The simple yet effective choreography suggests a change of tides — people entering and exiting, a kind of ebb and flow. But what stays constant is the presence of the 'here and now', and the realization thereof. *The Record* makes every person unique in this deeply human work.



I set out one muggy New York summer evening in 2013, filled with dread, to check out a play. Every block I walked I kept thinking that maybe it wasn't too late to invite a friend over for a late dinner. I picked up a *Village Voice* and flipped through the movie listings. I looked into shops and thought about my worn-out shoes that needed replacing. Why, in god's name, had I committed myself to seeing *Death of a Salesman*?

As I walked, I tried to recall all the times I'd heard the hapless, sixty-something salesman Willy Loman tell his sons, 'They know me, boys, they know me up and down New England.' Once in a show with gleaming production values at Toronto's Soulpepper Theatre, twice in a shaky 'old-man voice' by a high schooler in a grey wig, once in a cramped storefront theatre that smelt vaguely of piss, once from the mouth of Dustin Hoffman on my laptop while bedridden with the flu … I practically feel obligated now to send old Willy Loman a Christmas card, as if he were a distant great uncle I see every couple of years at a family reunion. And like strained conversations at a family reunion, my encounters with Willy invariably feel like duty.

To potentially make matters worse, the show I was headed to was a site-specific production – as in, a performance occurring outside the confines of a theatre. I don't have anything against site-specific theatre per se, but the only thing worse than watching a dull production of *Hamlet* is watching it play out on a fire escape. It's hard for a boring site-specific production to compete with the more interesting episodes of real life unfolding around it – I can't help but be more compelled by the man chucking tires into the dumpster across the street than by a soliloquy delivered from an emergency exit door. Site-specific theatre is susceptible to the same pitfalls that can make conventionally staged theatre dull – you just have to

suffer through it in less comfortable locations. You can only hope that the chosen location is integral to the piece rather than an arbitrary obstacle.

Still, I pressed on, the asphalt on Wall Street still slick from a late-afternoon rain. In truth, I was on my way to see a reworking of Miller's classic called *This Great Country* by 600 Highwaymen, an upstart theatre company I'd been hearing lots of buzz about. I arrived at a shuttered clothing store at Pier 17 Mall at the South Street Seaport, in the shadow of New York City's financial district. The mall was still bustling, which lent our gathering in this defunct store the aura of a chance encounter between strangers unfolding amid the tumult of everyday life.

The production featured a diverse cast of seventeen performers ranging in age from seven to seventy. Six actors of different ages, genders and backgrounds, all with varying degrees of previous acting experience, took turns playing Willy Loman. Virtually no props were used, and the blocking was reduced to its bare essentials. The stillness and simplicity of the scenes were occasionally punctuated by surprising moments of group choreography, stirring pop songs and rhythmic instrumental tracks. The production shrewdly circumvented much of the fussy, overly literal staging I had always associated with the play. And, most significantly, I was reminded while watching the show that *Death of a Salesman* is a story that America owns collectively. It's a play so canonical that it embodies both our conception of America and America's conception of itself. And America is no longer – if it ever truly was – embodied by the white, suburban nuclear family. I watched in amazement as 600 Highwaymen radically and refreshingly transformed the play into a portrait of America's diverse working class. Far from offering us a mothballed post-war period piece, *This Great Country* intrinsically understood Miller's original text as an ageless parable for the fallacy of the

American Dream, and its gender-blind, age-blind and colour-blind casting enhanced both its timeliness and timelessness. Given the risky casting conceit, there was the sense that, at any moment, the gold of this perilous alchemy could turn back to lead, with, say, an unseasoned performer blanking on his lines or the incongruity of age and gender becoming a distracting gimmick. This suffused the piece with a palpable energy. In fact, given the rigorous construction of the production and the actors' unflagging commitment, the occasionally mumbled line or bit of awkward choreography became some of the most revealing and human moments of the evening.

Setting the production in a disused store in an active mall placed the piece squarely in conversation with the capitalist underpinnings of private and public America. And unlike those inescapable art-school performance interventions in subways or public spaces that presuppose our everyday lives to be so bland and un-artful that they must be invigorated by an artist's invasive whimsy, *This Great Country* implicated unsuspecting shoppers in a subtle and inviting manner, the action visible through floor-to-ceiling windows beckoning but never commanding the curious to draw closer. In the windows the audience could see their own reflections, the intrigued glances of shoppers passing by and the evening slowly darkening into night.

Never in my many previous encounters with him had I ever been moved to tears for Willy Loman. He'd evoked my empathy. My pity. But never tears. I'd always chalked this up to my age; I'd only had an intellectual understanding rather than a lived experience of the tragedy of unfulfilled promise. But that night, under harsh fluorescence, watching a gentleman with little evident theatre training and a thick Korean accent portray Loman, I was moved to tears. Though I knew nothing about this actor, something in his performance suggested to me a very raw and lived familiarity with the broken American

promise. His earnest and unaffected delivery cut through Miller's melodrama like a blade.

In one particularly powerful scene, this Loman told his boss he didn't want to travel for work anymore. He was too old for it and it was wearing him out. His boss, played by a white boy no older than eight or nine, was initially more preoccupied with his new iPhone than with Loman. When Loman asked for a local beat, the boss berated him. 'But where am I gonna put you, kid?' the boy shouted, eliciting laughter from the audience. But there was a tragic current beneath this exchange: here was an overworked immigrant asking a kid born into privilege for a break, for a slightly bigger piece of the American dream, and being put in his place.

I left the storefront that night dumbstruck. It took me half a moment to even realize it was pouring rain. As I leapt from a puddle exploded by a passing cab, I thought: *This* is why I put up with seeing so much boring theatre. The hope that, every once in a while, I will encounter a life-affirming and transcendent experience. *This Great Country* was the living embodiment of the theatrical ideal: a space where anyone can come together and confront that which oppresses them. Theatre as a radical space of togetherness, where we become other people to unpack the complexity of being ourselves, of being human.

600 Highwaymen's production succeeded because it located the beating heart of Miller's original and transplanted it into a vital new body. It was alive. A great many productions are nothing more than a series of actors breaking into a theatrical graveyard, digging up the corpse of a play and trotting it about onstage. The value of a production is in no small part derived from its ability to relevantly engage with its present context. Why this play now? This is the essential problem with Museum Theatre: productions of plays that are content to simply be relics from the past. History lessons. Museum

Theatre allows the distancing qualities of geography and time, of accents and costuming, to inoculate audiences against a play's difficult questions. One of the great travesties of Museum Theatre is the killing and stuffing of once-mighty plays into theatrical taxidermy: like the head of the black bear on the cottage wall, these plays become harmless effigies of their once-fierce and mighty selves.

Few places are more notorious bastions for theatrical museology than summer-stock theatre. Summer-stock companies are found in urban park amphitheatres and small towns throughout the English-speaking world, mostly serving up light, inoffensive fare for vacationers and tourists. The Shakespeare-in-the-Park phenomenon is a popular subset of summer stock. While I've seen a few terrific Shakespeare-in-the-Parks, I've seen a greater share of tedious rehashings. Sure, Shakespeare was a populist, but his work was also deeply political and fearless. Even his history plays, far from being Museum Theatre, were attuned to the political machinations of his contemporary England. But by routinely underestimating an audience's capacity for the daring and direct, many contemporary theatres sap Shakespeare and thousands of other classics of their incendiary potential.

Euripides' *Medea*, first produced in 431 BCE, enjoys frequent restagings because of its powerful, timeless narrative: the jealousy and revenge of a woman betrayed by her husband. Revenge that, in tragic Greek fashion, culminates in the murder of her two children. But this wrenching play can be reduced to archaeology with a few actors ponderously intoning an ancient myth. Other productions can be electric, reflecting contemporary life just as urgently and provocatively as the play did in ancient Greece. Take Mike Bartlett's searing 2012 adaptation at Glasgow's Citizens Theatre, which transplanted the narrative to a London suburb in which, to quote Mark

Fisher's *Guardian* review, a young single mother in track-suit bottoms 'can switch in an instant from making a cup of tea to listing the ways she'd like her estranged husband to die.'

Of course, a classic doesn't need to be literally situated in the present day to be relevant. A considered, purposeful production in the play's original historic mode can be an equally clear mirror held up to today's world. But, no matter how hard it may try to ignore it, a production of a classic can't escape its contemporary context. It must negotiate the contemporary politics it will be held accountable to. Productions of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* or *Taming of the Shrew*, for instance, that do not somehow address the play's misogyny are doomed. As I stated earlier, what prevents timeless plays from preservation in theatrical formaldehyde is their timeliness – the ability of the director and her creative team to reflect meaningfully on the way we presently live in the world.

Three different, notable productions of *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett's 1948 masterpiece, embody this well. In 1993, Susan Sontag staged *Godot* at Sarajevo's Youth Theatre during the height of the Bosnian War. The production drew so much international attention to Sarajevo that many credit it with contributing to the war's end, and it inspired the city in 2009 to name the public square directly outside the theatre after Sontag. Just as Beckett's tramps were waiting in their interminable limbo, so too were the people of Sarajevo waiting for the war's end; as Sontag has remarked, the production could have been called *Waiting for Clinton*. When asked why the citizens of Sarajevo, already in despair, would want to subject themselves to Beckett's nihilism, Sontag replied, 'In Sarajevo, as anywhere else, there are more than a few people who feel strengthened and consoled by having their sense of reality affirmed and transfigured by art.' And surely the act of simply mounting a theatre production under such extraordinary circumstances constituted a triumph of perseverance over despair.

As Sontag recounts in her essay 'Godot Comes to Sarajevo': '[W]e rehearsed in the dark. The bare proscenium stage was lit usually by only three or four candles, supplemented by the four flashlights I'd brought with me. When I asked for additional candles, I was told there weren't any. Later I was told that they were being saved for our performances … The main obstacle, apart from the siege lighting, was the fatigue of the malnourished actors, many of whom, before they arrived for rehearsal at ten, had for several hours been queuing for water and then lugging heavy plastic containers up eight or ten flights of stairs. Some of them had to walk two hours to get to the theatre, and, of course, would have to follow the same dangerous route at the end of the day.'

In 2006, American visual artist Paul Chan visited Hurricane Katrina–ravaged New Orleans and found, like Sontag had in Sarajevo, a city waiting for salvation. In Kalamu Ya Salaam's *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans: A Field Guide*, Chan recalls, 'Friends said the city now look[ed] like the backdrop for a bleak science-fiction movie … I realized it didn't look like a movie set, but the stage for a play I [had] seen many times.' In 2007, in collaboration with New York's Classical Theatre of Harlem, Chan returned and staged four free outdoor performances of *Godot* in two New Orleans neighbourhoods. A gutted two-storey house was used as the set in the city's Gentilly neighbourhood, while a once-busy intersection acted as the stage in the Lower Ninth Ward, where one of New Orleans' largest black neighbourhoods was all but erased by flooding. In a nod to Katrina's most dispossessed victims, Vladimir and Estragon were played by two black actors: Wendell Pierce and J. Kyle Manzay. Chan's production, which made international headlines at the time, has become an essential part of the growing canon of art exploring Hurricane Katrina and its fallout.

Finally, and unsurprisingly, *Waiting for Godot* has had an enduring link with incarcerated populations. The first known

prison production, and one that Beckett himself believed to be one of the play's most significant productions, took place in Wuppertal, Germany's Lüttringhausen Prison. An inmate obtained a copy of the play's original French edition and painstakingly translated it into German himself. He then managed to secure permission to perform the play, and *Waiting for Godot* had its Lüttringhausen premiere on November 29, 1953. The inmate wrote a letter to Beckett in October 1954, informing him of the production: 'You will be surprised to be receiving a letter about your play *Waiting for Godot*, from a prison where so many thieves, forgers, toughs, homos, crazy men, and killers spend this bitch of a life waiting…and waiting…and waiting. Waiting for what? Godot? Perhaps.'

A major factor in the proliferation of Museum Theatre in North America is our conception of the director's role within a production. The director is often seen as being responsible for servicing the vision of the playwright as adeptly as possible. The playwright is regarded as the creative mother of a play and the director his or her midwife. This is not the prevailing model in continental Europe, where the primacy of the director's vision often trumps that of the playwright. In the hands of a director, dramatic text is often seen as something to wrestle with or subvert; it's the friction between the playwright's intent and the director's choices that yields meaning. And classical texts, from Ibsen to Shakespeare to Euripides, particularly lend themselves to frequent and radical reinterpretation because audiences are familiar with the structures and narratives the directors are subverting.

For instance, Heiner Müller's production of *Hamlet/Machine* staged at the Deutsche Theatre Berlin in the fall of 1989 as the GDR was crumbling. The production spliced together Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with Müller's own 1977 play *Die Hamletmaschine*, becoming a dense nine pages of text radically

deconstructing Shakespeare's original; critics have variously interpreted it as a meditation on the tyranny of totalitarianism, the twentieth-century ideological struggle between capitalism and communism, and Müller's rebuke of East German Communist intellectuals, among other, more timeless themes of human nature. *Hamlet/Machine*'s potency and dramatic legibility would be profoundly diminished without an audience's knowledge of Shakespeare's original. Müller rips out the soul of Shakespeare's play and Frankensteins it into a profoundly new and terrifying body.

An example of a reimagining that retains the integrity of the original dramatic text could be the Münchner Kammerspiele's 2013 production of Tennessee Williams's *Orpheus Descending*, directed by Sebastian Nübling. In Nübling's production the play's typically realist set (that of a southern dry-goods store) is replaced by a massive carnival swing-ride that the performers ride and hang from. The dangerous eroticism of the character Val is enlivened by his riding an actual motorcycle onstage, riffing on an electric guitar and performing monologues into a microphone with rock-and-roll swagger. Nübling's production, with its self-aware use of Americana and its non-specific sense of era, extended the reach of Williams's play beyond a doomed romantic relationship into a broader meditation on America's decline.

It turns out 600 Highwaymen are only two people: young husband-and-wife duo Michael Silverstone and Abigail Browde, who founded the company in 2009. In my conversation with Browde, a waifish and erudite New Yorker sporting Woody Allen–style spectacles, she says that prior to *This Great Country*, she and Silverstone had developed two previous pieces from scratch through a devised creation process. 'And we were really craving the structure of a play that was not only a play but *the play*. Like if you're going to work with

something and the thing you want is dramatic structure, then take the play that is the most well-made of the Well-Made Plays.' Browde tells me how it was through dismantling the text that she came to realize the purposeful construction of Miller's original and how the process of unmaking and remaking the classic was a process of personal reckoning with its meaning. 'I didn't really understand what a Well-Made Play was when I started working on it and I didn't understand just how well *Death of a Salesman* was made until we started taking it apart and it was like: "Oh, we can't take that out because that is so brilliantly set up for this."' She mimes an intricate, tangled web in mid-air. 'It's woven. It's such a tight fabric. And it was a fun process to unpick, thread by thread, to figure out what was important to us, what was the project and what was it that we were telling – why not just do *Death of a Salesman*? Why was it ours?'

Browde admits that sturdy plays like Miller's, and the many that have been made in its mould, were her entry point into live performance while growing up in Middle America. For Browde, and for countless other Americans, performing in these plays in community theatres or seeing them in a regional playhouse was an early gateway to the possibilities of live performance. 'As a kid,' Browde says, 'I did a lot of community theatre where I grew up and that kind of model is where most people in America get their theatre, unless they live in New York or Chicago. You have your regional playhouse and you're going to do the Broadway spinoffs and *A Christmas Carol*, and there are beautiful things about that.'

