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ALEXANDER MORFOV:

THIS IS NOT MY PRIME-MINISTER

The premiere of the latest production at the National Theatre Bulgaria will be on 1st Dec . The production is staged by the most successful Bulgarian director abroad Alexander Morfov. This is his second version of “One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest” by Ken Kesey after his production on the stage of “Lenkom” Theatre in Moscow. In the role of the rebel McMurphy is Deyan Donkov. He will rise against the system and the system’s dictator, nurse Ratched, in the role is the actress Renny Vrangova.



- We live in an absolute madhouse. Why did you decide to present us with yet another one, mr. Morfov?

- Because in the madhouse that we present something does happen – as if it changes the status quo of a madhouse and turns it into something of greater importance, into a core sense for our society. Yes, we live in a madhouse and it's full of people like nurse Ratched. We don't see people like McMurphy. It's a place to hide so that you won't have to admit your weakness. It's much easier to say "I'm ill." Than "I'm weak.". To be ill is a matter of diagnosis, that is, it's not your fault. To admit that you're weak – it's your own problem. In this production I value the most the process of that difficult search for your own "self". At the end McMurphy asks the rest of the patients "Well then, is it so difficult to just be yourself?" One of the patients answers "No, I don't know who I am anymore. I'm mentally challenged and I'm proud of it."

- How do you cope with that constellation of actors?

- I do believe in chances, those are even not mere chances to me. I chose Ivan Barnev while having a walk one evening and listing in my mind all the options for this role... Right in this moment he parked his bicycle in front of me, they had been walking on Rakovska street at the same time. Deyan Donkov is one of the reasons why I'm making this production. Working with Alexander Abdulov at Lenkom was a challenge because he is an amazing actor and person. When he passed away I had to restage the production with other actors and the efforts of fitting people into a skin that's not theirs were tremendous for me. Back then I said to myself that I should stage this play with Deyan. If, of course, I manage to tame him.

- Do you think that the average Bulgarian enters – as your McMurphy does, as “an elephant in a glass shop” and ruins the comfort of the western world?

- At this point I am seriously confused what exactly is the average Bulgarian. Regardless if he enters this western world as a thug, as a locomotive or with his muddy shoes – he used to have subconscious dignity of a true man, a manly man. He lost this quality somewhere, life broke him. When life is shaking you you lose all honour, dignity, moral. You can imagine what's left – ambition, vulgarity, instinct for self-preservation.

- Did life break you?

- I know this feeling quite well, I know what it means to fall. When looked from aside, people wonder: "What is he complaining from?" On the outside everything is quite well. But internal breaks, scars, are numerous, there are hundreds of them – the loss of perspective, of hope, fading hopes... You become a realist, this is not a pleasant experience nowadays.

- Is flying the escape for all Bulgarians from the local “cuckoo’s nest”?

- Flying for some, for others – falling.

- You were lucky to board on the flight for Russia. Now you are invited to work in Israel, Romania and Greece. Are you soon returning to Moscow?

- I have a lot of invitations in Russia but I need some rest. I'll return there next season.

- Why is that? Is it because of the failed production "Lion in the winter" at Lenkom? Wasn't there a scandal?

- No, it was a very polite agreement. There were some problems – my personal problems and problems of the theatre. That's why we postponed the production and then I came back here for treatment. They decided to continue rehearsing with Gleb Pampilov.

- You had blood pressure problems. The Bulgarian artist is not very concerned about his health, is he?

- Everything comes from the dull concept for machoism. How could I expose myself and show that I'm suffering? It's getting more and more complicated to admit who you are, what you are. But the mask cracks and there is a person underneath it, there is this 50-year old man, quite vulnerable. I've had blackouts, severe crises that I've told about no one, I've never searched help to overcome them. How can I admit that I'm actually very weak! We are men, tough Bulgarians, dudes... This crack is turning into an enormous slit that threatens to break the nation.

- The wild, unrelenting Morfov from 10 years ago is quite soft now...

- As Luka sais in the "The Lower Depth": "I've been beaten a lot, that's why I'm soft now."

- Has making art begun to endanger artists' health in the past years?

