

## The Nature of the „BEAST”

Petre-Gabriel COVEȘANU\*

**Abstract:** Pre-adolescent kids love stories and do not accept deviations or interruptions in the narrative line. They are connected to "life" and immediately condemn the lack of sincerity. The very young audience is different from an adult or teenage audience. It must be understood and educated. "Children are the future" is not a cliché but a reality. If the psychological mechanisms and springs that make them work are analysed and used intelligently in a show with a complex universe, theatre can create a leap in consciousness for new generations. Building techniques must be developed and improved in such a way that the performing arts regain their vital role in the rebirth of a nation.

**Key words:** Theatre, children, show, imaginary

### 1. Introduction

„What I see in Nature is a magnificent structure that we can comprehend only very imperfectly, and that must fill a thinking person with a feeling of "humility.”<sup>1</sup>

As the manager of „The Ion Creangă Theatre”, I can address a children audience before the start of a show. I greet them calmly and easily, but with a smile. The answer comes immediately: "Good morning!" I am answered in chorus, although in some cases the teacher disapproves, but the children are curious to see where things go. I say, "Good morning!" again, much louder this time. The children are smiling. Free to make noise! “Hello!” they shout. And the ice broke...

Once, overcome with excitement, I continued to ask them: "Do you think the Universe is magical?". A wave of "YESSSSSSSSSS" followed my question, leaving me without a second to catch my breath. If I were to ask the same question to a class of teenagers, the reaction would be completely different. Total silence or maybe a raised eyebrow followed by a critical look.

---

\* PhD student at George Enescu National University of Arts, Manager of Ion Creangă Theatre Bucharest

<sup>1</sup> Albert Einstein, *The world as I see it*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publisher, 2021

## THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

---

Everyone would be asking "Who is this idiot?" Most young people after the age of twelve develop a sense of self-awareness. Any enthusiasm or desire to join the "game" is carefully guarded. If I were to do the exact same thing with a group of adults, the response would be radically opposite to the little ones. Some would be embarrassed or self-conscious and decide not to react at all, at best others would show some generosity and a willingness to get into the spirit of the entertainment.

How do children differ, what do they respond to, what makes them detach and how do they react when faced with a story played out for them?

„The whole audience – hundreds and hundreds of children – were creating a storm to blow the Great Slick back out to sea and save the creatures living in a rock pool. What made it so fantastic was that you could feel that they were all totally into what they were doing. They were all fully involved and willing to play their part in the survival of those small rock pool characters. It really was the most powerful and moving experience. The big lesson was that if you play it for real, if there is no hint of tongue-in-cheek, then you will gain the respect and interest of the young audience because they are willing to be involved.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, I believe that studying children's behaviour is vital for theatres dedicated to them.

### **2. Direct communication and children's sincerity**

The trip to theatre is special and quite rare here, a treat, sometimes even a day off from school. Children like to participate in joint activities. Their expectations are high. The stage becomes like an arena upon which their eyes and minds are fixed. It's big and everything is immediate and therefore more important and interesting than a TV screen and much harder to ignore or turn away from. All five senses are stimulated simultaneously, something that technology will never be able to replace or even compensate for.

---

2 Stafford, Adam, *The Selfish Shellfish*, London, University Press, 1994

## THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

---

The excited chatter from the audience before the curtain rises paves the way for something special, an event in their lives. Actors feel and register that. If they manage to respond with the same energy every show will be different.

At the same time, the cuteness of children should not delight a theatre person, on the contrary. With this kind of viewer, they must be on guard all the time. Always present "here and now". They must be extremely alert, accepting and adapting to the reaction of this very young audience. The lights are dimming. Black. A huge wave of emotion accompanied by coyotes pierces the darkness. The children's joy is contagious, and they take it from each other, transmitting it to the actors as well. In a good show, they quickly enter the story, helping or trying to hinder the action as the show unfolds. They like to take sides with the positive characters and identify with the comic ones and get angry at the behaviour of a negative character. The debate is in their hands, and it happens now, in the community, out loud. The reasonings are fair and extremely agile. Communication of group decisions is immediate. Children are direct and sanction or approve an important action on the spot. Their lack of inhibition and open enthusiasm makes them a much more interesting audience than the adult audience. But their ability to instantly assess what's happening on stage and respond can be unsettling to the practicing actor. If the latter is inexperienced, it can divert the meaning of a scene, pleasing children, who, unhappy that the story is no longer evolving, will get bored and try to take over the reins of the show. Yes. Correct. Immediately admonish a leader who is not leading them in the right direction, in the right sense. And harshly punish "Why are your pants torn?" "Why are you lying!" "Can't you hear?" or worse, if the show doesn't spark their imagination, a wave of harsh and direct complaints is unleashed: "You're ugly!", " You are fat!" or "You're boring!"