But working with Miller's classic also reinforced for Browde the massive gulf between mainstream American theatre and what she sees as her practice in contemporary performance. She finds it hard to relate to a theatre predicated on strictly replicating things the way they were originally intended – reproducing precisely what has previously worked, like a well-made plan, in which there is little margin for interpretation, risk or error. 'When I go to see plays at the regional theatres across America,' Browde explains, 'I don't feel like we're making the same thing. I don't even feel like they're part of my family … Like, think of all the places that did *August: Osage County*, which I thought was a great play. It closes on Broadway and then the regional theatres do their version of it, or they all do their version of *Rent*, and they all costume it so that the main guy's wearing the same sweater …'

I burst out laughing, knowing exactly the sweater she means. 'That red sweater with the blue stripe through the middle, right? The one that the guy with the glasses wears.'

Browde smiles, nodding. 'It feels like a totally different medium to me. That kind of theatre feels like a cousin. Kind of like: "Oh yeah, I remember you. We had dinner at that family thing a long time ago. But we don't have to hang out every night."'

600 HIGHWAYMEN: *The opposite of transportation*

by Ben Gansky | April 30, 2015

Performance still from *This Great Country*. Photo by Maria Baranova.

Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone have created performances together under the name 600 HIGHWAYMEN since 2009. I first encountered their work in the summer of 2012, when I saw *This Great Country*, their interpretation of *Death of a Salesman*, at the River to River Festival in Lower Manhattan. Presented in a gutted department store, *This Great Country* was an exactingly contemporary revision of Arthur Miller's play, in a way that was deeply and almost shockingly generous. I had never seen a show with a cast so diverse (in terms of age, ethnicity, bodies, voices) and so attuned to each other and to their audience. The performance felt like a portrait, not of the individual alluded to in Miller's title, but of the nation referenced by 600 HIGHWAYMEN's name for this piece. The presence and attention of the performers (seeing each other, seeing the spectators) seemed to deal directly with the reality of the situation—actors in front of an audience—rather than attempting to camouflage or mediate that relationship.

When I first spoke with Browde and Silverstone about this conversation, they asked if rather than conduct a one-time interview, they could instead write their responses over the course of several weeks or months. Since the success of their piece, *The Record* (a sold-out hit at the Public Theater's Under the Radar Festival in 2014, now touring in Europe), they had given a succession of interviews in which the writers chose to focus on the casting of their shows, and specifically on what had been labeled the casting of "non-performers" (Browde: "How can they be non-performers? If they're performing, they're performers!")

Currently in residence at the Park Avenue Armory, Browde and Silverstone are developing a new piece titled *The Fever*, inspired by Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, which has them reconsidering their practices of relating performers to the audience.

Ben Gansky Let's start with why. Why make shows?

Michael Silverstone I make shows to get closer to who I am, and to get closer to other people, especially those who are not like me. Making theater is a way for me to have conversations with myself and with other people. It's the way I stay active. Also, I'm interested in staring. Things happen when you look at something or someone for a long time—like empathy, or compassion, or even just clarity, seeing the surface and imagining what's beyond. I'm making theater to do all that more.

Abigail Browde Living art feels like the deepest connection I have to a kind of poetic transcendence. I'm not even sure what that means, but living art, people moving in front of other people, is the purest, most accessible, most moving form of expression to me. Humans perform for one another. We look at each other. It's what we've always done. Staring at each other—whether it's on the subway, in the grocery store, or onstage—feels like second nature, like eating, breathing, talking, and so on. Making plays is sculpting our animal instinct to look at each other.

MS I'm also making theater to wake up to agendas other than my own. We've got an idea of what we'd like to happen, and as much as we push it, something else is going to occur, something we can't control. The idea of dictating what to do or what to experience, and then expecting that very thing to occur, is an impossible expectation, and it's also a bit boring to make. I'm using the form as a way to put myself in collision with other agendas so that I might come out at the other end more tolerant, or more humanized, or just less narrow.

BG Do you see your work as engaging with any specific problems/issues in the field of contemporary performance?

AB In the relationships between artists and those who support them (institutions and funders) I think there's an over-proportioned value in "knowing." In my experience, there are plenty of artistic processes well worth their salt that can't be effectively put into words. Many processes are instinctive. We've got this system in place where we reward the people who make work that can be articulated—or people who can be articulate [about that work]—and so a specific arc of projects is rewarded with resources and support. I do realize it's hard to support someone if you don't understand their intuition or their practice, but I think it's a limiting system.

We addressed these issues from the beginning by making ourselves completely self-reliant. We chose to make shows where we didn't need institutional support. But the sustainability of this is difficult. And it's not always fun. I mean, had someone come to the bingo hall in Texas where we made *This Great Country* and offered to figure out how the electricity in that building worked, so we would stop blowing fuses two days before the opening, I would have been thrilled. Or if we had a producer or manager who would make sure there was adequate heat in the church when we made *This Time Tomorrow*, I would have kissed them. But I also know that had we held out for adequate heat and perfect electrical wiring, we probably wouldn't have made those shows. Or they wouldn't have been what they were. And what they were was genuine and specific and important to us. Also, when it comes to "problems in the field" there's the lobby problem: lots of money going to maintain and renovate the physical theaters, but not the same dedication of funds going towards the artists. Lobby renovations instead of living wages. I think this is a problem in the field.

MS Our first five shows were made in the social hall of our neighborhood church, often rehearsing while other things were happening in the room: baby showers, piano lessons, even setting up for a funeral, and instead of fighting the overlap, we fell in love with it. We learned to be fluid. The situation was always being complicated, and that kept it alive. There was only so much we could plan. We learned to watch the whole room, to see what was happening in a fuller sense. Working in the church got us thinking about human landscapes, and how to recalibrate the focus of an audience. We want our shows to be messing with the dials and the hierarchies. I want there to be a lot at stake in the way we assemble people.

BG One of the seminal texts of the last half-century on theatre-making is Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*. Rereading it recently, it struck me as dated—in fact, colonialist—to conceive of any space as "empty," without context or history, as *tabula rasa*. In the same vein, I am disturbed by the tendency of character- and plot-based theatre to treat actors as seemingly empty vessels for characters. What do you think about Brook's thesis, "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage"? Any thoughts as to how the kind of responses your work has sometimes evoked ("non-actors," "non-professionals") might relate to its challenging the dominance of a theatre paradigm based in disguising the truth of a space and performers, rather than revealing it?

MS We're interested in the lives of the people onstage, both what is true and what is inferred. I want to look at a person and have an idea of how they were raised. Or where they live. Or what they eat for breakfast. I

want to know that the creators are telling me that's an okay thing to do. This is important. My prejudices, my narratives, my values—there's so much I'm interested in sorting through in the theater.

AB Blankness is, indeed, impossible. It's a false premise to imagine that it's possible to be blank, bare, empty. But falseness as an idea must be addressed when you're working in theater. It's such an inherently fictional, false medium. The falseness of memorizing words and then reciting them effortlessly, the falseness of fictional circumstance, the falseness of acting like you are not being watched, when in fact what you're doing is sculpted for surveillance (and often by a large mass of people). Michael and I tend to deal directly with this falseness, to really engage with it. Each piece has a different relationship with this.

MS Richard Avedon has a quote about "the surface" of the subjects he photographed from his *American West* series in the '80s. "You can't get at the thing itself, the real nature of the sitter, by stripping away the surface. The surface is all you've got. You can only get beyond the surface by working with the surface."

AB Our deepest success is when we can bend and manipulate the theatrical form (one that really deals in games of pretend and falseness), to make something true and real.

BG Can you talk a little about how your backgrounds have influenced your work?

MS After we graduated from NYU, Abby was making shows that she was writing, choreographing, and performing in. I was directing new plays, and I was having a hard time in that world. I kept getting hurt, and I didn't feel in control of my work. I felt like a janitor. At the same time, I was heading this theater group in a maximum-security prison, and I was spending a lot of time with this group. I was teaching them acting. We'd work on monologues, and ultimately we performed a full-length play for the public. Something about this specific group, and the way I figured out how to work with them, pulled me out of a disillusionment I didn't realize had taken hold. I began to feel a lot of possibility. And right around then Abby and I started working together.

BG How do you go about relating your personal lives together to the work you're making?

AB How we live our personal lives and how we make work is very messy. We spend an inordinate amount of time with each other, sharing and articulating and explaining things. At the same time, we're both very private people. Actually, neither of us *likes* to talk about our ideas with the other, but we do it. It's like an emotional shoehorn.

Actors have also told us that we keep our cards close to our chest. This is true. We prepare the process so that the actors' focus stays on the inside. We work with smart people, but we don't rely on them to have an outside perspective on what we're doing. Their job is to be inside the apparatus, working on the task at hand, so they're prepared to work with the spectators.

MS There are opposing forces in our creative process, but actually we're trying to simplify the whole thing in a big way. We're trying to open our shows so there's room for something to happen, something unknown to all of us. We're setting up a framework, and we're aiming to get lost in the gaps.

I thought a lot about this when working with *Death of a Salesman*. That first scene is so great because this guy, Willy, has come home in the middle of the night, and his wife finds him standing in the middle of the kitchen alone. She's in her robe and he's dressed for work, and it's the middle of the night and she turns the light on. And they're just standing there. It's the truest sense of reality, even they don't know how they arrived at this point in time. The thing is, in a lot of productions, all that reality gets lost. A bunch of decisions are made that take away all the uncertainty. Linda kisses Willy on the forehead, she helps him with his coat, a cup of tea is made, they do the special glance. It all becomes very digestible. But theater can be much more mysterious. We can deal with figuring it out on our own. If the actors are working and the setup is right, something really great can occur.

But this is really a matter of personal taste. I'm interested in work that has room for me to make something happen on my own. I don't want to be transported, I want to wake up to myself. I want to be triggered. Not every audience member has to feel the same thing, but I do know that you've got three minutes at the top of Miller's story to get the majority of the audience thinking about their parents, and I think there's a way to do this that is more subconscious, more ephemeral—something that sneaks up on you.

BG How are you guys working to leave things onstage unresolved for an audience?

AB We're leaving gaps that are generally filled by traditional American realism. Put some spackle over the hole and paint it clean. This is super apparent I think in the choreography for *Employee of the Year*.

MS We're asking performers to think about themselves in relation to the experience of being seen by an audience, and in relation to the words being said. We're not very interested in psychological realism, or in the fictional given circumstances. Sometimes we talk through this idea I stole from Brian Mertes, which is that there are three things—character, self, and the text—and each occupies the foreground, middle ground, or background of every moment for a performer. They are constantly shifting and being rearranged by the performer. This is asking the person onstage to be thinking of who they are while onstage. It's asking them to be present and to be aware. It becomes a very concentrated thing.

BG When you say "reality of the narrative" or the reality of the lines, do you mean the reality as it relates to the actual personal life of the performer?

AB No, I don't think that's what I mean.

MS Sort of.

AB It isn't about the actor's "personal" life, but more the reality of who they are in the moment of doing the show. Less psychoanalysis.

BG So, reality perhaps meaning in this case the reality of the situation—this being a performance in front of an audience.

MS Yes, and really listening to the physical mechanics of being up there. Like, feeling your eyes move and your blood flow.

BG Can I ask you guys about your recent experience workshopping your new show, *The Fever*, at the Sundance Institute Lab at MASS MoCA? How are these questions resonating for you in light of this recent development period? Mistakes, presence, leaving things unresolved—maybe especially as relates to the dynamic between performer and content?

MS We're trying to disturb some of our core ideas with this next project. It's time to move to new stuff. When we hit material at MASS MoCA that felt like our other work, I couldn't digest it. It was as if my body was rejecting it.

BG Can you outline a sense of either what you feel like you're rejecting or what you're embracing through this process?

AB Ha!

MS Stillness. Standing on two feet.

AB Yep. And even looking at the audience is something to upend for us.

MS "The encounter" between spectator and performer. Symmetry. A lot of what we've been talking about, actually. These are things we want to put aside.

AB This does not mean we're asking the performers to pretend the audience isn't there. We're not erecting a solid fourth wall.

MS No, but it feels like we're partially building it up again. At least half-so.

BG And this show is based on material from *Rite of Spring*?

AB "Loosely inspired by" at the moment. I think we're in a "breaking up" period with *Rite of Spring* as a source. We need to see other people.

BG How do you go about that sort of dating scene?

AB For real. Tinder for art projects.

BG Tinder dramaturgy.

AB OKDramaturg.

MS Usually our work is in direct conversation with visual art, and we've been looking at sources that are thematically linked in some way for a while.

BG That's fascinating. It's something I didn't know about your process. Can I ask what or whose work in particular has influenced this and/or past pieces?

MS The artist Nick Cave. He makes these soundsuits, full-body pieces for people to wear. What I like is how open to interpretation they are. There are a lot of ways to read them. And they alter your perception, which is something we're always trying to do. In the past we've done this by playing with time and point of focus, but never with something so theatrical. To me this show feels like a goodbye to something, or a letting go of the argument.

AB Or a hello to something else. Something additional.

BG Do you feel like that's a reaction to a direction you were taking in *Employee of the Year*?

AB I think actually there's something about having made *Employee of the Year* and then remounting *The Record* in the Netherlands around the same time that made us look at our work in a very new way.

BG Did you have any particular revelations?

MS Both shows feel very solitary to me, and I'm feeling not so interested in the singular anymore.

AB Oh, that's interesting. That's right.

MS It feels like we're breaking the skin to get lost in the cells of something greater, maybe something more chaotic.

Ben Gansky is a director, writer, designer, and producer of new performance work. His company GRANDMA works at the intersection of comedy, performance art, and experimental theatre. He is currently at work on his MFA in Directing at Carnegie Mellon University with a focus in emerging media and interactive platforms.

Ein Mosaik aus Menschen

ALLEIN: Mihaela Iclodean probt für „The Record“. Ihre Mitspieler lernt sie erst bei der Premiere kennen. *Fotos: Behrens*

44 Hannoveraner proben getrennt voneinander für Theaterstück „The Record“

VON STEFAN GOHLISCH

HANNOVER. Mihaela Iclodean spielt Theater. Sie geht ein paar Schritte vor, verharrt, dreht sich um 45 Grad, geht noch ein paar Schritte und in die Hocke, steht wieder auf und streckt einen Arm aus. Vielleicht wird jemand diese Geste erwidern, vielleicht auch nicht. Iclodean wird es erst bei der Premiere von „The Record“ erfahren. Erst dann lernt sie ihre Mitspieler kennen bei dieser Produktion für das Festival Theaterformen.

44 Hannoveraner zwischen sieben und 77 Jahren, die einander nicht kennen, werden ab 9. Juli gemeinsam auf der Bühne stehen; das ist das Konzept dieses Stücks der New Yorker Autoren und Regisseure Abigail Browde und Michael Silverstone, die sich „600 Highwaymen“ nennen. Silverstone ist noch in den USA, um für „Employee of the Yeart“, das andere Stück, das die „Highwaymen“ in Hannover zeigen werden, zu proben. Browde studiert bereits mit den Laiendarstellern die Bewegungsabläufe von „The Record“ ein – auf einer Probenbühne der Staatstheater in Bornum.

SELTENES DUETT: Regisseurin Abigail Browde (links) macht die Bewegungen vor.

