

My work at the Ludwig Museum falls into my larger philosophy of the arts. I cannot see myself as an isolated painter, tucked away in the studio, laboring on canvases; that life never appealed to me. I love to make art, but I also enjoy using art to communicate across cultures and languages, and I share the art of others with the public by helping build the museum volunteerism programs necessary to increase the scope of museum activities throughout the world. I was able to balance these passions by creating and exhibiting new paintings in Szolnok and Budapest in addition to my work at the Ludwig Museum.

During my stay in Budapest, I have realized that the art community in Hungary is relatively small. Therefore, creating connections with other major institutions within this community is both attainable and beneficial to a museum volunteer program and an American artist as well.

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An Investigation into the Recent Relationship Between the Theatre Cultures of Hungary and the United States

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In this critical analysis I discuss the rich, recent history of contact and collaboration between the theatrical communities of the United States and Hungary. I evaluate a variety of specific examples of three general working models used to facilitate these collaborations, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each. These working models include: institution to institution, institution to artist, and artist to artist interactions with the Fulbright Program serving as a hybrid model. During my travels to Budapest, Hungary between 2005 and 2007 and my time living in Budapest as a Fulbright grantee for the 2007-08 grant period, I conducted personal interviews, immersed myself in Hungarian theatre culture by developing personal relationships with Hungarian theatre professionals, attended countless numbers of Hungarian theatre and dance performances and read numerous publications on the past and present highlights of Hungarian theatre in order to gain insight into each of these working models. This paper draws on these experiences to shed light on the nature of recent contact and collaboration between Hungarian and US theatre artists, questioning how best to build on these relationships in order to increase cultural understanding between these two countries.

Introduction

Throughout history artists have incited large cultural shifts by driving the social and political discourse of the time using their bodies of work as a catalyst for societal change. Theatre artists in particular have been on the forefront of these shifts. One of the gifts of the theatre is that it facilitates sharing and communion between artistic collaborators and audience members. The theatre of a particular culture can reveal much about its struggles and value systems. Theatre is a place to learn about people, what they choose to say and how they choose to create. Martha Coigney, former International Theatre Institute (ITI) Worldwide President, believes, "...theatre will save the world because it is the place where we learn about other cultures; it is where we tell our stories to one another. That's what I watched happen for forty years, the theatre's ability to keep the human conversation going."¹

In 2005, 2006 and 2007-08 I had various opportunities to travel and live in Budapest, Hungary and see the theatre's ability to facilitate the human conversation first hand. At first glance, the theatre cultures of Hungary and the United States seemed distinctly separate and dissimilar. However I soon discovered there was a rich, recent history of contact and collaboration between American and Hungarian theatre artists. While the dialogue between these two theatrical communities has

increased cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity in both countries, much is to be learned from the different models of contact and collaboration that have developed between the United States and Hungary over the past eighteen years. These various working models include relationships between institutions and other institutions (i.e. The University of Tennessee's partnerships with the National Theatre in Pécs and the Academy of Drama and Film in Budapest), institutions and artists (i.e. American regional theatres and universities commissioning the work of Hungarian theatre directors and Hungarian Repertory theatres hosting visits by American artistic directors), artist-to-artist interaction (i.e. members of American ensemble theatres collaborating with members of Hungarian independent theatres and individual American theatre artists engaging and sharing ideas with Hungarian theatre artists) as well as collaborations fostered by the Fulbright Program (which serves as a hybrid of all three above mentioned working models). In this paper I will examine the positive and negative aspects of these various models in an attempt to participate in the established theatrical dialogue between the United States and Hungary.

Modern Hungarian Theatre History

I cannot discuss the present state of the Hungarian theatre culture without addressing the social role theatre has played under the various modern foreign

¹ Martha Coigney, Personal Interview, 9 December 2006, NY, NY. Transcript on file with author.

occupations of Hungary. Theatre in Hungary has always been important in preserving the integrity of the Hungarian language. There have been several periods in Hungary's tumultuous history of occupation where, because of the mother tongues of the various occupiers (i.e. Austria, Germany, the Soviet Union) and the overall difficulty and linguistic isolation of the Hungarian language itself, Hungarian was almost lost. Hungarian is unlike any other language spoken in the European world; it shares its roots with Finnish, however these two languages have gradually drifted apart over the centuries. Today is it nearly impossible to find any linguistic similarities between Hungarian and Finnish. The threat of losing the Hungarian language altogether was particularly present at the conclusion of World War 1 when, after the signing of the Treaty of Trianon (1920), Hungary lost two thirds of its territory and ethnic Hungarians/native Hungarian speakers found themselves living in what is now known as Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Slovenia, Austria, Croatia and the Ukraine. During this time, theatre was an important way to retain the spoken Hungarian language and Hungarian cultural customs. As theatre critic István Nánay says, "...Beyond the [Hungarian] border, in their own communities, theatres played a role similar to churches. Their primary task was to preserve, cultivate and promote the Hungarian language, while their artistic roles were considered secondary."²

² István Nánay, *Beyond the border: Hungarian Minority Theatres*. From A Shabby Paradise, ed. Péter Fábri, pp. 64.

Theatre in Hungary continued to play a key role in maintaining a sense of Hungarian identity under the Iron Curtain. During this time of Communist rule, the government controlled all aspects of the average Hungarian's life. One of the safest ways to express displeasure with this totalitarian oppression without experiencing repercussions from the Communist party was to simply go to the theatre. Under the Communists,

The programme of nationalization was total, preventing for many years the kind of spontaneous movements that could have mirrored organic, internal changes in the art of theatre...Some artists, however, found the antidote to this. A kind of conspiracy developed between the performers on stage and their audience, a mutual 'winking' as a form of public protest against the ruling regime, difficult to imagine among democratic conditions.³

A noteworthy example of this "winking" or speaking in code to the audience was a production of Peter Weiss' *Marat/Sade* that premiered in the Hungarian province of Kaposvár in the early eighties.

Weiss was born outside of Berlin to a Hungarian/Jewish father and a Christian mother. He and his family were forced to flee Germany in the early 1930's to avoid Nazi persecution. They eventually settled in Sweden. In 1964, living in Berlin, he made a name for himself with his play, *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the inmates of the*

³ István Szabó, *How the System Works*. From A Shabby Paradise, ed. Péter Fábri, pp. 13.

asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade. The play is set after the French Revolution and follows the Marquis de Sade as he uses his fellow inmates at the lunatic asylum at Charenton to stage a play in 1808 about the assassination of Jean-Paul Marat, which happened fifteen years prior. The play examines issues of attaining power, abuses of power, the nature of revolution and the role of the individual within the revolution.

In his production of *Marat/Sade* in 1982, Hungarian theatre director János Ács used visual cues in the stage design coupled with the text's exploration of revolution to set the play not in France but in Budapest during the Hungarian revolution of 1956.

The fact that this production gave homage to the 1956 revolution was never said, let alone written, in so many words. But everyone knew—a peculiar contradiction of the time... The backdrop depicted the famous Corvin Lane, where one of the most bitter battles of the revolution was fought...1956 was the greatest taboo and so was the lack of freedom. For some reason, however, censors turned a blind eye. The production won the critics' award and was performed over a hundred times before 1989. Some traveled from Budapest to Kaposvár over a dozen times to see it.⁴

The final scene of *Marat/Sade* was crucial to Ács' evocation of the 1956 Revolution. At the end of the play, the inmates cry,

*Charenton Charenton
Napoleon Napoleon
Nation Nation
Revolution Revolution
Copulation Copulation,*

and then begin a violent revolution. The stage directions read, The shouting grows...The struggle between NURSES and HERALD develops and catches the attention of the others. Suddenly the whole stage is fighting... Music, shouting and tramping increase to a tempest...The NURSES go among the patients wielding their batons. ROUX springs forward and places himself before the marchers, his back to them, still fettered with arms.⁵

János Ács used the violence of this last scene of the play to depict the horror of civilian Hungarian revolutionaries fighting a bloody battle with the occupying Soviet soldiers in 1956. This production of *Marat/Sade* was "...one of the most shattering instances of the use of allegorical, symbolic language and, at the same time, of truths being bellowed out in suppressed pain, straining the outermost boundaries of what could be said in public..."⁶

5 Peter Weiss. *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat As Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis De Sade.* London: Dramatic Publishing, 1965.

6 András Forgách, *Breaking Out*, 12-13. From *Collision*, eds. Péter P. Müller and Anna Lakos, pp.12-13.

4 Anna Merényi, *The Provincial Theatre that Became a Legend: The Story of Kaposvár.* From *A Shabby Paradise*, ed. Péter Fábri, pp. 112.

The Hungarian Theatrical System

The theatre system in Hungary is divided into two areas: those theatres funded by the state and those theatres receiving little or no state funding. This division breaks down into repertory theatres and independent theatres. The state-funded repertory theatre system involves the use of a salaried company of actors on long term contract playing in a permanent, home theatre building. The slang term for these theatres in Hungary is "stone theatres". A repertory theatre usually has a large subscription base and, unlike our theatres in America which run one play for a fixed period of time and then move on to another, the repertory system allows for the company to put on a variety of plays in a short period of time using the same company of actors. So, in any given month, a repertory theatre in Hungary can run four, five, six and sometimes seven different productions. In the repertory system, once a play has been staged it can run for many years, which allows audiences, and tourists in particular, to see the popular shows from several seasons ago. This system does involve the constant need for elaborate changeovers between productions. However, it also allows for the mounting of only a few new productions in any given season, as opposed to the United States where the entire season of a regional theatre is made up of newly mounted productions or, due to growing financial pressures, co-productions with other regional theatres.

Independent theatres, however, are usually not funded by the state and exist in a much more precarious place in theatre culture. The word 'independent' or 'alternative' "...is a label of being outside the mainstream structure...of subsisting on temporary funding, of problems with rehearsal and performance space, of the insecurities about an assessable and calculable perspective."⁷ Independent theatre companies in Hungary have similarities to small ensemble theatre companies in the United States in that they often rarely have a permanent home building or rehearsal space but typically rehearse a piece for an extended period of time (the basis for a performance is often an adaptation or a work the ensemble creates collaboratively). These groups also tend to have their own form of performer vocal/physical training. Ironically enough it is the independent theatres that struggle for government support and space, but those same independent companies provide the basis for Hungarian international theatrical acclaim. The works of Krétakör, Pintér Béla and Company, Artus and Réka Szabó and Company are well known throughout Europe; Krétakör and Artus are also regular visitors to the United States. In January of 2007 and again in March of 2008, revered theatre critic, Andrea Tompa, and I discussed the plight of the independent theatres. It is her belief that:

Independent work is fragile in itself. If somebody were to ask me what would I want to do for the development of

7 Andrea Tompa, *I am the Text—Variations on Theatrical Text.* From *Collision*, eds. Péter P. Müller and Anna Lakos, pp. 151-152.

