

BULLETIN - SUMMER 2012

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President's Corner

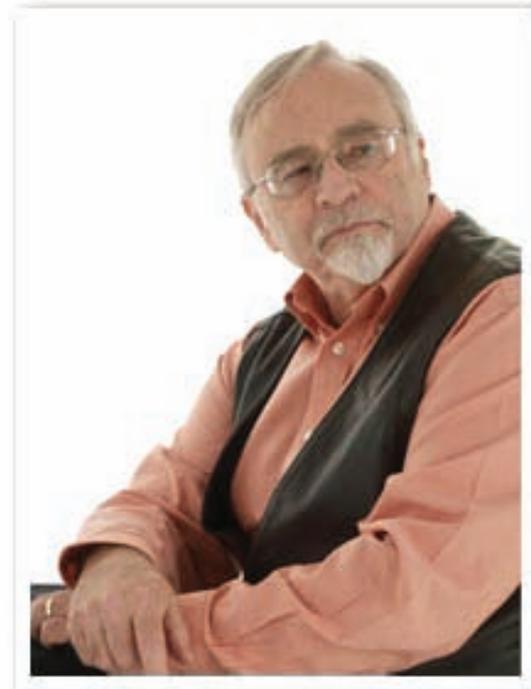
by Don Rubin

Can one still make a financially-rewarding career in criticism in Canada? The sad reality is that the 21st century has not been kind to critics or criticism in this country.

Many who entered the field through journalism have found themselves often unceremoniously moved from full-time status to part-time and then from part-time to free-lance to simply being a stringer. Indeed, there are probably only about a dozen people in Canada these days who can claim full-time (or anything even approaching full-time) status as reviewers or even reviewer-reporters. This is as true on radio as it is in print. As for television, for some odd reason, it never even got into the field on any kind of genuine basis in Canada (criticism not being seen as particularly visual).

Many writers with serious interests in criticism – including established free-lancers – eventually find themselves turning to academia for careers as well as active outlets. CTCA's membership certainly represents a cross-section of both these career paths. Academic publications, however, are far from the frontlines and allow critics only occasional opportunities to write (though when they do write it is usually at greater length, with fewer general restrictions and with an needed opportunity to verify facts).

Some of the more determined among us -- for example, Jerry Wasserman in Vancouver and Jeniva Berger in Toronto -- have developed quite effective websites (at significant personal cost in both time and money) and these are recog-



Don Rubin

nized today by the theatre community and fellow writers as being increasingly valuable.

Many younger colleagues with critical interests are now, of course, determinedly carving out careers as critical bloggers with the freedom to write what they want and when they want to. They publish on-line from daily to monthly. The risk there in this area is that there may be no one on the other end to read it these blogs. A dozen hits – though impressive – may not even a single reader make. And how do hits work in generating income. Can a hundred hits pay for a pizza? All this is a far cry from my own entry into the profession many decades ago when journalistic criticism was taken far more seriously and when there was far more of it. In New York – where I actually wrote professionally from 16 to 26 – there were some two dozen full-time critics covering everything that opened. Indeed, as journalists, they competed aggressively in their coverage and they had a significant readership. And that was just the dailies. Weeklies compounded the interest along with a growing number of radio reviewers. Out-of-town newspapers also sent critics to major New York openings and to see what was happening on-stage more generally in the city. A week or more in New York was the norm for most critics back then, vene for those from Canada such as Herb Whittaker (writing in *The Globe*) and Nathan Cohen (writing in *The Star*). Both also included a paid trip to London for additional theatre coverage each year.

As the regional theatre movement grew in significance across North America in the 1960s and 70s, a new interest in theatre “beyond Broadway” (as a book from the period by *Village Voice* critic Julius Novick called it) grew in stature and import. These theatres too had to be covered. The growing theatre world was all before us.

My first critical work in Canada was as back-up to Nathan Cohen at the *Toronto Star* in the late 60s. Cohen was among the first critics to see the significance of the regionals and he went out of his way to cover them as they began to appear in Winnipeg (MTC), Vancouver (The Vancouver Playhouse), Montreal (Theatre du Nouveau Monde) and Halifax (The Neptune). In the decade after Canada’s Centennial, a large number of smaller alternate theatres began to emerge in many of these same cities challenging the better-funded regional groups while doing more radical work, Canadian work, original work.



Julius Novick

As Cohen spent more and more time out of town covering this phenomenon, he convinced *The Star* that they needed additional writers to cover the small groups emerging in Toronto. Urjo Kareda and I vied for space to write about what we saw growing up around us. Though we went in different ways, we both saw the future in theatre such as John Herbert’s *Garret*, Paul Thompson’s *Passe Muraille*, Ken Gass’s *Factory* and Bill Glassco’s *Tarragon*.

My own move into the academic world included the founding of a semi-annual publication called the *York Theatre Journal* in 1971 which attracted readers across the country who wanted to subscribe. In January of 1974, the tiny *YTJ* morphed in the national *Canadian Theatre Review* which celebrated the growing profession in Canada. *CTR* later moved to other universities and, now back at York under Performance Studies scholar Laura Levin, recently celebrated its 150th issue.



Laura Levin

But as *CTR* rigidified into academic respectability and as criticism moved from issues of quality to little more than reportorial description (as one writer recently described academic criticism “if it can’t be measured, it ain’t real,”), as the democratic blogsphere replaced notions of expertise, the whole idea of a professional career as a critical writer began to fade.

Will it change? I am sure it will when someone can figure out how to monetize personal websites, when someone can figure out how to get people to pay – even modestly – for professional opinions. Some have already had some modest success in this area (Lynn Slotkin in Toronto for one) but the financial model is not yet there. As professional writers, we need to keep looking closely at the possibilities and never give up the dream that good writing and good thinking in the field of theatre needs good recompense to keep it flowing.

Everyone involved in theatre criticism these days are looking for new outlets as newspapers cut back on both reviewers and space.

Warsaw: Canada Re-elected to IATC Executive

Canada was re-elected to the prestigious Executive Committee of CTCA's parent body, the International Association of Theatre Critics, at IATC's most recent world congress. Held in Warsaw this past spring, delegates to the Congress elect ten countries each biennium to help guide organizational policy.