Damit das Konzept aufgeht, ist jede Bewegung, jede Geste streng getaktet, zeitlich wie räumlich. Darüber, wie genau man ein solches Mosaik aus Menschen zusammensetzt, möchte sie sich nicht so gern auslassen: „Wir möchten, dass die Menschen sich auf das Stück einlassen und nicht die ganze Zeit grübeln“, sagt sie. „The Record“ ist eine Kombination aus Theater, Tanz und Performance, die nach bisherigen Aufführungen für ihre ganz besondere Magie gelobt wurde.

Letztlich treibt das Stück die Einzigartigkeit des Theatererlebnisses auf die Spitze: Setzt sich sonst nur das Publikum Abend für Abend neu zusammen, ist es hier auch das Ensemble. Das macht den Blick frei auf den reinen Menschen. „Es gibt keine klassische Erzählung; es ist eher wie ein Rorschach-Test: Für jeden ist das, was er sieht, etwas anderes“, so Browde. Bei der Auswahl der Spielenden hätten sie und Silverstone vor allem auf deren Präsenz geachtet: „Wir haben Menschen gesucht, von denen man die Augen kaum lösen kann, wenn sie auf der Bühne stehen.“

Für Iclodean, von Haus aus Theaterpädagogin und Sozialpsychologin, ist die Arbeit an dem Stück vor allem eine große sinnliche Erfahrung: „Das wird ein Abenteuer“, sagt sie: „Ich selber werde überrascht sein, was mit mir passiert. Man hat keine Ahnung – das finde ich so abgefahren.“

„The Record“ bei den Theaterformen: am 9. (20 Uhr), 10. (18 Uhr) und 11. Juli (16 Uhr) im Ballhof eins.
www.600highwaymen.org

DIE THEATERFORMEN

Das Festival Theaterformen, das im jährlichen Wechsel in Hannover und Braunschweig veranstaltet wird, findet 2015 zum 25. Mal statt: vom 2. bis 12. Juli auf den Bühnen des Schauspielhauses, im Pavillon und im öffentlichen Raum. Es widmet sich den unterschiedlichen Formen, wie Theater in der Welt gemacht wird. 15 Produktionen werden gezeigt, darunter acht deutsche Erstaufführungen. Erstmals ist Martine Dennewald Künstlerische Leiterin; eine ihrer Neuerungen ist, dass, zum Zwecke des Vergleiches, manche Gruppen mit zwei Inszenierungen eingeladen sind. Das Schauspielhaus wird während der Zeit zum Festivalzentrum – mit allabendlichen Open-Air-Konzerten.
www.theaterformen.de

ART & WEISE

Welches Geheimnis?

Was ist **„Cäsars Geheimnis“**? Wissen wir nicht. Aber so sollte das 36. Abenteuer der tapferen Gallier Asterix und Obelix heißen, der zweite Band des Teams Jean-Yves Ferri (Text) und Didier Conrad (Zeichnungen). Geht aber nicht – aus rechtlichen Gründen. Der Titel musste kurzfristig geändert werden. Es gibt nämlich ein Kinderbuch, das genauso heißt. Geklagt hat niemand, aber man kann ja nie wissen. Und hier verraten wir das Geheimnis um den neuen Titel, er lautet „Der Papyrus des Cäsar“. Und kein Geheimnis ist, dass die neue Episode am 22. Oktober auf Deutsch erscheint. *art*

A mosaic of people
44 Hannoverians are rehearsing separately for the play "The Record"
By Stefan Gohlisch

Photos: Behrens
Caption big photo: ALONE: Mihaela Iclodean is rehearsing for “The Record.“ She will not get to know her fellow performers until opening night.
Caption small photo: RARE DUET: Director Abigail Browde (left) is demonstrating the movements.

HANNOVER. Mihaela Iclodean is playing theatre. She takes a few steps, pauses, turns 45 degrees, takes a few more steps and crouches, gets up and stretches out an arm. Maybe someone will pick up this gesture, maybe not. Iclodean will not find out until the opening night of “The Record.” That is when she will get to know her fellow performers of this production for the festival Theaterformen.

44 Hannoverians between the ages of seven and 77, who do not know each other, will be on stage with each other starting July 9; that is the idea behind this piece by New York writers and directors Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, who call themselves “600 Highwaymen.” Silverstone is still in the United States to rehearse for “Employee of the Yeart” [sic], the other piece the “Highwaymen” are going to show in Hannover. Browde is already rehearsing the movement sequences of “The Record” with the non-professional performers — on a rehearsal stage of the Staatstheater in Bornum.

For this concept to work, every movement, every gesture is strictly timed and measured. How exactly this mosaic of people is put together is something she would rather not divulge: “We want people to embrace the piece rather than to pore over it the whole time,” she says. “The Record” is a combination of theatre, dance, and performance, which has been lauded for its particular magic following the performances to date.

Ultimately, the piece takes the uniqueness of a theatre experience to the highest level: where ordinarily there is only a new audience from one evening to the next, here it is also the ensemble. This allows for a clear view of the pure human. “There is no traditional narrative; it is more like a Rorschach test: everyone sees something different,” says Browde. When selecting the performers, she and Silverstone were mostly interested in their presence: “We were looking to find people you can hardly take your eyes off of when they are on stage.”

For Iclodean, otherwise a theatre pedagogue and social psychologist, working on the piece is mainly a big sensual experience: “It is going to be an adventure,” she says: “I am going to be surprised at what happens to me. You just don’t know — that is such a kick.”

Der Schauspieler als Tier

6000 Besucher: Abwechslungsreicher Dreier zum Abschluss der Theaterformen

VON JÖRG WORAT

HANNOVER. Finale bei den „Theaterformen“: Am letzten Festivalwochenende gabs noch einmal drei Premieren zu sehen. Die, das gehört hier zum guten Ton, eine höchst unterschiedliche Ästhetik boten. Die Bilanz: Von 7500 Karten wurden gut 6000 verkauft, die Auslastung lag bei 80 Prozent. Gut 4500 Gäste nahmen am Rahmenprogramm der Theaterformen teil.

„Wenn ich zurückkomme, bin ich ein anderer“ hat der Argentinier Mariano Pensotti sein Stück genannt, das im Schauspielhaus zu erleben war. Es geht um den Verlust von Idealen, sei es politischer, sei es künstlerischer Natur. Kunstvoll hat der Autor und Regisseur sein Beziehungsgeflecht zwischen den Figuren verwoben, das sich erst nach und nach enthüllt. Zwei gegenläufige Förderbänder transportierten sowohl Darsteller als auch Requisiten horizontal über die Bühne – schon logistisch eine Herausforderung.

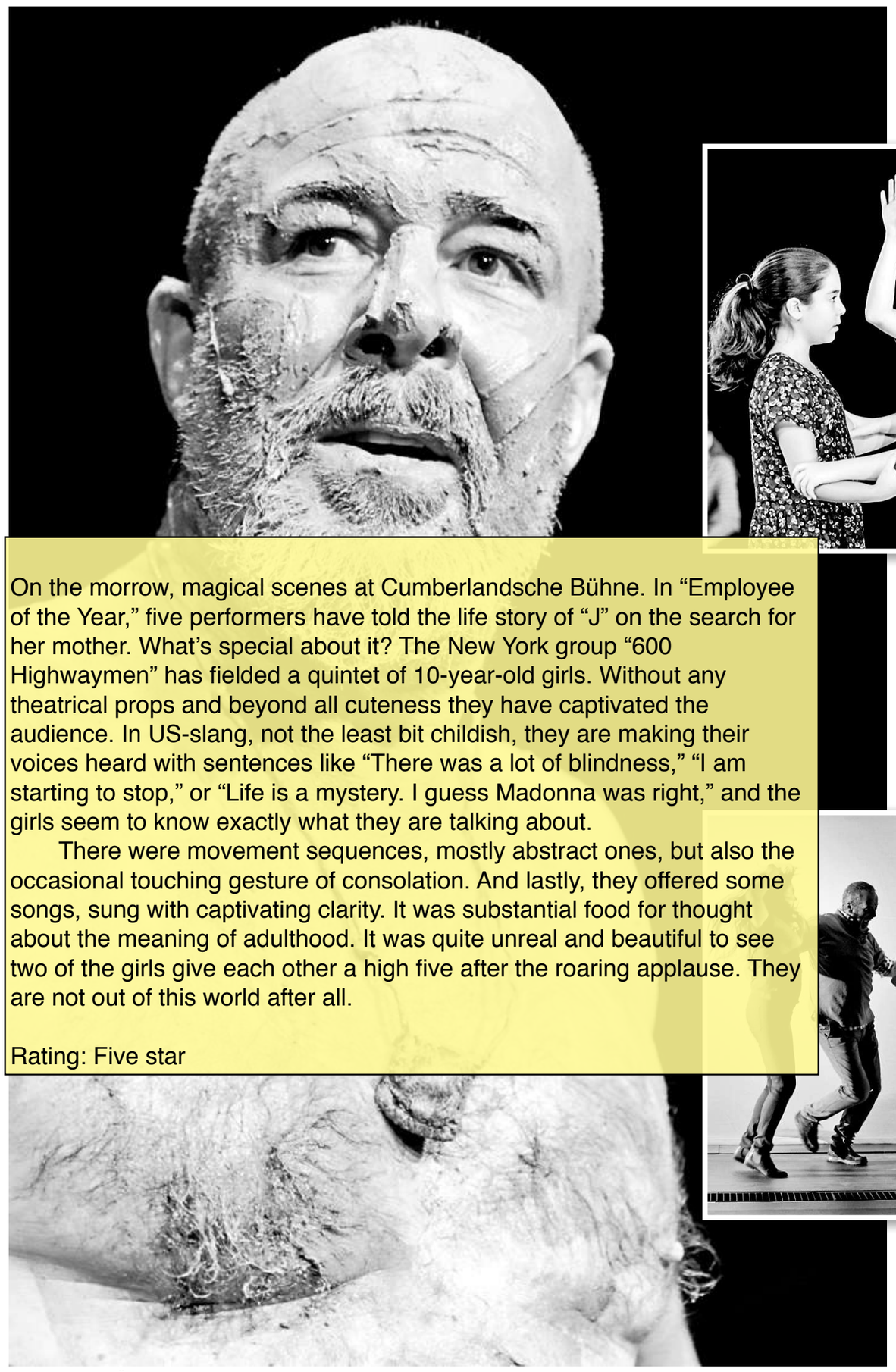
Es gab Momente von schrägem Humor: Hier trat eine Transvestiten-Beatles-Coverband auf, dort wurde eine hoffnungsvolle Musikerin in einer TV-Show von einem argentinischen Äquivalent zu Dieter Bohlen heruntergeputzt. Sehr sympathische Inszenierung, die indes im sprachlastigen ersten Teil darunter litt, dass man sich gar zu sehr auf die Übertitel konzentrieren musste. ★★★★☆

Magische Szenen tags darauf in der Cumberlandschen Bühne. Fünf Darstellerinnen erzählten in **„Employee of the Year“** die Lebensgeschichte von „J.“ auf der Suche nach ihrer Mutter. Was daran besonders ist? Die New Yorker Gruppe „600 Highwaymen“ hat ein Quintett von zehnjährigen Mädchen ins Rennen geschickt. Das ohne jegliche Requisiten und jenseits aller Putzigkeit das Publikum in seinen Bann zog. In kein bisschen kindlich anmutendem US-Slang erklangen Sätze wie „Es ist alles Verblendung“, „Ich hatte angefangen aufzuhören“ oder „Life is a mystery. Ich glaube, Madonna hatte Recht“, und die Girls schienen genau zu wissen, was sie da sagten.

Zuweilen kamen Bewegungsmomente ins Spiel, meistens abstrakte, aber auch schon mal eine höchst anrührende Trostgeste. Und schließlich waren berückend klar gesungene Lieder im Angebot. Man konnte massiv ins Grübeln geraten, was eigentlich Erwachsensein bedeutet. Irgendwie fast irreal – und schön zu sehen, wie zwei der Mädchen nach dem begeisterten Applaus ein High Five austauschten: Sie sind also doch von diesem Planeten. ★★★★★

Auch das eher klassische Schauspiel hat bei den „Theaterformen“ seinen Platz, wie **„Death of a Colonialist“** im Ballhof 2 bewies, ein Stück des Südafrikaners Greg Latter in der Regie von Craig Freimond. Hauptfigur ist der Lehrer Harold Smith, dessen Unterricht exzentrische Züge aufweist. Seine Leidenschaft gilt dem Volk der Xhosa – um genau zu sein, behandelt er nichts anderes, unabhängig von allen Vorgaben des Lehrplans. Dass er im Eifer des Gefechts schon mal Rituale der Körperbemalung demonstriert, lässt die Runzeln auf der Stirn des Schuldirektors keineswegs verschwinden.

In seiner Egozentrik merkt Smith nicht, wie ihm alles einschließlich der Familie entgleitet. Erst in der Katastrophe beginnt der durchgeknallte Lehrer zu begreifen. Feinstes Schauspielertheater, Jamie Bartlett war als Harold Smith ein regelrechtes Tier: Da dampfte die Bühne. Vielleicht ein Tick kitschig, das Ganze, aber unter dem Strich der würdige Abschluss eines Festivals. ★★★★☆

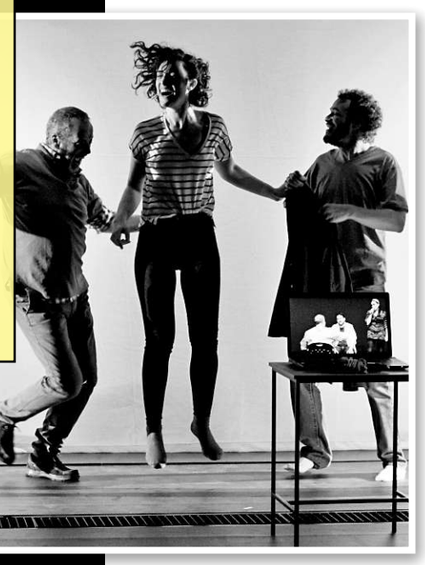


LEBEN IST EIN MYSTERIUM: „Employee of the Year“ mit jungen Mimen. *Foto: Baranova*

On the morrow, magical scenes at Cumberlandsche Bühne. In “Employee of the Year,” five performers have told the life story of “J” on the search for her mother. What’s special about it? The New York group “600 Highwaymen” has fielded a quintet of 10-year-old girls. Without any theatrical props and beyond all cuteness they have captivated the audience. In US-slang, not the least bit childish, they are making their voices heard with sentences like “There was a lot of blindness,” “I am starting to stop,” or “Life is a mystery. I guess Madonna was right,” and the girls seem to know exactly what they are talking about.

There were movement sequences, mostly abstract ones, but also the occasional touching gesture of consolation. And lastly, they offered some songs, sung with captivating clarity. It was substantial food for thought about the meaning of adulthood. It was quite unreal and beautiful to see two of the girls give each other a high five after the roaring applause. They are not out of this world after all.