Hungarian theatre culture, it would be to give more space to independent work: to venues, workshops and rehearsal spaces. I don't necessarily think we should gradually close down the repertory system because I believe that Eastern Europe's theatre heritage is this huge repertory system, and it should be preserved. But, at the same time, there should be more space given to independent work. And since this field is very narrow, good work can hardly be born because of the lack of sustainable possibilities to create.⁸

Although independent theatres and repertory theatres are often aesthetically at odds with each other, many repertory theatres are now recognizing the power of the cult following of the independent theatre scene and inviting popular independent theatre directors and their companies to perform in the smaller second stage and black box spaces. This is a trend that also exists in the United States. It is true that the repertory theatre system serves as the historical foundation for the theatre's place in Hungarian society, but the work of independent theatres tends to be more controversial, cutting edge and mobile because of its low budget simplicity. In fact, it was the independent theatre company Squat Theatre that first traveled outside of Hungary and introduced the outside world to Hungarian theatre culture.

Squat Theatre

Many American theatre artists and audience members were first introduced to a slice of Hungarian theatre culture through the work of the Hungarian expatriate theatre collective, Squat Theatre. Squat Theatre had a profound influence on the American avant-garde theatre scene in the seventies and eighties. The company began in Budapest under the name Kassak Studio and, after being banned from working in the theatre by the Hungarian government, retreated underground and called themselves "apartment theatre". The company was expelled by the Communist regime in Hungary in 1975 and came to the United States in 1977. Squat Theatre's storefront performance space in the Chelsea district of New York City was also their living space. The group became known for site-specific work often using the streetscape outside of their live/work space as the backdrop for their pieces. The repertoire of the company was unique because of the obvious influences from other art forms such as film and music as well as the visual inventiveness, physical rigor and use of nudity, large puppets and live animals in their performances. Squat Theatre frequently toured small venues and large theatre festivals in the United States as well as Europe. In the seventies and eighties, Squat Theatre was the only example of theatre from Hungary in the United States. The company dissolved in 1984. Many of the members gradually returned to Hungary after the fall of the

Iron Curtain (Squat founder, Péter Halász, returned to Hungary in the early nineties. He died of liver cancer in 2006. Halász's final "performance" was the staging of his own funeral in the Palace of Arts in Budapest one month before his actual death.) While Squat Theatre was based in New York City, they became a catalyst for exchange between the theatre cultures of Hungary and the United States because among the people who saw their work was American international theatre pioneer Philip Arnoult. Arnoult later produced one of their most celebrated pieces, *Pig, Child, Fire!*, as part of The New Theatre Festival in Baltimore, Maryland in 1977.

Philip Arnoult

Philip Arnoult was the first American theatre practitioner to play a key role in introducing Hungarian theatre culture to the American theatre community and its audiences. Arnoult began his interest in international theatre in 1971 when he began the Theatre Project in Baltimore, MD. During this time he also became involved with the International Theatre Institute (ITI) and developed a close friendship and working relationship with Martha Coigney, the then Director of ITI Worldwide. ITI is structured so that there is a worldwide headquarters called ITI Worldwide with each individual ITI member country having its own ITI division office called a Center. These ITI Centers are usually housed in the building of a larger theatrical institution. For example, The United States Center of ITI is now based at Theatre Communications Group (TCG) in New York City and the

Hungarian Center of ITI is based inside of the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute in Budapest. The ITI Worldwide website describes the organization as, "An international non-governmental organization (NGO)...founded in Prague in 1948 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the international theatre community. A worldwide network, ITI aims 'to promote international exchange of knowledge and practice in theatre arts (drama, dance, music theatre) in order to consolidate peace and solidarity between peoples, to deepen mutual understanding and increase creative co-operation between all people in the theatre arts'."⁹ ITI also coordinates seminars, conferences and workshops for international theatre professionals.

Arnoult's first involvement with ITI was attending a meeting in Helsinki, Finland. It was at this meeting when he realized the lack of information the world had on what was happening in America was substantial. His second involvement with ITI was when he presented a paper to the international theatre Congress in Bulgaria. Arnoult says he gave this speech because,

In 1973/1974 there was a much savvier understanding in Western Europe of Robert Wilson and the Performance Group, Bread and Puppet, Mabou Mines...that first generation. But that was about the only touchstone and not everybody remembered that nor did everybody get to that. So I gave a

8 Tompa, Interview.

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International Theatre Institute. See generally www.iti-worldwide.org.

speech at this congress—not talking about playwrights, not talking about physical spaces and certainly then not talking about directors but I tried to look at...well, the posit was there’s something new happening in America in 1973/74...¹⁰

What Arnoult is referring to is the beginning of the ensemble theatre movement in the United States. Arnoult worked with many of these ensemble theatres during his tenure as Artistic Director of the Baltimore Theatre Project. Some examples include: Theatre X from Milwaukee, The Play Group from Knoxville and the Iowa Theatre Lab. Arnoult says that ITI (under Martha Coigney) was really the only organization paying attention to American alternative theatres. When theatre professionals from abroad came to America, ITI sent them to Iowa instead of Broadway.

In 1974 Arnoult attended Don Boros’ Experimental Theatre Festival in Ann Arbor, MI. Boros was an Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan. He was preparing the next festival (with NEA funding) when the university let him go. Then Herbert Blau came to Baltimore as the head of University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). Arnoult met with Blau and said “let’s do a festival...I think there’s ten grand from the Endowment just hanging there. And let me talk to ITI.”¹¹ In 1976 Martha Coigney was able to get \$150,000 out of the State Department that had been set aside for the celebration of the United States Bicentennial.

Arnoult and Blau’s festival with ITI was

¹⁰ Arnoult, Interview.

¹¹ Arnoult, Interview.

called The New Theatre (TNT) festival (1976-1979). In the first year, thirty three theatre companies participated: five were international, Meredith Monk was the only participant from New York City and the rest were small ensemble theatres from all over the country. The TNT festival drew theatre people from every region of the United States and served as a formative experience for many of today’s influential theatre professionals. Molly Smith, Artistic Director of Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., first became aware of Arnoult’s presence in the American theatre community at the beginning of his tenure as Artistic Director of the Theatre Project.

Philip brought in the best and most interesting groups from Europe. He had a whole festival, the TNT Festival. And I attended that for 2 years and was completely blown away by the work that I saw there. It’s where I was introduced to Squat Theatre and other great experimental companies that were just terrific and very influential...I have always found companies that are coming out of Europe as very influential for my own work because I’m interested in what’s different from me as opposed to what is me. And I think that has been Philip’s whole gift throughout his career. His work at the Theatre Project created a natural segue into really being a connector between artists and theatre companies overseas.¹²

The TNT Festival solidified Arnoult’s relationship with ITI. He was asked to go to the next ITI Congress and he served on a world committee called the New Theatre Committee.

¹² Smith, Interview.

One of Arnoult’s colleagues at ITI was the director of the Hungarian Center of the International Theatre Institute, György Lenyel. Lenyel was on the Executive Committee of ITI and was persistent in encouraging Arnoult to travel to Budapest. Arnoult made the trip to Budapest with Martha Coigney; he was finally persuaded by Lenyel to come to Hungary because he thought of Lenyel as, “...a connector and a person who created access.”¹³ The fall of Communism (often referred to as the “political changes”) resulted in the opening of the Hungarian borders. At that time, the small country and its theatre culture was relatively unknown to the rest of the world. Lenyel says he made such a strong effort to convince Arnoult to come to Hungary because, “I felt that Philip was a person who can make a relationship and open a door to Hungary...and also, because of political reasons, Hungary was misrepresented to the rest of the world. I always felt that Hungary is not really known in the States. Philip was someone who could change that.”¹⁴

Institution to Institution: Educational Partnerships

During this time, Arnoult began working at the University of Tennessee (UT). It was his idea that the UT theatre department search for a channel or institution in Hungary with which they could forge an artistic relationship. The university then received money from the

¹³ Arnoult, Interview.

¹⁴ Lenyel, Interview.

Ford Foundation to forge an east/west connection. Arnoult and Lenyel decided to have Lenyel’s theatre, the National Theatre in Pécs, serve as the UT partner institution. The two institutions initiated an exchange of artists. Marianne Custer, the current head of the MFA Design Program at UT, went to Pécs in 1991 to design costumes for a production of *The Liar*. Lenyel then visited UT for a week. It was during this visit that he and Arnoult began to lay the foundation for Lenyel to direct and give lectures at the university. Shortly thereafter, Lenyel made another trip to UT and Arnoult proposed that Lenyel direct *Liliom* by noted Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnár because he felt Americans were only familiar with the American adaptation, *Carousel*. The production was plagued by difficulties involving miscommunications between Lenyel and the set designer as well as the casting of an actor who was ill equipped to play the lead character of Liliom. The play’s reception was very mixed due to the violence and anti-feminist sentiments in the script. The dramaturg for the piece raised concerns to the local media about the content of the play as well as the depiction of violence against women in the staging. Several protests were staged outside of the theatre during the run of the show. The reviews from local critics were not complimentary of the production.¹⁵

Lenyel eventually decided that the partner of a drama department should not be a professional theatre but another drama department. His theatre had no

¹⁵ Custer, Interview.

financial resources from the state or city for this kind of relationship with an American educational institution. Lenyel thought the Academy of Drama and Film in Budapest would be the perfect partner for UT, so he introduced Péter Huszti, the Head of the Academy, to Arnoult and Arnoult's partner at UT, Tom Cooke. Huszti was and still is one of the leading actors in the country. Huszti was Lenyel's good friend; they worked together many times in Lenyel's former theatre, the Madách Theatre. Lenyel says it was a pleasure for him to recommend Huszti to Arnoult. "I am very, very emotional about this project. Not proud, but emotional. Because if I am thinking back on my activity with ITI, that was one of the star moments in my work and my life because that was one of the best ways to open doors. And I believe the contact with the University of Tennessee is one of the best contacts the Academy had."¹⁶

Philip Arnoult's developing relationship with the Academy through Péter Huszti and his translator and collaborator, Peter Linka, was the second important step in solidifying an ongoing relationship between the theatre communities of Hungary and the United States. After the initial introduction through György Lenyel, Péter Huszti invited Arnoult and Tom Cooke to Budapest to introduce them to the Academy. Huszti, Cooke and Arnoult began talking about organizing an international theatre school festival in Budapest at the Academy. Péter Huszti says he was interested in hosting this international theatre school festival as a

¹⁶ Lenyel, Interview.

way to build bridges between Hungary and the rest of the world. He remembers that when he was a student at the Academy the Communist regime allowed them to travel but only in one direction: east, from Budapest to Moscow and back. Peter Linka recalls that while he and Péter Huszti were in talks with Philip Arnoult, Huszti said to them, "Now that we have these political changes and the borders are open, let's invite a couple of schools from the west to compare ourselves to see what we do and to see where we are...how they stand, how we stand."¹⁷ The first exchange was five days long and informal because there was no set structure or packed program. The list of participants was created through personal contacts so there were only four or five schools involved. That was the beginning of what later became the bi-annual International Theatre School Festival. UT was increasingly involved in these festivals over the years as they grew in size.

