

Impressions

Theatre for Children
and Young People in
Denmark



ASSITEJ Denmark
Axeltorv 12, build. D
DK-1609 Copenhagen V

T: +45 35 34 45 09
F: +45 35 30 44 01
E: info@assitej.dk
www.assitej.dk



Contents

Page 2: The Audience

- Henrik Ipsen

Page 6: The April Festival

- Henrik Køhler

Page 10: The Newcomers

- Carsten Jensen

Page 14: The Development

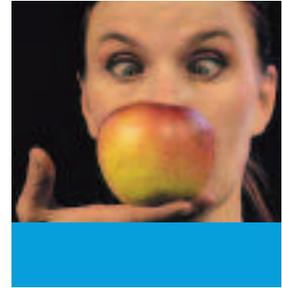
- Beth Juncker

Page 18: The Experimentation

- Gitta Malling

Page 23: The Challenges

- Jørgen Carlsund



New Impressions...

by **Peter Jankovic**, Chairman of ASSITEJ Denmark

For years ASSITEJ Denmark has played an active part in the international promotion of Danish Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) in collaboration with the Danish Theatre Centre (Teatercentrum) and the annual April Festival. We intend to continue doing so in the future. We also have a well-functioning collaboration with the Danish Arts Council's Committee for Performing Arts and the Danish Centre for Cultural Development in connection with festival guests, exchange projects and specific initiatives involving selected Danish children's theatres and shows – most recently in China, Serbia and Burkina Faso. We wish to develop this collaboration and use our respective competencies to benefit Danish TYA.

ASSITEJ Denmark is part of a worldwide organisation that has national centres in more than 80 different countries, which means that global collaboration, exchange and develop-

ment is always our main focus. Denmark and the Nordic countries have helped develop ASSITEJ International's third world network and have also initiated projects in politically unstable and often not very lucrative parts of the world like the Middle East and the Balkans. This will still be an important part of ASSITEJ Denmark's work programme in our effort to help secure the cultural rights of children all over the world.

The foundation of Danish TYA's international success, however, is the unique Danish system of state, regional and municipal support for the art form and its democratic distribution. We are very proud to present this new edition of "Impressions", in which we offer a fresh view of the Danish scene from various artistic, cultural and political angles through the eyes of some of the most prominent writers and practitioners in the field. Please enjoy!

The Audience

by Henrik Ipsen, Actor and Project Manager – Odsherred Teater

I remember being on stage in the middle of a performance, facing a sold out house. I had just stopped in the middle of a line and was gazing into the dark, only able to discern the outlines of the audience. Standing up there, showered in light I found myself thinking, "What are you doing here? Are you here for them - or just for yourself?"

I had been on contract with a major Danish theatre for seven years. I had played everything. Four or five shows a year. Rehearsals during the day and on stage in the evening. Over the years I had fulfilled the artistic ambitions of a number of directors and designers. At that moment, standing there in front of a big audience, pausing for a little too long, I felt infinitely empty. I realised then that the only reason I was on stage was for the great exposure I experienced. I had nothing to say to all those people out there in the dark. All I wanted was their recognition. Not for the story I was telling – it was someone else's idea – but for my skilled execution of it.

As for the recognition – this I did get. They always applauded the performance, usually demanding two curtain calls. They never booed or showed any disapproval. People would sit there quietly and behave in the appropriate manner. During my silence on stage that evening, I realised that this was not enough for me. I needed something more, something greater than that. I wanted

to be in dialogue with the audience – to feel them. I wanted artistic influence on the story I was telling – on its form and content. And I knew that all this would mean leaving the theatre I worked in.

So, a couple of months later, I find myself seated in a school gym. At a Danish theatre festival – one of the world's biggest ones. Sitting amongst a group of kids aged 10-15. They are chattering and commenting on the show – two of them obviously newly in love. A group of boys are fooling around, someone else is furtively writing a text message, but suddenly they are all quiet – something happens on stage attracting their attention. Some now with eyes wide open – others biting their lips, holding their breath. Silence. Then the reaction – an alleviating disrespect fills the room, no false pretence. One girl loudly insists that she was not moved by what just took place – the group of rowdy boys are now pacified and small, but after nudging each other a bit, they are back to normal.

