

Report: Forum, Theatre for the very Young
March 4 and 5, 2009
Bologna, Italy

Submitted by: Manon van de Water
Chair, ITYARN Board

FORUM: THEATRE FOR THE VERY YOUNG

An Assitej International project, organized by La Barraca-Testoni Ragazzi in collaboration with ITYARN International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network

I. FORUM “Theatre for the Very Young”

NOTE: *For full forum program, biographies, and abstracts of plenaries and keynotes see the website ityarn.org*

Overview:

This was the second international event that ITYARN collaborated on, and although smaller in scope, it was equally successful. The goal of the forum was to bring researchers and practitioners together through keynote addresses, paper presentations, round table discussions, and performance attendance. The forum was an option in the *International Festival of Theatre and Culture for Early Childhood: Visioni di Futuro, Visioni di Teatro . . . 2009* and was attended beyond expectation. Wolfgang Schneider, president of *Assitej International*, and Ivica Simic, secretary general of *Assitej International*, opened the forum, followed by a plenary session of three *Ityarn* researchers: Lise Hovik (University of Trondheim, Norway), Evelyn Goldfinger (University of Palermo, Argentina), and Gesche Wartemann (University of Hildesheim, Germany). The session was moderated by Gerd Taube (Kinder und Jugendtheaterzentrum, Germany), and Manon van de Water (University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA). The session proved a rich foundation for discussion throughout the conference, and indeed the festival.

The second day of the forum, March 5, included four keynote speakers: Charlotte Fallon (Théâtre de la Guimbarde, Belgium), Roberto Frabetti (La Barracca/Testoni Ragazzi), Graziano Melano (president Assitej Italy), and Anne Nøjgård (Teatret Lampe, Denmark). Wolfgang Schneider moderated the session, which showed the visions and reflections of these artists on their own and other’s work with theatre and the very young.

After lunch the group of forum participants was split into two, an English speaking and an Italian speaking one, for two roundtables moderated by Gerd Taube and Manon van de Water respectively. Each group had an hour and half discussion on theatre for 0-3 years old (Taube) and theatre 3-6 years old (van de Water). Each session had some invited panelists who started off the discussion (see program). The discussions were lively and touched upon a variety of topics.

In the last session of the day Taube and van de Water came together and, moderated by Simic, summed up the main issues that came up during their respective roundtables.

Gerd Taube observed 12 issues for further discussion that came up during his 0-3 roundtable. They are, in no particular order of importance:

1. what are the needs of the children for theatre in relationship to their other needs;
2. what is the social impact of theatre on children--art as social intervention;
3. how much is the artist inspired by his own childhood and how can that be translated to the contemporary world;
4. the usage of theatre: what is the potential of theatre to educate, since experience is the basis of learning;
5. what is extraordinary in theatre for the very young;
6. why theatre for this age group (0-3) and what kind of theatre;
7. notions of children: children as human beings vs. children as human becomings;
8. acceptance experience theatre for the very young as a given, not a question
9. consideration of interaction with the audience: before, during, after; performances based on interaction;
10. notion of two audiences: adults and children: who observes what and whom; difference performances in daycare centers vs. parents with children
11. what is the responsibility of the artist;
12. what children do we reach with this theatre form? To what extent is this a middle class phenomenon?

Manon van de Water added for her 3-6 roundtables that many of the issues Gerd listed above also impact theatre for 3-6 years old. She started out with the observation that much more exchange and discussion is needed and wanted by all who participated in the discussions. In her first roundtable, the English speaking one, the discussion was centered around the relationship between the Audience and the Art. Do we foremost need to keep the audience in mind or is our first responsibility to create a work of Art? Much of the research focuses on audience perception and pedagogy, versus the idea of making a piece for young audiences and further a focus on the art. Two different points of view emerged:

- Art is a communication of ideas, therefore the audience is central;
- Art as confrontation: the aesthetics are central

Nonetheless there was also consensus on what complicates the discussion: the inherent problem that the consumer for whom the art is intended is not the buyer.

This group also discussed the issue of responsibility of the artist, and the underlying notions that children are not adults, and that the adult theatre artist is not a child.

For her second roundtable, the participants of which consisted mostly of educators, van de Water started where she left off the first roundtable: What is the role of the story in theatre for the very young? Most of the group agreed that we tell through stories. How central it would be in theatre for the very young, turned out to be mostly an issue of preference: of theatre artists, such as Bruno Cappagli who prefers to make theatre based on stories and tell through stories, but can enjoy and appreciate theatre that communicates otherwise just as much; and of the teachers, many of whom prefer stories as it is their preferred way of teaching this age group. This group also added to the consumer/buyer dichotomy the notion of the theatrical background and education of the

buyer, harking back to Gerd's observation of theatre for the very young as a middle class phenomenon. They expanded upon the actor-audience interaction, noting that the children, over the years, contribute to refining the artists' skills and tools. (It needs to be noted here that this group consisted of artist panelists, Bruno Cappagli and Carlos Herans, who worked for this age group for years, and local teachers who "consumed" their productions for years). In conclusion, this group suggested that one possible way out of the art-pedagogy dilemma was to offer art for family audiences, and that if it is really Art, it can be enjoyed by a larger age range.

