

Dear Friends,

So here is # 6—our look at what's happening in Hungarian theatre through the lens of our partners at *Színház Magazine*. Tamás Jászay once again is our reporter and this one is filled with good news.

Here, he takes a look at:

- this past December's dunaPart 4
- Enikő Eszenyi's *Hamlet* at the Vig Theatre
- Béla Pintér's new piece at the Katona József Theatre
- Róbert Alföldi's two premieres

And from our side, two true theatre pioneers in Albuquerque write about their upcoming collaboration with Stereo Akt - an upcoming ABQ version of *Promenade*.

I've talked to some of the 20+ US theatre folk who were at dunaPart 4, and while I had already seen a good bit of the theatre work shown (there were both a theatre and a dance track this year), I sorely missed seeing Mundruczó's *Imitation of Life*, Viktor Bodo's *Diary of a Madman*, and Martin Boross' *Addressless*.

Enikő's *Hamlet* was very familiar to me—I had seen rehearsals in May, caught a run of the first act a week before it opened in late September, and then finally saw the 10th performance in early October. A wonder! Designer Csaba Antal was at his best (he has worked in the US with János Szász at both ART in Cambridge and at Arena in DC.). It was a sure bet that the young Vidnyánszky would stun (and he did). And I can confirm Tamas' take on Géza Hegedüs D.'s *Claudius*: it was revelatory.

Both Béla and Róbi continue to astound—they have been in the national and international spotlight for multiple decades, and still deliver fresh, exciting, nuanced and important theatre.

And things are afoot on this side of the Atlantic: when Stereo Akt comes to Albuquerque to start on phase 1 of the *Promenade* project, they are scheduled to play their piece, *Etiquette* at the Revolutions Festival, with three performances on 17 and 18 March. I've missed this piece the last three times I was in Budapest, so I'm not letting this one go by. I have old friends, besides Rich and Sandy there—I'll finally get to see the piece.

Finally, two pieces of news:

- We just confirmed support for continuing our partnership with *Színház* and the *Hungarian Letter of News* through 2018. So, six more issues will be coming your way.
- And the “you”: we are now sending CITD’S three publications (HLN, the *Russian Notebook*, and *DISPATCHES*) to over 600 US professionals - up from 300+ a year ago:
 - 127 Artistic Directors
 - 65 Foundation/Service
 - 58 Directors
 - 51 Actors
 - 39 Educators
 - 31 Presenters
 - 31 Playwrights
 - 29 Journalists/Critics
 - 27 Management
 - 19 Dramaturgs
 - 16 Producers
 - 10 Designers
 - 56 Other

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip'.

Philip Arnoult
founder & director

SZÍNHÁZ



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Tamás Jászay

REPORTER BIO: Tamás Jászay (1978, Szeged) is a critic, editor, university lecturer. Editor of the biggest critical webpage in Hungary, Revizor (www.revizoronline.com), besides that he publishes reviews, interviews, reports in all important Hungarian cultural magazines. He teaches at the Szeged University. His PhD dissertation was written about the history of the renowned Hungarian independent performance group, Krétakör ('Chalk Circle'). Co-curator of the Hungarian Showcase (2013), dunaPart 3 – Hungarian Showcase of Contemporary Performing Arts (2015) and dunaPart 4 (2017). As part of his work on the 2015 Showcase with CITD, he traveled for a month to San Francisco, New York, Austin, and Baltimore.

dunaPart4 – Hungarian Showcase of Contemporary Performing Arts

Summary and evaluation

[dunaPart4 - Platform of Hungarian Contemporary Performing Arts](#) was organized by [Trafó - House of Contemporary Arts](#) between 29 November and 2 December 2017. The first dunaPart took place in 2008 and it became a (more or less) biannual meeting of the most important Hungarian independent dance and theatre groups. (Besides the four editions of dunaPart we have to mention [Hungarian Showcase](#), which took place in 2013 and was organized with the help of CITD.) The concept of the event fits into the international performing arts' scene: in Europe as well as in America, showcases like ours provide visibility for artists who otherwise do not have a chance to get into the international circulation. The main goal of dunaPart did not change through the times: we wanted to show the present state of independent performing arts in Hungary for our guests from abroad. The four-day long event encourages networking, founding new partnerships, refreshing old relations, etc. A footnote: I took part in dunaPart4 as one of the six curators (one of the three responsible for theatre productions) and also part of the organizing staff.