This continues for the whole duration of the performance – everything enacted on stage is critically assessed by the audience, both when the story is incoherent and the actors off balance, as well as when the actors are concentrated and strong, and the story hits the mark. The reaction is instantaneous. Neither simply positive nor negative – but both. Like in life. The show is over and the audience meanders



In 2007 the Danish April Festival welcomed nearly 100 international observers from 25 different countries. Some guests are specially invited by ASSITEJ Denmark to establish networks or develop projects and exchange professional experience and knowledge in the field of TYA.

out – but I remain seated. Transfixed. Deeply moved at what I have just witnessed. The young audience's litter scattered on the floor reminds me of a painting I once saw of a deserted market place in the Middle Ages. Ariane Mnouchkine's epic movie "Molière" from 1978 comes to mind, since I feel that what I have just experienced had the same substance of sweat and presence as that film. I had no idea that this kind of theatre culture existed in Denmark and I get a strong feeling that this is the place I want to be.

Two years pass before it is my turn to face an audience of young people for the first time. I am to play for 7-12 year old kids and feel very excited about the meeting. My memory of the festival is still fresh in mind, and the fact that I have chosen a monologue makes it no less exciting. I have only myself to blame if all fails. The process up until this day had turned out to be exactly what I had hoped for, though very different from what I had been accustomed to at the big theatre. There the important thing had been for me to take care of my part of the job – acting.

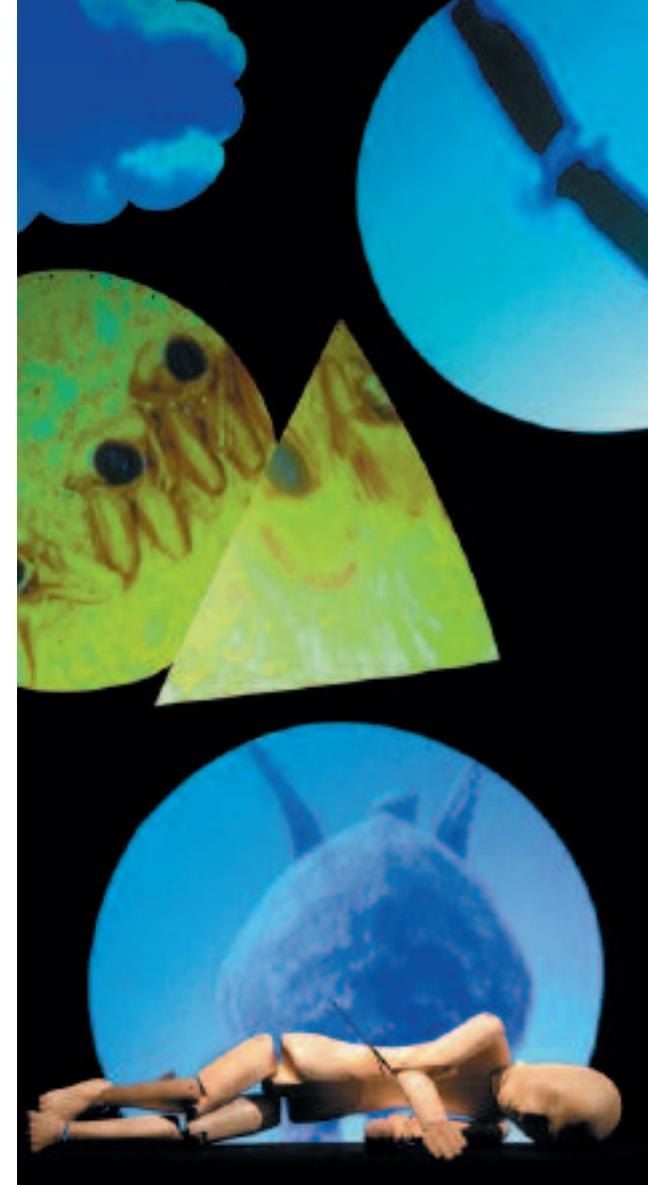
This time the process had started with my receiving a script and being asked whether I might like to do it. I read it – the story sparked me and I accepted. From then on I was involved in developing the concept. What was our intention with the story? Which form or style would serve the play the best? Which director would be able to fulfill the task?

Together we found the best people in the country to resolve the play exactly how we intended and commenced our collaboration. A joyful process that left me with something I felt a great sense of ownership towards, thanks to the dialogue from day one. The creative process was not exclusively for directors and designers but a collective one. I had never experienced this before, and it felt very different and deeply gratifying. Now was the time to put it all to the test.