Rating: Five star



GRUPPENDYNAMIK: „Wenn ich zurückkomme, bin ich ein anderer“. *Foto: Benjamin*

DA DAMPFT DIE BÜHNE: Jamie Bartlett spielt den Lehrer Harold Smith, der sich besonders für das Volk der Xhosa interessiert – und auch sonst ein wenig sonderbar ist. *Foto: Market Theatre*

ART & WEISE

Sich reich singen

Wunderbar, endlich passiert mal etwas gegen die böse, böse Armut. Durch das „Global Citizen Festivals“ am 26. September im New Yorker Centralpark. Mit dabei sind Stars wie Beyoncé, Ed Sheeran und die Musiker von Coldplay und Pearl Jam. Coldplay-Sänger Chris Martin hat das Spektakel mitorganisiert. Tolle Idee, millionenschwere Popstars singen machtvoll gegen die Armut – ganz super, wirklich wirkungsvoll. Das ist ein bisschen wie: Alkoholiker geben sich die Kante für mehr Nüchternheit in der Welt. Oder so. Auf jeden Fall Prost. Und unsere Unterstützung habt ihr hiermit. Kostet ja nichts. *art*

Klassik in Altstadt geht in die Region

HANNOVER. 15 Jahre Klassik in der Altstadt, das musste gefeiert werden – mit einem besonderen Jubiläumskonzert in der voll besetzten Kreuzkirche. Unter dem Titel „Opus 15“ gab es synagogale Chormusik, Opernarien und klassische Instrumentalmusik mit den Preisträger des kleinen Klassik-Festivals.

Andor Izsák

Neben dem renommierten Europäischen Synagogalchor unter der Leitung von Andor Izsák – er erhielt 2014 den erstmals verliehenen „Kulturpreis Klassik in der Altstadt“ – spielten Harfenistin Katharina Steinbeis (Festivalsiegerin 2014), Koloratursopranistin Julia Bachmann (2011) und Kreuzkirchenorganist Axel LaDeur (2010). Und die brachten Mozarts „Laudate Dominum“, dazu berühmte Gounod-Arien und großartige Synagogalmusik.

Das tolle Wetter bescherte dem Festival mehr als 10 000 Besucher. Auf dem Marktplatz sang das „Don Giovanni“-Ensemble Auszüge aus der gleichnamigen Mozart-Oper (Urszula Cichocka, Jang-Won Lee, Philip Björkqvist). Weiter ging es am Historischen Museum mit dem „Fübrass-Bläserensemble“ und in der Kreuzkirche mit Violine und Akkordeon. Später trat noch das Duo „Fleurdeon“ am Historischen Museum auf (Nastja Schkinder, Olga Fedarynchyk).

In diesem Jahr wurde wieder Publikumspreis der Stiftung Sparda-Bank vergeben: 1. Platz für das „Don Giovanni“-Ensemble, 2. Platz für Elena Ilinskaya (Violine), Charlotte Klinke (Violine) und Sofia Kruszewski (Akkordeon), 3. Platz für das Duo „Fleurdeon“. „Mit den Besucherzahlen sind wir zufrieden“, so Festival-Organisatorin Ariane Jablonka. Und Klassik in der Altstadt geht noch weiter – erstmals in dem neuen Format als „Klassik in der Altstadt on tour in der Region“ (Unterstützung durch die Stiftung Niedersachsen): Am 18. Juli gastiert es beim Sommerfestival „facettenreich“ auf dem Hemme-Milchhof in der Wedemark. *sei*

Söhne Mannheims feiern Jubiläum open air

Xavier Naidoo

MANNHEIM. Mit zwei ausverkauften Open-Air-Konzerten vor dem Mannheimer Schloss haben die Söhne Mannheims ihr 20-jähriges Bühnenjubiläum gefeiert. Auf der Bühne im Ehrenhof des Schlosses standen unter anderem die Ur-Söhne Xavier Naidoo, Michael Herberger und Claus Eisenmann. Mit dabei waren zudem ehemalige Wegbegleiter wie Rolf Stahlhofen und Butch Williams. Als Überraschungsgast trat der Schauspieler mit Mannheimer Wurzeln Uwe Ochsenknecht auf. Im November geht die Band auf Jubiläumstour. In Hannover sind die Söhne am Dienstag, 17. November, ab 20 Uhr in der Tui Arena, 20 Uhr (Einlass 18.30 Uhr). Die Tickets kosten von 47,35 bis 58,85 Euro. Der Vorverkauf (NP-Ticketshops) hat begonnen.

Documenta-Buch von Ex-Finanzminister Eichel

Hans Eichel

KASSEL. Zum 60-jährigen Bestehen der Documenta in Kassel bringt Ex-Bundesfinanzminister Hans Eichel (SPD) ein Buch über die Weltkunstausstellung heraus: „60 Jahre documenta. Die lokale Geschichte einer Globalisierung“ (Siebenhaar-Verlag, 256 Seiten, 19,80 Euro). Das Buch von Eichel (73), der einst auch Kasseler Oberbürgermeister war, verbindet einen Rückblick mit einer Bestandsaufnahme und Zukunftsentwürfen. Außer Beiträgen von Künstlerischen Leitern der Documenta wie Catherine David, Roger M. Buergel, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev und Adam Szymczyk enthält das Buch auch Texte von Documenta-Professorin Dorothea von Hantelmann. Am 15. Juli 1955 wurde die erste Documenta in Kassel eröffnet.

Holstein-Musik-Festival wächst auf 178 Konzerte

LÜBECK. Mehr Konzerte, mehr Spielorte: Das 30. Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival wächst weiter. Insgesamt 178 Konzerte sind bis zum 30. August geplant, und als Porträt-Künstler sorgt der Schlagzeuger Grubinger für Wirbel. Im Mittelpunkt des Festivals steht jedoch in diesem Jahr Peter Tschaikowsky mit seiner mal leidenschaftlichen, mal melancholischen Musik. Der Komponistenschwerpunkt ist eine der Neuerungen, die 2014 eingeführt wurden. Das ebenfalls im vorigen Jahr etablierte Künstlerporträt ist dem jungen Percussionisten Grubinger gewidmet. Er wird 16 Konzerte geben, darunter eine große „Percussion-Party“ in der Kieler Sparkassenarena.

Herbstmilde „Jenůfa“ in der Staatsoper

In Janáčeks Meisterwerk wird toll gesungen: Die Inszenierung bleibt hinter der Musik zurück

VON HENNING QUEREN

HANNOVER. Kein Stoff für einen lauen Sommerabend: ein brutaler Baby-Mord, verschmähte Liebe, religiöse Unterdrückung, Schuld, deprimierende dörfliche Enge, Messerattacken und doch ein klein wenig Hoffnung. Leos Janáček hat daraus sein Meisterwerk „Jenůfa“ geschaffen – das in der Staatsoper in einer eher herbstmilden Inszenierung Premiere hatte.

Das Ereignis an diesem Abend ist eindeutig die Musik, kristallklare Konturen und vergleichsweise zügige Tempi machen diese auch wunderbar instrumentierte Partitur durchhörbar. Präzise, prägnant, ohne schneidene Schärfe, aber auch ohne romantischen Schummer, so legt Karen Kamensek ihre Janáček-Interpretation an. Das Orchester spielt in großer Form.

Toll auch die Sänger: Das ist schon klasse, wie Robert Künzli als Laca sich bis zum großen Ausbruch im dritten Akt zu Heldentenorformat steigert. Hedwig Fassbender legt die Rolle der Küsterin auch stimmlich eher nobel an. Kelly God als Jenůfa macht Verzweiflung mit guten Spitzentönen hörbar, verfügt aber auch über genug Schöngesang für den verhalten hoffnungsvollen Schluss. Und Ivan Turšić als Steva hat geringe Kondiditonsprobleme. Wer sich diese schöne Oper einmal richtig gut live anhören möchte (auf CD ist Charles Mackerras immer noch konkurrenzlos), ist hier richtig.

> Der Schönheit und Anmut, aber auch der Lebenswahrheit dient der Gesang.
>
> ***Leos Janáček***

Denn man kann sich auch deshalb so gut der Musik widmen, weil die Inszenierung eher von der milden Sorte ist. Als wenn sich der Regisseur mal vorgenommen hat, auf die Zutaten des Regietheaters zu verzichten und es einfach mal weitgehend so zu machen, wie es im Libretto steht. Keine aufregenden Projektionen, keine verstörenden darstellerischen Aktionen. Hier wird visuell niemand überfordert, es ist alles da, die Mehlsäcke sind aufgestapelt, die Dorfbewohner tragen Schiebermütze und Schürze, der Himmel blaut, der Rosmarin blüht – und alles wird mit einem kräftigen Schuss „Anatevka“ angereichert, wenn im dritten Akt auch noch folkloristisch getanzt wird.

Was man aus diesem Stück machen kann, hatte vor einigen Jahren Barbara Beyer an der hannoverschen Staatsoper gezeigt und eine brutal-gefühlskalt Welt auf die Bühne gestellt, in der die Babys kurzerhand auf den Müll wanderten.

Bei Regisseur Floris Visser ist die Inszenierungstemperatur im angenehmen Bereich. Die immer gleiche Bühnenbild-Konstruktion ändert im Laufe der Handlung vor allem die Farbe, von Weizengelb, über Depri-Grau bis zu Hoffnungsgrün. Die (unter)drückende Macht der Kirche wird durch ein ebensolches großes Kreuz symbolisiert, bei der Hochzeit wird Wein im Glas serviert – alles nicht falsch, aber auch nicht wirklich innovativ. Das leichte Missverhältnis von harmloser Inszenierung und dem Wunder der Musik wird im Schlussbild besonders deutlich, wenn Janáček noch einmal gänsehauterzeugend seine Musik aufrauschen lässt – und hier Jenůfa einfach ein Jacket über die Schulter gehängt bekommt und das versöhnte Paar schlussendlich in den Bühnenhintergrund schreitet.

Für das Regieteam gabs im etwas längeren Schlussapplaus ein paar Buhs, ungeteilter Jubel für Sänger, Chor und Orchester. Regie: ★★★☆☆, Musik: ★★★★★

DIE MACHT DES KREUZES: Künsterin (Hedwig Fassbender, stehend) und Jenufa (Kelly God) in der Inszenierung von Floris Visser. *Foto: Landsberg*

A piece of theatre consists of acts, acts consist of stage directions and dialogue. Theatre as a word processing tool — that is what it has been for a few hundred years. And that is what it still is. But it is also something else.

It can also consist of many small movements, of gestures and walks, of turns, tilts, looks. That is how it is in "The Record," a production that the American theatremaker Abigail Browde developed together with Michael Silverstone. "The Record" is a kind of framework of space and time in which 43 performers execute movements. The crazy thing: all performers will encounter each other for the first time on opening night. Rehearsals are with one actor at a time; at the premiere (at Festival Theaterformen on Thursday, July 9, at Ballhof) they will all be on stage together for the first time. It stands to be an evening with many surprises.

Marielle Schavan, 24 years old, who studies Inszenierung der Künste und der Medien [Staging of the Arts and the Media] in Hildesheim, is one of the 43 participants. Yesterday afternoon she had another individual rehearsal with Abigail Browde. Schauspiel Hannover is an important collaborator of Theaterformen, that is why rehearsals are being held at the Staatstheater on Bornumer Strasse. "Klein Bornum" [Little Bornum] is the name of the rehearsal room. There is also a "Gross Bornum" [Big Bornum], where they seem to rehearse something with music, because the rumbling of bass can occasionally be heard through the walls. The director is holding a kind of flow sheet in her hand, she has made markings with pencil and highlighter.

Marielle is supposed to start at minute 53. She nods and swings into action. She runs, stops, turns, throws her arms around, makes the snowplow move, swings an imaginary golf club, is here, is there, eventually assumes a crouching position and looks on. Nothing happens. Still nothing. Marielle looks. Then she gets up, traverses the room in silence — and suddenly does not know how to continue. "H three to four?" she asks. "No, H six to seven," says the director without looking at her notes. Apparently she knows the sequence by heart. She makes sure that everything appears organic. "The audience mustn't notice that you are looking for your position," she says to Marielle. She is especially fine-tuning a few tiny movements. And she explains why: those are movements that are cues for someone else for certain actions.

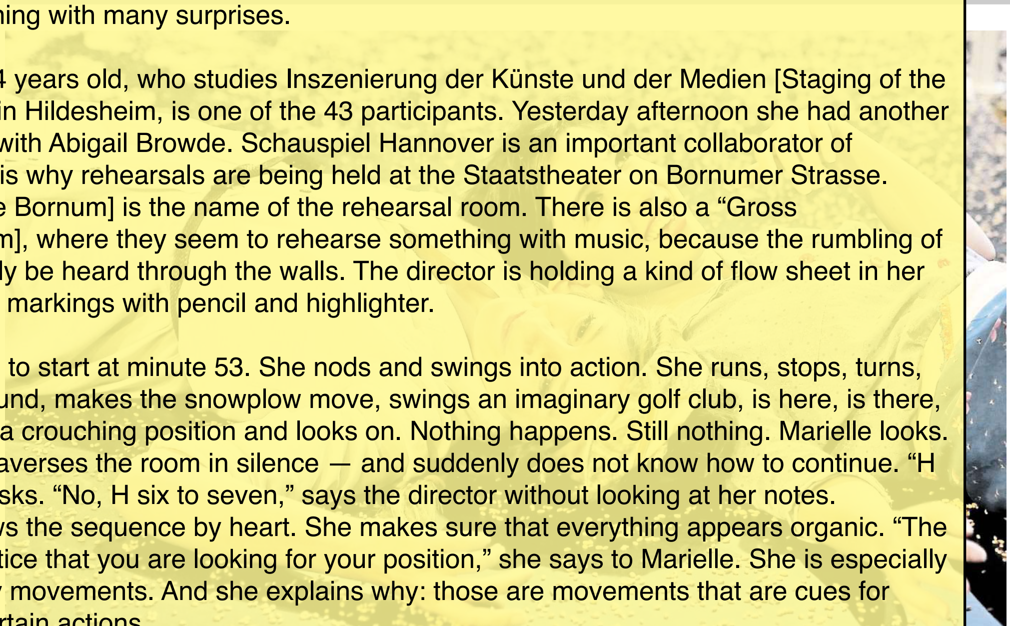
In the end, Marielle's movements, together with those of 42 other people, are to form a whole. There will be music, too — the performance is accompanied by a band. What is being rehearsed here is, at its core, nothing but an invisible sculpture made of space and time.

Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone had the idea a few years ago. "We wanted to bring something unrehearsed to the stage," the director says. That is how "The Record" came to be. The first performance was 2013 in New York. A year later the production was in Groningen, at the beginning of this year it was shown in Paris. And there has been plenty of praise. The New York Times called "The Record" one of the best pieces of the year. Regardless of critical praise: it is certainly an exciting form of theater.

The opening night of "The Record" on July 9 is already sold out. There are still tickets for the performances on July 10 and 11.

...g in Bonn

in der UNGeneralversammlung ein, die die Zerstörungen verurteilte. Böhmer warnte, die Extremisten seien sich der Bedeutung des Kulturerbes für die Identität und den Zusammenhalt eines Landes bewusst. In Bonn soll nun ebenfalls eine Resolution verabschiedet werden, um die Bedeutung des Schutzes des kulturellen Erbes der Menschheit zu unterstreichen. Daneben soll es auch um das Great Barrier Reef gehen, das letztes Jahr kurz davor stand, als gefährdet eingestuft zu werden. Australien soll nun darlegen, was es zu seinem Schutz unternimmt.



Drei starke Frauen

Worpswede zeigt Kollwitz, Mammen und Reylaender

Von Berit Böhme

Starke Frauen beherrschen von Sonntag an die Künstlerkolonie Worpswede bei Bremen. Unter dem Motto „Kunstwege – Lebenszeichen" sind Retrospektiven von Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), Jeanne Mammen (1890–1976) und Ottilie Reylaender (1882–1965) zu sehen. „Die drei Frauen haben die epochalen Umwälzungen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts miterlebt und auf sehr individuelle Weise in ihrer Kunst verarbeitet", sagte Matthias Jäger vom Worpsweder Museumsverbund.