Other countries elected included China, France, Japan, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, the UK and the US. Japan was the only country elected unanimously while China (host of the 2014 Congress) and the UK missed unanimous endorsement by only one vote each. Canada, a popular international choice, appeared on all but three ballots. This is the third election for Canada in the past four bienniums.

Canada has two national centres, one for anglophone writers and one for francophone writers (the Quebec Theatre Critics Association). By agreement, if Canada is elected to the international Excom, the two centres take turns representing the country for that biennium. Brigitte Purkhardt of the Quebec Centre represented Canada over the past two years. For the 2012-2014 period, IATC President Don Rubin will represent Canada.



Brigitte Purkhardt

Excom members must pay their own way (or find some sponsor to pay their way) to international meetings. There are usually four meetings in a two-year period (normally October and April). The next Excom meeting is scheduled to take place in Chicago in the fall.

Over 200 critics attended the Warsaw meetings representing about 30 of the IATC's 50 or so member countries. The congress included a seminar on theatre space (see Malcolm Page's report in this Bulletin) and much theatregoing (see Alvina Ruprecht's report on Warsaw theatre) as well as a formal meeting where organizational business was dealt with including the election of the new Executive and officers.

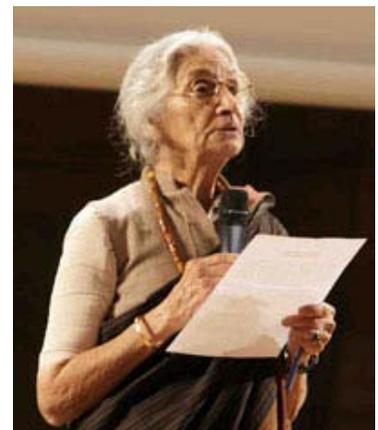
Continuing as President of IATC for his last two year term is Yun-Cheol Kim of South Korea. Michel Vais, editor of the Quebec theatre journal *Jeu*, was unanimously re-elected as Secretary-General for another two-year term.

It was also agreed that international dues will go up slightly (the first increase in a decade). For CTCA (which splits the international dues with the Quebec association), the increase amounts to an additional \$25 per year (from \$75 to \$100).

A highlight of each Congress is the presentation of the IATC Thalia Prize, an international award given for influential critical writing over an extended period of time. This year's winner was from India, critic and scholar Kapila Vatsayan. The author of more than a dozen books on Indian dance and culture, Dr. Vatsayan, a member of the Indian Parliament and now in her 90s, was one of the first to write about Indian dance theatre in a cross-cultural context. Her work has been used by theatre and dance scholars around the world for nearly five decades.

Normally, the Thalia winner attends the Congress and gives a keynote speech. Unfortunately, Dr. Vatsayan lost her sight over this past year and was unable to attend in person. Instead, she recorded on DVD a moving 40 minute talk about her career and Indian dance. It was that talk which was played at the Congress and which is available for viewing on the IATC website (aict-iatc.org).

Finally, the Congress offered praise for the IATC webjournal, *Critical Stages* (criticalstages.org) which is available to IATC members world-wide. *CS*, which appears twice a year, has been averaging some 50,000 hits per issue. CTCA members are invited to write for it with reviews of up to 1500 words. The only caveat – for both performance reviews and book reviews – is that the material should be of interest to critics internationally. That is, would you be interested in reading an equivalent piece coming from, say, Denmark or Ghana?



Dr. Kapila Vatsayan

Warsaw: Theatre Space: Beyond the Theatre Building

by Malcolm Page



"Theatre beyond Theatre" was the theme for the colloquium at this year's Warsaw IATC Congress. Some 25 speakers from 20 different countries gave 15-minute papers, many accompanied by video or other visual material, a situation that unfortunately left no time for discussion (organisers please note). Lots of fragments, then, for the audience to make sense of.

The general title was interpreted by most speakers to mean theatre outside theatre buildings, though breaking the fourth wall in a conventional theatre or even arranging seating on three or four sides can also be seen as a step in this direction. Speakers tended to focus either on outdoor theatre or on the use of non-theatrical spaces; that is, various kinds of 'found space.' The favoured terms were mobile, promenade and site-specific.

In Canada we know about this subject from the book, *Environmental and Site-Specific Theatre*, edited Andrew Houston, (2007). In such work, the focus itself becomes more 'performance' than 'theatre.' Found space, for instance, deflects most theatrical expectations:

at a show in an art gallery, for instance, do you look at the pictures on the walls?

We heard of work in Poland that used a disused brewery and the basement of a former hospital, spaces which served communities generally unaccustomed to theatre. *Sleep No More*, recently in New York, used a hundred richly decorated 'hotel' rooms (actually an old warehouse) for several simultaneous scenes (Canadians will remember John Krizanc's *Tamara* which used this type of space more than 30 years ago).

We had papers about the much-revered Romanian director Silviu Purcarete (see Patricia Keeney's article on Romanian theatre in this issue) and the lesser-known Luis Castro of Portugal and on Kerekator Theatre in Hungary. Moldova's cultural scene, we learned, is such that no independent company has survived longer than two years. Two Finnish critics told us that circus and spoken theatre are blending while another critic told us that Marina Carr's *Rafferty's Hill*, an Irish play I happened to see at the Royal Court in London, is a hit in Croatia.



Punch Drunk's *Sleep No More*

As for theatre outdoors, Theatre Hikes in Chicago, we heard, does classical texts on two-mile walks with the audience as active participants. Outdoors, too, are the street theatres of Mumbai and Nigeria, the subjects of two more papers. Need one add that theatre even in the west was usually outdoors until a little over 400 years ago.

I would like to point out here for Canadian critics that audience intervention has long been part of the work at Calgary's Old Trout and still is in their latest show, which they labelled '*Open Creation*.' The scenario was itself posted on their website, as were later first and second drafts, reputedly influenced by readers' suggestions. So we're right in there with such work. The chair of one of the sessions, our own Don Rubin, also mentioned the work that critic-director Byron Laviolette is doing on the upcoming live and online event called *ZED.TO*. That seems to be taking such work in even more experimental directions.