Of all the things I have ever played on stage, this was the most difficult one. We chose to tell the story as nakedly as possible. There was only me – nothing else – no props, nothing. In principle we wanted to be able to take the show out on a bicycle and play it anywhere. The form was aimed directly at the children, inspired by the narrative technique of Dario Fo – we wanted the audience to comment during the performance, which, of course, they did! The task was to bring the story all the way home without losing the children's concentration. It was difficult and demanding, but in a good way. I now understand exactly how those actors must have felt that day at the festival. I also understand why Peter Brook says children are the best critics in the world. Brook takes his actors out to schools with a "work in progress" to see if what they are doing only moves and interests the artists. If the children fail to live and feel with the actors and hence become impatient, Brook will simply change the piece.

Children demand that you are authentic, present and communicative, if they are to show any interest. A performance is a living organism, and the perception of whether or not something is relevant varies from child to child. There is no leaning back thinking that a good story is enough in itself. You have to be dedicated to your audience in everything you do to stand a chance of having fun with the kids and getting the story across. Still, it goes without saying that the more relevant the story – the better you will fare.

Today I feel very much at home in the part of the theatre business we usually call Children's Theatre. Theatre for Children and Young People is probably more to the point. I would even venture further and call it the "growth section" of Danish theatre. Because in recent years an increasing number of actors trained in the theatre schools are coming to our field directly after graduating. We are beginning to see a productive interaction between the old collective theatre companies and the new generations of actors and directors. I fully understand that attraction. The field may well deserve greater exposure than it has today, yet on the other hand this growth section affords an artistic freedom very rarely encountered in other forms of stage art. And considering the fact that Peter Brook himself has discovered that children are "the best critics in the world", it becomes almost self-evident: Performing stage artists in search of artistic challenges can begin their quest in our field.



Apart from member theatre contributions, ASSITEJ Denmark also receives financial support from the Danish Arts Council's Committee for Performing Arts and the Danish Centre for Cultural Development for our international activities.

The April Festival

by **Henrik Køhler**, Head of Office – The Danish Theatre Centre (Teatercentrum)

The Danish Theatre Centre publishes an annual catalogue of the national TYA repertoire for the following season: **The Red Catalogue** - in which theatres and organisations pay a fee to advertise.



"That was the best story I've ever seen. I could feel it all over my skin."

These were the words of 6-year-old Kasper, as he emerged from the dark after seeing a show at the big Danish Festival. It is hard to express more clearly what it is all about: Letting the children feel "all over their skin" what professional art can do to a person. Why, then, do we invest money, time and so much effort in organising the world's biggest theatre festival for children and young people? Because we

are repaid so generously when we see, maybe even just once, a child forever changed after encountering the magic of the theatre.

The very first Festival was held in 1971. 15 theatres participated with 25 different shows. Today the Festival is the biggest of its kind in the world presenting over 100 theatres, 150 different shows and 500 performances. During the festival week all the children and young people of the hosting municipality are given the opportunity to visit the theatre, and in the

concluding weekend alone more than 20,000 children, youths and adults come to see the shows, all free of charge. The Festival is also visited by approximately 1,000 theatre people, international guests and theatre presenters, and it will usually change forever the local citizens' conception of TYA. Consequently, organising this festival is not merely a task, it is a privilege.

But after 37 years, how do we continue creating a festival which, despite constant

change and improvement, still adheres to the same basic form?

Probably because the Festival's primary focus remains the children. Children as an audience, and as the recipients of a cultural experience. From the very start we have stuck to the principle of making it a touring festival. This way, each year, we can ensure that new children in different regions have their fill of professional stage art. It is a concept that has the power to change the way people think about culture for

children and young people, even in a country like Denmark, where the democratic rights of children are generally taken seriously.

The fact that the Festival serves the important end of providing the many touring children's theatre companies with a space to present their works and sell their shows to promoters from all over the country is an advantage. This greatly helps the theatres acquire the necessary financial basis for existing as professional companies, and it simultaneously facilitates the "cultural food chain" that supplies professional stage art throughout the year to Danish children, regardless of their economic, social, ethnic or cultural background.