Imitation of Life, dir. by Kornél Mundruczó

About the program: 6 curators (all of us were critics and editors, which makes the curatorial board unique in Hungarian theatre life) selected 29 productions (15 contemporary dance, 13 theatre shows and 1 new circus show) from the past 2 years. Besides the main program, panel discussions and other off-programs were also available (and quite popular: the organisers' intention was to put Hungarian performing arts into a Central-European context; the invited guests talked about financial, artistic, aesthetic challenges in these dark times...).

We created two paths to follow in the program: one for dance people and another one for theatre professionals. It was no surprise that in this context dance shows proved to be more popular as they traditionally work with smaller crew, no or small sets and costumes, minimal technical requirements. And we had to realize during the selection process that the Hungarian contemporary dance community is much more into experimental works than the young generation of theatre makers. It is not easy to sum up the theatre part of dunaPart, but one can observe that the new generation is not really interested in the politically divided country or everyday politics. They focus more on private matters, family relationships, plus they revisited pieces of the classical canon. There were some exceptions: Kristóf Kelemen, a young dramaturg and director, created his [*Hungarian Acacia*](#), which gives an extremely funny overview about how a native American tree became a Hungarian national symbol. Another socially committed show was the new work of Martin Boross: in [*Addressless*](#) he deals with the questions of poverty and homelessness in a participatory game. You can move your own homeless 'avatar', whose main aim is simply to survive.



Hungarian Acacia, dir. by Kristóf Kelemen

We had 122 international guests from abroad in Budapest. The United States traditionally sends a big cohort; this time we had more than 20 participants from across the ocean. The second and the third biggest groups arrived from France and from Germany. The French professionals were mostly interested in dance shows, while the German ones wanted to get acquainted with the new generation of Hungarian theatre makers. Altogether we had curators, journalists, festival and theatre directors and many other professionals from 26 countries all over the world. After the showcase we asked our guests to fill in a short survey about their experiences in Budapest. According to the survey, more than 80 percent of the guests were satisfied/very satisfied with the event.



Solos, chor. by Adrienn Hód

The practical outcomes (festival invitations, cooperations, guest plays, etc.) of an event like this do not take place immediately. At this point, we are very proud that 12 performances/directors invitations are already announced, which means that in the coming months Hungarian dance and theatre shows will be presented in countries like the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Croatia, Bulgaria, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria and even the United States.

For more details see Jim O'Quinn's reflections in *American Theatre* [here](#).

Hamlet for the next generation

Enikő Eszenyi's *Hamlet* at Vígszínház

Hamlet is still one of the most popular plays of Shakespeare in Hungary (and probably everywhere else). According to the database of Hungarian Theatre Institute we had more than 130 (!) different performances in the last few decades all around the Carpathian basin. That fact makes it more surprising that one of the oldest theatres in Budapest, Vígszínház (Comedy Theatre), which has a long history with Shakespeare, had not staged the play since its founding in 1896. The reason is simple: Vígszínház has an auditorium with 1,100 seats and there was no one before who dared to produce *Hamlet* for such a big hall. The artistic director of the theatre, Enikő Eszenyi, decided to break the ice when she staged [*Hamlet*](#) for the first time in the history of Vígszínház in the autumn of 2017.

The show itself divides the audience as well as the critics. Speaking about the artistic level of the productions at the Vígszínház, we always have to take into consideration the huge auditorium: one has to fill seats day by day, and in many cases this requires artistic compromises. To summarize Eszenyi's vision on *Hamlet*, we can say this show is mostly for the youth; for those who have never seen Shakespeare on stage, for those who think that theatre is still a boring place, where old people declaim for hours without any sense.



Attila Vidnyánszky, Jr. in the title role of *Hamlet*

This brand new Hungarian *Hamlet* overwrites some traditions connected to the reception of the play. I would not call it a very original staging – sometimes it is more like a hotchpotch of very different ideas, gags, jokes, images, a contemporary, videoclip-like journey around the possible interpretations of the character of the Danish prince. Csaba Antal, the set designer, created a huge, seemingly empty space recalling the interior of a space station or a modern office building. The metal- and glass-based machinery is a perfect choice for all the 'hide and seek' games in the play. The strong visuality determines the whole show: spectacular actions take place not only on the stage, but sometimes even among the spectators' seats (for the famous 'mousetrap' scene a dozen spectators are invited on stage to enjoy the hospitality of the Danish royal court). The two gravediggers remind us of homeless people just arrived from the Nyugati train station, which is located three blocks from the theatre building. (Other allusions to the actual present days of Hungary cannot be identified.)