In fact, almost all the work outlined in the two dozen papers would have to be labelled at least semi-experimental, so none will have much impact on, say, the audiences at the Shaw and Stratford Festivals. I also noted frequently an element of re-invention when discussing such work. In becoming excited by outdoors and unfamiliar space, one must recall the great predecessors such as the Globe and open-air theatre generally in London and New York, about Brook's experiments in the 60s and 70s which led to *Orghast* and *The Mahabharata*. Is there anything new under the sun?

The Mission Business' *ZED.TO*

Yet I don't want to sound jaded. The fact is that so much thinking and so much energy going into theatre in its many varied forms is still most inspiring.

Warsaw: Fascinating Journey Through a Troubling Past

by Alvina Ruprecht

During the recent IATC Congress in Warsaw, delegates were treated to more than a dozen plays and musical events as well as meetings with representatives of the Polish theatre community. This was only part of what was actually on in Warsaw at the time. Indeed, the number of productions was overwhelming and what we saw seemed an excellent cross section of contemporary Polish theatre. Making it even better was its nearly perfect accessibility: most of the productions also boasted English surtitles.

More daunting were the distances from hotel to the theatres via public transport through various neighborhoods and then labyrinths of parks. Most critics in attendance were seeing two plays in one evening so the challenges were real. Theatre exists at a very high level in Poland so most of the productions were exceptional events. For me, the sight of theatres packed with enthusiastic young people was genuinely marvellous to see. Often willing to sit on floors or steps, their excitement and chatting created an atmosphere that I hadn't seen since visiting Cuba where young people also packed the theatres to hear and see what the artists had to say about the current state of affairs in the country.



Alvina Ruprecht

In Poland, something similar appeared to be taking place. People were there to hear what the directors, writers and actors had to say not only about the present but also about the past. Culture and politics remained the centre even after many shows. On several occasions, actors read statements of protest regarding the government's newly adopted policy of reduced support for theatres that did not include more commercially-oriented programs in their seasons.

There are over 30 major theatres in Warsaw, a city that, for me, seemed to overflow with main and subsidiary spaces in many different styles. From the small Teatr Studio (ironically located in the gigantic Palace of Culture, a gift from the Soviets) to the Studio Teatralne to the elegantly modern Teatr Powszechny (Modern Theatre) to the Teatr Imka (a refurbished factory with metal staircases and brick walls, like the Usine C in Montreal), the city was clearly not short on spaces.

Most striking, however, were the performances themselves which revealed two things to me: first, a practice that is deeply rooted in the major theatrical traditions; second, that the past was an obsessive presence in the content of every single play. There appeared to be a constant rethinking of Poland's recent history, a need to clarify or redefine Polish identity, to set things straight as it were, to rethink former discourses, former images of the world; a need to relocate Polish memory and break all the taboos. Was there a certain amount of guilt that had to be cut out and done away with? Perhaps. Most countries involved in wars do their best to silence that which is embarrassing, that which people would rather forget. Colonial powers are good at that sort of thing. But Poland seems to let it all come out through its theatres and, to me, that was quite astonishing.

Starucha (The Old Woman), for example, was based on a short tale by Russian writer Danil Kharmis written around 1939 as a monologue in a form that blurs the distinction between theatre and prose. This staged dialogue retains all the angry parody of Stalinist socialism, using disruptive forms of humour that create discontinuity, irrational linguistic relationships, and a sense of the rational world falling apart. The author, a contemporary of Bulgakov, is best-known for his writings for children, Kharmis' work was rediscovered after Glasnost and *The Old Woman* is now considered his masterpiece. This adaptation and staging by Igor Gorzkowski, takes us back to the visual language of the early 20th century avant-garde (where constructivist, early absurdist and burlesque met the modernity of Mayakovsky and Malevitch).

Gorzkowski impeccably constructed spatial compositions and lines that reflect "pure" form in the Kandinsky sense of the word, revealing the depth of a long tradition of theatre that almost appears to be etched into the actor's bodies and, of course, into the gaze of the director. He has in this sense choreographed the whole event with actors who become the most obedient of bodies. This would seem to be an example of physical theatre coming from a contemporary working of Russian traditions of the biomechanical and the pre-revolutionary modernist experiments of the Russian stage.



Igor Gorzkowski

The old woman arrives in an apartment of a famous writer and suddenly she dies. No need to know why, The important thing is how to get rid of the body. It is in the way. The famous writer doesn't know how to do what he has to do but he knows he has to remove the body since a girl is soon coming to visit him. That is, how do we get rid of people, how do we remove them from our lives so we don't feel they were ever there in the first place. An angry comment about life here and a vicious parody of Stalin's society set out like a contemporary painting where someone has turned on the key and all the characters suddenly start moving about. This play left the deepest impression on me.

Another exciting show was *The Furies* presented by the Modjeska Theatre from Legnica, a small city in Poland's Silesia region. It appeared to be a collectively-created work under the direction of Marcin Liber, reputedly a provocative figure in today's Polish theatre. The form is close to performance art; a series of sketches putting into question the vital elements of recent Polish history. There are flashbacks, references to the Holocaust, to torture, to military traditions, to wars and killings, to the complex relations between the Germans and the Russians which still haunt this part of Europe. It is all condensed in the figure of a woman who receives a coat that becomes an obsessive -- almost fetishistic object -- bringing us through it into the concentration camps and back through history. Reminding me of Gogol's *Overcoat*, it is all done as an explosive caricature to unbearable rock music making it as physically uncomfortable as possible.

Indeed, the show feels like a form of perverse punishment. Disturbing and quite brilliant, it was definitely the strongest theatre I saw during the week. The transfixed audience of young people obviously shared something of this feeling.

A Piece on Mother and Fatherland, a daring work by a company from the city of Wrocław -- best known as the centre of Grotowski's work -- could only be described as extremely courageous. Staged in a way similar to *The Furies* with a similar visual grotesque form of burlesque, it charged headlong into the myth of Motherhood and the Maternal and its relation to stereotyped gender models. Tearing all in its path, it was another form of performance art that breaks away from all the conventions of the traditional "play" setting up a series of wildly aggressive, anger-driven mini-performances where preconceived notions of what is feminine are played out by a team of actors who transform their bodies, their style, and their attitudes into disruptive worlds. A powerful visual and verbal statement of the effect of the feminist revolution on the artistic conscience.