Péter Huszti traveled to the University of Tennessee over the course of four years (two or three weeks each year) giving acting workshops on four different topics. One such workshop was entitled, "Shakespeare on Love", where Huszti wove together love scenes from Shakespearian plays. This later became part of the program at the International Theatre School Shakespeare Festival. Peter Linka says of this festival:

"In the festival, we had scenes with American and Hungarian students together, because the American and

¹⁷ Linka, Interview.

Hungarian students had worked on these scenes with Péter. So they came here and during the first few days of the festival, Péter started rehearsing with them together so they could get used to each other and learn the cues in a foreign language. So the American student would be doing their part in English while the Hungarian student would be doing their part in Hungarian. And it was watching what acting is all about, what people want and what they desire, what tactics they're using. Even though they don't understand the other person's language, they fully understand the intent."¹⁸

Both Peter Linka and Péter Huszti say that the main goal for working with UT and beginning the International School Festival was to open a window to the world. "To get to know the world and to let the world know us."¹⁹ Unfortunately, these festivals are now part of the past because Huszti is no longer the Director of the Academy. Reaching out to schools abroad was part of Huszti's program during his seven-year tenure as Director. There is also no longer anyone at the Academy serving as a "foreign minister", which was Peter Linka's unofficial title. Linka was the first and last. After Tom Cooke left UT, the brains, motor and desire behind the international program died. The same happened at the Academy after Huszti was no longer Director (although he is now the head of the Acting Program).

Philip Arnoult's relationship with László Marton, Artistic Director of

¹⁸ Linka, Interview.

¹⁹ Linka/Huszti, Interview.

the Vígszínház (Comedy Theatre) in Budapest, marked the third major partnership focused on making connections between the American and Hungarian theatrical communities. The Vígszínház is one of the largest and oldest repertory theatres in Budapest. László Marton became the Artistic Director of the Vígszínház in 1985. In addition to his work in Hungary, Marton has worked many times at the Actors Theatre of Louisville (ATL), particularly during the annual Humana Festival of New American Plays. He also often works at the Court Theatre of Chicago and Soulepper Theatre in Toronto. Philip Arnoult and László Marton were both part of the ITI New Theatre Committee. Marton says he was immediately impressed by Arnoult's ability to organize and connect people. They met again at ATL, when John Jory was running the theatre, during one of the Humana Festival special visitors weekends. Over breakfast they began brewing an idea to make ties stronger between American and European theatre cultures. Marton felt strongly about the need to strengthen this relationship because, "Something which became obvious during my time in the United States is America needs, as every theatre culture needs, directors with different perspectives and different views."²⁰ So, he and Arnoult started thinking about how to make the connection between the United States and Hungary more active. They met a woman who was visiting Louisville from the International Communication Agency (ICA) in Washington, D. C.

²⁰ Marton, Interview.

Jimmy Carter created The International Communication Agency during his presidency. The primary responsibility of the ICA is to work together with the State Department to oversee and guide international informational, educational, and cultural activities, including exchange programs.²¹ The ICA representative was very interested in Arnoult and Marton's exchange idea. This was the first developing chapter of what would later be called the Eastern and Central European Theatre Initiative (ECETI).

During a visit to Budapest in 1994, Marton called Arnoult and asked him to attend a dress rehearsal of the performance that was set to open the Vígszínház's season after a major renovation of the theatre building. "The 1993/94 season will always be known as the 'tent' season. To prevent any hiatus in the theatre's work during renovation, the company relocated to a large tent near the Western Railway Station."²² This opening play was called *Dance in Time* (*Össztánc*). This piece was developed by the company through a series of improvisations, the best elements from which were incorporated into a story and written by Pál Békés. *Dance in Time* is a unique play: it is designed for the company by the company, again relying on the group technique. It dramatizes the last seventy years of Hungarian history without any words, only movement and gestures.²³

21 International Communication Agency. See generally, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=30576.

22 Eszter Harangozó, *The Vígszínház*. From *A Shabby Paradise*, ed. Péter Fábri, pp. 87.

23 Eszter Harangozó, *The Vígszínház*. From *A Shabby Paradise*, ed. Péter Fábri, pp. 87.

Because of the physical and non-verbal nature of the piece, *Össztánc* became a favorite of non-Hungarian speaking visitors to Hungary and was highly praised by Jane Perlez of the New York Times: "For the opening work of the theatre's new life Mr. Marton chose *Let's Dance Together* (*Dance in Time*), short stories with mime, dance and music but no dialogue. The stories are based on aspects of Hungary's 20th century history. The audience loved it...A rousing performance...The theatre is back!"²⁴

It was Arnoult's idea to re-create the production with the students in Knoxville, TN. I asked Marton if trying to work with young Americans on a theatre piece that encompasses seventy years of Hungarian history, a history the students were not familiar with nor did they completely understand, somehow took away from the authenticity of the piece, but he said this was not the case. "One of the charms of the United States is that it's a relatively new country. So, everybody in the United States has ascendants (sic), has fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers etc. that came from somewhere."²⁵ Marton's says that many of the students working on the play had grandparents and great-grandparents that came from various parts of Europe. Therefore, these students had grown up hearing stories of surviving war. This re-creation of *Össztánc* was as successful in Knoxville as it was in Budapest and was well received by critics and audience members alike.

24 Eszter Harangozó, *László Marton: A Classic in a New Context*. From *A Shabby Paradise*, ed. Péter Fábri, pp. 95.

25 Marton, Interview.

Institution to Artist: Towson University and Hungarian Theatre Artists

In 1994, Philip Arnoult and Juanita Rockwell helped found the Towson University Master's Degree Program in Theatre. The idea was to create a program with an international component focused on training the experimental/alternative theatre maker. It was also during this time in the early nineties that Arnoult was establishing ties with the Independent theatre scene in Hungary through his working relationship with the Artistic Director of R.S.9 Theatre in Budapest, Katalan Laban. Laban was involved in cultural politics and was in the process of bringing the major Informal European Theatre Meeting (IETM) to Budapest. She also was the co-chair of the Independent Theatre Organization sector of Hungary. In 1992 Arnoult saw R.S.9's *Kafka America* "*We Want to be Indians*" at the Edinburgh festival. He was very enthusiastic about the group and the performance. After that, he made several trips to Hungary and invited Laban to the United States two or three times. Because of Arnoult's connection with the ensemble theatres in the United States, he brought a group (including Michael Fields of Dell'Arte, Conrad Bishop of the Independent Eye and Stacey Klein of Double Edge) to the Independent Theatre Festival in Budapest in 1997. Arnoult says that there was not much of a follow up on the part of the American ensemble theatres because he believes they did not have the

financial resources needed to do so. After the festival in 1997, Arnoult organized a tour for Laban in the United States of these small ensemble theatres, which was largely funded by Towson University. Towson University also brought Laban and a Hungarian contemporary dancer named Eva Magyar to the United States to teach master classes. Magyar later participated in an international festival of solo work sponsored by the university at the Baltimore Theatre Project.

Laban says that the trips to the United States and discussions with American theatre artists in Hungary helped prepare her for what she saw as being a possible future of Hungarian independent theatres. Laban called this potential future an Americanized theatre system where independent theatres have a full office staff but no regularly paid acting company. After the fall of Communism, government subsidies in Hungary were being slowly cut from the arts and culture sector. Independent theatres suffered greatly and lost most of their subsidization, whereas the repertory theatre system was still fairly generously supported. Laban began to see the writing on the wall when she realized that independent theatres were going to have to exist with very little government financial support. She saw small American ensemble theatres struggling to survive in a situation where every penny must be raised or earned and feared that Hungarian independent theatres were potentially destined for the same fate. This fear is still very real for her and is becoming a fast reality. Laban recalls the

height of her theatre company's success under the cushion of total government subsidization when she says, We could do our best work during this time because the actors had a steady paycheck and could focus solely on the work. We didn't have to worry about newspaper people or ticket sales. We had more time to rehearse the show as an ensemble—we could develop the play together, base the show on the personality and talents of the actors. This kind of working model is happening less and less in the independent theatres in Hungary. Once the political changes came, R.S.9 was forced to change as well to the more Americanized model.

²⁶ Laban says her ties to the United States raised her awareness of how to navigate through this new American theatrical model. She also believes the exchanges and interactions with theatre professionals from the United States were important for her development as a theatre director. She hopes the Americans involved in the exchange process learned something from their time in Hungary and came away from the experience changed in some way.

I hope that all those people who Philip brought here to Hungary were able to realize that there is another country, there is another culture; understanding that there is not only one justice, there are different viewpoints. It is not only about how I was brought up or what I think is correct but what is other people's way of thinking. You can learn how to respect other people's way of thinking. And, of course, if you travel to another country, you have to look and listen and

²⁶ Laban, Interview.

get adjusted and respect that culture and give up your own opinions, in some cases. You can realize that the whole human race is one family if you travel and work with people from other cultures. Theatre and art is how we can learn to respect each other.²⁷

In January of 2000, Towson University hosted the TCG/ITI Conference: International Origins for New Theatre Practice. The main issue examined during the conference was emerging shifts in theatre training. This conference served as a way to deepen and continue the Hungarian connections fostered by Philip Arnoult and provided momentum for the beginning stages of the next phase of his plan to strengthen ties between the theatre cultures of United States and Hungary.

Institution to Artist: the Eastern and Central European Theatre Initiative (ECETI)

The positive working relationship between Philip Arnoult and László Marton would play an important role in Arnoult's future work in Hungary through the ECETI program (1999-2004). ECETI was a project of the Center for International Theatre Development, an organization Arnoult started in 1990. In 2000, Arnoult says,

I was smelling something that was going on in Central Europe by then. It was this next generation of young

²⁷ Laban, Interview.

directors fully formed after the political changes. I was also at a really strong point with a Dutch project I was working on. But, ultimately, the triangulation of the three countries [the U.S., Hungary and the Netherlands] didn't work out because the institute in Holland came under attack. I thought it might have legs, but it didn't. What did happen was my discovery of what was happening in the theatre scene of Hungary and Central/Eastern Europe.²⁸

The Eastern and Central European Theatre Initiative was funded by the Trust for Mutual Understanding. The purpose of ECETI was to link young directors, whose work was fully formed after the fall of the Iron Curtain, from Poland, Hungary, Romania and Russia with a select group of American partner theatres (Arena Stage, Washington DC; American Repertory Theatre/ART, Cambridge; New York Theatre Workshop; Alliance Theatre, Atlanta; Actors Theatre of Louisville/Humana Festival; Sundance Theatre Lab, Sundance, Utah; Portland Center Stage, Portland, Oregon; Berkeley Repertory Theatre; and La Jolla Playhouse). Arnoult would bring Artistic Directors and staff members from the partner theatres to see the work of these young directors. From 1999-2004, Arnoult brought delegations of Americans to Hungary seven different times.

The Vígszínház, often served as the artistic home for these groups while they were in Budapest. Marton says of this,

²⁸ Arnoult, Interview.

