

Interplay Europe 2006
Festival of Young Playwrights

Schaan – Liechtenstein
Nenzing – Austria

18 –25 June 2006

The View from the foot of the mountain in Base Group (or should it have been Base Camp?)
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Sunday 18th June

I'm in the Alps – for the first time in my life ever – fantastic. I'm on a train from Zurich to Liechtenstein (well just outside actually – the last part of the journey has to be conducted by bus) and it's hot...really hot....mountainous, and beautiful with lakes, clear blue water, snow peaked mountain tops, wooden houses, and hardly any people, where are all the people? Even the 3 English playwright delegates I was travelling with have forsaken me, well actually it's the opposite, I've had to go on ahead so I'm not late for the tutor delegates meeting scheduled for 5.00pm local time – one of our party, Tinu missed her flight due to the wonders of the London tube system (no such problems with the trains in Switzerland I can tell you – printed timetable, with all your connections for both trains and buses, timed to the minute, for outward and return journeys, all on one ticket, all one price, all completely reliable, and all conveyed in English – easy, amazing, so smooth, so good, but what's all this speaking in English about, how am I going to brush up on my elementary standard German, if every time I say Guten tag to someone they smile at me sympathetically and then start talking to me in English?) so Hannah and Daniel have stayed in Zurich as a friendly welcoming committee for the tardy Tinu.

So where is Liechtenstein?

The official opening dinner and party tried to answer this very fundamental and universal question. First we marched to a field on a very steep incline, where we drank schnapps, re-arranged our clothing for increased ventilation around the neck area, and re-arranged our posture, so we were once again, upright on 2 legs and then 2 men dressed as local agricultural workers introduced us to some cows, wearing very loud cow bells, and then they sang to us in German. Good to hear some native tongues at last, but I couldn't understand a word, and the question remained unanswered.

Next we marched to the Park of Stein Egerta – very beautiful, very peaceful, and an exquisite surrounding. Where 2 men, this time dressed in evening dress and looking rather suspiciously like twin brothers of the agricultural workers, this time spoke to us in German, French, and English, all at the same time simultaneously translating everything themselves as they made their speech – brilliant and highly amusing. Question answered. Liechtenstein is not Switzerland, because Switzerland is over there, on the other side of those mountains there. Neither is Liechtenstein Austria, because Austria is on the other side of those mountains over there. So this is Liechtenstein, here. It's small, but very pretty, alpine, fresh, warm and welcoming....and then the clouds descended, the rain came, the night fell and we retired to bed ready for a week of work, duly welcomed and filled with anticipation.

Monday 19th June

More shenanigans with maps as each of the 42 delegates from 12 countries showed and shared and explained where they were from, with the rest of us. What appeared to be a simple, informative, and bonding exercise on paper, actually became quite an interesting political and historical, good – humoured act of provocation – there's something in the whole maps and geography, and drama I reckon – very interesting.

And then the work. Back to the wonderful Park of Stein Egerta, where weather permitting we would spend the rest of the week, sat in it's sumptuous grounds, in groups, debating the merits and pitfalls of each others' `work in progress' plays – whilst sipping water, knocking back gallons of coffee, and munching on copious amounts of fresh fruit. How good does it get?

I began our Base Group by asking all 10 members what we hoped to get out of this week. We duly responded in the following way:-

To meet many people from many countries. Text development.

Creativity, inspiration, and fresh ideas.

To know what my generation's like – a universal feeling for now, to be a contemporary writer for all Europeans.

To get energy to write, to be inspired.

To read what everyone in Europe is writing about. To discuss the play and to see how to bring something new to it.

To discover what aspects of the play are new and to find new ways of communicating and writing.

To discuss the play and to find out how other people in Europe tell their stories and write specifically for theatre. To find out if we have to tell stories and to discover how to best use and utilise the medium of theatre.

To discover what is happening outside of Turkey. To explore the relationship and connection between writing and acting on stage – how des this relationship work? To find out what young people and actors want from writers. To find out how to improve my play.

To meet other writers and improve by reading other people's plays.

To gain insight to different theatre traditions and cultural approaches to theatre.

After dinner I officially declare our Base Group as the Base Group with a Heart. Others go off in search of an identity for their Base Groups.

Tuesday 20th June

Our cultural highlight and outing was a performance in English of `Sparrow Fritz' written by Rudolf Herfurtner and performed by Theater Katerland, Winterhur from Switzerland. A charming and endearing piece of theatre about overcoming incredible odds, aimed at the younger members of the community.