Jerzy Jarzyna

repaired.

Probably the most polished performance of the week was *Teorama*, a stage adaptation of the Pier Paolo Pasolini film about a strange young man who moves into an impeccable and correctly functioning bourgeois family, transgressing all the taboos of that class. He then leaves them in moral, structural, emotional and psychic ruin. Directed here by Jerzy Jarzyna, one of Poland's most respected contemporary directors, the work is slick and minimalist, stripped to the essence. This stunning staging foregrounded a formalist aesthetic, the complete antithesis of the highly wired, burlesque, grotesque, fractured performances seen earlier in the week. Jarzyna's world is a choreographed one with his actors working almost as dancers. Something here about class consciousness and uneasy relationships with "outsiders," a sense of a social fracture that cannot be

Let me say that this was the first time I had been to Poland and the "discovery" of their contemporary theatre was an exceptional moment for me, an experience I had not at all expected.

Whittaker Voting: AGM Set for September 22 in Toronto

The CTCA will hold its next Annual General Meeting on Saturday, 22 September in Toronto from noon to 4 p.m. The meeting will include a luncheon from 12 to 2 with a soon-to-be-announced guest of note following by the business

portion of the day. All CTCA members who can be in Toronto that day are welcome to attend. Details will be announced in early September.

As a legal not-for-profit corporation, CTCA is operated by a volunteer Board of Directors which usually meets in person or by e-mail/telephone two to three times each year. One of those meetings is required to be designated the Annual General Meeting and it is always open to the full membership. Anyone beyond the Board interested in attending should let Anton Wagner know (awagner@yorku.ca) so that an appropriate space can be chosen. Please send an e-mail by 1 September.

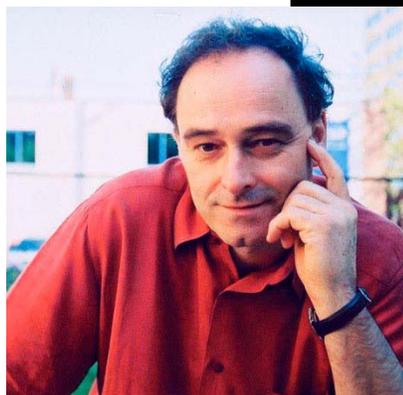
Those attending the AGM will also have an opportunity to input into the coming year's activities and vote on the winner of the 2012 Herbert Whittaker Award for Distinguished Contribution to the Canadian Theatre. Nominations from members across the country will be accepted up to the day of the AGM.

As mentioned in the previous Bulletin, the Whittaker Award was initially made in 1976 when CTCA was in its first incarnation as the Toronto Drama Bench. The Bench, which began in 1972, began the Distinguished Contribution Award to recognize pioneers and lifetime contributors to the Canadian theatre. The award can go to a playwright, an actor, a director, an administrator or, yes, even a critic.

The list of nominees will be announced at the AGM and a vote held. The winner will receive a plaque from CTCA at a ceremony later in the fall. The first winner was teacher, actor, director and producer Dora Mavor Moore, later to be made even more famous through the Toronto theatre community's own awards, the annual Doras. But the Drama Bench was there first and we were pleased to be able to offer such recognition so early.

A list of past winners includes:

Marion Andre, theatre founder-director
Brent Carver, actor
Joy Coghill, director
David Gardner, director-historian
Ken Gass, theatre founder-director
Gratien Gelinas, playwright-actor
Bill Glassco, theatre founder-director
Tom Hendry, theatre founder-playwright
Astrid Janson, designer
George Luscombe, director
Jackie Mazxwell, director
Monique Mercure, actress
Ed and David Mirvish, producers
Dora Mavor Moore, actress-teacher
Mavor Moore, theatre founder-playwright-actor-teacher
Susan Rubes, theatre founder
Paul Thompson, director
R.H. Thompson, actor



Ken Gass



Jackie Maxwell



Susan Rubes

If you are unable to be in Toronto for the AGM and voting, you can still send in your own nomination for this year's award. A name is all that is needed though if the name is not an obvious one, please add in a couple of lines explaining who the person is and the reason for your nomination.

Among those already nominated for this year's award (subject to verification that they have not won previously since our list is not complete) are director Christopher Newton, director Des McAnuff, playwright-theatre founder Sky Gilbert, playwright Tomson Highway, playwright Djanet Sears, playwright-director Wajdi Mouwad, playwright Judith Thompson, playwright Michel Tremblay and historian-editor Anton Wagner.

Additional nominations should be sent to drubin@yorku.ca.

Nathan Cohen Awards for Critical Writing

CTCA will offer two awards again this year for Critical Writing: one for review pieces up to a thousand words and a second for longer critical or analytical pieces. The phrase "critical or analytical" is used to distinguish longer pieces from more general features and personality profiles.

The deadline for entries is **October 1st, 2012**. All entries must have been published in a newspaper, journal, magazine, book or on a regularly produced blog or website between 1 October 2010 and 30 September 2012. Writers should note that blog entries are eligible so long as the blog regularly appears and has an established name. That is, blog entries cannot be casual and purely personal in character.

There is a \$10 fee per entry if you are a member of CTCA. Anyone not a member of CTCA will pay a \$35 fee for the first entry and a \$10 fee for each entry thereafter. Anyone paying the \$35 fee will be designated as an Associate Member of the organization for the remainder of the year. Normal membership can be applied for on the following 1 January. To ensure that these awards recognize a wide base of critical writers, winners of the most recent Cohen Award (in this case, the winners for 2010) will not be eligible for the 2012 competition.

Members of the Board of Directors are eligible unless they are serving on the jury.

Head of the 2012 jury will be former *Globe and Mail* theatre critic Kamal Al-Solaylee. Two other distinguished members of the theatre community will work with him on selecting the winners.