This ended the forum. Suggestions were made to continue these kind of forums, perhaps with more focused and smaller discussion groups. This may be taken up in one of the future ITYARN endeavors, as suggested below.

II. ITYARN BOARD MEETING

Following is a report from the small but intensive board meeting we had in Bologna, March 5, 2009, 9-11 am

Present were Gunnar Horn, Geesche Wartemann, Manon van de Water.

Several initiatives were discussed and we can confidently conclude that ITYARN is alive and growing.

Since we did not have a quorum to vote, all items below were discussion items and have been shared with the other board members.

A. LOGO

We agreed upon an immediate need for a logo, a visual image for networking.

Action has been taken to get some examples for approval. A final decision will be made during the next board meeting in June. This is the most pressing matter since we are asked to participate in a number of events (see below).

B. WEBSITE

Once we have agreed upon a logo the website will be redesigned accordingly. Following a logo Gunnar Horn will solicit input from the board. One area for improvement will be to make past postings easily accessible in an archive.

C. DISSEMINATION/VISIBILITY of ITYARN

Once we have the logo and the web we will make concerted efforts to disseminate information on ITYARN in the larger research world. We would do this initially by posting a message with the logo and the mission of Ityarn, as well as a new invitation to join the network.

D. YOUNG SCHOLARS

The German festival AUGENBLICK MAL! requested Ityarn to recommend three young scholars to be potentially invited to Berlin in May for the Next Generation Program. We

unanimously agreed upon three young scholars.

E. INVITATIONS

Please note that these invitations are only in discussion for now. Details will be posted on the website when plans proceed.

I. Linz, Austria. June 25- July 1, 2009.

Stephan Rable invited the ITYARN board to come to Linz. This would give ITYARN the opportunity to meet with Assitej International Board, and the 2011 Malmo/Copenhagen XVII Assitej Congress planning committee. Stephan would also like to set up an open dialogue between ITYARN and the Next Generation, as well as university students and professors. The theme of the festival is co-productions and ITYARN would contribute to an intercultural dialogue about intercultural work. This will also be the place where the logo is decided.

II. Kristiansand, Norway. Oct. 14, 15,16, 2009

Gunnar Horn invites ITYARN to come to Kristiansand to explore the relationship between Theory and Practice. The meeting would take the form of a symposium with a double keynote and organized discussion groups. It will be open to all ITYARN members to take part in and find new ways of research on and with practitioners.

III. Buenos Aires, Argentine, late July-early August OR late Oct.-early Nov. 2010

María Inés Falconi invites ITYARN to come to Buenos Aires in a meeting that would involve researchers from Argentine and will be connected to Buenos Aires University. Her aim is to stimulate and encourage Argentine Researchers.

She envisions a Forum similar to the one in Adelaide, with a keynote, plenary session, and working papers. Eight researchers will be invited, other researcher will come from across Argentina. The topic will be theatre for young people, 11 and older.

Because the goal is to reach Argentine and other Latin-American researchers there will be two operating languages, English and Spanish, and there will be translators.

IV. Copenhagen/Malmo Assitej XVII World Congress and Festival, May 20-29, 2011. We received an invitation to take part. Details will be discussed in Lintz.

III. PUBLICATIONS

Two publications contain a selection of the ITYARN papers presented at the inaugural conference in Adelaide, Australia.

The Assitej Book 2008-2009 contains a selection of papers as presented at the Conference. They include the three plenary papers (Cheela Chilala, "Shifting Aspects of Children's Theatre in Africa;" Geesche Wartemann, "Theatre as Interplay. Processes of Collective Creativity in Theatre for a Young Audience;" Manon van de Water, "Theatre for a Young Audience as Cultural Production Aesthetics Meaning and Material Conditions.") and four additional papers (Roger Bedard: "The Cultural Construction of Theatre for Children and a Young Audience: A Captive Eddy of Recursive Harmonies;" Joohee Park, "Ideologies of Theatre for a Young Audience in Korea during the 1920s and 1930s " Deidre Onishi, "Keeping the Lessons of Horror Alive: "Kamishibai" and Stories of Hiroshima"; and Sinje Kuhn: "to meet on equal

terms?!” Community-building processes in performances of Theatre for a Young Audience.” The selection was made by ASSITEJ International. This book has been published and is available through your national Assitej centers. For more information see www.assitej-international.org/

Youth Theatre Journal 23.1, 2009, will come out in May, and contains an edited selection of the inaugural conference papers. The papers, revised for publication and submitted by the individual authors, have undergone rigorous, blind review by Youth Theatre Journal’s editorial board before they were accepted for publication. A few submissions have been delayed and may appear in volume 23.2. This is not only the first issue of *Youth Theatre Journal* to be devoted to TYA and ITYARN, but also the first issue of the journal to be published by an international academic publisher, Routledge/Taylor & Francis, which means anyone can access these articles through their university or public library database. More information will follow when the journal has been published.

ITYARN Mission and Board

ITYARN is a collaboration between universities and ASSITEJ international to further research on professional theatre for young audiences (TYA) coordinated by Agder University (Norway), the University of Hildesheim (Germany), Arizona State University (USA) and the College of Letters and Science (University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA)

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www.ityarn.org

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