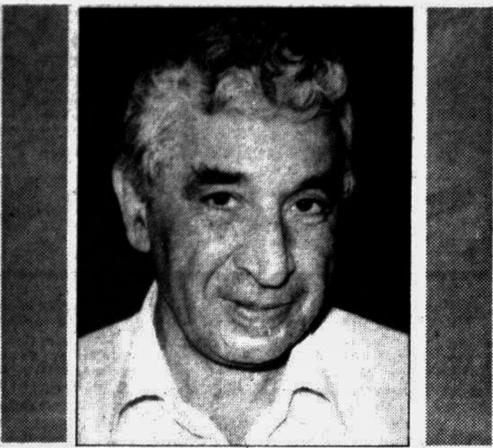


# LIMELIGHT ON THE INTERNATIONAL THEATRE SCENE

by Rahat Fahmida



Director of Cyprus Centre for International Theatre Institute and president of Cultural Identity and Development Committee, **NICOS SHIAFKALIS** is very much interested in the theatre work of the different cultures.

**The Daily Star (DS):** What is cultural identity? And what is the function of your committee?

**Nicos Shiafkalis (NS):** It is vast, you cannot define it in a few words. But in order to give a first impression, we work on a cultural environment movement. We want to preserve the cultural environment. Because, as there is pollution of the environment, there is also, I believe, pollution of culture — with the invasion we have from the satellite, and all these by-products of sub culture. So we believe that, we should preserve and develop the theatre mosaic of the world. So we are very much interested to work with the different theatre cultures of every region. And we are trying our best to promote it and get as much benefit as we can from the different theatre methods and work in all the regions of the world.

**DS:** For how many years have you been with theatre and how do you think that theatre helps in international understanding of the people?

**NS:** It is known that the theatre can really play a very important role in the social development and also in understanding between people. This is also the function of International Theatre Institute, founded after the Second

World War, in Czechoslovakia in 1948. It has set as its target to be a tool in the hands of UNESCO for understanding and peace between the nations. And our work as a cultural identity committee is to assist and to achieve this aim. Of course, theatre is a language that can talk to people without propaganda. It makes people aware of the friendship between the nations, cooperation, if it is done in the proper way.

I have been with theatre for about 40 years now. I used to act before but now I concentrate more on directing.

**DS:** Who are your favourite directors?

**NS:** This is a big question. I respect the work of many directors, well known directors — Peter Brooke, Rodovskii. And I would say some new names, I will say that in the recent years I see a good fortune for Ralph, and mention may be made of Peter Slyné of Germany. Ingmar Bergman is a great director. I think this answer would be a list of big names. But I think today there are talented young directors in all countries who are quite viable and they are doing a good work in the theatre.

**DS:** Thank you very much for sparing your time.

Bangladesh Centre of International Theatre Institute recently organised a seminar on 'Impact of international interaction in contemporary theatre', in collaboration with the International Theatre Institute (ITI) Communications Committee. Four of the most well-known directors from different regions of the world expressed their views on 'theatre — as a performing art', in an exclusive interview with 'The Daily Star'.

**DS:** What role has theatre played in Thailand earlier and also during the recent Democratic movement?

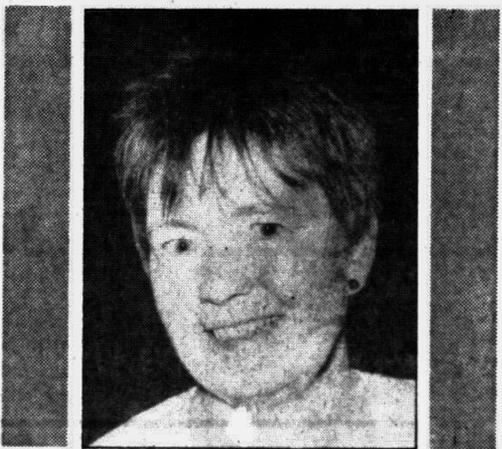
**CSP:** We understand now in Thailand that drama and theatre come from true tradition. One is the court drama, as you know that Thailand is a Kingdom, and the other is the folk theatre. This court drama has been contemporised. Before they were only performed in the palace. Now, as the government has promoted them to perform, common people can see them at ceremonies. This court drama, usually is a play like Ramayana — you know, and other stories. So in a way court drama which are contemporised has been able to enhance the identity of the Thai culture. The folk drama, which are performed usually in the villages, they are still very popular and they still have mass appeal. Because this form, such as 'likay', is a kind of 'jatra' — dance and songs also accompany dialogues; and another form is the puppet theatre 'nangyan'. All this can

comment on contemporary problems, so they are related to the people. For example, last year, during the Gulf War, one performer talked about the war. This year during the democratic movement against the military government in Thailand, they joked about the military regime. So these are the relevance of the folk theatre.