Entries must be sent by post to CTCA secretary-treasurer **Anton Wagner** who will acknowledge receipt with the required fee. He will then forward the entries with a code and without the writer's name on them to the selection committee. Anton can be reached at **Suite 2306, 201 Sherbourne Street, Toronto M5A 3X2**.

The awards – including the Whittaker Award -- will be given out in the fall at a time and venue to be announced.



Kamal Al-Solaylee

Calgary Gets Its Critters

by Jessica Goldman

Calgary Critics know a good idea when they see it. So when our colleagues at the major papers in Toronto decided to establish the Toronto Theatre Critics' Awards, we all thought "us too, us too!" Actually the idea of a critics' award has been brewing for a while here in town and with the 2012 anointing of Calgary as the Cultural Capital of Canada, we felt that the time was right to make it official.



Calgary - Canada's 2012 Cultural Capital

Stephen Hunt and Bob Clark of the *Calgary Herald*, Louis B. Hobson of the *Calgary Sun* and myself from CBC's Calgary Eyeopener and www.applause-meter.com are happy to announce that this year marks the first annual Calgary Critics' Awards, the Critters as they are being affectionately called.

The Critters? You see, while we all thought the title Calgary Critics' Awards sounded dignified and official, we also thought it sounded a tad boring. Especially when mentioned along with our city's other theatre awards, the people's choice Betty Mitchell Awards, known to all as the Betty's. The four of us put on our creative thinking caps to come up with a catchy and representative name, but apparently we are all better at writing reviews than we are at naming awards. So we went to the public for help.

On June 7th, we announced the establishment of the awards and a contest that invited the Calgary public to suggest an affectionate name for them. The response came quickly and pretty soon we had over one hundred suggestions to choose from. But in the end, it was unanimous, the Critters made us all smile and we felt it brought a lovely levity to the whole endeavour.

With our name set, the next step was to meet and pick the nominees and winners for our 14 categories. We are happy to report that despite some vigorous yet illuminating discussion on choices, we were able to come up with a list of nominees and winners that we are all extremely happy with.

The Critters announced its first nominees on July 18 and an award ceremony will take place on August 1, 2012 at a free and hopefully fun event for everyone in the Calgary theatre community.

Even though we are only partially through the process at present, we have already felt the benefits of the effort ourselves. Too often theatre critics don't get a chance to get together, talk shop, learn from each other and establish friendships. Working on these awards has created a camaraderie among all four of us that is greatly appreciated and lots of fun. A bit like we hope CTCA can be on the national level.

Now our hope is that the awards themselves will create a feeling of celebration in the wider theatre community as we recognize the great productions and performances we have seen over the season and honour the vibrant Calgary artists and companies we are privileged to work with.

And thank you to CTCA member J. Kelly Nestruck of the *Globe* for letting us pick his brain on the Toronto awards process. We hope that our ambitious awards, which announce both winners AND nominees, provides some inspiration.

Game on Toronto!



J. Kelly Nestruck

Review: The Ubiquitous Bard

by Robin Breon

As many of us partake in the spring/summer season of Shakespeare festivals, outdoor Shakespeare-in-the-park performances, Shakespeare's by-the-lake, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival and numerous other events that annually centre on the work of the Bard, I'd like to offer a personal reflection on two excellent Shakespearean productions experienced over the past two years, ironically both presented in Quebec and both not interpreted by way of the English language (except through subtitles).

The summer before last I was in Montreal for the Festival Transamériques. The indomitable Marie-Hélène Falcon, artistic director of this annual event that usually conflicts with Stratford's openings, had invited Toneelgroep Amsterdam (the Netherlands' largest theatre) to present its mash-up of Shakespeare's Roman tragedies (*Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*) staged by Holland's most notorious director Ivo van Hove. Presented in a fast-paced contemporary setting that involved a CNN style format allowing for reportage, interviews and "off camera" dramatic scenes, the largely youthful francophone audience ate it up for the entire six hours of this modernized take on power politics, love and war.

Returning to Quebec last summer, I saw Robert Lepage's quintessentially Canadian version of *The Tempest* presented in French (without English subtitles) as a collaboration between Lepage's Ex-Machina company and the indigenous Huron-Wendat Nation on their reserve just a short drive out of Quebec City. Presented in a lovely outdoor space on the banks of Rivière St-Charles, the audience was



Marie-Hélène Falcon

again youthful and eagerly engaged with the Bard.

This summer, having just returned from seeing six shows at Stratford, it occurs to me that it is somewhat strange and a bit disappointing that Robert Lepage has never directed a production there. He was overlooked in his formative period when he was gaining a reputation in Quebec, the rest of Canada and then on the international festival circuit. Perhaps now he is out of Stratford's reach. I don't know, but I think an effort should be made regardless.

The point was driven home to me while watching Des McAnuff's production of *Henry V* and the strained attempt to use actors in hockey jerseys with red maple leaves emblazoned on them in the opening prologue, and a huge flag for the curtain call at the end in an attempt to "brand" the production "Canadian". Contrast this artificiality with R.H. Thomson's interview with Jean Louis Roux (one of the CTCA's founding patrons) on Theatre Museum Canada's website as he describes the 1966 production of *Henry V* (directed by Michael Langham and featuring a young Christopher Plummer) and you will get my point here with regard to capturing the zeitgeist of a country that is uniquely bi-lingual and profoundly multi-cultural.

Antoni Cimolino (whose terrific production of *Cymbeline* this season is not to be missed by the way) may now have an opportunity to correct past omissions in his new position as Artistic Director at Stratford. Maybe he could pick up the phone and see what Lepage's schedule looks like a few years down the road. Hey Antoni: Here's Lepage's phone number: 418-692-5323.

Review: A Festival in Transylvania

by Patricia Keeney

Sibiu. This is a small Romanian city founded in the 12th century and designated the capital of Transylvania in the 17th century. Still going strong today, Sibiu held its 19th International Theatre Festival this past May and made for itself many new friends.

The first Sibiu Festival, back in 1993, surprised its guests with mountain snow in March (the town is five hours by car from Bucharest in the middle of the Carpathian mountains). It also had many of its first-time tourists carrying garlic around in their pockets to ward off any vampires they might encounter.