Wednesday 21st June

We crossed the border (by coach) and went into Austria. Let us not for get this festival was being co-hosted by the town of Nenzing in Austria – however, we couldn't all fit into this tiny but perfectly proportioned town – hence the need to occupy and be resident in Schaan.

Nenzing provided us with the opportunity to conduct some one to one tutorials with the playwright delegates, allowing the tutors to give valuable intensive and exclusive time and attention to individual writers. We also watched another 2 shows and took part in a debate about theatre for young people and the next generation of new writers, where they are coming from, what they are writing about, and what's the current landscape and climate like for those people hoping to make a career out of writing. Recognition and identity seemed to be major issues with most of the writers present.

Thursday 22nd June

Hasan Erkek an Associate Professor in theatre at Anadolu University in Eskisehir, Turkey gave us the low down on the history, origins, and future of Turkish theatre, complete with accompanying notes and dvd, while Festival Director Henning Fangauf from Frankfurt in Germany gave us a whistle stop tour and overview of the current new writing scene in Germany. Two very contrasting yet rich and promising cultural perspectives. As the union of Europe grows ever stronger and expansive I feel it is imperative we feed and nourish our

writers as cultural and political commentators, critics, archivists, soothsayers, but most importantly purveyors and creators of the thrill, excitement, and entertainment of live dramatic performance.

In the evening some of us went to Schaan City Hall to watch Cinevox Junior Dance Company from Switzerland perform a series of dances from their current repertoire. I passed on this one, preferring instead to conduct another couple of one to one tutorials and then limber up and warm up for the proposed after show dancing party\discotheque - note decks were at the ready in the theatre foyer. Why were we partying and dancing so early, we were barely halfway through the programme? I don't know, but after a relatively slow start, a brilliant time was had by everyone brave enough and mad enough to grace the dance floor – the decks were overridden by a live and direct link to i-tunes ensuring the latest and up to the minute hits were at our disposal and delight – we danced, swayed, pirouetted, Latin, salsa, Slavic, danced in pairs, danced alone, danced en masse, congoed, flamencoed, limboed –you name it we attempted it until the early hours of the morning. Brilliant. Glad I'd done my homework first.

Friday 23rd June

My final day and an early start – great. Glad I danced the night and the early part of the morning away – who needs sleep when you're an international playwright's tutor anyway?

Ascent of the Alps then. This was billed as a day of 'Nature and Inspiration' and indeed it was. Approximately 1800m above sea level we traversed an old smuggler's path up the mountain, through alpine pastures, where at the summit, we crossed from one country into the next, from Liechtenstein into Austria, stopping for the obligatory photograph at the sign post, gingerly straddling the barbed – wire fence with one foot in Liechtenstein the other in Austria. Before going down the mountain on an old alpine path to eat traditional Austrian food, hear poetry, and tie poems to the trees, listen to a traditional Austrian brass band, in traditional Austrian dress, and make short Base Group presentations with extracts of work from people's plays on the side of the mountain - the freshest open air theatre I have ever experienced – finally ending the excursion with more schnapps (and appropriate re-arrangement of clothing in the neck area for increased ventilation, and re-arranged our posture, so we were once again, upright on 2 legs) and metres and metres of fresh meat and savouries served up in a makeshift buffet in a cowshed....yum. On the way back to Schaan I reflected on, flotsam, fauna, mountain streams with fresh icy cold water, ice rink-sized discs of snow, defiant against the warm radiant sun, goats with cow-bells, cows with....cow bells, electric fences (which at least 2 members of our party had to test if they were really that shocking...and yes they were...ouch!!!) the amazing and extreme pungency of wild garlic (I'm sure I can still smell it) birds, bees, butterflies, the panoramic view, the mountainside, the mountain top, cross cultural couplings, cross cultural debates, cross cultural perspectives, cross cultural influences, cross cultural alliances, getting lost in the moment, getting lost quite literally, being found, bonding, listening, learning, appreciating, quiet, clouds, descent, ascent, amazing.

Thanks must of course go to:-

- 1\ The towns of Schaan and Nenzing for having us.
- 2\ Georg Biedermann – President ASSITEJ Liechtenstein and Festival Coordinator - and his brilliant and scarily well-organised and accommodating staff team at the Theater Am Kirchplatz, Liechtenstein
- 3\ Sabine Wollgens – on behalf of the Luaga & Losna Association, Nenzing
- 4\ Henning Fangauf – Festival Director – and major driving force and lynchpin behind, in front of, and around Interplay Europe
- 5\ And finally.....but by no means least - The vision that is Interplay.

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