The Vígszínház has hosted, over the years, various American theatre leaders (artistic directors and such) and showed them our view, our policy on running a large repertory: how we work with young directors, how we develop a huge audience (small children, young people, a subscription season based on classics). In the meantime, we always introduced young Hungarian directors to these American artistic directors. So these folks would come and see shows, see how the theatre works and meet the directors. We always tried to make the visits very personal. I think we achieved something that was very important for theatre culture. Ultimately, I think it became something that was the essence of cultural exchange...I think we learned a great deal from each other. That is the most important thing. I think the American theatre people that were here learned there is another way of thinking about the theatre.²⁹

Because the Vígszínház, which has an active subscriber base and appeals to the wealthier segment of the theatre going audience in Budapest, can be considered as similar in administrative structure and artistic aesthetic to many regional theatres in the United States, it was an important place for the American artistic directors to find young Hungarian talent that would appeal to their own audiences. It could be argued that having one theatrical institution serving as the main lens through which these American artistic directors viewed Hungarian

²⁹ Marton, Interview.

theatre culture created a slanted view of the culture. However, having the regional theatre artistic directors view the Hungarian theatrical landscape through the eyes of a major repertory theatre with a similar aesthetic did create a comfort level for the Americans that ultimately ended in their commissioning the work of Hungarian directors. It is possible that American audiences would never have been exposed to the work of these Hungarian theatre directors if the regional theatre artistic directors had been intimidated by exposure to more cutting edge parts of the Hungarian theatre scene that did not appeal to them.

Philip Arnoult's major Hungarian partner during ECETI was András Nagy. Arnoult met Nagy in 1999 when Nagy had just taken over as president of the Hungarian Center of the ITI. The two immediately embarked on a partnership. Nagy says that at that time, "I was very newly active as the Hungarian ITI president and I felt like I was looking for new energy, new ideas and wanted to learn new ways of working in the international field and Philip was fantastic for that."³⁰ After that first meeting, Arnoult came back to Hungary in February of 2000 and he and Nagy (at the ITI Center) organized the first trip for a group of theatre professionals from the United States (including Jim Nicola from New York Theatre Workshop, Rob Orchard from American Repertory Theatre, Juanita Rockwell from Towson University and Molly Smith from Arena Stage) to introduce them to Hungarian theatre culture and theatre artists.

³⁰ Nagy, Interview.

This was the test of Arnoult's theory: "There's interesting work being done here—it's competitive, they can work in English—I wonder if anybody will be interested."³¹ Arnoult says he would have been happy if, at the end of that trip, the response from more than half of the group was, "Philip, you're right. There's something here, you should keep an eye on it."³² Instead, there were two directing contracts written for two theatres and three separate projects. After seeing *Mother Courage and Her Children* directed by János Szász at the Vígszínház, Rob Orchard said to Arnoult, "I want him to direct that at ART."³³ Later on, in 2002, János Szász was also commissioned to direct *Marat/Sade* at ART. Molly Smith said to Philip, "I want him to direct and I want to sit and talk to him about *A Streetcar Named Desire*."³⁴ It was also during that visit where Molly Smith saw Enikő Eszenyi's *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Vígszínház and was impressed. She asked Eszenyi to come to Arena Stage and direct *A Man's A Man*. Later, Chris Coleman, Artistic Director of Portland Center Stage, asked Robert Alföldi to travel to Portland and re-envision his production of *The Merchant of Venice*. Jim Nicola was also interested in this production but could not find the right venue in New York City.

That first Hungarian trip was the springboard for the future. Nagy says working with Arnoult was an educational tutorial in how to deal in international

³¹ Arnoult, Interview.

³² Arnoult, Interview.

³³ Arnoult, Interview.

³⁴ Arnoult, Interview.

relations. Nagy also believes that working with Arnoult aided ITI in expanding their horizons, particularly by creating access to well respected and established American theatre artists like Jim Nicola, Molly Smith and Rob Orchard.

It was so important for me and the others at ITI to start a dialogue with these people and have their feedback on Hungarian theatre; to have the opportunity to learn from the American theatre makers' taste, way of thinking and priorities but also to introduce them to what was going on in Hungarian Theatre which was at that time very exciting and interesting.³⁵

When András Nagy resigned from the Hungarian Center of ITI, Arnoult lost his main partner in Hungary. Arnoult tried to continue working though the Hungarian ITI with Nagy's successor but this proved to be a difficult partnership. The infrastructure Nagy had built during his time at the Hungarian ITI did not run smoothly after he left. Nagy says he resigned from ITI partly because he felt he was no longer understood, supported or trusted by his Board of Directors. Now Nagy is the Director of the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute (OSZMI). He says this is a very different situation because it is a state sponsored position of a much larger institution. OSZMI is also partly a museum, which has a very different set of rules and laws. This position does not allow him the flexibility to continue his focus on working in an international forum.

Philip Arnoult says that András Nagy was an important partner because he

³⁵ Nagy, Interview.

is, "...generous, truly diplomatic and never promoted himself as a playwright. He never came to the table with an agenda."³⁶ Arnoult and Nagy both say that the success of ECETI was that they understood each other very well. Nagy says it was always clear to him what it was and whom it was Philip was interested in. It was also important that Nagy had people/assistants/advisors/colleagues who could help with artistic decisions and with the organization of visits.

Two of these colleagues, dramaturg Kinga Keszthelyi and theatre critic Andrea Tompa, played key roles in introducing Hungarian theatre culture to American theatre artists. Keszthelyi became involved in the ECETI program during the visit of the second group of American theatre professionals in 2000. Nagy recommended her to Arnoult because he says she had wonderful organizational skills and very good taste in theatre. The group consisted of roughly ten Americans visiting Budapest for ten days (they traveled to Kaposvár as well). Keszthelyi escorted them to nine different performances. The group also met with Hungarian theatre professionals during the day. It was a rigorous schedule. Mornings and afternoons were set aside for interviews and watching videos of performances that had previously closed. Keszthelyi's role as organizer of these early trips included: booking the group's hotel, reserving the theatre tickets, arranging meetings with important theatre professionals, getting video or DVD's of

³⁶ Arnoult, Interview.

performances, writing the synopsis of the plays that were not available in English translation and briefing the group on each piece they would see during their visit. She also dispersed books on Hungarian theatre that she felt would be interesting and illuminating.

Kinga Keszthelyi acted as chief organizer of these visits until Andrea Tompa took over in 2002. Tompa's first involvement with ECETI was organizing a trip for a group of Americans to attend the National Festival in Pécs. Participants included American theatre professionals Marc Masterson (Actors Theatre of Louisville) and Chris Coleman (Portland Center Stage). Tompa says she saw the mission of the ECETI program as bringing American artistic directors to Hungary and introducing them to Hungarian theatre directors. The goal was for these Hungarian theatre directors to be brought to the United States in order to have American audiences exposed to a foreign theatrical perspective. But she admits that, in the beginning, it was often difficult for her to understand the clarity and overall objectives of the program. There was also a lack of understanding about the American system of producing work; the term "producer" in and of itself was a foreign concept.

In our view, sometimes I'd discuss it [ECETI] with the Hungarian theatre professionals...we felt that this project was not concrete enough. And it had no clear focus: where does it want to go? What is the target? For instance... well, you have to understand that for a Hungarian theatre maker or professional the idea of a producer is something said

in Chinese. We don't have anything like that. The producer is the state here—the state gives money to produce things. When Philip was here walking around we were saying, 'well he is a producer', but nobody knew what a producer does.³⁷

Arnoult served as more of a matchmaker than a producer. For some theatre professionals working in Central Europe the idea of having a project like ECETI, with no concrete gauge for success, was unfamiliar to them. The many trips to Hungary and the enormous effort for exchange resulted in four major productions by Hungarian directors in the United States. To Tompa, this seemed like a small number.

To be honest, at the beginning, the results were not very convincing to me. Yes, I know that János Szász, or Eszenyi or Alföldi were invited to the States to direct shows but that's not really a great number of people or a great number of shows. But when Philip translates it into US dollars and he says that there was a big amount of money [1.5 million dollars]...yes, the American theatres invested a big amount of money in producing shows. But this number didn't really mean anything to us.³⁸

Perhaps the difficulty for Tompa and her colleagues was caused by the signing of contracts as being the expressed purpose of the program. With this singular purpose in mind, it is possible that Hungarian theatre professionals were expecting a greater number of contracts for Hungarian directors. However,

37 Tompa, Interview.

38 Tompa, Interview.

because American regional theatres are large institutions complete with their own internal bureaucratic systems, it is highly unusual to achieve immediate results as far as planning collaborations and partnerships. Often times these relationships come to fruition and grow with time. Perhaps the real gift of the ECETI program, the gift of individual encounters and interactions between the staff of the American regional theatres and the Hungarian theatre directors as well as the dialogue between the Hungarian directors and American audiences, was easy for Tompa to overlook in the beginning because the outcome and direct effect is difficult to measure. However, Tompa says she eventually began to understand and appreciate the scope of these exchanges.

When I met more theatre makers from the US and I started to talk to them... for me it became more and more clear that what they want is not necessarily to find the right director and to take them to the States, but to come to this part of the world and explore things, wander around, find things to get inspired by. And maybe, sometimes, continue the dialogue in another way...or sign a contract or whatever. But the concrete result is not so important... So, for me to understand basically what

Philip does it took me quite a long time.³⁹ An in depth conversation between Andrea Tompa and Molly Smith might have helped clarify some of the concrete results of ECETI. Molly Smith went on two trips to Hungary with Philip Arnoult during the

height of the ECETI program. Smith met Arnoult when she went on the first trip with him in 1999. Jim Nicola mentioned her name to Arnoult when she became the Artistic Director of Arena Stage. She recalls:

I got a phone call from Philip saying, 'Listen, are you interested in any international work.' And I said, 'I'm very interested in it...however, Arena has a focus on American plays and American voices, but what I would be interested in is looking at artists from the other side of the ocean in North/South America, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, wherever, that could come in and look at the American work through a different lens.⁴⁰

Smith was a delegate on the first trip to Hungary.