Sibiu Festival Poster

This year, the vampires were nowhere to be found. They had either fled or were now luxuriously accommodated in sumptuous spas along the route into town. The Festival – an explosion of theatre, music and street events in and around the most historic and visually evocative parts of Sibiu -- this year hosted well over a hundred events from across Europe and across Romania. These included book launches, seminars and

even an editorial meeting of the IATC's web journal, *Critical Stages*, which in turn allowed several IATC members to participate in Festival activities in this city, Unesco's European Capital of Culture in 2007.

For many years, this was the best funded festival in Romania and it still gets the lion's share of money. But government budgets are obviously reducing everywhere – even in eastern Europe – and last minute budget cuts prevented Canadian playwright and director Wajdi Mouwad (among others) from participating. Mouwad was supposed to have done a reading here of a new play of his. A loss, particularly for this Canadian critic who had been looking forward to a local angle on the festival.

Nevertheless, there were still numerous productions well worth seeing. The most spectacular were two pieces staged by Silviu Purcarete, Romania's most highly regarded director of the moment (the country has turned out many over the years) who had two of his major productions on view, *Gulliver* and *Faust*. These are classics that lend themselves fabulously to image theatre and serious flights of socially critical fantasy. Because classics are widely accessible, theatre practitioners can play with them, as did our own Morris Panych in his dance version of *Moby Dick* at Stratford a few seasons back. But "play with them" they must, skillfully and ingeniously, because earnestly realistic renderings -- such as

Poland's Provisorium Theatre's *The Brothers Karamazov* (also on view here) -- fall flat with familiarity.

Purcarete's *Gulliver* is certainly never boring. Described as a series of stage exercises (begun at the Edinburgh Festival and continually performed for three years), the production is visually rich, even bulging at times with too many scenes. Surtitled for visitors who don't speak Romanian, it includes large chunks of Swift's text. In this year of the (theatrical) horse, Gulliver's opening scene with its high-stepping Houyhnhnms elicited palpably appreciative recognition. Prancing around in white leotards and aristocratic wigs, backs arched, tails swishing, elegant walking stick legs lifted and poised, these creatures -- sublimely superior to the human Yahoos -- eventually gives way to the physical entrance of an actual horse, allowing Purcarete an inspired comment on the cleverness of artifice and the inevitability of the real.

The rest of the show centres on Gulliver's excoriation of his fellows, including his own family, after years spent in the clean, rational, simple society of enlightened horses. Scene after scene of social inhumanity unfolds before the innocent eyes of the putative hero -- a boy on a hobby horse. The play is sometimes narrated by him, sometimes narrated by the worn and weary old Gulliver bent in a wheelchair, force-fed and beaten with pillows by his daughter.

Violence in Purcarete's production is made more horrific by its casualness, its flippant humour, stylized costumes and staging that is elevated to a level of insouciance with clever theatrical tricks. Guts are ripped while white clad figures sift flour. Baskets and bundles of babies fill the stage. A child is born into a bucket and sold while indifferent mothers create a ballet. The baby is weighed. Then killed with a hammer blow. And carved by a smiling chef who offers its cooked heart to the boy on the hobby horse who has blithely chosen it from a menu.

None of Swift's horror is lost in this production and much of his satire on the blithe brutality that remains alive and well in human thoughtlessness is all too clear.

A second Purcarete production is also epic and touching, The master's prize-winning *Faust* created at Sibiu in 2007 -- and now considered a national classic -- ranges from pyrotechnical spectacle to conspiratorial whisper in its dramatization of the complex and dangerous relationship between the savant Faust (driven mad with his appetite for experience) and Mephistopheles (tormented because the world keeps resisting his maleficence). Mounted in a giant unused factory building away from the centre of town, this production constantly collides the small world of personal feeling with the great world of history, politics and culture in ever more compelling and disastrous ways.

White-clad, seated at splintery old school desks, fingers flying over computer keys, Faust's students early on provide an almost choral backdrop against the pale cavernous walls of the study where he experiments, injecting the limp body of a young girl, grieving as he lays her dead form in a box (a foreshadowing of his beloved Margaret's demise?), drinking his wine in anticipation of the next experiment. Music thunders, children's voices beguile the air and a candle sputters while innocence and despair flit across the face of this torn Faust, poised on a precipice of anguish.

Barking annoyingly, a wily little dog called Mephisto soon romps in. Played by one of the company's major actresses -- Ofelia Popii -- as an androgynous sprite, this devil is unrelentingly animated, morphing into a trickster figure of negation, rude, crude and brilliantly anarchic. While Faust sleeps, she dons his cap and specs and prepares a potion that will entrap his spirit, railing raucously about her lack of success in the world one moment and the next delicately sighing her secret pact into his ear. At the drop of blood that seals their deadly deal, Mephisto sucks in an orgasmic breath.

His cell suddenly becomes a heavenly playground. Red cheeks blazing, he circles round a mattress of nearly naked giggling young girls. They rise sweetly with lanterns and bells shivering, crying for their mothers. Faust leers as they pile on one another to sleep. Blindfolded, they frolic mechanically with him until Mephisto herself jumps into his arms. Blood on her hands, she addresses the innocents: 'Do you really want him?'

Then the entire set literally opens (heralded by a drunken couple, stiffly resplendent in Restoration costume, astride a giant hippopotamus) and the thousand strong audience is carefully ushered behind the stage into a vast smoky circus



Purcarete's Faust

of hell, huge scaffolding scoring the space, displaying wicked performances of sex and brutality amidst deafening monster mash music. Walpurgis night in Mephisto's perverted paradise. Puffed up in raucous red, the demon here has become disaster itself.

Margaret's body is glimpsed but her eyes are dead. Faust has destroyed her.

Back in his cell (the audience moving once again), he whips his devil around the room. In black robes and white hair now, she throws at him the words he has forfeited: debt, care, need. While his eyes are bandaged by gravediggers, she revels in visions of hell, knowing she must grab the spirit before it gets away. But once accomplished, what will she have left? For Faust is her game too. "Now who will restore me," she wails and laments. Not the dark but the light is also gone. The scope of this production -- its outrage and intimacy -- match Goethe's original in all its incarnations.