A scene from Hamlet

The title role is played by one of the most important actors of the young generation: Attila Vidnyánszky, junior. Watching the amazing young actor, one forgets about all the melancholic, slow, hesitating Hamlets. Instead of them now we have an athletic, impressive, loud and violent young hunk, who believes more in actions than in 'words, words, words'. His Hamlet is a naïve and playful clown full of energy, who conquers proudly the rotten world with his physical and mental abilities. One of the leading actors of the older generation of Vígszínház, Géza Hegedűs D., plays the new king, Claudius: he does not act like an old, tired man, but a middle-aged hedonist, a business man, who enjoys life and women and alcohol, a real despot. His Gertrude, played by Enikő Börcsök, is a real fan of her (new) husband. Touching moments arrive, when she realizes that she has to care more about her beloved son, but it is too late.

Eszenyi's *Hamlet* gives valid contemporary answers to the questions raised by a 400-year old classic (the refreshed, new text of András Forgách helps a lot). I would recommend watching the show mostly to the younger generation, who will enjoy the quick action, the clear storyline, the spectacular staging, an experience they do not expect from a classical play.

Béla Pintér's new piece at Katona

Tamás Ascher at Háromszék

It is not an overstatement: one of the most awaited shows of the 2017/2018 theatrical season in Hungary was the premiere of *Tamás Ascher at Háromszék*, written and directed by Béla Pintér, a co-production of [Katona József Theatre](#) and Béla Pintér and Company. To understand the context of the show, you have to remember Pintér's previous (and very first) show at Katona: [The Champion](#). At the end of her review, [Andrea Tompa](#) writes about the scandal caused by the Puccini-adaptation a year ago. "...[T]he media immediately discovered the story resembling a mayor's family affairs in the provinces (which was discussed in the tabloids). Actually, this man was a conservative, Fidesz-politician... The conservative, pro-government *Heti Válasz* (Weekly Response) first published a review of the show where the critic was 'puzzled' by the ethical questions of the show (i.e. telling a story of a real family). But three days later the same media makes a 'correction' by the deputy editor in chief of the magazine: denounces the private life of the artistic director of the theater, Máté, going into details about abortion, etc."



Ernő Fekete, Tamás Keresztes and Zoltán Bezerédi

Finally, we got the answer from Gábor Máté, artistic director of Katona: he encouraged and supported Béla Pintér to write and direct a play about Máté's private life. The result is *Tamás Ascher at Háromszék*. (Háromszék County/Three Chairs County is an administrative county in Transylvania, Romania: according to the storyline, Ascher and Máté goes there to find actors for a new piece.) Tamás Ascher is a part of living theatre history in Hungary, he is the chief stage director of Katona and his shows in the last four decades determined the face of Hungarian theatre all around the world. Béla Pintér created a very special world, which strongly reminds us of the golden age of Hungarian theatre, the 80s.

Pintér mixed the two legendary theatres of these times, Katona József Theatre and Kaposvár Theatre (which was that time the strongest repertory theatre in the countryside, from where Máté and Ascher arrived to Budapest), presenting a never existing company called 'Kaposá'. At Kaposá there are many theatre professionals working who resemble some existing, living people. On the stage we can identify Gábor Máté (played by the leading actor of Katona, Ernő Fekete), Tamás Ascher (played by Tamás Keresztes), or the actor Zoltán Bezerédi (played by himself, with a wig on). Pintér is again very good at inventing a folktale-like story, but this time he works with real-life characters. It creates an embarrassing atmosphere, as to understand most of the jokes and many of the dialogues, one has to be very familiar with all the gossip and reality of theatre life in Hungary today and 30 years ago.



A scene from *Tamás Ascher at Háromszék*

Two thirds of the show seems to me as a sort of a cabaret with insider jokes, understandable only for those working now or then at the theatre. The spectator has the chance to identify the well-known and/or unknown characters of a past world, and besides that we can think about what is true and what is not about those directors still working. After the too long introduction in the last episode, the real tragedy arrives: as in the case of *The Champion*, Pintér gives again a memorable character to the actress Adél Jordan. In this piece she plays a former lover of Máté, who was forced by the director to have an abortion.

Tamás Ascher at Háromszék could have been an important event, as Hungarian theatre usually does not deal with self-reflection, but because of the proportions of the play I would not call it a successful answer to the questions raised by an editor who wanted to appear too loyal to the government.