- The people in theatre that I know and love, are giving 100% of themselves. From 9 to 14h they rehearse, after that they continue to rehearse at home, in the evenings they perform until, let's say, 10h. Their salaries are approximately 500 lv. (250 eur) per month, while some of them have bank debts and already own 300 of those to the bank. That makes a total of 200 lv. per month to live with. Every single day is a total stress for them – what to do, how to survive. And I don't even mention family, bills, all the rest.

- Did you visit Hristo Murafchiev at the hospital? How is he?

- Obviously, from now on he has to limit his actions, his emotions... But this illness will not change his nature – on the second day after waking up from the coma he began giving orders to each nurse what to do. To want, to insist and to shout at everyone to give him the phone because he had to call the mayor, the Union of Bulgarian Actors, etc... Nothing has changed. Currently he is very nervous because he is not as phisycally agile as he used to be. We have to convince him to go slower.

- Can you go slower?

- I can go with only one production per year. I must finally start this “Ulysses”. I have had this dream for a long time – making a production Russian-style, rehearsing for 6 or 8 months and building the material day after day – experimenting, travelling, returning and starting from zero... To remove yourself from the burden of the end result, called premiere.

- Do you support the culture reform?

- I believe that the reform is held unadvisedly and is imposed by someone – having it happen at all costs, by Friday if possible. In reality, there is no reform, only cutbacks and walking orders, restraints and constrictions of perimetre. Reform means creating a new ecology that would permit something new to evolve. While the “new base” (*term used in the regulations of the reform acts*) is the former standard only three times decreased. I foresee a new reform after a couple of years, an even more severe one. We are on our way to reach the model of Italy or Greece – where there are only three state theatres. All the rest will be local, private or city companies.

- Is that bad?

- It is bad because Greece and Italy have a fully developed parallel structure for funding projects. They also have an almost fanatic attachment to their own history and theatre. We don't have those feelings for art, we are not the cradle of theatre, we are not Greece. Also, theatre has never been a priority here as it is with the Russians. So the suspension of this art from Bulgarian social life will not lead to any collisions. It will simply disappear.

- Some time ago you made a riot in theatre. Why are you silent, mr. Morfov, now - when culture is nearing the edge?

- A riot calls for a clear idea of its aim. Otherwise it would be an act of anarchy. It is a great responsibility to lead some people united for a cause and if I undertake this challenge I need to be absolutely confident where I'm heading. For the moment I can't find a horizon to aim at. Because I know that the state is exhausted. It's not clever to undertake such a movement only in the field of theatre, while healthcare and education are in decay as well.

- Are you a friend of the Prime-minister who recently applauded you production “Exiles” and then came backstage to greet you?

- No, to me the Prime-minister is a superficial guard who happened, by some accident, to take the leading role in Bulgaria. This is somewhat humiliating for the Bulgarian nation but it's a fact. I often think of myself as not part of this nation. The people who are engaged in this hellhole around us are not my people. The same person who throws his garbage from the balcony and listens to chalga, he chose this prime-minister. This is not my prime-minister. I have no choice but to tolerate the situation because the majority voted for him.

- Weren't you flattered by the acknowledgement by Boyko Borissov, applauding "Exiles", and by the promise for another 10 million for culture?

- This was a populist act. What money! Bullshit – words thrown to the wind – he never gave them, he'll never give them. I wonder how the people hasn't yet realised, haven't seen that this is a soap opera actor who loves seeing himself on TV, speaking seriously, but never doing anything.

- Is the Bulgarian free 21 years after the political change?

- The Bulgarian is as not-free as he used to be before this change. It is simply one system in the place of another. That's exactly the problem in our production – each system degenerates over time, it mangles itself, becomes a parody of itself because eventually it starts manipulating. Even communism is basically a good idea, an utopian idea according to which the man does not have a lord, everybody is entitled to what he's produced and all people are equal. But this degraded into totalitarianism. What we have here today is Balkan eastern pseudo-democracy – anyone is free to exploit the laws and his rights to his own comfort. We are very backwards from an evolutionary point of view and cannot expect from ourselves any innate humane approach. We are one step before the step where the democratic society appears.

- Aren't we ready for freedom?

- We're not. We are susceptible and we have thirst for totalitarianism. I am becoming more and more convinced that time has come for a military regime. For a junta that would introduce order. But just for a while – until this regime decides its time for it to collect the fruits of the balance it has introduced.