Other theatre performances during the festival were strong but nothing as mighty as Purcurate's. Several groups even struggled mightily with the co-ordination of surtitles and the accuracy of translation. American playwright Neil LaBute's *Fat Pig* -- language driven -- was notable among them. So was *The Last Day of My Youth*, an adaptation of a novel by contemporary Polish writer, Tadeusz Konwicki. Essentially a love story set in the disturbing days before World War II, the poetry of this text felt bludgeoned by a wooden translation that allowed only glimpses of parable and yearning. In the simple wooden set of shimmering birches and pools of water, one sensed levels of a world both symbolic and achingly real but only minimally conveyed.

Site specific theatre was served inventively by *A Streetcar Named Popescu* performed on a trolley trundling out to the Romanian pioneer village of Rasinari. Based on the works of the poet Popescu and played in three languages, this piece tells the story of the Popescu family featuring puppets made in the Bunraku style. More novel than anything else, the most dramatic moment turned out to be an unscripted one in which our valiant little tram veered actually off its tracks requiring the audience of 40 to be picked up by a city bus, the actor's waving sadly as we left.



A Streetcar Named Popescu

On the dance side of things, Israel's Vertigo Dance Company gave a superb performance of a piece called *Null*, a Hebrew word meaning loom, a mathematical term designating zero, an English word denoting, it would seem, existential malaise. Erotic and compelling, the inventive soundscape of strings, gongs, and street panic drew dancers into various states of anxiety, determination, question and rest, balancing superbly, then letting go. Tough and tender, muscular and delicate, this assured and exciting program wove its rapt audience into an astounding range of aesthetic, intellectual and emotional moments. We need to see this group in Canada.

Out on the streets, the activity also never stopped between a band on giant wheels whirling along with sax player, drummer and guitarist spinning out funky rhythms to the Carillon company's delightful moving music box with a real ballerina spinning atop a grand piano played by a musician in eighteenth century dress.

In the end, a not-so-new old-fashioned festival here in the middle of Transylvania, enchanting tourists and natives with a variety of romantic images from the past, Vlad the Impaler only one among many.

Ruminations: Can Theatre Survive in an Electronic Age?

by Jeniva Berger (1983)

Note to Readers:

In 1983 in Mexico City, CTCA's founding president, Jeniva Berger, gave a paper at the eighth world congress of our parent

organization, the International Association of Theatre Critics, presciently entitled "Can Theatre Survive in an Electronic Age?" Given that we are now right into that "electronic age" it seemed an interesting moment to look back at what she wrote and see how close her ruminations were to reality. The paper is presented here with Jeniva's agreement in a shortened version.

Imagine that this is the year 2010. Your evening at the theatre has become another evening in front of a life-sized television screen in your own living room. In fact, as a critic, you spend more time reviewing drama on television or by video cassette than you do in a theatre. This is not unusual, however, since live theatre has become a rarity. Prohibitive costs of mounting productions, lack of government subsidies and the subsequent escalation of ticket prices have made live theatre, whatever remains of it, an occasional excursion to be enjoyed only by the very rich. Television has become the sole means of entertainment for the average man.

This is, of course, an imaginative exercise. Or is it?

At this very moment, the electronic medium continues to reach out and change our lives, and with it the cultural habits that we once thought were inviolable. As theatre critics and journalists we would mourn the death of live theatre for it provides an irreplaceable human bond that has been passed down to us from ancient times: the communal sharing of a dramatic experience between spectators and actors. It has only been in the last generation that those ancient dramatic precepts have been threatened.

As children of a film age when films were intended for exhibition in movie houses we were certainly able to keep the distinction between the medium of film and that of theatre, clear. The two art forms themselves drew very clear boundaries and criteria as to what they would give audiences and what they expected back.

But the video revolution changed that forever. Films produced for television became a staple of TV programming. Along with films came an array of other kinds of entertainment and news programs including the introduction of the series and mini-series and television specials such as musical spectacles and cultural events. Because of the huge numbers of people whose homes were now equipped with at least basic television services and because of their diverse interests, television became a hungry medium whose programming needs had to be met constantly....

What is important here is that with these developing technological services, we will be seeing more and more specialized interest programming. None of our cultural industries have become immune to an ever increasing fragmentation of the market and, because of the influence of television, all have now had to adapt to it. Magazines and periodicals have become geared to target their material to special audiences; radio has become a specialized medium; feature films shown in film houses emphasize the large screen, stereo, special effects, longer runs, a "special night out...."

This rippling effect created from the video revolution can be felt in the kinds of new contemporary drama and theatrical presentations we are seeing in North America. Our new young playwrights are, after all, products of this television age and it is small wonder that many of their works show the influence of television and films....

[As well] we cannot ignore the impact of the modern rock concert, if for no other reason than it has become the theatre for our young people. With its emotionalism, spontaneity and overwhelming communal spirit, it may be the closest thing to pure theatre they have experienced. And if this is what they have to expect from a live theatrical experience, what can a simple stage drama, a symphony concert or a ballet offer....?

How much impact will a rapidly changing technology have on live theatre? The answer is that we really don't know. We have perceived in this last century that technology has shaped the form, content and consumption of culture creating new variants of cultural industries....The demand for content in a television market that is highly segmented and specialized is pushing theatre into the video arena, and the theatre industry, looking for new sources of revenue to survive, must respond....

Certainly the globalization of culture through the new technology becomes attractive, not just in financial terms for the consumer who will be able to enjoy international music and theatrical events for a relatively small fee, and to the production and distribution companies who, as communication advances, will be able to offer these events for a marginal cost, but in aesthetic terms as well for it will encourage cultural exchanges and will lay at our doorstep a world of theatre to which we may never have had access....

Even in a smaller and more specialized market, the meeting of video and live theatre is not something we can ignore or dismiss. Wooing an audience which is already television-oriented, educating them to appreciate better and higher calibre dramatic works on television is not as difficult as luring a new generation weaned on the electronic medium to the special experience of live theatre....

We must as critics, writers and theatre journalists be prepared to keep an open mind, to consider fresh approaches and be eager to explore (along with the rest of the theatre community to which we belong) the invention and exchange of new forms and ideas.