And it was at that time that I saw the work of János Szász and Enikő Eszenyi. János I just knew as soon as I first saw his work, it was on *Mother Courage and Her Children* at the Víg and I was just flabbergasted by it. And then the other project that I saw there was *Much Ado About Nothing* and that was Enikő Eszenyi. They were the two artists that I immediately connected to.⁴¹

What drew her to János Szász was, Brilliance of imagery, design, verocity of acting. I know *Mother Courage and Her Children* pretty well and what he was able to do with it was quite different and iconic. And so, pretty soon we were able to contract him to come here and direct a production of *Streetcar Named Desire* from

40 Smith, Interview.

41 Smith, Interview.

his perspective...And he also brought over his own set designer. Because he doesn't really know America, a place like New Orleans is a land of the imagination. And so he really worked at it psychologically through the relationship between the two sisters. He just blew the play apart and had audiences arguing in the aisle ways. Audience response was pretty great. Critically, *The Post* slammed it, which was really odd. And other critics came up to this critic and said, 'You completely missed the boat on this.' If I were to look back on the five productions that have been the most important in my nine years here, that would be one of them.⁴²

Smith's impression of Enikő Eszenyi was, I liked Enikő Eszenyi's work on *Much Ado About Nothing*. She comes at it as a performer; she's one of their stars over there. There was a fleshiness about her work that I liked, a humanness about it. And also a volatility in the actors which I thought would be terrific. And with Enikő we went in a different direction. She directed *A Man's A Man*; again, different lens looking at that play. And that was a production that was critically well received but audiences didn't like it very much... almost the exact opposite of *Streetcar*. They just didn't get it. But I think it was more that they didn't get the play--- her translation of it, it was a much more European translation as far as the feel of it. I thought it was stunning visually.⁴³

One of the highlights of the ECETI program was introducing American audiences to the work of Hungarian theatre directors. Molly Smith believes it is extremely important for the audiences

42 Smith, Interview.

43 Smith, Interview.

of Arena Stage to see American plays through the lens of a foreign director because these directors, "...just look at the text, they don't have all the cultural baggage we would have."⁴⁴

I think we as Americans have a familiarity with the work, we have a familiarity with something like *Streetcar Named Desire* and it has been such a part of our American vernacular, Marlon Brando, 'STELLA!'...to have someone come in who doesn't have that, where it's wiped clean, where they don't go to those moments at all. And I think the way János really looked at it is that she was as brutal as he was. That Blanche is as brutal as Stanley. And so it really was these two tigers meeting up and almost devouring each other. In the end, he had her in a straight jacket. That's how she was taken out by the doctors...He also added two young girls as the sisters, two children within the play so that you saw what the earthquake of their relationship was and saw why they were bonded...two beautiful girls with long black hair that would move through this world. So, you had an entre act to it as well. He saw the whole play through that perspective of the two sisters, so by the end of the play when Stella has to give away her sister it's horrifying.⁴⁵

Smith has been to Hungary twice. "Interestingly, they are my favorite directors...as far as just looking at groups of directors, of any of Eastern Europe... nothing moved me in the same way as the work in Hungary."⁴⁶

Although the Hungarians are Smith's

44 Smith, Interview.

45 Smith, Interview.

46 Smith, Interview.

favorite directors, her process of working with Hungarian directors has not always been easy. The collaboration between Arena Stage and Enikő Eszenyi on *A Man's A Man* proved to be quite difficult and taught Smith about the nuances of working with directors from a completely different cultural background as well as the complexities of working in an international, global forum. Not only are cultures and customs completely different but methodologies and styles of communication are dissimilar. This makes it even more necessary that the collaborators be the right fit for the project.

It's not easy bringing people in from different countries. The challenges, the difficulties...it's not just a language barrier, it's a cultural shift as well. I think it has a lot to do with the way in which actors and designers are worked with because, over there, anything is pretty much fair game. Or you go into Russia and a director yelling and screaming at you for an hour is a sign that they like you. Whereas, in America, that's a sign that you're a complete failure. So, you're always having to deal with the cultural divide within that.⁴⁷

Molly Smith is passionate about continuing this tradition of cross-cultural exchange between Arena Stage and directors from abroad, particularly Central and Eastern Europe.

I want our audiences to see our American classics or soon to be classics the same way that they would view Shaw or the same way that they would view Ibsen;

that they can be constantly re-interpreted for our time. As opposed to, 'Oh for goodness sake, I saw *Death of A Salesman* twice.' So, for us, as a theatre that really focuses on American work, there always, always has to be this step back from it to see it from a different perspective.⁴⁸

American audiences can learn a great deal about themselves by seeing the re-envisioning of their classic plays through the eyes of a director from another part of the world. It is illuminating to see these stories told from the point of view of a director who is coming from a completely different cultural context. This kind of exposure is also a way to increase cultural understanding and engage in diplomacy. Molly Smith says of this,

...for me the biggest thing has always been to promote not just cultural understanding but it is this soft diplomacy that occurs through artists when it isn't occurring through governments—then artists need to step up and make it happen on a one to one basis, because that's how minds change. And America, in this moment, is seen in a horrific way around the world and one way that that can change is one on one relationships.⁴⁹

János Szász also believes in the importance of building cultural understanding through collaboration and says he has been directly impacted by this notion of creating soft diplomacy through artistic exchange. He describes the process of working on *A Streetcar Named Desire* at Arena Stage as

48 Smith, Interview.

49 Smith, Interview.

47 Smith, Interview.

one of the most remarkable experiences of his life.

“I do my best work under difficult circumstances. At Arena, we had almost no time to rehearse the show. I also felt that the area in D.C. where the theatre is located is breathtakingly dangerous. I was completely out of my element and far away from my family. But these challenges helped me. And I was able to work with the best actors I have ever encountered. I am very, very proud of that show.”⁵⁰

In addition to his relationship with Arena Stage, Szász has a long-standing dialogue with American Repertory Theatre (ART). Since the beginning of the ECETI Program, Szász has directed *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Marat/Sade*, *Uncle Vanya* and *Desire Under the Elms* at ART. He is also scheduled to direct *The Seagull* in December of 2008. Szász says that working in the United States has shaped his directing career in numerous ways. “Working in the U.S. really made me sharpen my skills. Being in an environment with such clear rules and expectations was good for me; I thrive under this kind of compression. Hungary is much looser somehow and has a kind of Eastern European Mediterranean mentality which is difficult for me to deal with.”⁵¹ One large difference between the theatre communities of Hungary and the United States is that American regional theatres have a much shorter rehearsal period (usually four to five weeks) than Hungarian repertory theatres. Szász feels

50 Szász, Interview.

51 Szász, Interview.

that the condensed time in the American system creates a sense of urgency and clarity of focus; he notices that the “all the time in the world” mentality of the Hungarian theatre system brings about a lack of concentration that permeates the overall creative process and affects the work ethic of the actors.

“I have a hard time in Hungary now since I began working in the U.S. because I expect the same level of dedication from the Hungarian actors as the American actors. But in the United States, actors focus on one project at a time while Hungarian actors are working on many things at once (because of the nature of the repertory system). I think this Hungarian way of working breeds laziness in the creative process.”⁵²

Due to his preference for the American working method, Szász plans to continue to nurture his close relationships with Arena Stage and ART. He feels strongly about his established place as an important part of ART’s worldwide community of collaborators. “ART is really my second home, my family. I cannot find a theatre or company here in Hungary that feels as natural for me.”

Despite the achievements of ECETI, the program was ended in 2004. When Philip Arnoult began ECETI in 1999, he established the 2004 end date. Arnoult’s definition of success for the program was to create a dialogue between the theatre cultures of the United States and Hungary that had a life of its own and did not need his cultivation. Failure would be the

52 Szász, Interview.

absence of any conversation. Arnoult felt that a time frame of five years was enough to determine the result. Fortunately, ECETI was a success in that the collaborations and exchanges it generated continued to flourish and have fostered a new generation of ripple effects.

Artist to Artist: Suspects Abroad

One of the most notable ripple effects of ECETI was New York Theatre Workshop’s Artistic Director, Jim Nicola, beginning an exchange program called Suspects Abroad. However, the goal of this program is different than that of ECETI. The Suspects Abroad program involves New York Theatre Workshop affiliated theatre artists, called the Usual Suspects, traveling the globe on organized tours in order to be immersed in different theatre cultures and introduced to new and different ways of thinking and creating work. The Usual Suspects make up NYTW’s community of theatre artists, which includes important figures in the theatrical fields of performance, design, directing and choreography. A possible byproduct of these immersions for the individual Usual Suspect is meeting potential future collaborators, but the main purpose of these trips is to find inspiration. A description of the program from the NYTW website states:

This program supports distinctive opportunities for NYTW’s community of artists, the Usual Suspects, to travel with small groups of their colleagues to theatre festivals around the world,

providing an immersion experience in some of the world’s most vibrant contemporary arts communities. The Suspects Abroad pilot program was designed to elevate the activities of the Usual Suspects, provide an infusion of new theatrical ideas and techniques into American theatre, and create opportunities for multidimensional artistic growth.⁵³

Jim Nicola’s first trip to Budapest was in 1999. “In the biggest global sense for me it was becoming acquainted with a culture that I knew nothing about and a region that I knew very little about, Eastern and Central Europe.”⁵⁴ Nicola was highly informed by the difference in the structure of theatre culture in Hungary as opposed to the United States. “Learning the shape and structure of the field, of the art form, was very powerful. To still see the old idea of a repertory company at work and relatively strongly even though they were feeling that it was suffering because subsidies were being cut and so forth.”⁵⁵ He was also moved by the place theatre life has in Hungarian society.

The most important thing that united the experience of getting to know a history and a culture of a community, a nation and the world of theatre art that I live in was to encounter a culture where theatre was so central and had been such a significant mechanism for creating a national identity...Here [in Hungary] I

53 New York Theatre Workshop. See generally, www.nytw.org/artist_development.asp.

54 Nicola, Interview.

55 Nicola, Interview.

feel like people who are making theatre are in the core of their community. So that was great to see a society that believes in something and puts money forward for it to be there at the center.⁵⁶

One major component that differentiates the theatre in America and Hungary is the examination of history that is found in Hungarian theatre. There is a clear, overarching concern with history within the population of Central Europe because this is an area of the world that has been so defined by its past. It is difficult to forget a country's collective history when there are bullet holes from World War II still embedded in the buildings, where plaques mark the street corner in the former Jewish ghetto where people were rounded up and taken to Auschwitz, where family members still hesitate to express their true beliefs and opinions due to lingering fear of the Communist regime. As an American theatre professional, Jim Nicola says he believes it is important to understand how the history of a particular country influences the art emerging from that country. He says that traveling and being introduced to different theatre cultures helps him to understand that our way in the United States is not the only way of living and making work. He touches on this when he says,

I heard Chuck Mee once talk to a group of students at Dartmouth, and he told them that he had a degree in history. And they all kind of looked at him like 'why would you bother with that?' He said that it was really important to study history, not so much for the details of

facts of the past, but to be constantly reminded that the way things are now doesn't have to be this way; it can be another way. And that you could make it another way, or you should feel empowered to make it another way. So those things seem really important to me: that Americans in general and artists in my particular circumstance are very isolated. My impulse as an artistic director is to engage other people in things that have interested and excited me. So, it's very personal. So, I try to present work to the audience that interests and excites me and I think might interest them. And with artists I try to do the same thing. What can we do together that you might find interesting that I've already found interesting? So, I thought the opportunity to travel and see that it doesn't have to be the way that it is and they [the Usual Suspects] don't have to be the way that they are was important. I knew it would be important to distinguish for them that we weren't suggesting they should do that kind of work or be like that and you get produced at NYTW. That wasn't what we were saying. What we were saying was: here's an opportunity for you to consider your life and work and possibly meet some interesting collaborators as well.⁵⁷

Although New York Theatre Workshop is a theatrical institution, the idea behind the Suspects Abroad program is to give the individual artists affiliated with the theatre an opportunity to experience new theatre cultures, find fodder for inspiration and possibly meet potential collaborators. These trips are about

56 Nicola, Interview.

57 Nicola, Interview.

person-to-person encounters. A recent Suspects Abroad trip was to Budapest in October of 2006. Andrea Tompa served as the organizer for this trip. Tompa's work at the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute involves many different aspects, but she says the most important element of her job is to organize Hungarian theatrical immersions for non-Hungarian visitors. During this Suspects Abroad visit, she understood that this group from NYTW was visiting Hungary for the educational and inspirational experience and not to sign contracts. So, she changed her tactics from the days of ECETI and decided that there would be no list of compulsory shows to see or directors to meet. There were, of course, important names but she decided to focus simply on people who were doing good performances.