We must understand there is another position of the Western drama. These were imported. Now a days in Thailand many new play-wrights are coming up. This is good in a way, you should write your own plays.

Children's plays are also an important section. In Thailand children's theatre is very active. These children theatre perform and tour in rural areas, like in Bangladesh. It is important for this theatre to go to the country side, especially because of the deprived children, many of whom have no opportunity to go to the theatre.

**DS:** Thank you.



**MARTHA VESTIN** has been with theatre ever since she was a child. Her whole life is dedicated to theatre. A member of the cultural identity committee of ITI, dealing mainly with theatre journal. Her specialisation at present is theatre direction. Vestin is now working in Sweden and, has worked for a long time in African countries. This is her first time in Bangladesh.

**The Daily Star (DS):** What role do you think theatre plays in international interaction and international communication?

**Martha Vestin (MV):** Well it can play many roles. Theatre is more difficult to work with internationally compared to film, which is distributed all over the world, for good or for bad. In that way we have very heavy influence of films on our culture. For example, the influence of American films. It does change the value system. Whereas in theatre, it is much more to deal with cultural identity of the people. So, it is difficult in regard to cultural exchange, as it is more specific. On the other hand, I think it is more important, because it gives us a chance to understand so much more about others by looking at theatre. Even when you see theatre of your own country, you understand about another character — how they think, how they feel, how they react and so on. So, it is a way of mutual understanding.

**DS:** As you have worked in African countries, what role do you think theatre plays in different movement of the third

world countries?

**MV:** Well, theatre can be so much more instrumental, so much more important, especially where there is no television, the literacy rate is rather low — and in the villages there might not even be a radio or electricity, there the moving theatre groups, theatre animators can play a very important role in using this performing art in a traditional way to raise issues that are important to everyone. This can be and is done in a very special way, dealing with very specific matters in a particular village. Problems can be discussed and revealed in theatres in a more liberal way, where the people are being able to discuss and criticise their situations. People tend to be more open in theatres, whether as actors or even as audience. They are frank, than if you call them up for a discussion of any sort. In these group discussions it becomes difficult for everyone to say what they think.

Through theatre it is easier to speak the truth, be provocative wherever and whenever necessary. It is one of the best ways of communication.

**DS:** Thank you

**CHUA SOO PONG** is a well-known theatre director from Thailand. He has worked for different types of theatres over the years.

**The Daily Star (DS):** How far are you conversant and interested regarding our different forms of theatre?

**Chua Soo Pong (CSP):** I saw jatra last year and I really like it — it is the traditional theatre. Because jatra is so spontaneous and they can comment on the current situation, so, it makes the theatre relevant to the society. It reveals the problems of the people — it is very important.

I have also seen that there are many community theatres. And the community theatres go to the countryside and perform in the open air. These are very important, because you only can perform drama in a theatre building and make it a very high price entertainment, but then many people would not be able to see it. That is why I think street theatre is very important. And in this area, I think, Bangladesh has done a very good job.

I have seen many perfor-

mances last year when I came to the ITI seminar — I was very impressed by the performances, in term of the writing, in term of their staging, and you have excellent designers.

When Bangladesh theatre group went to Korea about ten years ago — it was very successful. The Koreans did not know Bengali, but they could appreciate drama. That is because it is conveying the hopes of the people, their problems and also their dreams. So, you know, these are universal. Hence people can appreciate those issues that are expressed in the drama regardless of their cultural differences.

**DS:** So, this seminar for which you are here — 'Impact of International Interaction of contemporary theatre' — how do you see the role of theatre in the betterment of international relations?

**CSP:** I think, the problem now is, we in the Asian countries, have translated many

## Secret of Enamels

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open kilns in refractory earth muffles, at a temperature of about 850 to 900 degrees Celsius.

### Dazzling Technique

Cloisonne enamel can be made on gold, copper, silver



Sailing up the river Lakshya.

or bronze. The 'cloisonnes' (partitions) or ribbons of metal are soldered onto a thick metal plate. Then the enamel is placed, a drop at a time, between the vertical partitions. The object might have to be fired a dozen times to obtain the visual depth and the vitrified splendour of the plate.