Róbert Alföldi and the 'lower depths': Fassbinder and Tolstoy

Two new premieres by Alföldi

Róbert Alföldi, former artistic director of the National Theatre, Budapest, is still one of the most popular directors in Hungary. In recent years, he is mostly interested in staging classical plays and/or stories, dealing with issues that can be easily translated to the present Hungarian situation. Just to mention a few examples: his huge, arena-size production of *Fiddler on the Roof* touches upon the xenophobia of today's Hungary; *Incendies* by Wajdi Mouawad addresses the question of refugees, which is still a hot topic in our country, and so on. Hereby I present briefly two of his recent premieres: one is an adaptation of a Rainer Werner Fassbinder movie, the other is a play by Leo Tolstoy.



Fear eats the soul

Fear Eats the Soul is a 1974 movie by the celebrated director, Fassbinder. The movie was acclaimed by critics all around the world, plus it won the Critics' Award at Cannes International Film Festival. It is the melodramatic story of a cleaning lady, a widow in her 60s, who unexpectedly falls in love with an Arab guestworker in his 30s. The shameless relationship of the young, handsome hunk and the respectful woman is a red flag in the eyes of her neighbors, her co-workers, her family.

Alföldi stages the linear story from the moment of the birth of love to the explosion in a minimalistic manner on the stage of Átrium. (The setting and the costumes take us back to the exotic world of the 70s.) In his hands the play (which was tailored for his purposes by dramaturg, István Ugrai) becomes a didactic drama dealing with issues of xenophobia, alienness, intolerance and selfishness. The show loosely follows the script and presents a world where the time has stopped: we did not learn anything in the last 50 years.

Judit Hernádi plays Emmi: she is a well-known and highly acclaimed actress, who has been playing in comedies and musicals in the last decades. This role brings new colors to her acting. In the first scenes her words almost cannot be heard, she speaks so silently. We get acquainted with a funny, almost autistic woman, who simply forgot to live so far. During the play we see how she 'awakes', when he meets Ali, and the way she loses her faith in humanity, when the world around them wants to kill them both. Her partner, Barna Bányai Kelemen, is the perfect choice for the role of Ali. He plays a sensual and sensitive fellow, who has his own secret and who exists in a world with the instincts of a wild animal. Their relationship itself is an exceptional one: it is no question that these two people were created for each other. Unfortunately, the world cannot accept it.



The Power of Darkness

The cruel world is also in the focus in Alföldi's production of Leo Tolstoy's rarely played drama, *The Power of Darkness*. The plot takes place somewhere in the Russian countryside more than a hundred years ago. At first it looks like a typical love triangle: the old and dying owner of a farm has a young wife, who falls in love with a peasant, Nikita. I would not call the events taking place in the next hours unexpected: the old fellow dies, the young couple get together. The problem is that Nikita's stepdaughter gets pregnant soon after the marriage: the newborn baby is murdered by his father.

From this short summary one can understand that Alföldi invites us to feel how people live in a hopelessly dark world. We can feel it on our skin as we are sitting around the tiny stage of Latinovits Theatre in Budaörs, hearing and watching the cries of all these poor and miserable people. They all try to survive and if they can do it by a murder, they do not hesitate to commit it. It is a play about crime and punishment: everybody lies, cheats, kills the other with words or with actions. All the characters are looking for a moment of happiness, but under these circumstances there is simply no chance to live for a happy ending.



Budapest comes to Albuquerque

Stereo Akt spreads over the US

By Sandy Timmerman and Richard van Schouwen, Q Staff Theatre

Last summer, we were treated by our old friend Philip Arnoult to a visit in Baltimore to get acquainted with the work of Stereo Akt's *Promenade* and to see the vibrant DIY theatre scene. We were able to get on the bus of this moving, site-specific production not once, but twice! The

journey from the Baltimore 2017 trip creates a story that sets up our present moment of art and Hungarian exchange as theatre makers in Albuquerque.