I don't care about their age or interests because the important thing is to give something interesting to those people who come to see shows. And if I compare the very first meeting of ours and the last group of Americans that came in 2006, the difference would be that at the beginning it was clear that people are coming here to find new directors, interesting directors who are willing to work in the US and they can sign contracts. So, it was a very clear output or desired result. But this last visit of this group of people from NYTW, which is related to Philip's work, had a different target because it wasn't already about searching for people and working with different directors but to make contacts, to get

inspired by work, to talk to interesting people...My position in Hungarian theatre is completely neutral. I'm not interested in selling anybody. I'm interested in my own success but I am successful if these people are happy, if they get inspired by what they see and if they have new ideas, questions, etc. So, if they hate a show it is the same for me as if they love it. But the success of mine is if I can show them something that is good for them.⁵⁸

Tompa expresses concern, as someone who is responsible for making introductions to Hungarian theatre life, for showing theatre professionals from abroad an accurate portrayal of theatre culture in Hungary as opposed to a utopian view.

...probably for those people who come here for a week or two to look around and see Hungarian shows, they have the impression that Hungarian theatre is very good, because we usually pick the top of the shows to show them---and not only from one season but two, three, or even four seasons ago [this is a product of the repertory system]. So, this is a completely distorted image of the Hungarian theatre culture.⁵⁹

Andrea Tompa is trying to change the distortion of that image.

58 Tompa, Interview.

59 Tompa, Interview.

Artist to Artist: Artus in the Studio

The second type of artist to artist model I will explore in this paper is when members of Hungarian independent theatre companies collaborate with members of American ensemble theatre companies. An example of this type of working model is the tri-company collaboration between Gábor Goda's theatre/dance company, Artus (Budapest), and the company members of Thunder Bay (Massachusetts) and the Toaca Cultural Foundation (Bucharest, Romania).

The overall artistic aesthetics of these three companies share distinct similarities and differences. For example, Gábor Goda comes from a training background of pantomime and contact improvisation.

In Goda's works, the boundaries between the various art forms become blurred; music, puppetry, song, verse, architecture, and visual art all contribute to the whole as much as motion does. Goda founded his company Artus in 1985, and soon moved out of conventional proscenium venues, based even today in a disused factory building. Artus' collective compositions tend to reveal—on the level of associations, not narrative—the most ancient and most universal emotions and experiences of humanity, and thus present a primarily intellectual challenge to the audience.⁶⁰

60 Fuchs, *Two Decades—Three Generations: Hungarian Dance Theatre*. From *A Shabby Paradise*, ed. Péter Fábri, pp. 60-61.

Thunder Bay's aesthetic includes a focus on music and soundscape. On their website, Ed and Beth Skinner describe the aesthetic of Thunder Bay as:

Thunder Bay's dramatic worlds are manifested through striking visual imagery and music in an innovative style linking mask and puppet characterization with extraordinary voices, dance and acting. The evolving style of speech, chant and song uses overtone harmonics and other multiphonics, microtonal slides, yodels and calls. Within the group's performance aesthetic, visual elements are animate and set design is always in motion and interactive.⁶¹

Toaca's aesthetic is best described in a review of their production *Dorde* by Paul Xuereb of *The Sunday Times* in Bucharest.

It was an aesthetic relief to watch a piece that was pure theatre, a work in which technique and discipline were fundamental, language only secondary in importance and entertainment incidental. *DORDE*, (MITP Valletta) is a myth made flesh, a short but impressive work directed by Nona Ciobanu (Romania). The work is fluid, like the rivers and clouds over which *Dorde* flies over his magic horse, *Murgu*. The plot is a basic one about human longings, fears and the final reality of death. It is an austere fairy tale that depends for its effectiveness on the skill and expressiveness of the actors and their

61 Thunder Bay. See generally, www.thunderbayus.org.

ability to evoke a variety of space or the remote spaces of a grim forest. As one can well imagine, the acting skills needed were hardly of the naturalistic type and depended very largely on the expressive use of the body, sometimes in a semi-acrobatic style, and the ability to use, deploy and re-deploy what little there was in the way of set, which was basically a platform easily taken to pieces and easily reassembled. As in dance theatre, much also depended on the discipline interaction of the cast and their ability to switch roles from one second to the next. The dialogue was mainly English, with a liberal sprinkling of Romanian, Russian and even Maltese.⁶²

It is possible to see how an outside eye might find the idea of a collaboration and collision between these three different aesthetics enticing.

Gábor Goda first met Philip Arnoult through Eva Magyar and her company, Shaman Theatre. Magyar brought Arnoult to see one of Artus' pieces and this introduction opened up a direct connection between Arnoult and Goda. Arnoult came to see another Artus production and brought Nona Ciobanu, Artistic Director of Toaca, with him. Arnoult, Goda and Ciobanu started to talk about the fact that Ciobanu and Goda's companies might have something in common. Arnoult encouraged them to meet so they could begin an informal dialogue. Goda and Ciobanu immediately

62 Toaca Cultural Foundation. See generally, www.toaca.ro/Theatre_project1.php.

felt a positive connection. Goda says, "It was very nice that Philip's idea was not to do anything. There was no goal...just to speak and inform each other about how we work, what's the style. There was no pressure. Nona and I were both very cautious. And it wouldn't have worked for us if there was any pressure...we would have stepped way back. Even later when we started to talk about how to work together we had to keep the idea of no pressure, no goal, just let happen what will happen."⁶³

Arnoult had put Ed Herbst and Beth Skinner, Artistic Directors of Thunder Bay, in contact with Ciobanu and Toaca much earlier. Therefore, Artus was the third company to join the conversation. When Ciobanu was in Hungary and it was clear Goda and she were developing an artistic bond, Arnoult called Herbst and told him, "We're having a nice conversation here so let's continue the dialogue."⁶⁴ After one year, all three companies found a way to meet together.

The first time Artus met Thunder Bay, Gábor Goda and his collaborator, Ernst Süß, went to the United States and met Ed Herbst and Beth Skinner. Goda did not immediately feel that these were people his company could work well with. But he said it was nice to meet them and spend time with them. On the other hand, he felt he instantaneously spoke a common language with Toaca. He says he thinks this could be because Thunder Bay was from a different culture. But with

63 Goda, Interview.

64 Goda, Interview.

Toaca, they understood the same jokes, there was an instantaneous kinship.

Later in the process, Herbst traveled to Hungary. There was a two-year period of these kinds of meetings: Artus to the United States and to Romania, Thunder Bay to Romania and Hungary. All three companies continued to talk together and share ideas. Eventually, they started to discuss what they might do together, what kind of collaboration they could create. All three companies decided to begin dreaming about what they would make together and where they would create this work. They agreed that in order for all members of the collaboration to be on equal artistic footing it would be best to create in a neutral territory, a place none of them was familiar with or called home. Perhaps this was because all three companies feared being considered the “other” in this creative situation. Creating work based on a culture that was “other” for all of the individuals involved did somehow put them on what they perceived to be a level playing field. For a number of years, Goda says he had been interested in the role time plays in the Mayan language. When Goda brought up an idea about exploring Mayan culture, everyone was immediately interested. “Ed and Beth had a friend in Chiapas, an anthropologist (the best friend of Ed’s mother) and there was also a dancer living in Chiapas who used to work with Ed. So, there were many signs and connections that showed this was the right spot.”⁶⁵ They then traveled to Chiapas, Mexico in

the spring of 2006; this was the first time all three companies came together and were attempting to generate material.

The main concern was how to work together. Thunder Bay and Artus/Toaca had very different definitions of what it meant to collaborate and different ideas of how they should work and exchange ideas. All three companies decided to best way to begin was to go to separate rooms and generate material. Then, at dinner or lunch time, they would show the others and talk about what they had made. If someone was interested in what the others were doing, then they were free to join in. Goda wanted to allow something to happen rather than force something to happen but he felt that Herbst was frustrated with this way of working and desired more direct contact and structure. After one week, Goda invited Herbst to add sound for a piece Artus was working on and this invitation seemed to ease Herbst’s frustration. On the last day, there was a kind of workshop day or showing day where the companies shared how they had been working and what they created. Here is where Goda said he could see just how different the three companies were.

Regardless of the apparent difficulties in this collaboration and the differences in aesthetic process, the three companies decided to continue working together. In October of 2006, Ed Herbst traveled to Budapest to work with Artus. It was planned that all three companies would meet in Santa Fe, New Mexico in the fall of 2006, but they were unable to secure funding. It had been Goda’s plan to ask Herbst to compose music in Santa

Fe for the creation of the Artus work based on the material they generated in Mexico. Instead, Goda invited Herbst to come to Hungary because he felt he still needed Herbst for the music. During the rehearsal process, the Artus Company would generate material one day and Goda would cut it the next. It was a very loose process and it turned out that music became a less integral part of the piece. This meant that Herbst needed to be very flexible but had difficulty because he felt his role in the collaboration was unclear and underdeveloped. On the last day, Goda gave Herbst an outline of the piece and asked him to write down (going step by step through each scene) the music for each part of the performance. Goda says that Herbst seemed to relish this part of the process because he had a clear set structure and attainable goal.

The next time these three companies met in the spirit of collaboration was in October of 2007 at the Santa Fe Art Institute in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Susan Prince, who had been a coordinator for their program in Mexico, also joined the companies. The three groups approached this residency with a very different set of goals and working methodologies in mind. Goda and the members of Artus arrived in Santa Fe with the intention to travel to the surrounding areas of the Institute and explore ideas based on themes of nature and using the human body in replacement of natural elements. Because they had premiered a piece inspired by their discoveries in Chiapas the year before, they felt ready to embark upon a new investigation. Thunder Bay

was creating and refining material for a new piece based on the story of Alice in Wonderland; they asked for specific help with video projections from Ernst Süss (Artus) and Iulian Baltatescu (Toaca). Toaca was continuing to explore the investigation they had begun in Chiapas, but they decided to work primarily inside of the Institute. Like in Chiapas, the three companies worked mostly separately with some small collaboration between particular company members. A decision was made at the beginning of the residency that after one week they would have a sort of “open day” in the Institute in order to show each other what they had been exploring and creating. Thunder Bay and Toaca immediately began generating material specifically for that showing while Artus ventured outdoors and explored. Goda said he and his company decided they would choose which material to present on the morning of the showing. Because Toaca and Thunder Bay were both working inside the Institute, there was more collaboration between them, although there were instances when certain members of Toaca or Thunder Bay would join Artus in the natural elements. In fact, there was one day when everyone accompanied the members of Artus on an outdoor excursion and showing in a riverbed.