Die Ausstellung in der Großen Kunstschau vereint 70 Grafiken, Plastiken und Ölbilder von Käthe Kollwitz. Darunter sind Selbstbildnisse von 1889 bis 1938, der HolzschnittZyklus „Krieg" von 1922, Totenblätter für Karl Liebknecht sowie politische Plakate.

Die Kunsthalle präsentiert mit 100 Objekten außerdem die bislang größte Reylaender Werkschau, einige Bilder werden zum ersten Mal öffentlich gezeigt. Reylaender war als Teenagerin Malschülerin in Worpswede und lebte von 1910 bis 1927 in Mexiko. Später machte sie sich in Berlin als Porträtmalerin einen Namen. „In jedem Bild steckt eine kleine Geschichte. Sie konnte karikieren und hatte Humor", sagte Susanna BöhmeNetzel, Kunsthallenleiterin und Reylaender Enkelin. Reylaender war mit der Berlinerin Jeanne Mammen befreundet. Vermutlich kannten sie Käthe Kollwitz – zumindest vom Sehen.

„Mammen, Kollwitz und Reylaender waren 1929 neben vielen anderen bei einer großen Berliner Ausstellung vertreten", sagte die Kuratorin Katharina Groth. Der Barkenhoff widmet sich Jeanne Mammens Œuvre. Mammen war eine gefragte Illustratorin in der Mode, Kino und Zeitschriftenbranche. Schalk blitzt aus ihren Berliner Varieté und Bordellszenen. Ab 1933 widmete sich Mammen dem Kubismus und der Abstraktion.

Am Wochenende wird in Worpswede außerdem die neue Dauerausstellung „Martha und Heinrich Vogeler" im Haus im Schluh eröffnet. Neben Schlüsselwerken aus der HeinrichVogeler Sammlung wird die Geschichte des russischen und des Worpsweder Familienzweiges erzählt.

Porträt von Vogelers zweiter Frau Sonja Marchlewska im Haus im Schluh. dpa

weitere seltsame Angewohnheiten". Ullstein-Verlag, 336 Seiten, 9,99 Euro.

tinenser hinweist und vom AlMidan Theater aus Haifa jetzt in der Theaterwerkstatt im Pavillon aufgeführt wurde.

Die Inszenierung in der Reihe „Neue Welten" im Rahmen des MasalaFestivals ist nicht der erste Auftritt des paläs...

Kein Wunder, dass die Vorstellung im Pavillon vor ausverkauftem Haus stattfand. Zu Recht, denn das Ensemble aus Haifa bringt hier in einer starken, teils burleskkomischen, teils lehrstückhaft hinterfragenden Inszenierung die Wur...

...sparsamen Bühnenbild ein – Meereswellen, die Harmonie, Flammen und Rauch, die das Chaos signalisieren. Denn darin endet dieses Stück, in dem Autor Tarabashi nicht nur britische Besatzung und jüdische Landnahme in den...

Nationalgalerie: Kittelmann bleibt

Der Direktor der Berliner Nationalgalerie, Udo Kittelmann, bleibt bis Oktober 2020 im Amt. Sein Vertrag wurde um fünf Jahre verlängert. Kittelmann (57) leitet seit 2008 die Alte und Neue Nationalgalerie, den Hamburger Bahnhof, die Sammlung ScharfGerstenberg und das Museum Berggruen. Der Stiftungsrat beschloss auch, dem Generaldirektor der Staatlichen Museen, Michael Eissenhauer, die Leitung der Gemäldegalerie zu übertragen .

Mirjam Wenzel fürs Jüdische Museum

Die Literaturwissenschaftlerin Mirjam Wenzel soll neue Leiterin des Jüdischen Museums Frankfurt werden und damit die Nachfolge von Raphael Gross antreten. Diesen Vorschlag machte der Frankfurter Kulturdezernent Felix Semmelroth am Donnerstag in Frankfurt. Die 42jährige Wenzel leitet derzeit die Medienabteilung im Jüdischen Museum in Berlin. Der Magistrat der Stadt muss dem Vorschlag Semmelroths noch zustimmen.

Der Abend der vielen Überraschungen

Theatermacherin Abigail Browde probt für die Theaterformen „The Record" – ein Stück, bei dem keiner der Akteure die anderen kennt

Von ronald meyer- arl t

Ein Theaterstück besteht aus Akten, Akte bestehen aus Szenen, Szenen bestehen aus Szenenanweisungen und Dialog. Theater als Textverarbeitungsinstrument – das war es ein paar Hundert Jahre lang. Und das ist es auch immer noch. Aber es ist auch etwas anderes.

Es kann auch nur aus vielen kleinen Bewegungen bestehen, aus Gesten und Gängen, aus Drehungen, Neigungen, Blicken. So ist das bei „The Record", einer Produktion, die die amerikanische Theatermacherin Abigail Browde zusammen mit Michael Silverstone entwickelt hat. „The Record" ist eine Art Gerüst aus Zeit und Raum, in dem 43 Akteure Bewegungen ausführen. Das Verrückte daran: Alle Darsteller werden einander bei der Premiere zum ersten Mal begegnen. Geprobt wird mit jedem Akteur allein, zur Premiere (beim Festival Theaterformen am Donnerstag, 9. Juli, im Ballhof) stehen alle das erste Mal zusammen auf der Bühne. Es dürfte ein Abend mit vielen Überraschungen sein.

Marielle Schavan, 24 Jahre alt, die in Hildesheim Inszenierung der Künste und der Medien studiert, ist eine der 43 Teilnehmer. Gestern Nachmittag hatte sie wieder mal eine Einzelprobe bei Abigail Browde. Das Schauspiel Hannover ist ein wichtiger Kooperationspartner der Theaterformen, deshalb wird im Probengebäude des Staatstheaters an der Bornumer Straße gearbeitet. „Klein Bornum" heißt der Probenraum. „Groß Bornum" gibt es auch, dort scheinen sie etwas mit Musik zu proben, denn immer mal wieder dringt Bassgewummer durch die Wände. Die Regisseurin hält eine Art Ablaufplan in der Hand, mit Bleistift und Textmarker hat sie Zeichen gemacht.

Marielle soll bei Minute 53 beginnen. Sie nickt und legt los. Sie rennt, stoppt, dreht sich, wirft die Arme herum, macht den Schneepflug, schwingt einen imaginären Golfschläger, ist mal hier, ist mal dort, hockt sich schließlich auf den Boden und schaut. Nichts passiert. Immer noch nichts. Marielle schaut. Dann steht sie wieder auf, rennt stumm schräg durch den Raum – und weiß plötzlich nicht mehr weiter. „H drei bis vier?", fragt sie. „Nein, H sechs bis sieben", sagt die Regisseurin, und zwar, ohne auf ihren Merkzettel zu schauen. Anscheinend hat sie den Ablauf präzise im Kopf. Sie achtet darauf, dass alles möglichst organisch wirkt. „Das Publikum darf nicht merken, dass du deine Position suchst", sagt sie zu Marielle. An einigen winzigen Bewegungen feilt sie besonders. Sie verrät auch, warum: Das sind Bewegungen, die jemand anderem als Hinweis für bestimmte Aktionen dienen.

Am Ende sollen sich Marielles Bewegungen mit denen von 42 anderen Menschen zu einem Ganzen fügen. Musik wird auch dazukommen – die Performance wird von einer Band begleitet. Das, was hier geprobt wird, ist im Grunde nichts als eine unsichtbare Skulptur aus Zeit und Raum.

Die Idee hatten Abigail Browde und Michael Silverstone vor einigen Jahren. „Wir wollten etwas Ungeprobtes auf die Bühne bringen", sagt die Regisseurin. So ist „The Record" entstanden. Die erste Aufführung gab es 2013 in New York. Ein Jahr später war die Produktion in Groningen, Anfang dieses Jahres in Paris zu sehen. Und Lob gab es auch schon reichlich. Die New York Times wählte „The Record" zu den besten Stücken des Jahres. Auch ohne Kritikerlob: Eine spannende Theaterform ist das allemal.

Locker gehen: Regisseurin Abigail Browde (rechts) und Marielle Schavan.

Foto: Marta Krajinović

Die Premiere von „The Record" am 9. Juli ist bereits ausverkauft. Für die Vorstellungen am 10. und am 11. Juli gibt es noch Karten.

O-TON

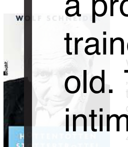
Geigen, bis Blut kam

Er war der strengste Lehrer. Und wohl auch der beste. Wolf Schneider war Leiter der Henri-Nannen-Schule und hat Generationen von Journalisten geprägt. Sein Motto lautete dort „Qualität kommt von Qual". Jetzt hat er seine Lebenserinnerungen geschrieben. In dem Buch mit dem etwas schwergängigen Titel „Hottentotten Stottertrottel" (den er, hätte ihn ein anderer verfasst, wohl kritisiert hätte) beschreibt er auch seinen Umgang mit Journalistengenies:

Und so hielt ich am Freitagabend der ersten Woche, bei Bier und Brot, etwa folgende Ansprache: „Falls ihr euch für Genies haltet, sehe ich mich in einer von drei Rollen. Entweder ihr seid Genies, wie Mozart – dann seid ihr immer noch gut bedient, wenn ihr einen Vater habt, der euch erstens in die Feinheiten des Klavierspiels einweist und euch zweitens Disziplin aufzwingt; die war des kleinen Mozart Stärke nicht. Oder ihr seid zwar Genies, aber faul wie Paganini. Den zwang sein Vater zum Geigen mit Prügeln und mit Essensentzug, und der Sohn blieb ihm dankbar sein Leben lang. Oder: Ihr seid keine Genies – dann sehe ich mich in der Rolle von Vivaldi: Der hatte es am Ospedale de la Pietà nur mit Waisenmädchen zu tun. Die ließ er geigen, bis Blut kam, und sein Orchester wurde das Staunen der Welt."

Zur Einstimmung am ersten Tag, weniger farbenfroh, gehörte: Arbeitstempo und Arbeitsintensität sind hier zehn bis fünfzehn Mal höher als an der Uni. Ich erwarte Engagement. Sie sind die Sieger aus Tausenden. Ihre Ausbildung kostet das Haus mehr als 100 000 Mark pro Kopf. Sie werden hier so arbeiten wie ich selber: mit dem Ehrgeiz, dass keine Institution auf Erden sagen kann, man könne in anderthalb Jahren mehr lernen als hier.

„Das heißt auch, Sie werden bitte nicht krank (und wenn, dann melden Sie sich bei mir ab und nicht bei der Sekretärin). Bedenken Sie: Den niedrigsten Krankenstand bei der Post haben die Paketboten im Dezember – sie fühlen



Hans Eichel über 60 Jahre Documenta

Zum 60-jährigen Bestehen der Documenta in Kassel bringt der frühere Bundesfinanzminister Hans Eichel (SPD) ein Buch über die Weltkunstausstellung heraus. Mitte Juli erscheint der Sammelband „60 Jahre documenta. Die lokale Geschichte einer Globalisierung". Das Buch von Eichel (73), der einst auch Kasseler Oberbürgermeister war, verbindet einen Rückblick mit einer Bestandsaufnahme und Zukunftsentwürfen. Das Buch enthält auch Beiträge von Künstlerischen Leitern der Documenta wie Catherine David, Roger M. Buergel, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev und Adam Szymczyk.

Christusfigur in der Röhre

Eine mittelalterliche Christusstatue aus Holz wird in der Radiologie im Paderborner St.-Vincenz-Krankenhaus untersucht. Die Figur ist ein Exponat der Ausstellung „Caritas – Nächstenliebe von den frühen Christen bis zur Gegenwart", die vom 23. Juli an im Diözesanmuseum in Paderborn zu sehen ist.

Der sogenannte „Schmerzensmann" wurde geröntgt. So könnten Details zur Holzstruktur, Metallverarbeitung und der Beschaffenheit der Farbe erkannt werden, sagte Restaurator Christoph Fiebiger. Die Untersuchung des „Schmerzensmannes" habe unter anderem ergeben, dass die 1,18 Meter große Figur komplett aus einem Holzstamm gearbeitet wurde, was für ihre

Ein ausgebranntes Haus, die Suche nach der Mutter: Die Mädchen der Gruppe 600 Highwaymen haben viel zu erzählen. Foto: Baranova

Alles nur ein Kinderspiel?

Stücke aus Südafrika, den Vereinigten Staaten und Argentinien zum Abschluss der Theaterformen

VON RONALD MEYER-ARLT

Ach, das gibt es also auch noch. Guckkastentheater! Der Auftritt der Gruppe des argentinischen Regisseurs Mariano Pensotti beim Festival Theaterformen war durchaus etwas Besonderes. Das Spiel fand auf einer richtigen Bühne statt (der Guckkasten war rechts und links mit schwarzen Stoffbahnen abgehängt), und kein Zuschauer musste anders als durch Zuschauen und Ruhigsein zum Gelingen des Abends beitragen. Mariano Pensotti erzählt Geschichten.

Also rich with events and feelings is "Employee of the Year" by the American theatre group 600 Highwaymen. The piece by Abigail Browdie [sic] and Michael Silverstone is about a young woman in search of her mother. A home burns to the ground, a profound family history unfolds. What is special: there are no trained actors on stage but five young girls – all about ten years old. The five are speaking like trained actors, not the least bit intimidated and bashful, but loud and confident. And then they are also singing a few very beautiful songs that summarize the action. It is a balancing act. But it succeeds. In the end, one of the girls asks what will be remembered of this evening some years later. Plenty, one would surmise.

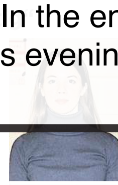
er ganz nah an der ersten Reihe. Einmal reibt er sich den Oberkörper mit Matsch ein, dann trommelt er sich auf die Brust, dass der rote Kleister bis in die zweite Reihe spritzt. Die Zuschauer fingern Taschentücher aus den Jackentaschen. Einige werden sie womöglich auch benutzt haben, um Tränen zu trocknen. Mit den Erfahrungsräumen, die Gruppen wie Rimini Protokoll und Regisseure wie Julian Hetzel beim Festival eröffnet haben, hat das hier nicht viel zu tun. Hier geht es um Mitleiden und Mitweinen. Diese alte Theaterform ist immer noch von erheblicher Wirkkraft.

Reich an Geschehnissen und Gefühlen ist auch „Employee of the Year" der amerikanischen Theatergruppe 600 Highwaymen. Das Stück von Abigail Browdie und Michael Silverstone handelt von einer jungen Frau, die auf der Suche nach ihrer Mutter ist. Ein Haus brennt ab, eine abgründige Familiengeschichte entwickelt sich. Das Besondere: Auf der Bühne stehen keine ausgebildeten Schauspieler, sondern fünf junge Mädchen – alle etwa im Alter von zehn Jahren. Die fünf sprechen wie ausgebildete Schauspieler, kein bisschen verschüchtert und verschämt, sondern laut und selbstbewusst. Und dann singen sie auch noch ein paar sehr schöne Lieder, die das Gesehene zusammenfassen. Es ist eine Gratwanderung. Aber sie gelingt. Am Ende stellt eines der Mädchen die Frage, was man von diesem Abend nach Jahren noch in Erinnerung behalten wird. Einiges, möchte man meinen.

