

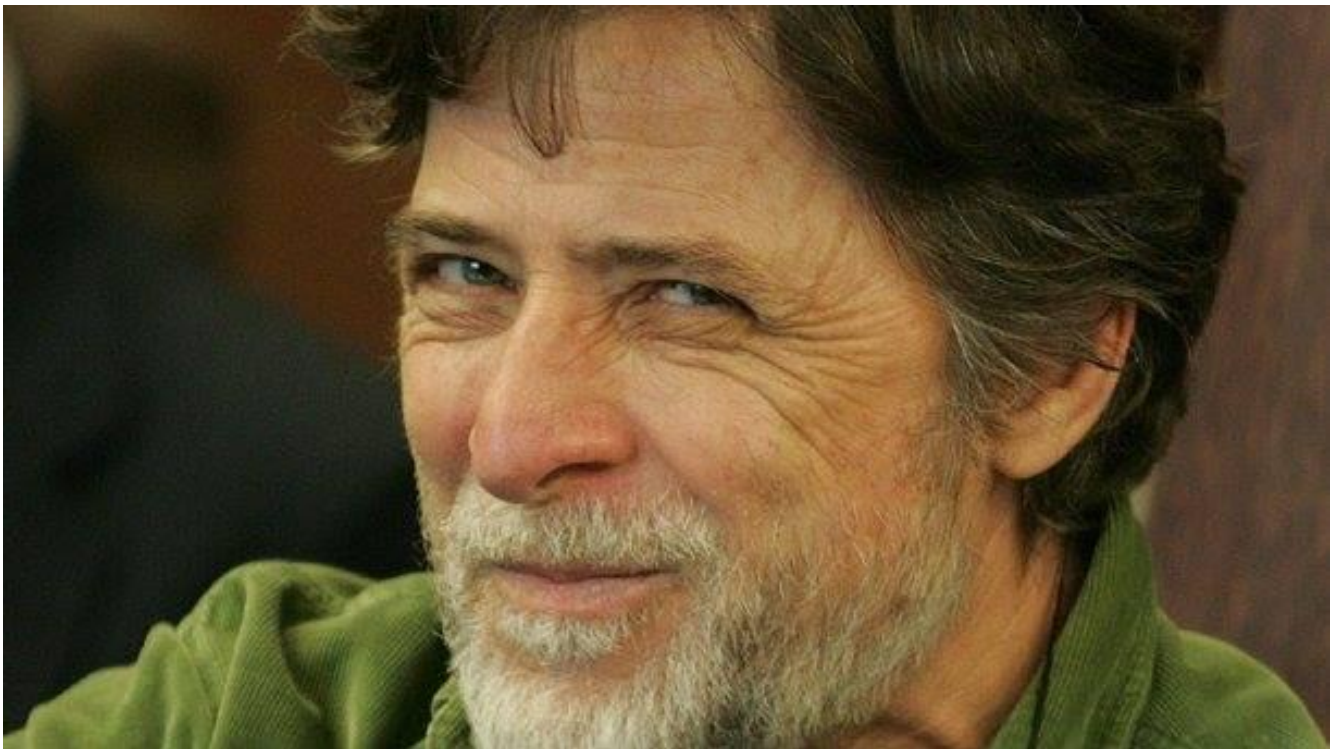


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ROUSSI CHANEV:

**THE REASON I AM PART OF THIS THEATRE, OR
MORFOV AND THE BUTTERFLY GANG**

THE PASSION TO FOLLOW THE FLAVOUR AND SAVOUR OF THE NATIONAL THEATRE



A friend is a person who knows you well but still likes you.

~ Scottish humor

Recently a theatre critic, a programmer for a huge festival, hesitantly said: “Lately there is some liveliness in our theatre, regardless of the severe financial condition it’s in. Modern Bulgarian theatre reminds the predator in the jungle who, as we know from the documentaries, is hiding in the bushes and is jumping any minute now... but you don’t know when... That’s the situation.”

Something is moving in the bushes, this is for sure, but I think it's due to the fact that something has emerged and started moving around the vast empty meadow in front of it, and by doing this, it is now shaking the whole jungle. You can see that.