Over the years the Festival has also had an effect on the artistic development of Danish TYA. The fact that practically everyone involved in TYA meets once a year for a whole week – seeing each other's work, conducting workshops, exchanging experiences and networking – provides a unique opportunity for the art form to keep moving and seek new directions – not to mention giving the participants a sense of professional pride. It is precisely this bubbling crucible of shows, children, theatre people, innovative art, international guest performances, vehement discussions and fantastic artistic experiences that keeps attracting people from all over the world to Denmark during the week of the Festival.

The Danish April Festival of Theatre for Young Audiences is different from most major festivals around the world in that it lacks a specific international focus. This is probably also its strongest point and the unique characteristic that many theatre people and presenters from abroad come to experience. Paradoxically, an

experience of the diversity of Danish TYA can be quite instrumental in understanding the special environment that has generated an international success with Danish companies playing all over the world every day. Whichever way we look at it, it is an undisputed fact that our guests from abroad come back year after year telling us how they always return home inspired and replenished.

But how long can we continue organising a festival this way? We must never stop questioning the concept. Events have shown that the Festival is more popular than ever. A recent major reform of the municipal structure in Denmark has left us with fewer but larger municipalities, creating a great demand for the Festival, as many Danish municipalities now wish to promote themselves through children's culture. Correspondingly, according to our annual evaluation the theatres are still happy to participate, and there is an on-going effort to make new theatres become an active part of the Festival.

Our greatest future task will be to ensure that a network of presenters – the individuals responsible for the distribution of TYA to the children – develops and adapts to the new municipal structures in such a way that the April Festival remains the best place to visit if you are looking for professional TYA. At the end of the day our Festival is a big window for TYA, and visibility will also be one of the most important factors in the survival of this unique art form.

As organisers of the April Festival, we at the Danish Theatre Centre therefore consider visibility for Theatre for Young Audiences to be our most important goal.



In 2008/09 the Red Catalogue presents 132 children's theatres offering shows of every kind for all age ranges. The catalogue is distributed free of charge to schools, libraries, theatres, and cultural institutions nationwide.

The Newcomers

by Carsten Jensen, Journalist – Editor of the Children's Theatre Magazine (Børneteateravisen)



ASSITEJ Denmark's collaboration since 2003 with ASSITEJ Serbia continues in the seasons 2007/08 and 2008/09 with Serbian visits to Denmark, Danish guest performances at the BITEF and TIBA festivals in Belgrade, workshops and new international co-productions exploring among other things the field of interactive theatre for children.

At the annual April Festival the numerous spectators and buyers from home and abroad can meet 100 or so Danish TYA companies. Many are well-known faces, but each year the festival welcomes new theatres that have qualified as professional practitioners of that great art for small people by presenting new productions that are eligible for state reimbursement – meaning that the state will provide a 50% refund for shows bought by municipal institutions.

Very few of these new theatres receive public funding – and probably they never will – but it proves that there is constant movement in the growth section. And it also proves that you cannot prevent enthusiastic people from making a theatre production and testing it on the open children's theatre market. A market characterised mainly by a large number of touring shows targeting schools, libraries and institutions, and to a lesser extent by in-house productions for small, permanent venues.

The best of the new companies may contribute to revitalising a field, in which, for years, the qualitative top of well-renowned theatres has been relatively consistent. The newcomers flaunt productions that effortlessly blend modern-day technology, Internet, video-projections etc. with more traditional theatrical expressions. Theatres such as Graenseloes with the show "Fucking Alene" (Fucking Alone) and Munk & Pollner with "Ensom men stærk?" (Lonely but Strong?). Or Gertrud Exner, who demonstrates that it is possible to create sense-stimulating toddler's theatre for 1 year olds in Teatret Madam Bach's show "Regn" (Rain)...



**ASSITEJ
Denmark is
participating
in a large scale
cultural
collaboration
programme
with Burkina
Faso and other
West African
countries
through the
period of
2007-10.**

**The programme
will consist of an
exchange
of TYA guest
performances,
theatre and
storytelling
festivals,
workshops with
children and
young people,
and regional
network
establishment.**

These companies fight a heroic battle, but they are competing against old theatres that are just as eager to play with the language of form and content: Gruppe 38 gives us poetic and challenging installation art with "Du må være en engel, Hans Christian" (You Must Be an Angel, Hans Christian); Det Lille Turnéteater presents award-winning crossover art like "Dorthe's Hjerter" (Dorthe's Heart) and Corona La Balance – The Danish National Ensemble for Children's Theatre – investigates interactivity in youth theatre with their show "IRL - In Real Life".