Anyway, to say Hungarian alternative theatre changed our lives and altered the landscape of theatre in Albuquerque is zero exaggeration, but it's hard to thread the timeline. To begin a long story:

We met Philip in '96 while embroiled in a swan-song production of *The Seagull*, directed by his longtime friend and suddenly cancer-stricken artist/director, Leonardo Shapiro, of Shaliko fame. We were very young and isolated in terms of our artwork, but through our collaboration with a dying Leo and his friend Philip, our horizons were broadened like shock-therapy. It was a hop-leap-and-a-jump:

- The “hop” was Philip bringing our Seagull production to his Baltimore Theatre Project space (our company's first tour).
- The “leap” was his introducing us while out on the east coast to other amazing groups--most significantly the Double Edge Theatre, who had substantial work and ties in Eastern Europe.
- The “jump” was his invitation and inclusion of our group in a (somewhat haphazard?) US/Hungary exchange targeting a festival of alternative theatre in Budapest, 1997. He was bringing representatives of 10 US alternative theatre groups/ensembles. We were the 10th group included, or the wild card, as he put it. God, what a time! We were hosted by RS9, Katalin Laban's theatre. We took in many mind-altering performances, most memorably Arvisura's *Master and Margarita*, and two performances at Studio K--one based on Caspar Hauser and the other a great children's piece involving puppets and carefully orchestrated Angklung music by the ensemble, live (directed by Fodor Thomas, I believe).

So, Philip did that to us.

Flash forward, I guess. We've been immersed for most of the last decade in the construction of our current theatre and arts center. It's a repurposed/remodeled, formerly troubled building on the very edge of our downtown, and along its historic railway. We've got two properties totaling 4 spaces--three live/work art spaces and our theatre. It's striking to look back on how our experience in Budapest led directly to this current situation.

Probably the most important take-away from our initial experience in Hungary, other than the art itself, was what we noticed about the theatres. First, we noticed there was a theatre about on every block. What? Why? Second, and more importantly, we noticed that every theatre space we visited had a pre- and post-performance gathering space equal in size or larger than the performance space itself. There were tables, a bar, casual food every place, always. We noticed that people

would begin gathering, meeting with friends, maybe a couple of hours before the performance. We noticed that people would gather afterward, often with performers/artists, often to a redecorated or transformed environment. We surmised that there was a very different social infrastructure surrounding theatre in lovely Budapest. And that to a certain extent, it necessitated a different physical layout or dedication of space in terms of the theatre itself--no matter how small or informal. You can keep running away with the implications. We did.

So, I've personally built 4 theatres in my lifetime. All indie's. I keep trying to get it right. The last two have been mightily informed by our Hungarian experiences and bonds. The current space, hopefully final, we own. It was significant to read in the last newsletter that Studio K is the only (independent) theatre to own its space (in Budapest). Don't know the particulars of how that plays in Budapest, but for us, it's been an odyssey.

We're now stretching our limbs back into theatre art, and away from development and construction. It's an absolute delight. And relief. It's wholly fitting that here in our first year of operation, Philip - who has kept faith, advised and consoled us during the long construction ordeal - has connected us with another amazing art group from Hungary, Stereo Akt.

Upon being introduced to *Promenade* in Baltimore we were immediately struck by the combination of lyrical beauty, social awareness and unique presentation of the performance. *Promenade* is a soul-searching, city mapping performance. It's an artwork re-created in each place of performance. The audience is lured into a bus ride and transported through scenes, neighborhoods, and stories specific to time and place. Each traveler dons a pair of headphones and is sonically immersed while sharing a ride and exposed to events within and without.

It seemed a perfect fit for our desert outpost. Though Albuquerque is vastly different from Baltimore, the way *Promenade* morphs to its setting made us envision it in our own theatrical landscape. Then, upon seeing a video of *Etiquette*, we felt that introducing Stereo Akt via the festival would allow our audience, who are already more versed in the concepts of experimental theatre than most, a chance to get to know and embrace these artists and their unique vision.

A vision that has enormous potential to speak to our community about themselves, others and the very city they belong to.

What a pleasure to be asked to write a little bit for you all about one of the richest and most enduring affairs in our lives' work in theatre. Trying to nail a title, can't, but it's somewhere entangled with Hungarian theatre, Budapest more specifically, and our friend Philip. Maybe, "Egeshegedre All Hard," if you're savvy to New Mex lingo.

In 2018, we are now in the process of bringing *Promenade* to New Mexico. Through a much-layered process of Skype calls and cross-company meetings, Stereo Akt is coming to New Mexico to perform *Etiquette* in Tricklock's "Revolutions Theater Festival." This will also allow for the piggy-

backing of first-phase work on *Promenade*. In October, Stereo Akt will return to finish the process and see *Promenade*'s opening. The entire theatre community of Albuquerque is already alight with enthusiasm. So grateful for this next and continuing endeavor with Philip, CITD, and our beloved kindred spirits in Hungary.



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