



Irina Gigova, Novinar newspaper, 07.07.2008

ALEXANDER MORFOV:

THE ARTIST IS HELPLESS WHEN FACED WITH CYNICISM OF MONEY



Due to the explosions at the Sofia Airport the top director Alexander Morfov and his team from the company of the St. Petersburg's theatre "Komissarzhevskaya" spent about 18 hours at the Munich Airport. In the meantime here in Bulgaria no one knew where they actually were. The actors and the technical team were not stressed by the radiation environment here but were worried that the lost night was the only time they had to build the set for the production "A Midsummer Night's Dream" on the stage of the National Theatre – a unique glass rotunda, hanging above the stage with no support, or at least, at first sight. The tour was with three productions. The surtitles for the first one were never prepared, nor for the second one. And then, surprised by the lively reaction of the audience – that obviously still understands some Russian, the director decided that titles will not be necessary at all for the third show – "Baal" at the Army Theatre. He was right. The first ever performance of Brecht's rock opera was to be cancelled because of another obstacle: one of the leading actresses,

Margarita Bichkova, lost her voice and had to seek an emergent medical help for inhalations and injections. Nevertheless, during the performance there was not even a hint for any problem. We all understood what Morfov meant, saying that Russian actors are very disciplined and prefer to serve theatre in stead of expecting theatre to serve them.

Mr. Morfov, were you able to drive away the sobmer thoughts that probably filled your mind while waiting for your flight home?

We're calm now. The shows are running, the audience is enjoying. What we need now is more strenght to be able to endure this tour to the end. It's a tiring experience, we have shows almost every day, we travel far distances. As the saying goes, so far so good.

Did the exlosive situation upon your arrival triger you to formulate yet another bitter truth about our country's condition?

We are so used to everything that even such dangerous incidents have become nothing more that an average news to us. As if it is a completely normal event to have 20 tons of TNT exloding near Sofia or to have people killed in the neighbourhoods. I don't even think about it anymore – they've killed the other day, yesterday, they will kill tomorrow... This is seriously worrying, I feel it. But ultimately we were worried because of something else – so many efforts were invested by the Apollonia foundation to make this tour happen. At some point the threat of failing the first performances endangered the whole tour. Thank God everything is back to normal.

The ending of your “A Midsummer Night's Dream” is quite unhappy: the artists are simply neglected by the lords. Is this a universal finding or is it the bitter experience of a Bulgarian stage director?

It is universal. The artist has always been helpless when faced with cynicism and the endless riches of those who gained them illegally. Art is by no means an alternative to their way of life. The alternative to a lot of money can only be even more money. Of course, this finding is very personal to me. My attempts to make anything different at the National Theatre have always been met with false smiles of understanding: “The financial commission hasn't had any meetings this month, please, call next month.” or “It is now late to start a project within the present financial year, but it is still early for the next one...” I would even prefer the open cynicism to this conceited mocking.

In that sense, is staging in Russia a more satisfying experience?

In terms of scale, I would prefer Russia. Like, in Moscow the theatre where I'm invited is financed by American producers and the budget of a production is approximately 7 or 8 hundred thousand usd. Work is the same everywhere. Preparing, planning a production – it

always has its obstacles and eases; you consider them before starting rehearsals. Those are the same wherever I am.

Are audience's reactions different here and in Russia?

The difference is in favour of the Bulgarian audience. Maybe because of the expectation, the desire of many people here to see those Russian productions and to like them. The difference there is in the opportunity to choose. After all, there are more than 200 theatres in Moscow and the thrill is different – being on the same ‘market’ as many world-scale directors in a world cultural capital, this is very inspiring.

What about the press? Here, more or less, you can guess what will be published. Do the Russian media publish diverse opinions about your productions – from "Hosanna" to "crucify him"?

Yes. There are those conservative critics there as well who oppose free interpretations of classical texts. The difference is that Russian theatre criticism is criticism and not mere journalism. There are a lot of specialised editions that publish opinions on theatre and those opinions can be very helpful to read because sometimes in the course of the analysis you would find hints for interesting decisions. In that sense theatre criticism, even if negative, is very constructive. Although I've never encountered a negative publication that would impress me enough to remember it. I don't pay attention to the positive ones, I scan them, read them as a newspaper. My overall feeling is enough for me. To be honest, both negative and positive opinions are equally unhealthy.

Do you miss your muse Renny Vrangova when rehearsing abroad?

She is with me all the time, regardless if not on stage. I never remain without this muse. On the other hand, in theatre “Komissarzhevskaya” there are equally talented actresses and it was a pleasure for me to work with them. But Renny is Renny. We are connected by the stage, our two children, our family, but mostly – our love for each other.