Many of the new players in the field show no particular interest in the traditional political, organisational or artistic values of the TYA community; more frequently their work springs from an interest in playing with the

theatre media and investigating their own possibilities. Several of them are organised in the newly founded association, Independent Stage Artists (Uafhængige Scenekunstnere), whose declared aim is to be a "visible, progressive, innovative and critical co-player in national and local cultural politics".

Nevertheless, there is a genuine will among the old and the new to meet, to talk art and to exchange experiences. And the new structuring of the old children's theatres – once collectively run companies with a permanent acting staff, now led by an artistic management hiring individual actors on a temporary basis – has already led to new forms of collaboration and has opened the possibility of connecting newcomers to the old theatres. This does not alter the fact that TYA is a hard

line of business. A government increase in state funding for theatre productions has been held back, leaving a relatively constant number of 120-130 companies to operate in a declining market for touring TYA. Structural reforms in the municipalities have also meant that many buyers have less resources in their schools and institutions for theatre purchase.

Consequently a majority of the growth section theatres are basically driven to make new productions with little or no money, which forces many to close down, quit – or lie low for a period, doing other jobs or surviving on the dole. As an alternative, some newcomers have set their eyes on the international market, where Danish TYA still has a very good reputation. Sofie Krog Teater, for example – an innovative puppet and anima-

tion theatre – had great success abroad with the "Diva" shows, yet hardly sold anything at home. Likewise, the performance theatre Carte Blanche survived on an international demand for their shows before becoming a well-subsidised regional theatre in Jutland.

The current dire domestic sales situation combined with an artistic call for foreign places also leads many of the "old" theatres to stake on English versions of their most successful shows and new, more visual productions. But first and foremost it is vital to retain the high level of Danish TYA and its characteristics: Intimacy, solidarity and the will to take up all sorts of difficult and existential themes. In this effort we see old and new companies joining forces in the battle to keep Danish TYA alive, dynamic, and forever young...

The Development

by **Beth Juncker**, Research Professor – The Royal School of Library and Information Science (Danmarks Biblioteksskole)

Drama is one of the oldest art forms in the world. You can feel the breath of history – Aristophanes, Euripides, Sophocles – as we step into the old amphitheatres of Antiquity in our late modern times. Yet drama for children, Children's Theatre, is one of the youngest art forms. In Denmark it developed as a special experimental small-stage phenomenon from the late 1960s onward, with Det lille Teater and Jytte Abildstrøms Teater setting new agendas. In the 1970s this budding art form becomes part of the young critical involvement in society that brings problems up to debate from a child's point of view. Young theatre companies with motley names – Banden, Team Teatret, Rimfaxe, Skifteholdet, Baggårdteatret, Artibus, Paraplyteatret – occupy streets, village halls, libraries and schools all over the country with performances about inequality, divorce, drinking, bullying, sex and other topical issues.

Previously, school classes of children and young people had been packed into the various small or large provincial theatre houses to see the productions of the Danish School Stage (Dansk Skolescene) and witness their national cultural heritage. The time had come to take the theatre out to the children, to break the fourth wall, to transcend the barrier between the stage and the audience, time to update and radicalise the repertoire and deconstruct the theatre bureaucracy.

Thus the Children's Theatre Association (BTS) and the children's theatre companies put their stamp – perhaps even inadvertently – on the Danish distribution system for children's culture and on the classical pedagogical concept of cultural education. Since the beginning of the 20th Century this concept had implied that in children's meeting with the arts, form was irrelevant. The cornerstone of the educational process was content – wholesome values, appropriate role models and opinions.