Überhaupt war das ein Festival, von dem viel in Erinnerung bleiben wird: ganz sicher die Begegnung mit Fachkräften für das Warten in dem Containerdorf von Julian Hetzel. Ganz sicher die vielfach gestaffelten „Situation Rooms" von Rimini Protokoll, in denen man Waffenhersteller, Waffenhändler und Kriegsopfer kennenlernen konnte. Und ganz sicher auch die Leidenschaft und Wortlust, mit der der portugiesische Regisseur Tiago Rodrigues zehn Freiwilligen und dem Publikum beim Auswendiglernen eines Shakespeare-Sonetts half.

genen Jahr in Braunschweig (85 Prozent). Es waren die ersten Theaterformen in der Intendanz von Martine Dennewald. „Es war großartig", sagte die Festivalchefin gestern. Sie freute sich über die „gro-

lian Hetzels Warte-Installation „Still" vor der Oper musste ständig mit Wasser gekühlt werden. Und beim Gewitter gab es einen Kurzschluss, so-



Martine Dennewald

19. Juni. Die Programmkonzeption steht bereits zu einem Drittel. Ein Schwerpunkt wird das Theater aus dem ostasiatischen Raum sein.

Die letzte Haltestelle

Das Deutsche Museum in Bonn steht vor dem Aus

VON KATJA HEINS

Menschengroße Dominosteine umwerfen oder in einem Karussell die Corioliskraft spüren: Das Deutsche Museum in Bonn setzt auf Lernen durch positive Erlebnisse. Doch der kleine Ableger des gleichnamigen Hauses in München macht gerade schwere Zeiten durch. Die Stadt Bonn will das Museum schließen.

Es geht um 830 000 Euro im Jahr für den laufenden Betrieb und die Miete. Spätestens 2018 soll nach dem Willen der Stadt Schluss sein, nach mehr als 20 Jahren. 1995 wurde die Einrichtung aufgebaut, um den Strukturwandel nach dem Umzug der Bundesregierung positiv zu gestalten. Rund 65 000 Besucher kommen im Durchschnitt pro Jahr. „Der Laden brummt", sagt Andrea Niehaus, die Leiterin der Bonner Außenstelle.

Im Mutterhaus in München macht man sich bereits Sorgen um den Bonner Standort. „Es wäre jammerschade, wenn die Einrichtung schließen müsste", sagt Gerrit Faust, Sprecher des Deutschen Museums in München. Doch eigentlich hat man dort eigene Probleme – in anderer Größenordnung: Der denkmalgeschützte Prachtbau an der Isar soll bis 2025 für mehr als 440 Millionen Euro saniert werden. Die Vorbereitungen für die Bauarbeiten laufen. Doch das Geld wird nicht reichen, um alles instand zu setzen. Zur Not sei natürlich auch noch Platz für die Exponate aus Bonn, auf den 74 000 Quadratmetern, räumt Faust ein.

Unter anderem müsste ein 25 Meter langer und viele Tonnen schwerer Transrapid umziehen. Dieser steht vor dem Museum im Rheinland. Hinzu kämen noch um die hundert weitere naturwissenschaftliche und technische Ausstellungsstücke. Dass eine Schließung des Bonner Standorts am Image des Deutschen Museums kratzen könnte, glaubt Faust nicht. „Die Kernmarke wird nicht beschädigt."

Im Bonner Stadtrat dagegen sind viele der Ansicht, dass die Dauerausstellung nicht mehr zeitgemäß ist und einer Überarbeitung bedarf. Hinter vorgehaltener Hand heißt es, das Mutterhaus in

Defekt: Der Transrapid vor dem Deutschen Museum Bonn. Foto: Marius Becker/dpa

München sei zudem wesentlich moderner und auch wesentlich präsenter. Viele wüssten außerdem gar nicht, dass der Bonner Ableger überhaupt existiere.

Das hört Niehaus oft und räumt ein: „Unser Standort ist sicherlich nicht der beste." Das Haus gehört zwar offiziell zur Bonner Museumsmeile, liegt aber nicht an der schicken Allee mit Straßenbahnanschluss wie die Bundeskunsthalle oder das Haus der Geschichte. Vielmehr ist es in einer Seitenstraße stadtauswärts beherbergt – noch dazu in dunklen Kellerräumen. Und die Haltestelle „Deutsches Museum" ist meilenweit entfernt davon.

Der Zug zum Schiff

„Goetzen/Liemba": Die freie Theatergruppe „Das letzte Kleinod" bringt ein Stück deutscher Kolonialgeschichte aufs Gleis

VON JAN FISCHER

Sie fährt immer noch, die ehemalige Graf Goetzen, heute Liemba, und bringt Passagiere über den Tanganjikasee. Das allein wäre faszinierend genug. Doch in der Inszenierung „Goetzen/Liemba" hat das Freie Theater Das letzte Kleinod noch mehr Geschichten über das 1913 in Deutschland gebaute Schiff gesammelt.

Erzählt werden sie an einem schönen, wenn auch kühlen Sommerabend. „Das letzte Kleinod" reist mit einem Zug durch Deutschland (der gerade erst mit Unterstützung des Landes und der Stiftung Niedersachsen renoviert wurde) und arbeitet mit den Gegebenheiten vor Ort, meist auf Abstellgleisen, Betriebshöfen oder Industriegebieten mit Schienenanschluss. In Hannover hat die Gruppe am Betriebshof Leinhausen Halt gemacht, eine Tribüne auf das Gelände gestellt und einen offenen Güterwaggon zum Schiff erklärt. Sieben Schauspieler

Bahn oder von Arbeitern zu Fuß. Wie die Goetzen dort mühsam wieder zusammengesetzt wurde. Wie sie unter dem Namen Liemba als einziges großes Passagierschiff auf dem Tanganjikasee heute noch die Lebensrealität an dessen Ufern beeinflusst.

Selbstverständlich ist die Geschichte der Goetzen/Liemba nicht immer eine schöne, denn sie ist eng mit deutscher Kolonialgeschichte verknüpft. Regisseur Jens-Erwin Siemssen ist tief in die Materie eingestiegen, nicht nur in Geschichtsbüchern, sondern auch vor Ort, und lässt sein Ensemble Misshandlungen durch deutsche Kolonialherren darstellen, Cholera, Malaria, Prostitution, die immer noch schweren Lebensbedingungen an den Ufern des Sees. Damit schlägt er einen Bogen von 1913 bis heute.

Dass das nicht belehrend wirkt, liegt vor allem daran, dass „Goetzen/Liemba" bei all der Schwere des Stoffes ganz leichtfüßig inszeniert ist. Die Darsteller

algeschichte zu nehmen und diese zu einer größeren Geschichte über das Leben am Tanganjikasee der letzten hundert Jahre aufzufalten, gelingt.

Es ist vor allem die Spielfreude des Ensembles, die den Charme der Inszenierung ausmacht. Die Geschichte der Goetzen/Liemba wird in assoziativ aneinandergereihten Teilen erzählt, sodass manchmal nicht klar ist, wann genau in der Geschichte des Schiffes die Szene spielt. Gleichzeitig changiert die Sprache zwischen Englisch mit starkem Akzent, Deutsch, Deutsch mit starkem Akzent und Suaheli, sodass es auch dort oft nicht leicht ist, allem zu folgen.

Trotz dieser Kleinigkeiten hat „Das letzte Kleinod" mit „Goetzen/Liemba" eine starke Inszenierung auf die Beine gestellt, die anhand einer Fußnote der Geschichte etwas Größeres erzählt. Die es aber auch schafft, ein sensibles Thema ohne moralische Plattitüden aufzubereiten und die vor allem durch die un-

http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/festival-theaterformen-in-hannover-buerger-in-kurzen-posen/12049938.html

DER TAGESSPIEGEL
RERUM COGNOSCERE CAUSAS

14.07.2015 14:35 Uhr

Festival "Theaterformen" in Hannover

Bürger in kurzen Posen

Von Patrick Wildermann

Amateure auf der Bühne: Das Festival Theaterformen in Hannover macht Hausbesuche und aktiviert die Bevölkerung. Der künstlerische Erkenntnisgewinn hält sich dabei manchmal in Grenzen.

Normalität als Bühne: Die Berliner Theatergruppe Rimini Protokoll spielt ihr Stück „Hausbesuch Europa“ in Wohnzimmern. - FOTO: RIMINI PROTOKOLL / ILLUSTRATION: MARIA JOSÉ AQUILANTI

Die Frauen hätten gerne Konrad geheißen, Lasse, Leon oder Marc. Eine besonders bodenständige ältere Dame gibt auch Manfred als männlichen Wunschnamen an. Bei den Herren führt der Klassiker Maria die Liste an. Der Schweizer Künstler Mats Staub hat Festivalbesucher befragt, wie sie gern geheißen hätten, wären sie mit einem anderen Geschlecht auf die Welt gekommen. Die Ergebnisse dieses nominellen Identitäten-Switches – eine ergiebige Inspirationsquelle für werdende Eltern in der Namensfindungsphase – sind als Videoinstallation in der Cumberlandschen Galerie in Hannover zu sehen. Staub, ein Stammgast beim Festival Theaterformen, zeigt nur stumme

Köpfe zu Musik und blendet dazu die Namen der Wahl ein. Künstlerisch mag sich der Erkenntnisgewinn in Grenzen halten. Aber für die Bürger-Festival-Bindung sind solche Projekte natürlich Gold wert.

Die Theaterformen, die im jährlichen Wechsel in Braunschweig und Hannover stattfinden, haben mit Martine Dennewald zum 25-jährigen Jubiläum eine neue Leiterin bekommen. Die gebürtige Luxemburgerin, die zuvor bei den Salzburger Festspielen unter anderem das „Young Directors Project“ betreut und als Dramaturgin am Mousonturm in Frankfurt gearbeitet hat, tritt dabei erfreulicherweise nicht als bemühte Erneuerin an, sondern verortet sich und ihr Programm bewusst in der Tradition des Festivals. Sowohl was den globalen Anspruch des Kuratierens betrifft, schließlich schauen die Theaterformen stets über die Ränder Europa hinaus. Als auch bezüglich der Tatsache, „dass sich das Festival schon lange in den Dialog mit der Stadt begibt“, wie die künstlerische Leiterin sagt.

Laien erobern die Bühne

Die Beteiligung der Zuschauer wird bei Dennewald besonders großgeschrieben. Unter anderem hat sie für ihre Antrittsausgabe die Gruppe Rimini Protokoll eingeladen, die neben ihren „Situation Rooms“ auch das Gesellschaftsspiel „Hausbesuch Europa“ in Privatwohnungen anbieten. Der Portugiese Tiago Rodrigues rekrutiert in „By Heart“ aus der niedersächsischen Bevölkerung zehn Freiwillige für eine „Marscheinheit Sonett Nr. 30 von Shakespeare“, eine Amateurpoeten-Armee, die „als Kampfansage gegen das Vergessen“ ein Gedicht auswendig lernt.

Und die amerikanischen Performer Abigail Browde und Michael Silverstone, bekannt unter dem Label „600 Highwaymen“, haben mit 44 Hannoveranerinnen und Hannoveranern die Choreografie „The Record“ erarbeitet. Eine Folge von eingefrorenen Posen, flüchtigen Begegnungen und Gruppenbildern, die wie viele Abende dieser Art der Sinnleere und dem Zufall eine Form abzutrotzen versuchen. Wobei „The Record“ nicht den Anspruch erhebt, repräsentativ für irgendetwas zu stehen. Laien erobern sich vorübergehend die Bühne. Und sind mittendrin statt nur dabei.

Den Trend zum Amat r gewinnt gerade noch mal Auft ürgerbühnen, andererseits als einma Deutsche Theater stellt in der k einen „Chor der gläubigen Bürger“ acht sich so was natürlich immer , das Theater Profis zu überlassen.

"Arbeit zielt auf ein

And the American performers Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone, known as “600 Highwaymen,” have developed the choreography “The Record” with 44 Hannoverians. A succession of frozen poses, fleeting encounters, and group portraits, which, in search of form – like many evenings of this kind – tries to defy meaninglessness and coincidence. “The Record” does not claim to represent anything in particular. Non-professionals are temporarily conquering the stage. And they are in the thick of things, not merely on the sidelines.

Obwohl es natürlich auch gute Beispiele für die Sternstunden ungelernter Schauspielkräfte gibt. Eine solche zeigen wiederum die „600 Highwaymen“ in Hannover mit „Employee of the Year“. Das Stück erzählt die Geschichte einer Frau, die nur „J.“ genannt wird und die im Alter von 17, nach einem fatalen Brand ihres Elternhauses, erfahren muss, dass ihre Mutter nicht ihre leibliche Mutter war. Ihr weiteres Leben verschreibt sie der Suche nach der tatsächlichen Erzeugerin, was zur mal komischen, mal herzergreifend vergeblichen Odyssee ohne Ende wird. Der Clou des 70-minütigen Erzählstücks ist aber, dass dieser große Lebensbogen von fünf zehnjährigen Mädchen aus New York vorgetragen wird. Ein schlagend einfaches und schönes Bild für die Zeit, die auf der Stelle tritt.

Wie beim Warten. Was auch das Thema einer Installation ist, die der Künstler Julian Hetzel auf dem Hannoveraner Opernplatz in Containern aufgebaut hat. „STILL (The Economy of Waiting)“ ist die Arbeit betitelt. Und genau darum geht es auch. Um Arbeit, beziehungsweise u eintlichen Untätigkeit, oder z ontainer auf, „zielt auf ein E

Text

Albeit, there are a few finest hours of performance by non-professional actors. One of those is shown by “600 Highwaymen,” in Hannover with “Employee of the Year.” It is the story of a woman called “J.” who, at the age of 17 after a fatal fire to her parental home, finds out that her mother was not her birth mother. She commits the remainder of her life to finding her biological mother, which leads to a sometimes funny, sometimes deeply-moving, never-ending odyssey. But the ingenious twist to this play is that it is told by five 10-year-old girls from New York; a stunningly simple and beautiful image for the standstill of time.

Im Weiteren begeg ene im Zehn-Sekunden-Ta um Betrachter in einer Obdachlosen, der „ als Spende erhält“, wie ein Schild belehrt. Ein bewegtes Schicksal inklusive Drogensucht und mehrjährigem Knastaufenthalt hat der Performer hinter sich. Sein Traum wäre es, erzählt er, im Schauspielhaus Hannover angestellt zu werden, „als Kulissenschieber“, egal was. Das wäre eine schöne Form der Teilhabe durch Kunst.

Kritikerpreis für Pianist Igor Levit

Der hannoversche Musiker Igor Levit wurde in der ausverkauften Philharmonie Essen mit einem Jahrespreis des PdSK (Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik e.V.) geehrt. Die Verleihung fand im Rahmen des Abschlusskonzertes des Klavier-Festivals Ruhr statt. Eleonore Büning, Vorsitzende des PdSK, gratulierte dem Künstler und überreichte ihm Urkunde und Blumen.

Levit, der schon in jungen Jahren durch seine „hellsichtige Musikalität und eine superbe Gestaltungskunst“ (wie es in der Jury-Begründung des PdSK heißt) auf sich aufmerksam gemacht hatte, wurde diese Auszeichnung vom Jahresausschuss 2014 zugesprochen, insbesondere für sein Schallplatten-Debüt, eine Einspielung der letzten fünf Klaviersonaten Ludwig van Beethovens. Inzwischen hat er als zweite Schallplatteneinspielung die Bach-Partiten vorgelegt, eine dritte Aufnahme (mit Variationenwerken von Bach, Beethoven und Rzewski) ist in Vorbereitung.