Anyhow – maybe because of age modulations or a propensity to look back in time – I am filled with optimism because I think that we can now talk of a new Bulgaria and not be afraid of making a mistake. We can now talk of a completely different country, we can now modestly shake ourselves from the pessimistic shades that have been cast upon us due to lack of this or more of that, from the constant repetition that since 1990 up until today – also staged in “The Bulgarian Way” at the “Off the Channel” theatre and in “On the Edge” at the National – everybody is leaving the country. Isn't it true, dear compatriots, that if the state had opened its borders, yet in 1960 the more advanced Bulgarians would have gone to Western Germany and France, those after them – in Yugoslavia, and finally the rest would gad about Greece or Turkey, while here there would be only Russian monuments left, surrounded by migrating villagers in times of defrost and perestroika...? That's why it's better – I say – that we finally leave those pessimistic banalities aside, times are different now. Whoever wishes to go, let him go. And then, let's see – and that's what it's about – what we, the still-living-here, begin doing and do with our own hands, what appears in front of our eyes.

During socialism, I must admit, I was rarely tempted to go see a production at the National Theatre, let alone being part of the company. I was a fan of slightly different theatre venues – where I could witness alternative shows, in harmony with my young soul, shows inviting disasters. Years passed, though, and democracy is now a thing, and a director stepped on the stage of the National, along with a gang of actors whose appearance would probably be better rationalised by someone else, rather than me. Isn't it strange, isn't it magical that this gang of actors, educated in puppet theatre, could transform the energy that they were suppose to give to wooden marionettes, into such power that is capable to supply Main stage performances?!

Because – speaking as an actor and from a strictly professional point of view – there were those actors whose education was for another type of theatre. It's a tough job to perform and enlive through a piece of wood or a plastic figure – to that end you must, at full tilt and with minimum resource, build a character using not mere speech but also intonation and acrobatical skills, and in those diverse positions the talking head needs to step back and let other parts of the body participate, while the small space above the screen is supposed to represent a whole new metaphoric world. It seems that “representing” is something much bigger than I had imagined...

So, the company in question threw away the marionettes or hid them under the tongue like coins and just like Pinocchio, having overgone a complete transformation, jumped on Main stage at the National Theatre and, to me, it blew its entire horizon – a horizon which until then had existed and which created the feeling of a heavy oak furniture made of fibreboard. This image was cracked by the fiery dance of fantasy, it flew in the air with sparkles and dispersed above the yellow paves on levels that engage your senses and dismiss your ideologies. Those

fiery people – namely Lafazanov, Morfov, Teo, Plamen, Teddy, Maya, infected by them also Marius, who also embroiled other nicks and chochos and rachkos – they genuinely redressed the image of the National Theatre. Receiving a wild reaction from the audience, at that. Had they not received this wild reaction, exactly then and exactly there, now they would have been practicing their profession around small village screens or maybe – nowhere.

An answer was given to the eternal question for some people: what does the audience mean to the theatre process, is its role significant or it simply reacts to what happens on the stage? The answer is: it just blesses a process occurring in theatre at some point of time, it starts liking certain things and starts playing with the proposal from the stage – it applauds it and wants it reproduced – like a child that insists on listening again and again the same fairy tale in all its versions so that it can feel again its favourite things. Until it finally reaches a point of relief. The feeling that the audience is leading the theatre process is misleading. Quite the opposite, the audience has always been shepherded by the theatre and theatre is half a mile further, creating a longing for its own flavour and savour. In that sense the Bulgarian stage received a nice and energising injection – it even made the predator in the bushes move – an injection for life.

For twenty years the National Theatre has been full of life and the main culprit is Alexander Morfov. And if we glance at the more hidden side of this – the way he creates the productions with his company – you will recognise the ultimate author. He takes an existing object – a play, and widens its territory of impression. He opens and adds more and more meanings to what's been written, or as Walt Whitman sings:

Within me latitude widens, longitude lengthens.

This approach – not merely performing or interpreting – is the actual original contribution. And Morfov revealed through his impressionistic pathos that he can make this happen – clearly and infectiously.

I had read somewhere that the word “author” originates from the latin “auctor” meaning “expanding, increasing” – that's how the Romans used to call a commander who conquered new territories for the fatherland. That is exactly why – as a popular showmen would say – it is my honor and my pleasure to be a member of the – let's name it – Morfov's poetic cavalcade with which he widened the emotional territory of Bulgarian theatre.

I know from experience what goes on with the predator in the jungle: being provoked to jump but also lost in deep thoughts, he hesitates in the bushes whether to jump to chase away this pointless butterfly gang that knows no limits - neither meadow borders, nor forest borders. Or to jump and join them in their play and in his turn demonstrate plasticity and skill. *His Rhodus, hoc salta.*