Goda believes that what he and his company members received from this long-term collaboration was not necessarily inspiration from the other two companies but inspiration from the opportunity to travel and engage with

65 Goda, Interview

various cultures. From the point of view of Artus, this tri company collaboration has reached its natural end. Through his experiences with Toaca and Thunder Bay, Goda has come to the conclusion that a particular collaboration can only be fruitful if there is complete equality among the various members or if the working relationship and hierarchy is extremely clear. In order for this to be possible, smaller groups of collaborators are necessary. For example, four or five people.

With this collaboration behind him, Goda is now focusing on and researching the possibility of his company traveling to Australia or Africa. He says that he would like his company to travel and spend two or three months in a new place every second year.

Over the past three years I have gotten a lot of inspiration from the trips with Thunder Bay and Toaca. In the past I have worked in other co-productions with international companies (from New-Zealand, Israel, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, etc.), which have added to my work a great deal. This helped me to look upon life, the world and my own work from another viewpoint. Through traveling and meeting people I have learnt about the myths of other cultures and peoples. I see my own contemporary being in the intersection of progressivism and tradition. This has been the focus of my interest for the last 15 years. I have written and directed a performance on the 131 sentence fragments of Heraclitus, the story

of Osiris, the Chinese fox spirits, Cain and Abel, the Mayan creation myth, the songs of the Maoris, the legend of the Grail and the Hungarian turul bird. When I look back I realize that large part of my work builds on the ancient consciousness of the various peoples and places of the world. As if I was examining a single gem from various angles – it glitters differently, it shows a different face from each angle, but it is still the same. I am not interested in the literary theatre but in the theatre situation itself. The ritual itself.⁶⁶

For Goda, these intercultural immersions are necessary in order to gain perspective on who he is as an artist in a global context and what stories he and his company members are compelled to bring to life.

Fulbright: The Hybrid Model

The Fulbright Program was established by the United States Congress in 1946 and is named after Senator J. William Fulbright, a proponent of education and international exchange. The Fulbright Program is sponsored by the United States Department of State and “is the largest U.S. international exchange program offering opportunities for students, scholars, and professionals to undertake international graduate study, advanced research, university teaching, and teaching in elementary and secondary

⁶⁶ Goda, Interview

schools worldwide.”⁶⁷ The program’s mission is to “enable the government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.”⁶⁸ The Fulbright Program seeks to foster cultural empathy by sponsoring one on one acts of diplomacy through immersion and awareness. J. William Fulbright believed that,

...international relations can be improved, and the danger of war significantly reduced, by producing generations of leaders, who through the experience of educational exchange, will have acquired some feeling and understanding of other peoples’ cultures why they operate as they do, why they think as they do, why they react as they do and of the differences among these cultures.⁶⁹

The Student Fulbright Program between the United States and Hungary has a strong history of creating a dialogue between theatre professionals in both countries as well as providing the financial and structural stability necessary for cross cultural collaboration. A student “Fulbrighter” is sponsored by the educational institution where they are currently earning or have previously earned their degree and is hosted by a

supporting educational or governmental institution in the visiting country. This is representative of an institution to institution exchange. However, the stated goal of the Fulbright Program is to provide students, scholars and teachers with one on one, personal interactions and cultural immersions. This means that the student Fulbrighter’s host institution, while being in direct contact with the student’s home institution as well as the visiting country’s Fulbright commission, encourages and facilitates the student’s engagement in various artist to artist and institution to artist encounters. Because the Fulbright Program serves as an institutional umbrella designed to foster direct engagement with the host culture, it is truly a hybrid model.

There have been many examples of American theatre artists developing artistic relationships with people and institutions in Hungary and vice versa with the support of the Fulbright Program. One such example of the web of collaborative exchanges Fulbright has provided between the theatre communities of Hungary and the United States involves a former American Fulbrighter named Ashlin Halfnight and his theatre company, Electric Pear Productions. Halfnight came to Budapest on a Fulbright Scholarship in 2005 and was hosted by the National Theatre. While in Hungary he wrote several plays, one of which was a bilingual English/Hungarian piece entitled *Cronotopia* that wove the myth of Cronos with the modern tale of an American real estate developer in Budapest. In July and August of 2007

⁶⁷ U.S. Fulbright. See generally, www.us.fulbrightonline.org/about.html.

⁶⁸ U.S. Fulbright. See generally, www.us.fulbrightonline.org/about.html.

⁶⁹ Huszár, Ildikó, ed., *Fulbright Student Conference Papers: Academic Years 2002/2003 and 2003/2004*. Back cover.

Halfnight and Electric Pear Productions (the name comes from the direct English translation of the Hungarian word for light bulb) spent time workshopping *Cronotopia* and premiered a fifteen minute abridged version at the Sziget Festival in Budapest, one of Europe's largest summer music and arts festivals. The American collaborators on the project included Halfnight, Emily Long and Melanie Sylvan while the Hungarians consisted of Yvette Feuer, Andy Hefler, Ottó Pécz, Samu Gryllus and Kinga Keszthelyi.⁷⁰ It is important to note that Kinga Keszthelyi, Ottó Pécz and Yvette Feuer are all Hungarian Fulbright Scholars and Samu Gryllus was recently awarded a Fulbright for the 2008-2009 academic year. Halfnight believes his time in Hungary,

...gave my work added depth. Being in an environment where everything's new...allows for a shift in perspective that I found very rewarding.

I began to notice things about my routines and my writing that I hadn't before...It was a liberating and wonderful time, and one that has produced some of my best work yet.

Halfnight met many colleagues at the National that quickly became collaborators.

...the two dramaturgs were wonderfully supportive and welcoming both in terms of professional help...and in terms of social networking...I also cultivated a very close and professional relationship with several of the

actors in the National's company. This resulted in professional collaborations that are still in the works..."⁷¹

Ashlin Halfnight's time working at the National Theatre proved crucial to the development of *Cronotopia* and allowed him to make several deep artist to artist connections. National Theatre dramaturg Kinga Keszthelyi also served as the dramaturg for *Cronotopia* and introduced Halfnight to actor Yvette Feuer and her musician husband, Samu Gryllus. National Theatre actor Ottó Pécz was as an actor in the piece and is now currently studying on a Fulbright at The New School in New York City, where Halfnight now resides. Halfnight says he is hoping to continue to keep this piece alive and tour it to various theatre festivals in New York City and Europe.

This collaboration between one American Fulbright Scholar and three Hungarian Fulbright Scholars is far from being the only example of a theatrical collaboration fostered by the Fulbright program, but it is the most recent, direct and easily traceable. The Fulbright Program provides the financial and institutional structure necessary in order for individual theatre artists to make artistic connections with other theatre artists and theatrical institutions. It also provides a concentrated amount of incubation time and cultural immersion where an artist can be financially secure and able to focus solely on creating. In Halfnight's words, "I think the Fulbright

70 Electric Pear Productions. See generally, www.electricpear.org.

71 Ashlin Halfnight Fulbright Final Report, 2005.

program is the best kind of foreign relations effort, period. It's on the ground, personal, and highly engaged in a non-threatening way."⁷²

Critical Analysis:

Philip Arnoult began his efforts to create a dialogue between the theatrical communities of the United States and Hungary in the early nineties. Since then, many different working models have emerged between the two theatre cultures. The three main categories of working models include institution to institution, institution to artist and artist-to-artist relationships with Fulbright serving as a hybrid model. There are many positives and negatives that come from these working models and the sub categories that emerge. As an American theatre artist working in Hungary, collaborating with Hungarian theatre artists and creating work based on my Hungarian roots, how can I and artists like myself best continue the impulse Philip Arnoult started fifteen years ago? I believe that in order to do this we must take the lessons learned from examining these different models and incorporate them into our own work.

By closely examining the ECETI program, it is my belief that its overall impact on both theatre cultures has been and continues to be significant. Possibly the most important impact of the ECETI program was the introduction of Hungarian theatre culture to American

72 Ashlin Halfnight Fulbright Final Report, 2005.

theatre audiences and theatre critics. This engagement in a global dialogue is necessary for American audiences, particularly today. The events of September 11th in the United States have further isolated an already geographically isolated country. The kind of artistic, international collaborations that flourished in America in the seventies, eighties and nineties are becoming more difficult due to fallout from Homeland Security. It is becoming increasingly problematic for an individual theatre practitioner, a theatre organization or a theatre festival in the United States to obtain visas for international artists. There was a time when the State Department saw international dialogue and exchange as a necessary diplomatic step in order to deepen perspective and break down cultural barriers, but, unfortunately, that time has passed. Any chance an American audience has to engage with the work of international artists opens an essential door of awareness to the outside world.

The ECETI program has had a positive impact on the audiences of American regional theatres, however, the impact on Hungarian audiences is more abstract. Hungarian audiences are indirectly affected by seeing the work of Hungarian directors who have come to the United States and been influenced by their contact there. It is also possible Hungarian audiences are indirectly affected by the kind of artistic validation and boost in self-esteem an invitation to work in the United States has brought to their theatre directors. What I do believe has been of clear importance for Hungarian theatre

culture is the opportunity, through ECETI, to open doors to the rest of the world and receive direct feedback from the theatrical community of the United States. András Nagy believes that the Hungarian theatre culture benefited from ECETI in several ways.

Figuring out the way to show the best face of our theatre culture to foreign visitors was an important process for us. Our dialogue with Philip helped give us a clearer vision in that regard. It was important for us as Hungarians to see work of and meet people from abroad who have a different view and mindset. We are in a kind of isolated theatre culture and we are not able to tour all over the world with everything we have produced. It was extremely important to have people coming here that were able to create those kinds of opportunities. For any theatre professional in Hungary to be able to travel and work in the United States or any other foreign environment is extremely important. This was influential in the work of Eszenyi, Szász, Alföldi and the others and served as a huge part of their learning process. It was also important for these directors to have international successes or failures...for them to see how their mentality, mindset and method would be received by a different culture.⁷³

I believe the theatre community of the United States could have also benefited from similar feedback from the Hungarian theatrical community as well as Hungarian audiences. I realize I am

touching on difficult ground here because this would have involved bringing delegations of Hungarians to the United States or bringing shows from the United States to Hungary, which was and is an extreme fiscal challenge. Nagy says of this, "The original idea behind ECETI was to bring Hungarians to the United States as well. We had a relationship with Bennington College and were in the middle of working out the arrangements for such a venture when the head of the program left. So this idea somehow died."⁷⁴

It is my belief that the ECETI Program had the potential to truly solidify a long-term dialog between the theatre cultures of the United States and Hungary but was ended before it could reach its full promise. András Nagy says that if he had been able to continue the project,

I would have wanted to give the next generation of cutting edge, challenging, controversial theatre makers a chance to travel to the U.S. This would have been a fantastic way to bring their experiences in America back to Hungary and to show different Hungarian energies and points of view to the American theatre culture. It could have been very beneficial for the Hungarians and possibly very inspiring for the Americans.⁷⁵

But the cultural differences between the countries proved to be difficult.