Igor Levit bedankte sich für den Preis und den Applaus des Publikums mit einer virtuos-exotischen Zugabe, er spielte die „Phantasy on Peter Grimes“ von Ronald Stevenson. Zuvor hatte er Griegs Klavierkonzert gespielt, begleitet vom WDR Sinfon… Lintu. Die La… ter www.sch… schnitt des K… Uhr auf WDR…

Große Bühne für die kleine Form: Kathrin Passig und Eric Jarosinski im Literarischen Salon. Foto: Michael Wallmüller

Anfang und Ende

Neue CDs von Gidon Kremer und Christian Tetzlaff

VON STEFAN ARNDT

Er ist aus der ersten Reihe zurückgetreten: Der große Geiger Gidon Kremer ist nur noch sehr selten als Solist in großen Konzerten zu erleben. Mit seinem Kammerorchester, der Kremarata Baltika, hält er sich lieber etwas abseits des Klassik-Mainstreams. Umso bemerkenswerter ist es, dass nun zum ersten Mal seit Jahren wieder eine CD erschienen ist, die Kremer als Solisten präsentiert. „New Seasons“ (erschienen bei Deutsche Grammophon) ist zunächst eine Hommage an die Komponisten Arvo Pärt und Giya Kasncheli, die Kremer früh begleitet hat und die in diesem Jahr 80 Jahre alt werden. Vor allem aber ist auf der Aufnahme das zweite Violinkonzert des amerikanischen Musikminimalisten Philip Glass zu hören. 1993 hat Kremer mit seiner Aufnahme dem ersten Konzert dieses Komponisten zum Durchbruch verholfen. Nun wirft er noch einmal alle Kraft auf das zweite. Die einzelnen Sätze, die von den amerikanischen Jahreszeiten inspiriert sind, werden durch Solostücke der Geige getrennt. Die zunächst spröde wirkende Musik scheint auf einen Musiker wie Kremer gewartet zu haben, der keine Furcht vor der Hässlichkeit hat. Mit unerbittlichem Strich und musikalischer Hellsicht treibt er dem Stück jegliche Banalität aus, bis es als ein Meisterwerk erscheint.

Der Geiger Christian Tetzlaff, der von der hannoverschen Konzertagentur Schmid vertreten wird, hat sich gerade endgültig im kleinen Kreis der weltgrößten Geiger etabliert: Als Artist in Residence hat er in der ablaufenden Saison bei den Berliner Philharmonikern die ganze Breite seines Könnens präsentiert. Und dazu zählt nicht nur die (grandiose) Aufführung des Brahms-Konzertes mit Simon Rattle, sondern auch viel Kammermusik. Dass er dabei höchste musikalische Qualität mit Abenteuerlust mischt, ist auch auf einer neuen, bei Avi-Music veröffentlichten CD zu hören. Rachmaninows zweites Klaviertrio gehört zu den erstaunlichsten Werken den jungen Komponisten: Mit 20 Jahren hat er das fast abendfüllende Stück dem gerade unter mysteriösen Umständen verstorbenen Vorbild Tschaikowski gewidmet. Gemeinsam mit seiner Schwester Tanja und dem Pianisten Artur Pizarro kostet Tetzlaff auch die längste emphatische Melodie aus – und verlässt doch nie die Grenzen des guten Geschmacks.

Herta … im So…

Herta Müller … für Literatur, … 16. Septembe… me Einladun… Schauspiel H… haus aus ihre… ist auch ihr … Literaturkriti… rausgeber Er… sie darüber … Schreiben ge… für die Lesun… ten gibt es an… haus und im … 16 und 12 Eu…

…0 Zeichen

…nski, die Faszination von Twitter zu erklären

…usiastisch und ausschweifend klagen, dass es keine weitere Forschung zu der kurzen …zt müssen wir das wieder …“, sagt Passig.

… genau das, was „Wir bitten um Ihre Aufmerksamkeit für eine …ge“ zeigt. Denn entgegen …ie immer wieder über die …eit der kurzen Form …t wird, zeigen Passig und …h anhand ihrer eigenen …den 140 Zeichen viel Wis… … Platz haben können.

…skizzieren ihre jeweiligen …zu nutzen, zwar nur grob. …iese grobe Skizze zeigt, …swert sein kann, einmal …schauen – auch wissen… …n das Symposium „Kurz & …ftigt sich zwar ausschließ… … Formen, meist allerdings …em Fokus. „Wechselwir… …nen Erzählen und Wissen …n Kleinformaten der Frü… …st da etwa der Titel eines Vortrags, oder „Kurznachrichten in wissenschaftlichen Zeitschriften, 1850–1930“. Tweets, als wichtigste kurze Form der Gegenwart, die sowohl der Kommunikation im Internet wie auch dem Journalismus neue Möglichkeiten eröffnet hat, tauchen hier nur am Rande auf. Was zum einen daran liegt, dass die Forschung auf dem Gebiet noch in den Kinderschuhen steckt. Zum anderen ist es auch, wie Passig mit dem Medienwissenschafter McLuhan sagt, „schwer, über eine Medienrevolution zu sprechen, während man noch mitten drin steckt“.

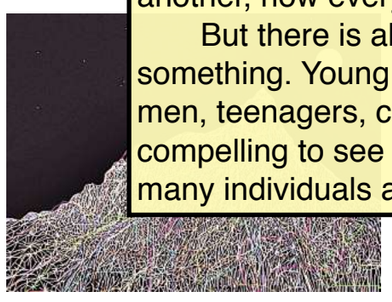
So zerfasert leider auch der Abend stellenweise. Das liegt an der fehlenden Moderation, aber auch daran, dass die beiden Twitter-Experten – wie sie auch immer wieder betonen – sich erst selbst vorsichtig in das weitgehend unbeforschte Gebiet vortasten müssen, sodass jeder Satz, jede These zunächst einmal eher experimentell geäußert wird.

Aber trotzdem scheinen hin und wieder kleine Wissensperlen auf, für die sich das Folgen lohnt. Wie auf Twitter eben.

„Wir bitten um ihre Aufmerksamkeit für eine kurze Durchsage“ fand im Rahmen des Symposiums „Kurz & Knapp. Erzählen und Wissen in kleinen Formen“ der Leibniz-Uni statt. Am Sonnabend spricht Lisa Gotto im Schloss Herrenhausen über „Micro-Movies. Zur medialen Miniatur des Smartphone-Films“. Mehr: www.engsem.uni-hannover.de

Jarosinski und Passig haben sichtlich Spaß dabei, ihre jeweiligen Arten, Twitter zu nutzen, auf der Bühne zu erklären und auseinanderzunehmen. Passig ist dabei angenehm trocken und lakonisch, …nen, die zwischen intellektuellem Sprachwitz und plattem Wortspiel angesiedelt sind. Ihn interessiert hauptsächlich die Kürze der Form. Die entlaste den Verfasser, auch mit der größten Schreib…

Der Ber… groovt



Viele Wege führen nach oben – aber so viele? Hannes Malte Mahler, Künstler aus Hannover, der bevorzugt mit dem iPad arbeitet, betreibt digitale Gipfelstürmerei. Seine mit dem iPad entstandenen Bergansichten, die am Ende auf metallisch glänzendem Fotopapier leuchten, sind noch bis zum 2. August in Ricus Aschemanns Galerie für Fotografie (Calenbergerstraße 12) zu sehen.

Die Bergansichten brüllen vor Farbe, was in merkwürdigem Kontrast zu den filigranen Liniengeflechten steht, aus denen sich die Bergmassive bilden. Das Feine und das Gewaltige gehen hier eine interessante Verbindung ein.

Hannes Malte Mahler ist der Entstehungsprozess seiner Werke immer sehr wichtig, deshalb sind die meisten seiner digitalen Arbeiten im Grunde kleine Filme. Die Entstehungsgeschichte eines Gipfelbildes kann man auf einem Monitor verfolgen – und auch als Bildschirmschoner bekommen. Den kann (gratis) auch erhalten, wer eine Mail an Mont-Screen@themahler.com verfasst – und angibt, für welches Betriebssystem er den Bildschirmschoner verwenden will. Besonders zu empfehlen für alle, die an großen Projekten arbeiten.

The People’s Movement

"The Record" at Theaterformen: A piece with performers who meet on stage for the first time

Theatre has its special charm, because you can never accurately predict what will happen. Cinema is always the same, theatre is always different. This new form of theatre should be no different, even though everything is meticulously planned out. "The Record" by the group "600 Highwaymen" is a play in a tight coordinate system. It is meticulously planned – and nevertheless gripping, because a lot can happen..... … What makes this theatrical installation new and exciting are the 43 performers. Ordinary people from the region are making an appearance. The age span of participants is 7 to 77, many are on stage for the first time. Director Abigail Browde, who has developed the piece together with Michael Silverstone, has rehearsed individually with each performer. It wasn’t until opening night at Ballhof that the individual actions were put together to form a whole. Walking sequences can be seen, lineups, intermixing. Occasionally someone is putting their hand on the shoulder of another, sometimes two are holding out a hand to each other, sometimes there is clapping. There is no talking.

You look at it like at an elaborate clockwork, pleased how one piece fits into another, how everything is connected, and how well this theatrical machine is geared.

But there is also something else. Though wordless, the play is telling us something. Young and old people are on stage, women (who are in the majority) and men, teenagers, children. All are in casual wear, everyone represents something. It’s compelling to see how a group is built from many individuals, and then dissolves into many individuals again…

Die Volksbewegung

„The Record“ bei den Theaterformen: Ein Stück mit Darstellern, die sich auf der Bühne zum ersten Mal begegnen

VON RONALD MEYER-ARLT

Theater entfaltet seinen besonderen Reiz, weil man nie genau vorhersagen kann, was geschehen wird. Kino ist immer gleich, Theater ist immer anders. Das dürfte auch bei dieser neuen Theaterform so sein, obgleich hier alles minutiös durchgeplant ist. „The Record“ der Gruppe „600 Highwaymen“ ist ein Spiel in einem engen Koordinatensystem. Es ist minutiös durchgeplant – und trotzdem spannend, weil viel geschehen kann.

Der Bühnenboden ist schachbrettartig strukturiert, die Darsteller bewegen sich etwa von A5 über B3 nach C4. Hinten im Zuschauerraum und rechts und links der Bühne befinden sich Bildschirme, die zehntelsekundengenau die Zeit anzeigen. Die Darsteller müssen also nur wissen, wann sie wo sein und was sie dort zu tun haben. Alles folgt einem präzisen Plan.

Dass bei dieser theatralen Installation trotzdem alles neu und aufregend ist, liegt an den 43 Darstellern. Ganz normale Menschen aus der Region treten auf. Die Altersspanne reicht von 7 bis 77, viele stehen hier zum ersten Mal auf der Bühne. Regisseurin Abigail Browde, die das Stück zusammen mit Michael Silverstone entwickelt hat, hat mit jedem Darsteller einzeln geprobt. Erst bei der Premiere im Ballhof fügten sich die Einzelaktionen zu einem großen Ganzen zusammen. Schrittfolgen sind zu sehen, Aufstellungen, Durchmischungen. Manchmal legt einer dem anderen die Hand auf die Schulter, manchmal reichen zwei einander die Hände, manchmal wird geklatscht. Gesprochen wird nicht.

Man betrachtet das wie ein verrücktes Uhrwerk, freut sich, wie eins ins andere greift, wie das alles zusammenhängt und wie gut diese Theatermaschine funktioniert.

Aber da ist auch noch etwas anderes. Das Spiel ist zwar stumm, aber es erzählt doch etwas. Junge und alte Menschen stehen auf der Bühne, Frauen (in der Überzahl) und Männer, Jugendliche, Kinder. Alle tragen sommerliche Freizeitkleidung, jeder stellt etwas dar. Es ist spannend, wie sich aus lauter Individuen eine Gruppe formt, die sich dann wieder in lauter Individuen auflöst.

Leute, Leute: Bei „The Record“ sind Laiendarsteller auf der Bühne. Foto: Celina Cameron

Bei der Zeitangabe 50:24 gehen sie alle gemeinsam in eine gewisse Schräglage, so als bliese ihnen ein starker Wind ins Gesicht. Das ist gar nicht nötig. Denn natürlich sind viele Freunde und Verwandte im Saal. Die spenden am Ende freundlichen Applaus. Und die Darsteller lächeln glücklich.

Am heutigen Sonnabend wird „The Record“ noch einmal um 16 Uhr im Ballhof aufgeführt. Die Theaterformen enden am Sonntag um 21.30 Uhr mit dem Abschlusskonzert der Pentatones im Festivalzentrum.

“The Record”: 35 performers non professionnels sur scène

Dernier jour de répétition à la Villette pour la compagnie 600 Highwaymen qui présente “The Record”, dans le cadre de la manifestation L’Esprit de groupe. Rencontre avec ses créateurs, Abigail Browde et Michael Silverstone.

J-1 pour les 35 performers recrutés par la cie 600 Highwaymen, tous non-professionnels, recrutés sur audition il y a quelques semaines. On pourrait s’attendre à un doux vacarme à l’heure des derniers réglages, surtout s’agissant d’une troupe aussi nombreuse. Mais non. Le calme règne dans la grande Halle de la Villette et le duo des metteurs en scène, Abigail Browde et Michael Silverstone, continue de faire comme au premier jour des répétitions, cinq semaines plus tôt : travailler individuellement avec chaque performer.

C’est ainsi qu’ils l’ont créé à New-York où ils l’ont joué huit fois avant de venir en France pour quatre représentations à La Villette et au Centre Pompidou : “C’est la première fois que nous travaillons ainsi en construisant une forme où les performers ne se rencontrent que le jour de la première représentation, mais tous nos projets reposent sur les personnes, nous explique Michael Silverstone. Si on réunit des gens dans un groupe, chacun commence à regarder comment fait l’autre, à l’imiter et ça devient une identité de groupe. Or, notre projet consiste à montrer chaque personne dans une dynamique très précise. Ensuite, c’est la personne qui nous intéresse, pas le personnage. C’est sa présence que nous voulons montrer plutôt que de lui demander de faire semblant d’être un autre dans un autre espace et un autre temps.”

Groupe humain, paysage *The Record* se présente comme un paysage de gestes et de parcours où seule la synchronisation entre tous les performers génère un effet de groupe, mais sans jamais gommer la personnalité et la qualité de présence de chacun. Une forme éminemment poétique dans le déroulement du spectacle qui ne laisse jamais oublier la portée politique d’une démarche où le groupe ne se confond pas avec la masse, où la simplicité des actions et des déplacements s’harmonise entre tous, justement parce qu’elles s’inscrivent du début à la fin dans un cheminement individuel où l’autre ne fait pas obstacle.

Inutile de dire que la poésie naît ici d’une partition extrêmement écrite, dans le temps et l’espace. “Chaque performer suit un script et sait exactement quoi faire et quand, précise Michael Silverstone. On leur demande deux choses : être présent et exécuter leur partition. Voir le public et avoir conscience d’eux-mêmes. Il s’agit simplement de faire et d’être. Les mouvements qu’ils doivent faire sont très simples, n’importe qui peut les réaliser, mais une fois réunis sur le plateau le jour de la première, ils créent une architecture de groupe où le corps n’est jamais figé.”

Une démarche qui évoque à la fois la sculpture sociale de Joseph Beuys et l’activité du regardeur qui crée l’oeuvre de Marcel Duchamp. “On estime que le public s’ennuie quand on cherche à lui imposer des personnages. On ne prétend pas jouer, mais on demande aux spectateurs d’interagir avec les performers par le regard, par l’attention portée à la forme qu’on lui présente. Et si on donne peu de représentations de The Record, c’est pour garder cette électricité du soir de la première quand tous les performers sont réunis pour la première fois sur le plateau et devant le public et qu’ils découvrent la musique live qui les accompagne.”

par Fabienne Arvers, le 23 mars 2015

The Record, 600 Highwaymen, les 24 et 25 mars à 19h, Grande Halle de La Villette, dans le cadre de L’esprit de groupe, et les 27 et 28 mars au Centre Pompidou.