It well may be that our most productive role in the coming years will be to gain as thorough an understanding of the demands of the electronic medium as we do of the stage so that we can pass on to our audiences the distinctions of each. No one should be in a better position to assess the merits of theatrical works on television than the people who are familiar with them in their original form. Surely, no one will then be in a better position to encourage audiences to attend live theatre for what may be a swiftly-eroding concept – human exchange.

Endnotes: Random jottings on this and that

A special CTCA welcome to new member **Patrick Langston** of Ottawa. Patrick is theatre critic of the Ottawa Citizen and a major figure in the local branch there, the Capital Critics Circle. In addition to reviews of professional groups and the occasional community theatre production, he writes a monthly theatre column and previews major shows for the Citizen. Patrick also writes for *Ottawa Magazine*, *Carleton University Magazine*, and *Penguin Eggs*, a Canadian folk-roots-and-world music magazine. Delighted to have Patrick in the national organization.....



Patrick Langston

We asked Patrick about the Ottawa critics group and how The Citizen specifically deals with the ongoing issue of covering Equity and non-Equity companies in the city. "As in most cities," he said, "there's a gulf between the two camps, and The Citizen no longer reviews community theatre. The Capital Critics Circle, however, recognizes both professional and community theatre at its annual awards. The annual CCC awards ceremony - informal and hosted by Ottawa Little Theatre - is a rare opportunity for the two worlds, which are more connected than some admit, to mix.

Why give awards? "Recognition of excellence and innovative growth in the local theatre community," he continued. "A chance to revisit the season and our initial judgments of shows. An opportunity to compare notes with fellow critics and, in some cases, reset benchmarks. Maybe most importantly to celebrate a vital if continually challenged art."

And from the other side of the country, a special welcome to new Associate Member **Anastasia Koutalianos** of Vancouver. A University of Toronto grad in French Lit with a diploma in magazine publishing, Anastasia is the director and founder of nadatodo.com (an online arts event calendar). She also has her own radio show several times a month on Vancouver's CJSF (90.1 FM). And her own online writing outlet can be found at blogspot.com. We asked Anastasia what she thought CTCA could do for her. Her response?

"I'm joining to work alongside professional theatre critics, to participate in workshops through IATC, and to learn from those who've worked in criticism before me...I am fond of the rarely-discussed, always-heard and never-forgotten...My voice is frank but fair. My reviews try to go beyond the rip-apart critique to expose the story within the story. On my radio show I promote both underdogs and big fish...I am thrilled to be involved with a professional organization like CTCA..."



Anastasia Koutallanos

Anyone looking to do some international free-lance (unpaid) writing is encouraged to submit material to the IATC's web journal *Critical Stages* (criticalstages.org). In any event, the magazine is worth a look. Each issue is built around a theme (Theatre and Expatriates, Theatre and Disaster), and also contains a large review section of shows

that are of interest to critics world-wide, interviews with trendsetters, book reviews and the like. CTCA's **Don Rubin** edits the book section so if anyone is interested in reviewing a new theatre book of importance, drop Don a note (drubin@yorku.ca) to verify interest and arrange for the book to be sent to you. If you think you have a review of international interest, send it to **Matti Linnavuori** in Finland (matti.linnavuori@welho.org). Anything else should go to the publisher's office in Korea **Yun-Cheol Kim** (yunckim911@yahoo.com).

The current issue (CS 6) includes reviews from Azerbaijan, Canada, France, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Korea and Romania along with material about theatre activities in Japan after last year's nuclear disaster there. An essay by the IATC President on the role of criticism today highlights the issue. The journal is free and is generating some 50,000 hits per issue. It comes out twice a year and is part of your membership benefits....

A special request from **NeWest Press** in Edmonton, a long-time publisher of theatre material among other things. They'd like to send CTCA members Press Releases a couple of times a year related specifically to theatre. They are also happy to send review copies of new theatre books out. CTCA has allowed them access to the e-mailing list but they have asked us to give members a chance to opt out. So if anyone does NOT want material from NeWest, please let their Marketing Coordinator Matt Bowes know. Just tell him you are a CTCA member and request to be removed from their press list....

Sincere congratulations to former CTCA Board member **Kamal Al-Solaylee** on the publication of his touching memoir of growing up (gay) in the Middle East, *Intolerable* (Harper-Collins). The book was released in late spring and has been favourably reviewed in Toronto and in some of the national media. It's also doing well in bookstores. It's an articulate series of recollections of life in his native Yemen and his youth in Beirut and Cairo. How did he wind up as theatre critic for the *Globe and Mail*? Read the book....

And congratulations as well to Bulletin editor **Byron Laviolette**. Byron has had enormous success in recent years as a director and dramaturg with the Dora Award winning clown duo Morro and Jasp. Their razor sharp satires on everything from growing up female to cooking shows have played to full houses at fringe festivals across the country and they have even played off-Broadway. Byron was also involved with a second show as director at this year's summer festival in Toronto and he is one of the writers on a new interactive production opening in Toronto later this year called *ZED.TO*. If Byron is not careful, he's going to slide over to the dark side completely and we'll lose his critical mind. All this while completing a PhD at York.... Byron was also singled out by *Now Magazine's* critical tag-team of Jon Kaplan and Glenn Sumi during the Fringe in Toronto for a special VIP Award for wearing "multiple hats." Bravo Byron!



Morro and Jasp

Anyone interested in attending an international workshop for young critics (under 35 is the usual cutoff but it's a loose 35) in Tblisi (a fascinating city in former Soviet Uzbekistan) should get in touch with CTCA President **Don Rubin** (drubin@yorku.ca) as quickly as possible. It's free accommodation and free meals and free theatre tickets for a week. The first catch is you have to get there somehow on your own or through a grant. The second catch is that it is taking place in mid-September and we only just got notice of it. But if you can do it, why not...?

Keep an eye out for CTCA's new and improved website with links to a whole range of critical resources. **Martin Morrow** is working on it. When it appears, we'll let you know. At that time, check your photo and bio to make sure it is up-to-date. The site gets a surprising amount of hits and with the new version that should increase significantly. It will probably roll out in early September.
