

THE SPECIES / HUMAN GOING EXTINCT

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A Small Radio, a one-woman show by **Maya Novoselska**, **Stefan Moskov** and **Borislav Stoilov**, director and set designer **Stefan Moskov**, costume design **Svila Velichkova**, music **Antoni Donchev**

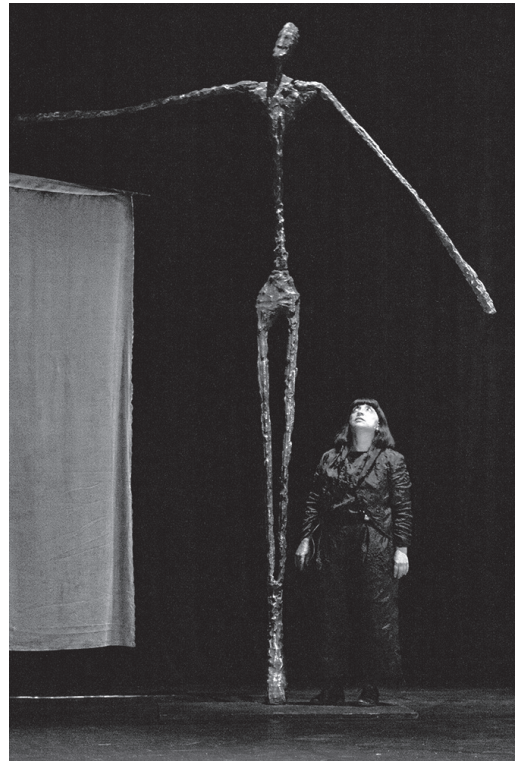
Aleko Konstantinov Satire Theatre and Artishock Productions, premiere 28th October 2011

In contemporary Bulgarian theatre Stefan Moskov has established his trademark, his distinctive creative landscape. He dwells in the realm of imagination, employing eclectic theatrical devices, blending the expressiveness of the puppet, theatre and cinema, and transforming the actor into a demiurge.

A Small Radio is a synthesis of a kind of Stefan (Tedi) Moskov's theatre, embodied by one actor and artist, Maya Novoselska. It gives vent to all underlying fears, disappointments and hopes shared by the spectators, who roar with laughter or quiet down with a heavy heart. Maya Novoselska excels at managing these emotions, directing them with an impeccable artistic taste, without ever allowing any sentimental empathy or comedy overacting. Her talent leads us along the edge of poetry and irony with finesse and ease embodied in her otherwise clumsy character.

If we are to begin with the plot of the performance, it can hardly be presented in a linear narrative. There is only one character, or rather only one creature. At the very start of the performance it identifies itself as human, obviously while sitting for an

examination-test, a little later it identifies its sex as female. The creature is, of course, Maya Novoselska, whose features incorporate a clown, a mime, a jester, a little guy, and all of that in the feminine, with Maya's



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big sad eyes, childishly touching naiveté and disarming smile. The first encounter surprises you, and perplexes you; the associations with stupidity emanating from the creature's behaviour come naturally. They are even directly suggested to us, only to be destroyed in an instant by virtue of the self-irony and self-awareness of the human in the creature's weakness and vulnerability. The answers to the questions the creature provides are rather gestures and facial expressions, because its language is still underdeveloped

and snuffling as it speaks by goggling its eyes or by puffing out its cheeks. But quite soon our unjust prejudice melts away in the light of the faith and dream in its eyes, or sinks into the mist of sadness caused by the disappointment that followed. It – the creature – wants to be a human being with a heart and head, to recite Rilke, to sing and to play music, to rejoice and to love, and to do so in the form of a woman – a pretty one, perhaps not the youngest one, but certainly one who is loved.

This strange little creature-woman is in fact the little ordinary person or every one of us at times of exaltation, at times of despair, at times of loneliness. With unbelievable skill and plasticity, Maya Novoselska impersonates that protean, evasive and vivid character that at the same time engraves itself into our minds. It brings together in its focus all preceding roles of the actress, cast as the little person, whom we know from stage and screen. All of them are reflected in this instant on stage, looking back over their shoulder and passing life to bid it a final farewell.



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The story is filled up with that woman's fate day after day, from her childhood to her death, in an odd, inconsistent tangle of events, emotions and memories of dreams come true or ones that never came true. With jumps in time and place, the way imagination can only travel when there are constraints of time or space. That's why the journey starts, triggered by a tune, a sound, or a thing, and space is populated with bizarre, disproportionate or imaginary objects. And as imaginary and real lives inevitably meet on the screen without having almost any point of contact otherwise, thus the cinema gets imperceptibly intertwined into the texture of the performance. Both on the screen and in memory, the real and the desired, embodied in images – perhaps banal, perhaps sentimental ones but first and foremost images rich in signs and references to a whole generation, maybe not even the only one. These images portray a bygone life saturated by the invading nostalgia with colours, sounds and experiences of sadness, laughter, shame, love, and whatever else.