During the 1960s the system went through a major ideological revision, and from the 1970s on, social awareness and critical insight took over. But form was still considered less important. Rather than the way the shows were played and narrated, it was the simplicity of the messages, clarity and understandability that defined their quality and value. In the children's culture system, theatre performances were not an end in themselves, but a means to achieve developmental psychological, pedagogical and educational political goals. Theatre for children was not "art". It was "pedagogy". The technological and social development was to turn all this upside down. Since the 1980s, globalisation has become extremely visible in everyday life. Visual media, television, video, game consoles etc. have invaded people's lives and moved from the rooms shared by the family into the



In 2007 a tour of Danish TYA was organised in Eastern China. Three Danish theatres visited a number of cities with shows, workshops and seminars. In 2008 ASSITEJ Denmark continues the collaboration with a specific exchange project and a Danish TYA festival in Shanghai.

children's rooms. Digital technology, the computer with its possibilities for work and leisure, MP3 players, iPods, mobile phones with communication, photo and editing equipment have now become household items. A fleet of media products which in opposition to the classic ones connect experiential roles with producer roles. Now people can listen and watch, compose and write, edit, design, layout, communicate, search, arrange. And they do. Children can be together physically in their spare time, but now they are also able to socialise regardless of the space or arena and be active producers and communicators in both situations.

The cultural liberation, everyday culture, destabilises the boundaries between the cultures of children and young people, highlights the potentialities in children's aesthetic formation processes, rendering children's culture visible. It also creates a gap, a lack of contemporaneity, between children's culture and the children's culture system. Children's culture functions on a daily basis through mediated aesthetic-symbolical forms of expression and communication. The children's culture system, children's culture, is still a professional pedagogically and psychologically founded culture of presentation, that mainly advocates classical expressions of art and culture – literature, theatre, music, visual art – and classical experiences of art and culture. The system still prefers content to form and the mediated expressions and experiences are still delineated as tendentiously trivial, plagiarising, unoriginal, commonplace. The young Danish Children's Theatre becomes a part of this classical presentation discourse.

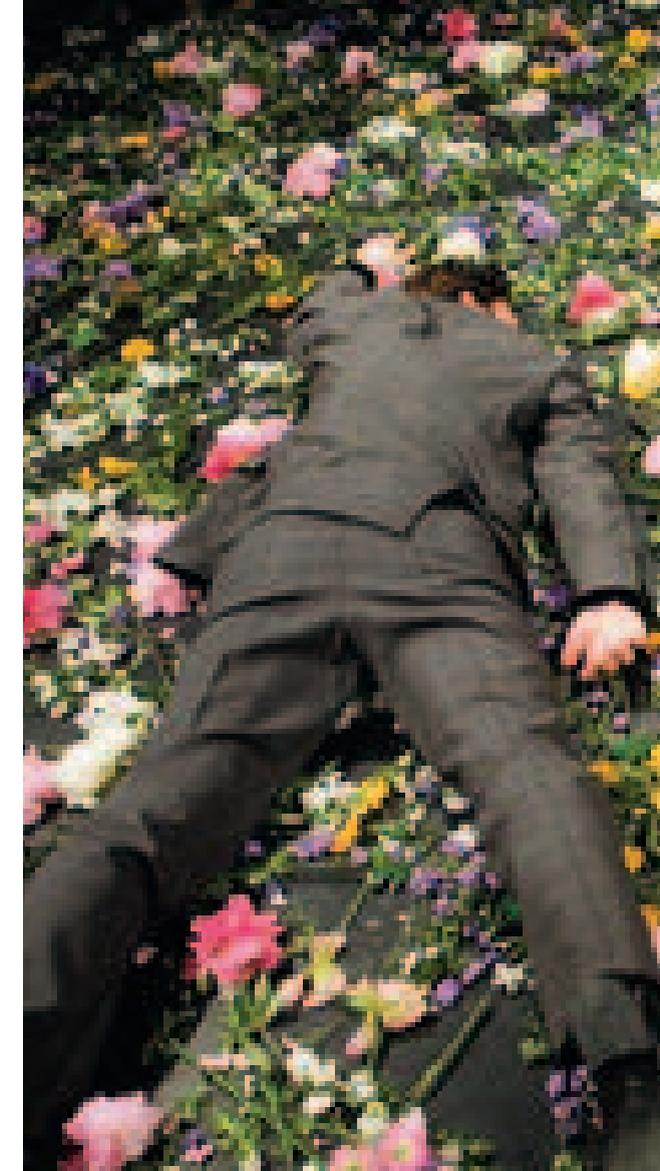
Influenced by the oppositional thinking of the children's cultural system the new situation initially provokes a series of critical, dissociating reactions among the theatres to modern media-borne forms of experience and communication. Should the designers plaster the rooms with moving pictures, should the directors put music bands on stage and allow punk, rock and rap to replace words, facial expressions and gestures in order to please the crowd? The new media forms lack intimacy, atmosphere, authenticity. Elements that the theatre possesses. These and the other classical art forms are then proclaimed the road to artistic salvation. The presenters who hear the call, heed to it.