Here it is a bit looser as far as the ability to change or re arrange schedules at the last minute or the acceptance of taking

74 Nagy, Interview.

75 Nagy, Interview.

73 Nagy, Interview.

a long time to return phone calls. These things are not possible or tolerated in the U.S. I was very unhappy that this project didn't continue, and I think that much of the reason had to do with a lack of interest and energy on the part of the Hungarian ITI and the board of the ITI after I left.⁷⁶

Nagy would be overjoyed if the dialogue between the two theatre cultures could be somehow reinvigorated. He believes it is important to breathe new life into this relationship. Jim Nicola's visit to Budapest with a group of Usual Suspects in 2006 was part of an impulse to resurrect and deepen the exchange, but that particular group did not travel to Hungary in order to meet collaborators or make collaborations happen. They were coming under the auspices of engaging in a brief introduction to Hungarian theatre culture while looking for general artistic inspiration. Nagy says he was "... very happy they came, but Philip was not there. So this type of energy [that of a producer] was missing. It was very nice to have Jim here with his group, which was a wonderful group of artists. But the follow up or how things would move forward didn't come into the picture in that sense."⁷⁷

Jim Nicola's Suspects Abroad initiative is possibly the most important organized ripple effect of the ECETI program. A clear positive and negative of this program is that these trips provide merely an introduction to particular theatre cultures, as seen in their trip to

76 Nagy, Interview.

77 Nagy, Interview.

Budapest. It is up to the individual Usual Suspect to continue the dialogue with a theatre culture only if they are inspired to do so, and the trips themselves are so short in length that it is rare for a Usual Suspect to follow up with a potential collaborator from abroad. The Suspects Abroad initiative is less about building concrete collaborations and more about cultivating the individual Usual Suspect's world artistic view. These kinds of quick theatrical immersions can be life altering and provide much artistic inspiration for the individual artists but they can also be difficult in that the artist is introduced to an altered or slanted view of the theatre culture. There is also the danger of cultural tourism or cultural shopping. Josette Féral, a professor at Quebec University, addresses this by saying,

Curiosity about other cultures is... not recent, no more than the practice of adapting and borrowing. This has always been the essence of art. What is new, however, is the process of awareness which is connected with the phenomenon as well as to the theory and critical analysis that take it as its object. The need to understand the reasons for such transfers, crossings, contributions and exchanges seems to have become inescapable.⁷⁸

Lee Breuer also touches on this point when he says,

I am desperately trying to develop an overview of what it means to be working interculturally in the theatre. There are a lot of underviews. They

78 Féral, *Pluralism in Art or Interculturalism?*

fall in the pattern of either I love the world and the world loves me, lets all get together and party interculturally, or, the notion of Western cultural imperialism—that we are ripping off every cultural icon we can get a hold of, and then selling it.⁷⁹

I trust that the caliber of artists NYTW is bringing on these trips understand that in order to create a work about a particular culture or informed by a particular culture, it is necessary to critically analyze the reasons behind the artistic impulse and do an in depth immersion in and investigation of that culture. Instead of “borrowing” from the different cultures they encounter, I have witnessed first hand that the Usual Suspects use these trips to point themselves toward asking deeper questions regarding the nature of their work and the place they hold in a global society.

A challenge all of the working models have faced over the years is the difficulty that comes with language barriers as well as cultural divides and misunderstandings. I believe it is important for all members of any collaboration to do extensive research and educate themselves on the cultural differences between themselves and their collaborators. This self-education is necessary to help all collaborators enter into the partnership as informed about each other’s individual cultural contexts as possible. Being educated and informed is a healthy way to avoid miscommunication and a way to show respect. It is also

necessary to make sure each collaborator is the right fit for the overall scope of the project. There should also be meetings deciding on a working methodology before the creative process begins.

Artist to artist encounters are extremely important in driving cultural exchange on an intimate, personal level. Often, the products of artist to artist encounters and collaborations are eventually showcased in a public forum where the audience then participates in the exchange, creating an even larger dialogue. Finding the right combination of artists for a collaboration is an extremely delicate process. Often, when searching for collaborators, artists pay close attention to similarities in aesthetic product as opposed to compatibility of aesthetic process. There are basic, fundamental questions that must be answered before an artist chooses to work with another artist or group of artists: Do I like this person or company? And I intrigued by their work? Do I connect with their artistic mission? Are we able to communicate? Do I agree with their working methodology? Answering positively to all of these questions is extremely important to a successful collaboration. However, these questions are often overlooked and remain unanswered until the process has already begun.

79 Cody, 59.

Conclusion

It is my belief that theatre artists and audiences can learn a great deal about their particular context in a global society by being introduced to the art and culture of other countries. Since the fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe in 1990, the theatre communities of Hungary and the United States have been engaged in an artistic dialogue. However, the strength of this dialogue is now waning. One main reason is the closing of the ECETI program and Philip Arnoult’s subsequent shift in focus toward Russian theatre. Without Arnoult and ECETI, there is no program or institution devoted specifically to nurturing the dialogue between American and Hungarian theatre cultures and, thus, there is no driving force behind the initiation of conversation and collaboration. ECETI served as a main catalyst for dialogue that created numerous ripple effects representing various working models; however, the more that time passes, the less these ripple effects retain their momentum and potency. It now appears that Fulbright is serving as the main driving force behind theatrical immersion and collaboration between the two cultures. But Fulbright has a wide scope focusing on all scholarly and cultural areas. Therefore, there is now no organization or program that is focused solely on the theatrical dialogue between the theatre cultures of the United States and Hungary. A large issue is finding someone with enough contacts and financial backing to drive the energy of such a program.

Another obstacle to the continuation of an in depth dialogue is the overall level and quality of the work happening in Hungary. Currently there is a general feeling of stasis in the Hungarian theatre culture that could very well be limiting American interest in dialogue and exchange. Andrea Tompa is worried about the current state of theatre in Hungary. She feels that theatre is becoming a less relevant part of the social dialogue because Hungarian audiences are becoming solely concerned with entertainment value. This is a common worry among theatre professionals in the United States as well.

Unfortunately, in the tradition of Hungarian theatre, as in everywhere else in Eastern Europe (and it is because of the Soviet theatre system) we think about theatre as a form of art that is separate from reality. Probably the lack of dialogue between reality and art in Hungary is very little because of this Soviet tradition. When we go to the theatre we want to forget the reality from which we are coming. We don’t want to face painful things, we don’t want to understand anything about ourselves or our environment or our lives but we want to be entertained. Entertained either by something that has no consequences or something that is only art and has no dialogue with reality.⁸⁰

Nagy agrees with this assessment but says, “...you can never really know what will change a point of stasis. Forming

80 Tompa, Interview.

a new company, or having a wonderful class at the Academy, or opening a new theatre or Robert Alföldi taking over the National Theatre can become a catalyst. And it may not happen very soon but after a time of preparation it has the potential. But another question is what is needed for the Americans. Sometimes they can connect easily with what is happening here but sometimes it's Russia or Poland that is a place of interest."⁸¹

The overall decline of ITI as an international organization plays a large role in the waning relationship between the two theatre communities. With ITI becoming an increasingly obsolete presence in the world's various theatre cultures, the strength behind international, intercultural dialogue continues to deteriorate. The problems of ITI losing its viability and the quick erosion of the theatrical exchange between the United States and Hungary can be partially explained by funding cuts in the arts and culture sectors of both countries. With political turmoil and recessions in the United States and Hungary, the arts have become one of the first areas to experience slashes in funding. Politicians often see the arts as being frivolous and unnecessary. This creates an insurmountable problem because lack of funding leads to lack of support, which leads to a view of irrelevance in the greater populous.

A major debate I have heard during my

time here in Hungary is if there will ever be resurgence in the theatrical dialogue between the United States and Hungary. I believe there will be, but it will have a new face and will fall almost entirely under the guise of artist to artist collaboration or exchange (with Fulbright continuing to play a key role), unless issues of funding are somehow resolved. I have just recently joined the cross-cultural conversation between the United States and Hungary because I believe that my work as a theatre artist will initiate from a deeper place if I expand my understanding of what theatre is by immersing myself in the theatre of a different culture. I believe that in order to become a better theatre artist, I must first examine my heritage and investigate what came before me. Professor Josette Féral describes the necessity for this kind of exploration by saying, "...the artist has to analyze and establish a cultural position. To reflect on their own history and background, investigate and analyze their origins so as to establish their own cultural position and thereby identify possible meeting points: in other words, one must clarify one's own analytical and creative context."⁸²

It is my choice, at this point in my career, to create work that is inspired by my Hungarian roots. My interest in and understanding of Hungary and its theatre culture comes from a personal place. My paternal grandmother hails from Budapest. She fled in 1944 during World War II and came to the United States via Germany. Two years ago I began

81 Nagy, Interview.

82 Féral, *Pluralism in Art or Interculturalism?*

developing a theatre piece, entitled *Leaves with A Name*, based on her experiences during the war and the secrets she had to keep in order to survive the horrors of that time. *Leaves with A Name* premiered in Baltimore, Maryland in 2007 and will be shown in New York City in 2009. My work on this play is the embodiment of my critical analysis of the theatrical working models that have developed between the United States and Hungary over the past eighteen years. In order to make this work with a sense of authenticity, it was and is important for me to learn from prior collaborations between the United States and Hungary. During this nine month period in Budapest as a Fulbright Scholar, I have spent my time digging through dense layers of family history and immersing myself in the local theatre culture. I saw many shows and met many theatre professionals under the guidance of András Nagy at the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute. I developed a close working relationship with many theatre professionals in Budapest and became intimately aware of the complexities of the theatre community. In order to create work inspired by my Hungarian roots or to create work based on any kind of cultural exploration, I must have an intimate knowledge of the social/political complexities of the culture as well as an understanding of the current theatre and dance in the region. For me, this kind of awareness has come through the exposure, immersion and dialogue that the Fulbright program fostered. Questions I am currently asking of myself are: how can I continue to make work

in the United States as well as Hungary, nurture working relationships with my Hungarian collaborators from such a vast distance, introduce Hungarian culture and customs to American audiences and introduce American independent theatre culture to Hungarian audiences? How can I continue to learn about Hungary and treat the culture with respect in my work? These are difficult questions with no clear answers, but the opportunity to live and work in Budapest on a Fulbright Scholarship has given me the confidence and knowledge base to continue asking. Perhaps I can some day bring the next ECETI program to Hungary.

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Number Theory and Educational Exchange in Hungary

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The purpose of this project was to spend a year studying number theory at the Alfréd Rényi Institute of Mathematics while promoting Hungarian-American educational exchange. The project consisted of coursework, independent research, and helping compile course notes for a number theory class taught in the Budapest Semesters in Mathematics exchange program. The report begins with background on the subject of analytic number theory, which was my focus, centering on recent developments and Hungarian contributions. The report also contains specifics of my academic tenure in Hungary as well as an overview of the course whose notes I am completing.