Tedi Moskov and Maya Novoselska have more than once proven their virtuosity in recreating this world. In this performance the two of them have shared the authorship – the one as a director and creator of worlds, the other as an actress and recreator of worlds. These two artistic individuals merge in a wonderful duet of human sadness, loneliness and undying hope and love for people and life the way it is, in its entire diversity and irreversibility, whose demijurge remains to be imagination and creative work.

Step by step Tedi Moskov gradates the human being's gaining awareness on the one hand, and, on the other, the human being's getting swallowed by the reality in which she/he is doomed to live here and now. Maya Novoselska refracts this process by her unique actor's individuality. We see her happy with the possibility of being human: oh, how many things the human being can do! She too can do well, perhaps even better. And she is even a woman – what a beauty! How young is she? Age does not matter, she is the eternal child, a grown-up child. Then she should position herself somewhere. Well, she is

the centre of the world. She is everything and everybody, she is just a little afraid of loneliness. She must find someone who loves her – very much and truly. And the narrative of the dream begins. Of course, "he" is a Neapolitan with an ardent heart. Just a hat and a pair of white shoes and there she is in front of us, Maya Novoselska herself in the clichéd sweet spell of the first date. There is just a tiny detail, this is a story of the date that did not happen, of the travels that did not occur, of the love letters that were not received. The objects are acted out by the virtuous skill of the actress and puppeteer, capable of animating even an old Viennese hanger.

The magical realism spiced with the necessary dose of irony engenders our sadness, pain and nostalgia for days gone by when the magical and the realistic found points of contact most often in the imagination or on the film screen.

Squeezed into the narrow space between the two possibilities, Maya Novoselska's character timidly shuts both doors. From the right resounds the noise of the workday with nothing romantic about it, just the banality of everyday life with

burnt out bulbs, discontinued water utility service, and unpaid bills. The objects from that pressing everyday life are magnified to incredible dimensions that go well beyond the human ones. Maya's helpless figure roams in it, giving herself courage and in her attempt to overcome her fear, Maya takes the character to a grotesque. From the left, one can perceive gentle sounds – the melody of

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a world whose indefiniteness attracts one but also frightens one. Some imaginary creatures and unfulfilled desires wander there. In an instant Maya is transformed into a singer, into an actress, into a star! This seems familiar, something already experienced. The character and the actress merge into a single image, enlarge it, deepen it, and above all, make it a real authentic experience. Glory and success are so transient, they fly away from the stage together with the audience and then pitch the audience back into the narrow space between the two doors: alone, facing the difficult choice which is as difficult as it is inevitable. Such a choice is indeed beyond our control. You can neither choose the left door only, nor the right one only, you cannot even stay locked in between. Because in that empty space you start to think out again, to invent, and to fill the closed room with life. This is what Maya Novoselska does with her talent to dress dramatics into sadly funny garments, to be comically unhappy and dramatically happy at the same time, lonely and at the same time with a heart ready to welcome the entire world without judging and denying it.

The performance bears the characteristics of the post-modern theatre both in terms of the attitude towards the text, which is deprived of entirety and is structured out of separate portions, quotes and references, and in terms of the theatrical suggestion with the ironic overturn of senses and meanings. The half-empty stage on which some objects from everyday life, deformed in their dimensions and forms, appear and disappear is poeticized by Giacometti's elongated figures. At the same time the alternating emotional states

of laughter and sadness modelled by Maya Novoselska's signature acting instantly captivate the spectator's imagination and provoke a profound inner perception of the audience. This signature acting is characteristic of Stefan Moskov's directing as in his most recent performances *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *The Opinions of a Stump* and to some extent in *Macbeth* one can see a transition from a negation busting with wit and vividness to a subdued and sad wit that is as inventive as before yet more and more philosophical. I do not know whether this can be looked upon as a form of maturity or a stage of creative evolution.

A Small Radio is a kaleidoscope of a kind of our "little" everyday life spun around under the nostalgic sounds of popular tunes, an encounter in the mirror of a passing time. Maya Novoselska's presence is so full-fledged and captivating that the performance has been repeatedly labelled an auteur one in the media. Each cue and each gesture express her specific and pronounced acting talent that erupts after a long suppressed silence. Our theatre stage needs her powerful acting presence. Her most recent stage acts are in the poetic and musical performance based on the book *I Am a Dream* by Dafina Georgieva that reveals her sensitivity to poetics and jazz. Let us hope that the tandem of Maya – Tedi will continue to captivate and surprise us on the stage.

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