Children have strong instincts, not yet dulled by society, and immediately detect when an actor is fake. They don't sit there and think, like adults, "This actor is not being honest" or "This actor is playing poorly." They just stop. I decide that what's going on isn't "alive" and that until something more enjoyable comes along, I might as well do something else.

# THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

---

## 3. How do we tame the "beasts"?!

The very young viewer immediately enters the imaginary of the story. Children prefer to be active rather than passive participants. They generate a kind of energy and electricity in the hall that passes through the stage every time.

What are the common characteristics of the child viewer?

- ⇒ Everyone needs stories. It is the essential element of the evolutionary process of the individual.
- ⇒ They love justice and defend the truth.
- ⇒ They like to be scared to overcome their fear.
- ⇒ They have perfect logic and notice inconsistencies immediately.
- ⇒ They are unpredictable for adults.

This type of viewer comes to the theatre under four types of circumstances:

- brought by the school or kindergarten, during the week, which means that the viewer came without expressing his desire, he was brought.
- brought by parents, during the week, with or without their consent.
- brought by parents, during the week, after school, as a reward.
- brought by parents, in the weekend or on a specific occasion. In this case the audience includes much more adults, mostly parents, that often has an inhibiting effect on their children. Additionally, babies in arms of their parents or very young children can be irritating distractions.

I believe that the best approach to a children's theatre performance is to apply the technique developed by Michael Chekhov<sup>3</sup>, both in terms of acting and in the way of making a story. What his method uses is the conscious return to the child stage, disinhibiting the body and freeing it from the daily routine, regaining the physical and cognitive functions we were born with. The body

---

3 Chekhov, Michael, *To the actor*, Bucharest, Nemira Publishers, 2017

# THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

---

is a membrane that must vibrate to external stimuli, which is essential in relation to the lively and spontaneous nature of the little viewer.

„To create by inspiration, one must become aware of one’s own individuality.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, a character is born organically and will remain flexible but constant throughout the story, the same but in permanent transformation in relation to external stimuli. An actor who understands what stage truth means and how the human body works, his working tool, will be able to give birth to characters that children will immediately accept, being in the sense of the story. Going forward, a group that can trigger the imaginary, as Chekhov proposes, will always keep the child viewer connected. „The same fundamental laws that govern the universe, life on earth, and man, as well as the principles that bring harmony and rhythm to music, poetry, and architecture, are subject to the Laws of Composition which, to a greater or lesser extent, can be applied to any performance.”<sup>5</sup>

## 4. Conclusions

I believe that a live show, coming from the creative imagination of a group of actors, can create an important experience for children. The "beasts" should not be tamed but carried as often as possible through the fascinating world, full of interpretation and wisdom of fairy tales.

„GO AWAY BEAST!” cried the little girl in her mother's arms.”<sup>6</sup>

## Bibliography

- Chekhov, Michael, *To the actor*, Bucharest, Nemira Publishers, 2017  
Chekhov, Michael, *To the actor*, (p. 85). Taylor and Francis. Kindle edition  
Einstein, Albert, *The world as I see it*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishers, 2021  
Purves, Libby, *How NOT to raise a perfect child*, London Coronet, 1999  
Reason, M., *The young audience: Exploring and enhancing children’s experiences of theatre*, Staffordshire, Trentham Books, 2010  
Stafford, Adam, *The Selfish Shellfish*, London, University Press, 1994

---

4 Chekhov, Michael, *To the actor*, (p. 85). Taylor and Francis. Kindle edition.

5 Chekhov, Michael, *To the actor*, (p. 93). Taylor and Francis. Kindle edition.

6 Purves, Libby, *How NOT to raise a perfect child*, London, Coronet, 1999

# THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

---

## Articles

Eluyefa, D. (2017). Children's Theatre: A Brief Pedagogical Approach, ArtsPraxis, Volume 4 Number 1. Available online at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330855424\\_Children's\\_Theatre\\_A\\_Brief\\_Pedagogical\\_Approach](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330855424_Children's_Theatre_A_Brief_Pedagogical_Approach)

Gardner, L. (2013). Why children's theatre matters. Available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2013/oct/23/why-childrens-theatre-matters>