IM GESPRÄCH MIT

abigail browde & michael silverstone

Das Festival „Theaterformen" holt vom 2. bis 12. Juli Theaterschaffende aus aller Welt nach Hannover. Unter anderem ist das New Yorker Kollektiv 600 HIGHWAYMEN dabei, bestehend aus Abigail Browde und Michael Silverstone. Im Gepäck hat das Regieduo und Ehepaar zum einen das Stück „Employee of the Year" und zum anderen das Konzept für „The Record", eine Mischung aus Theater, Tanz und Performance, die das Paar mit 45 Hannoverschen Mitspielern umsetzt. Im Gespräch mit dem Stadtkind erzählen die beiden New Yorker unter anderem, warum die Proben kolossal zeitaufwändig sind und wie sich Theatermachen mit dem Führen einer Ehe verbinden lässt.

Zum ersten Mal zeigt ihr Produktionen von euch in Deutschland. Könnt ihr eure ersten Eindrücke von der deutschen Theaterszene schildern?

Abigail: Vor einigen Jahren waren wir in Berlin und haben uns auf dem „Theatertreffen" viele Inszenierungen angeschaut. Das war sehr aufschlussreich für uns. Die Theatertradition in Amerika wurzelt im Realismus – man zeigt also zum Beispiel ein Familiendrama vor einem typischen Wohnzimmer-Küche-Bühnenbild. Alles, was davon abweicht, wird in den USA häufig als „experimentell" abgestempelt. Das ist hier in Deutschland anders – sogar Schulklassen schauen sich Inszenierungen an, die für amerikanische Theatergänger „experimentell" wären. Für unsere eigenen künstlerischen Konzepte sind das perfekte Voraussetzungen.

Michael: Als Martine Dennewald, die künstlerische Leiterin der „Theaterformen", uns eingeladen hat, bei dem Festival mitzuwirken, war das einfach unglaublich! Das war zu dem damaligen Zeitpunkt unsere erste Einladung nach Europa. Wir haben uns riesig gefreut und waren extrem aufgeregt. Das Team in Hannover hat uns zum Glück mit offenen Armen empfangen und steht uns engagiert zur Seite. Das ist gut, denn um „The Record" umzusetzen, muss man abenteuerlustig sein. Es folgt nämlich nicht den normalen Regeln von Theaterproduktion…

Lasst uns über „The Record" sprechen – was ist das Konzept und die Idee dahinter?

Michael: An der einstündigen Performance sind 45 Menschen beteiligt, die einander bis zur Premiere jedoch nie begegnen. Wir haben das Konzept bereits viermal an verschiedenen Orten mit verschiedenen Leuten umgesetzt. Dieses Mal haben wir die Performer bei einem Casting im Januar aus 200 Hannoverschen Bewerbern ausgewählt. Wir haben nach unterschiedlichen Menschen gesucht, nach Kindern, Senioren, Leuten mit und ohne Bühnenerfahrungen, nach schüchternen und selbstbewussten Leuten. Nun proben wir mit jeder Person einzeln – das ist natürlich zeitaufwändig! Zu Beginn des Probenprozesses zeigen wir den Performern jeweils eine Choreographie. Später, wenn sie das choreographische Material verinnerlicht haben, fühlen sie dann selbst, dass es bei der Performance aber noch um etwas anderes geht.

Worum geht es denn?

Abigail: Es geht um die performenden Menschen selbst. Es geht darum, präsent zu sein, angesehen zu werden, mit dem Publikum gemeinsam in einem Raum zu sein. „The Record" erzählt keine Geschichte im herkömmlichen Sinne und verzichtet komplett auf Sprache.

Michael: Die Personen, die wir auf der Bühne sehen, versuchen nicht, eine Figur zu spielen, und die Performance entführt das Publikum nicht in eine andere Welt. Im Gegenteil: Sie erdet uns, sie weckt uns auf. Es geht um den Moment, den Zuschauer und Performer teilen.

Warum habt ihr euch dafür entschieden, „The Record" mit Laien umzusetzen?

Abigail: Wir arbeiten mit Menschen, von denen einige bereits Bühnenerfahrungen haben, andere nicht. Aber wir stecken sie nicht in Schubladen wie „Profi" und „Laie".

Michael: Ich habe schon viel schlechtes professionelles Schauspiel erlebt – Schauspiel, das mich nicht berührt, das ich nicht glaube, das nicht verletzlich und nicht „echt" ist…

Abigail: Ein Teil unserer Arbeit im Probenprozess besteht darin, die Fassade der Menschen abzustreifen. Es geht bei „The Record" für die Darsteller nicht darum, einen Charakter zu verkörpern oder „so zu tun also ob". Oft fällt dieser Modus gerade denjenigen leichter, die sich zwar auf der Bühne zeigen möchten, aber Schauspiel nicht professionell gelernt haben.

Michael: Wir möchten außerdem vermeiden, dass unsere Performer so routiniert sind, dass sie alles als selbstverständlich ansehen. Die Minuten, bevor die Show beginnt, sollen wirklich ein echter Moment sein – ein Moment, den man gemeinsam fühlt. Ich fände es traurig, wenn jemand dabei ist, der abgeklärt sagt: „Ich geh vor die Tür, ruft mich, wenn ihr mich braucht."

Wie kommt ihr im Probenprozess mit der Sprachbarriere klar? Sprechen alle Performer Englisch?

Abigail: Unterschiedlich. Einige sprechen gutes Englisch, andere verstehen uns einigermaßen, wenn wir langsam sprechen. Im „Notfall" übersetzen unsere Produktionsassistentinnen.

Michael: Grundsätzlich habe ich das Gefühl, dass die Sprachbarriere hilft. Denn man muss sich genau überlegen, wie man einander begegnet und miteinander kommuniziert. Man benutzt kein abgegriffenes Vokabular, man lässt sich anders aufeinander ein, schaut sich eindringlicher an, verzichtet vielleicht zwischendurch sogar ganz auf Worte.

„The Record" habt ihr vor zwei Jahren in New York uraufgeführt und seitdem schon drei Mal an verschiedenen Orten auf die Beine gestellt. Was bedeutet das für eure Arbeit, eine Performance mit immer neuen Menschen zu „reproduzieren"?

Michael: Man kann sich keineswegs zurücklehnen. Es ist jedes Mal aufs Neue harte Arbeit.

Abigail: Ich fühle mich jedes Mal, wenn wir das angehen, als seien wir selbst neue Menschen. Auch wenn die Struktur und die Choreographie immer dieselbe bleiben, ist das Ergebnis trotzdem immer anders – weil es den Ort, den Moment und seine Menschen widerspiegelt.

Foto: Simon Courchel

Abigail Browde & Michael Silverstone

Foto: Marie Baranova

Ihr zeigt bei den „Theaterformen" noch eine zweite Produktion – mit dem Titel „Employee of the Year". Beschreibt kurz, worum es darin geht.

Michael: Das Stück erzählt im Gegensatz zu „The Record" eine „richtige" Geschichte: Es erzählt die Lebensgeschichte einer Frau, vom Kleinkindalter bis zum Tod. Das Besondere ist: Diese Frau wird gespielt von fünf gerade mal zehnjährigen Mädchen aus New York.

Abigail: Was ich daran besonders magisch finde, ist, dass man schnell von dieser Theatersetzung verführt und eingenommen wird. Man weiß, dass diese jungen Mädchen die Erfahrungen, die sie zeigen, im echten Leben noch nicht gemacht haben. Sie wissen nicht wirklich, wie es ist, verheiratet zu sein, Kinder und einen Job zu haben. Trotzdem glaubt man ihnen ihr Spiel. Gleichzeitig entstehen tolle Momente, in denen diese „Illusion" gebrochen wird.

Michael: Ja, ein Mädchen spielt vielleicht gerade eine 60-Jährige und dann kratzt sie sich am Arm oder niest. Sofort realisiert man als Zuschauer wieder, dass sie eigentlich ein Kind ist.

Ihr seid ein Paar und arbeitet gleichzeitig zusammen – wie funktioniert das?

Abigail: Es stellt eine Herausforderung dar, weil es ständig darum geht, Grenzen zu setzen und eigene Regeln zu finden. Gerade haben wir uns für ein Projekt mehr zu trennen versucht, weil das für unser gemeinsames Eheleben „sauberer" wäre. Es hat aber nicht funktioniert.

Michael: Die Kollision unserer verschiedenen Ansichten und Ideen zeichnet unsere Produktionen aus. Dass wir in ästhetischen Dingen nicht immer einer Meinung sind, haben wir zu akzeptieren gelernt. Ich genieße sehr, dass wir durch die gemeinsame Arbeit so viel Zeit miteinander verbringen können: Wenn wir reisen, sind wir immer zusammen. Wir lernen die gleichen Menschen kennen und können uns über alles austauschen, was wir erleben.

Abigail: In kreativer Hinsicht entstehen oft wunderbare Dinge, gerade weil wir in einer Beziehung sind und zusammen wohnen. Wenn ich zum Beispiel aus der Küche mitbekomme, dass Michael in der Badewanne gerade ein bestimmtes Lied rauf und runter hört, dann weiß ich, dass er darüber nachdenkt, künstlerisch damit zu arbeiten. Und ich denke dann automatisch auch darüber nach. Oft entsteht so ein sehr kreativer Prozess. Wir müssen nicht erst eine offizielle Teamsitzung einberufen, um über das Lied zu sprechen.

Michael: Stimmt, so ist übrigens auch die erste Idee für „The Record" zustande gekommen – in der Badewanne.

Interview und Übersetzung: Janina Martens

THE RECORD
Termine im Rahmen der „Theaterformen": 09.07. um 20 Uhr, 10.07. um 18 Uhr und 11.07. um 16 Uhr. Ballhof Eins.

EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR
Termine im Rahmen der „Theaterformen": 11.7. um 18 Uhr und 12.7. um 18 Uhr. Cumberlandsche Bühne.

Stadtkind Hannover
July 2015
pages 64–65
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A CONVERSATION WITH

abigail browde & michael silverstone

From July 2 to 12, the festival "Theaterformen" brings theatremakers form all over the world to Hannover. Among them is the New York collective 600 HIGHWAYMEN, consisting of Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone. The directing duo and married couple brought with them the piece "Employee of the Year" as well as the concept for "The Record," a mix between theatre, dance, and performance, which the couple will stage with 45 Hannoverian performers. In conversation with Stadtkind, the two New Yorkers talk about, among other things, why the rehearsals are tremendously time-consuming and how theatremaking can be combined with maintaining a marriage.

This is the first time you are showing some of your productions in Germany. Can you describe your first impressions of the German theatre scene?
Abigail: A few years ago we went to Berlin and saw a lot of shows at "Theatertreffen." That was very eye-opening for us. The American theatre tradition is rooted in realism — presenting, for example, a family drama in front of a typical living room–kitchen scenery. In the United States, everything that deviates from that is often labeled "experimental." That's different here in Germany — even school children are attending theatre that we in America would call "experimental." For our own artistic concepts, these are perfect conditions.
Michael: When Martine Dennewald, the artistic director of "Theaterformen," invited us to participate in the festival, that was simply incredible! That was our first invitation to Europe at that time. We were thrilled and extremely excited. Thankfully, the team in Hannover welcomed us with open arms and is giving us strong support. This is good, because to stage "The Record," one has to be adventurous. It doesn't follow the common rules of theatre production …

Let's talk about "The Record" — what is the concept and the idea behind it?
Michael: The one-hour performance involves 45 people who will have never met until opening night. So far we have staged this concept four times at different places with different people. This time we have selected the performers at a casting in January where 200 people from Hannover auditioned. We were looking for different types of people, for kids, old people, people with and without stage experience, for shy and confident people. Now we are rehearsing with every person individually — which, of course, is time-consuming! At the beginning of the rehearsal process, we show each performer a choreography. Once they've internalized the material, they realize that the

performance is also about something else.

What is it about?
Abigail: It's about the people who are performing it. It's about being present, being watched, being in the same space with the audience. "The Record" does not tell a story in the traditional sense and it dispenses entirely with language.
Michael: The people that we see on stage are not trying to play a character, and the performance doesn't take the audience to a different place. Quite the opposite: it grounds us, it wakes us. It's about the moment shared by spectators and performers.

Why did you decide to stage "The Record" with non-professionals?
Abigail: Some people we work with have stage experience, some don't. But we don't categorize them into "professional" and "non-professional."
Michael: I've experienced a lot of bad professional acting — acting that didn't move me, that I don't believe, that isn't vulnerable, isn't "real" …
Abigail: Part of our work during the rehearsal process is to strip away people's facade. For the performers in "The Record" it's not about representing a character or "to behave as if." Often this is easier for people who didn't learn acting, but who want to be on stage.
Michael: Furthermore, we want to avoid having performers who are so experienced that they take everything for granted. The minutes before a show should really be a true moment — a moment that is felt collectively. It would be sad to have someone who dispassionately says: "I'll be outside. Call me when you need me."

How do you deal with the language barrier during the rehearsal process? Do the performers all speak English?
Abigail: It varies. Some speak English well, others understand us, more or less, if we speak slowly. If all else fails, our production assistants can translate.
Michael: Generally I feel that the language barrier helps. Because you have to figure out exactly how to deal and communicate with each other. You can't use common parlance, you have to connect with each other differently, maybe even dispense with using words entirely sometimes.

"The Record" had its world premiere in New York two years ago and you've since staged it three times at different venues. What does it mean for your work to keep "reproducing" a performance with new people?
Michael: There's no way you can just lean back. It's hard work every time.
Abigail: Every time we tackle this, I feel as if we ourselves were new people. Even though the structure and choreography always remains the same, the result is always different — because it reflects the place, the moment, and the people.

You're showing a second production at "Theaterformen" — titled "Employee of the Year." Briefly describe what it is about.
Michael: Contrary to "The Record," the piece is telling an "actual" story. It is the story of a woman's life from infancy to death. What's special: this woman is played by five 10-year-old girls from New York.
Abigail: What I find especially magical is that you are quickly seduced and won over by

this cast. You know that these young girls haven't made those experiences in real life yet. They don't really know what it's like to be married, to have children and a job. Yet, they make it work. At the same time, there are great moments where this "illusion" is broken.
Michael: Yes, like when one girl is playing a 60-year-old, for instance, and then she's scratching her arm or sneezes. As a spectator, you immediately realize that she's actually a child.

You are a couple and are working together — how does that work?
Abigail: It is a challenge because it's constantly about creating boundaries and finding distinct rules. For a recent project we tried to work more separate from one another to create a "cleaner" marital life. But it didn't work.
Michael: The collision of our different views and ideas characterizes our productions. We have learned to accept that we do not always agree in aesthetic matters. I very much enjoy that we can spend so much time together through our joint work: when we travel, we are always together. We get to know the same people and are able to talk about everything we experience.
Abigail: Oftentimes there are wonderful things that emerge creatively from being in a relationship and living together. For example, when I'm in the kitchen and I notice that Michael is in the bath tub listening to a particular song, again and again, then I know that he is thinking about working with it creatively. And I automatically think about that as well. It frequently evolves into a very creative process. We do not have to call an official team meeting to talk about the song.
Michael: Incidentally, that is how the first idea for "The Record" came about — in the bathtub.