The technique of raised

enamel consists in creating hollows in the metal plate, using an engraver's point, a chisel or acid. The enamel is then put inside the hollows. Each layer of enamel is fired.

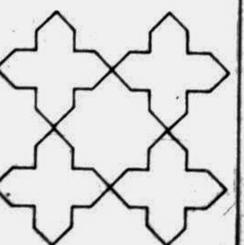
In the case of painted enamel, 'the plate to be decorated is entirely covered with several layers of opaque, opalescent, transparent or translucent enamel and these are fired in turn with the most delicate ones being done last.'

This dazzling re-invented technique is used with great imagination and inexhaustible originality. Mirande's themes are religious as well as mythological or folk art. Don Quixote cantering on his Rossinante next to 'Puss in Boots' from Perrault's tales, a merry clown, Christ, standing next to Harlequin from the Commedia dell'Arte, a sumptuous red cello (Mirande's reds exist nowhere else), next to a squirrel nibbling nuts in a forest or a lizard nonchalantly playing dominoes.

Mirande's stained-glass windows show the same

eclecticism and he does not hesitate to put Harlequin's head next to windows inspired by the Bible or the gospels in a church, or migrating birds in a clinic.

Mirande has exhibited his work all over Europe: in Geneva, Brussels, Luxembourg, Berlin, Bonn, Munich, Cologne, Frankfurt, Mainz, Treviso, Copenhagen, London and Oxford. He has also made tabernacles and crucifixes for altars in several churches in France and in Switzerland as well as mosaics for monasteries and schools.



**DR. RUSTOM BHARUCHA** of India is a world famous theatre director. He is equally famous for his book — 'Theatre and the World', which is regarded very highly all over the world. It was fortunate enough to know his views on just a few aspects of theatre.

**The Daily Star (DS):** What do you understand by cultural exchange?

**Rustom Bharucha (RB):** We have talked a great deal about the exchange of culture. We have been talking about it for a long time. But it is not a very innocent subject — a subject that has been placed in the historical context. And that is what my writings in the last few years are about — how do we place culture within certain context, so that they are not just materials, which can be used in an arbitrary way, transported elsewhere in an absurd manner. Basically I started thinking, as it often happens, — you need your country, and you begin to see how your country is for the first time, you begin to see how your country is represented. I was in the Yale School of Drama, I was basically trained as a kind of in-house critic, — thinking, conceptualising theatre. Then, I began to realise how India was constructed, and there are certain images of India that are very dominant. I belong to Bengal. Calcutta is where I grew up. But then, I was away in States for about 10 years. And I began to question this whole process of cultural exchange. It was not just the theoretical thing, because I worked practically in theatre. Apart from writing, I also direct, and teach. And basically, I started to test my own ideas, and provide counter to the existing theories to my theatre work.

One of my projects, which I spent three years on, was called the request concept project. This is a one woman mute play, written by a German writer Kroetz. It is basically the life of a working woman — one evening when she comes home from work. It is a play that documents her everyday actions and gestures relating to cooking, eating, watching television, listening to radio programmes etc. It culminates very suddenly in suicide. And this suicide, in the German text, was meant to be a gesture in a kind of protest against mechanisation in which this world has advanced. Well, I and a German colleague of mine took this very problematic text and we adapted it in about six Indian cities over three years.

It was accepted very very critically and also deeply. Because in each of the cities we worked with a woman belonging to that city who interpreted the life of this woman, and the gestures of this woman, in a very personal way. In Calcutta we worked with Usha Ganguly, Bombay we did it with Sulabadesh Pandey, in Madras with Chandra Lekha — the great dancer and radical thinker. We were not just exploring different contexts, we were also exploring different forms, different languages in theatre, by which this inner world of this woman could be dramatised. So in Madras, for example, Chandra used her own adaptation of Bharat Nathyam to represent this realistic text, which was a very innovative way of doing it. So after that, I am now based in India, and I continue to travel and search for principles of translation in different cultural contexts within India.

## Expo '92 puts pep into Seville

### GERMAN PAVILION A GREAT ATTRACTION

Rolf Gortz writes from Seville, Bon



Expo '92: The German pavilion in Seville

Photo: INP/Bundesbildstelle

**T**HE World Exhibition in Seville has enlivened the city. Millions of inland and foreign visitors have already come to the Expo-site in the Andalusian capital. The German pavilion in Spain is "cheerful, open and receptive". It was designed by architect Harald Muhlberger according to the guide-lines set out by Hans-Gerd Neglein, commissioner general for German participation. Richard von Wetzacker, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, praised the importance of the cultural contribution as part of our reality. To date, the German pavilion has been the most visited in Seville.

