

CHOREOGRAPHY OF WORDS, MOVEMENTS, AND MONOLOGUES

Rumyana Nikolova

Small Play for Children's Room by **Yana Borisova**, directed by **Galin Stoev**, set design **Julian Tabakov**

Cast **Radena Valkanova, Snezhina Petrova, Stefan Valdobrev, Vezhen Velchovski and Stilyan Stoyanov**

Theatre 199 – Sofia, premiere October 2007

The text won an anonymous chamber play competition organized by Theatre 199 in Sofia. The author's name is not a familiar one; for Yana Borisova this is a *début* text for theatre. And for the first time that is not a fact that justifies negative remarks but renders more visible the text's positives.

The play's originality lies in the light and genuine dialogue (as opposed to self-consciously structured in the name of dramaturgical rules and intrigue). Words and their arrangement (dialogue) are the text's exceptional achievement. That makes it a phenomenon in new Bulgarian playwriting, on the one hand, and a part of the current processes of European playwriting, on the other. It also makes it exceptionally "sensitive" to possible directors' interventions and stage interpretations. The team that staged the performance at Theatre 199 certainly understood the text. The fact that the author does not bother us with her concepts about the world, with her moral disagreements, with her ideas as a "prominent humanist"... or with the grave and



Photographer Simon Varsano

Snezhina Petrova (Jana) and Stilyan Stoyanov (Waiter)

insurmountable problems of our contemporary everyday life and culture, makes the text quite contemporary, in the sense that it is adequate to those movements that develop the essential language of an art or a culture. The plot is rather simple and easy to relate to. Four old school friends (Lora, Jana, Filip and Dodo) get together once a month to play. They have devised the game themselves in their childhood. We cannot say much about the characters either at the beginning or at the end of the

performance: what we have is their professions (a female bar owner, a female writer, a male lawyer, and an actor), their shared childhood, and individual moments of their biographies which are not served as important character-building details. The characters are shaped out of the spoken words, the manners, the movements... Of the energy concentrated in the dialogues and escalating in the monologues (for Jana, whose verbal expression is most vivid in the dialogues, the "monologue" is dance).

The news that Dodo is going to marry gets the intrigue going. The events are not occurrences, but words, and when words cannot organize the accumulated energy, the characters' stage acts are transformed into monologues and dances. The words triggered by the news reveal old relationships, stories, desires, preferences, passions... What is on trial here is which will turn out to be more important: the game or the players?

The game bears the meanings and the suspense (as far as the latter is not a term from quite another genre) in the play. The

text gravitates around a set of problems that I do not need or have to explain in detail; I would like to keep to myself the understanding and the remembrance of those friends with whom, when you get together in the "children's room", it does not matter how long you have been apart or what you have achieved; what matters is only the present moment of spoken words. This is the set of problems of a generation for whom incomprehension is not a fashionable pose but a fact of their daily grind. It is precisely the game that reveals the generation's hard-to-translate language.

Play is like art – a compensatory space. It outlines the territory of their "children's room". The room from which we do not throw out (or sometimes just move) our favourite toys until we have to make space for our children's toys; the place of true, sincere feelings and emotions. The characters represented are well integrated people in society: Lora owns a bar, Jana is a writer, Filip is an actor, Dodo is a lawyer; they have had their own experiences with love: both women have had short-

lived marriages, Filip has a problem with intimate commitment, it looks like Dodo wants to marry... But all that happens in the life we all call "reality." And our most real experiences, the ones we remember, the ones we recount countless times to our friends, belong to the other space, to the space of the "children's room" of the play. It does not make up the contents of "real" life but the authenticity

Photographer Simon Varsano



Vezhen Velchovski (Filip) и Radena Valkanova (Lora)

of what we experience there makes it exceptionally important and defining for our personality. The compensatory space of the children's room is the place where social masks do not matter. Here is the free area outlined by friendship; the territory where you can tease to the point of acrimony, dance, remember, share your culinary exploits in detail, and do all of that while playing.



Photographer Simon Varsano

Radena Valkanova (Lora), Snezhina Petrova (Jana), Stefan Valdobrev (Dodo) and Vezhen Velchovski (Filip)

The space in life that forms our emotional experience turns out to be quite a bit more important than the one in which we build our social status, however successful it may be. For the characters, that space is play.

In the performance the representation of the game is ingeniously translated by Galin Stoev by the comprehensible language of contemporary technology. The characters play with their mobile phones that keep their memories, photos, favourite melodies... This, though failing to explain the rules to us, somehow puts the question into the background and the spectator ceases to wonder or get distracted by them. Playing becomes a background against which the characters communicate: something like talking to some friends while you are listening to favourite music or watching a videotape of your children's parties. Thus, on the one hand, the game is favoured because it provides the alibi for their meetings, and on the other, it is turned into a landscape. This allows them to play, to abide by the rules and at the same time to talk about the topical

issues they are occupied with. Such as, for example, to discuss Dodo's future marriage while hopping on one leg or spinning around, because this is what the "red speaker" ordains.

The ease of the spoken words and the verbal reactions that follow them in the text provoke associations with dance. Dance with its meaning and suggestion of beauty and easiness is important for the performance. In addition to the literal sense of Jana's dancing sensuously with the waiter who is silently present, the motion of the equally light, unburdened by suggestions but quite precise set design (by Julian Tabakov) is also choreographic. The arm-chairs and lampions move along the stage as if in an elegantly placed movement score. Galin Stoev's work is like that of a choreographer who invites not only the actors but also the spectators to participate in that dance, performed by the exceptionally accurate ensemble of actors Radena Valkanova (Lora), Snezhina Petrova (Jana), Stefan Valdobrev (Dodo), Vezhen Velchovski (Filip) and Stilyan

Stoyanov (Waiter). They are the right participants in that choreography of words, movements, monologues; they are stumbling upon the news of Dodo's marriage but it transforms into an occasion for the dance to go on (maybe in another genre), reminding of other false steps, other fears... Actors join the game/dance and words as if they are their own, just thought of and immediately uttered. Thus, the spectator is inserted into the intimacy of the real experience. And if one has the senses that are cultivated in the "children's room", if one can relax and "play", one will find pleasure in meeting the creators of this performance.

Right from the start I wanted to make the disclaimer that it feels like there is no need to talk about this performance. It is clear, exact, laconic, and sensuous without being sentimental. None of its creative team attempts to "stun" us by some exceptional stage moves and tricks. And you can enjoy it, watch, take part in it or try to analyse it...

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