There is not even need of a special entrance to the 70-foot open facade. A glass-string curtain invites visitors to enter at whatever point they wish. This freedom, and the matching architecture of a suspended roof structure with a no wall support prompted Spanish newspapers to pro-

claim: "One of the best at Expo '92".

The pavilion of a nation should portray its people in their true context, timewise and culturally. And because this does not always have to be deal serious, visitors to the German pavilion are greeted from afar by the buffoons and picaaros from world literature. Till Eulenspiegel, Doctor Faustus, or Don Quixote. The 15,000 to 20,000 daily visitors to the pavilion experience the German contribution as something visionary rather than didactic. With a cunning use of mirrors, a massive, electrically controlled chunk of the Berlin Wall constantly repeats its shameful erection and its demolition amidst cheers. Many onlookers applaud the spectacle.

The "Nature and World theme" is highly impressive. As if painted by Caspar David Friedrich, a powerful oak behind glass turns green and then decays into the garbage of

**DS:** Which form of theatre from this region would have a good international impact?

**RB:** It is very difficult to say. Today the kind of theatre that is making an international impact — you have to see it in a political context, decided by certain people who make decisions well, that means those who are not knowledgeable or concerned about the culture. So I am very critical about the whole decision making process which goes into making those big international events. This is what I have studied in a lot of details. And I would say, what sells, if you want an international impact, is not necessarily what is good.

It is something with a spectacular quality. For example, today, the theatre exports from India, have to be of a spectacular nature. They have to be exotic. They have to, whether it is a true folk tale, or some heroic drama, or some martial art movement or flamboyant costumes, or whatever — but the fact is, it should be spectacular, colourful. And this is certainly a 'Tamasha'. This is kind of, I would not call it art or even entertainment, as even entertainment has its own dignity. It is a kind of spectacle really, that is something we have to question very very seriously. Because if we don't question it, then we are going to allow ourselves, and our cultures to be commodified. And that is not what we want. We don't want to present ourselves to the world through these superficial commodities. We would like to represent ourselves with more dignity and self-respect.

**DS:** Till now, who are your favourite directors?

**RB:** I have a great respect for a French director called Patrice Chereau, because the kind of historical vision he brings to his interpretation with certain classic.

It is really the honesty of work that ultimately matters. I don't like directors who put their trade mark on a production. But I like directors who work with actors — from whom we are able to get a certain kind of truth. It really moves me. If I feel that the director has genuinely worked with the actor, involving the actors creativity and he is somehow able to project that creativity, in an immediate, direct and honest way, I would say that is a director I am fond of.

**DS:** Thank you very much for sharing your views with us.

visitors from nearby Seville can still recall the Zeppelin's stopover. It caused a great sensation when it departed from outside the city gates on its first transatlantic flight in the year 1929. All the visitors clamour through the interior of the partly reconstructed airship, past Lilienthal's glider, to experience the 'dream of flying'. Although the airy, suspended pavilion will be dismantled on conclusion of Expo '92, the Siemens Tower opposite is to remain as a development centre of southern Spain. Its architecture tries to achieve the impossible by "surrounding" the basic circular form of the building with a square. This may well have been inspired by 'das El des Kilumbus', i.e. a pat solution. After all, a large part of Expo '92 is devoted to Columbus.

Visitors gaze in amazement at a solar-powered protective shield which, with the precision of a sun-dial, moves around the pavilion. Thousands of plexiglass prisms reflect the direct insolation, hold back the infrared rays and only let diffused daylight through.

"One cannot forecast the future, but you can invent it". This aphorism by physiologist John Scott Haldance not only fired the imagination of the solar architects of the Siemens Tower, but also the creators of the film-symphony, a video-cocktail consisting of pictures, sounds and music. Young master pupils from European film academies produced a film entitled "Evolution of Networks".

"This world exhibition is test of Spain's efficiency", said Spanish King Juan Carlos in his opening address at Easter 1992. And, indeed, these words highlight the leitmotif of an even which will go down as one of the most expensive and impressive in the country's history. On a site covering some 530 acres, 111 countries from five continents will be displaying till 12 October 1992 what the "beautiful new world" has to offer.