The children, on the other hand, would never dream of seeing the new media or music forms in opposition to the classical ones – literature, theatre, visual art, music. To them it is not a question of cultural education or choosing one or the other. It is about meaningfulness and significance here and now. It is about fun, excitement and challenges. By the 1990s they have long since subverted all values and rendered the new media opportunities equal to the classical options on a cultural palette that they use freely to the extent made possible by everyday life and national and local cultural policies.

During the same period an increasing number of children's theatre companies realise that they are on the wrong track. We should not hate the new media. Instead we should love their theatres. If the children's theatres are to communicate meaning and significance to

the media-accustomed children and young people of late modernity, the companies must accept that form and content are indivisible, and that they must experiment with the artistic forms of expression particular to the theatre. These need cultivating, refining, developing in order to enable the theatres to work with a child's perspective that will subsequently open up children's perspectives – in stories, narratives, figures, words, dialogue, gesture, mime, rhythm and movement – and create shows that hit their mark: fun, thrills, challenges, breathlessness. Treasure chambers that let us interpret, and from which we can steal expressions, figures and faces. Cultural education today is not a question of having seen or read the right things, instead it covers a wide span of cultural expression and communication. A physical file and library system that can be searched, activated and developed in practice on a day-to-day basis.

On this background the late modern Children's Theatre emerges as a series of exciting, very different, experimenting intimate stages – theatre companies each with their own prominent artistic profile. Theatres that are nationally and internationally significant because no topic is too big, too small or too wrong, and because they are always prepared to take on new artistic challenges, to develop and stay in motion. They create shows that are meaningful to children by taking the moment and the experience of the moment seriously, and by challenging and replenishing, through their art, the cultural range of expression that the children need in order to qualify their everyday lives.



To stimulate the distribution on a national level of TYA in schools, libraries and institutions the Danish state offers a 50% reimbursement to the municipalities for all purchase of professional TYA.

The Experimentation

by **Gitta Malling**, Stage Director and Theatre Manager – Limfjordsteatret

In 2004 the three regional theatres in the former County of Viborg – Limfjordsteatret, Carte Blanche and Thy Teater – joined forces in an effort to develop interactive theatre with and for children. The initiative was based on the County of Viborg's long tradition of working towards the development of children's curiosity and imagination through children's culture.

A number of art groups had been established, and they initiated a series of entertaining and very different projects in the county, all of which put children into focus. The cultural seeds that were sown back then eventually led to the establishment of Kulturprinsen (The Culture Prince) an institution that is in function today, and which has a development department run by Claus Reiche, former actor and holder of a Ph.D. on the children's theatre company Møllen.

Using a contemporary base of knowledge it is Kulturprinsen's task to work as an experimenting regional and national development centre for children's culture. Through its activities the centre is also responsible for developing new quality cultural services for children and young people, and for contributing to generate new knowledge and to develop new methods of presentation for the work with children and culture.



Denmark has a system of state funding that allots up to 15 mill. EUR yearly for the production and distribution of TYA. State-subsidised theatres may be regional theatres, small city theatres or theatres directly supported through project funding. The majority of Denmark's 120-130 producing children's theatres receive no state funding for their productions.



Kulturprinsen's interest in implementing research into artistic processes is a rarity in our theatre work, so it is no surprise that Kulturprinsen stood behind our research in interactive theatre with and for children. They applied for the funding, and together with the three theatres the project's "dogma rules" were formulated.

What basis do we have for experimentation and for developing interactive theatre? Well, Danish Children's Theatre is internationally renowned for its uniqueness of form and content, but most significantly for its relation with the audience, and in fact we have a long tradition of incorporating the child audience directly in our shows.

The theatres were each given the task of producing an interactive show based on the respective theatres' artistic profiles. The duration of the process was a period of two years between 2004 and 2006. Each theatre was responsible for its own production, but all three worked together and were mutually inspired through the workshops that they organised in collaboration with Kulturprinsen.

Using Lewis Carroll's novel "Alice in Wonderland" as a starting point, the task was to investigate how each theatre could create an expression that would involve the children in a different and more genuine way than is usually seen in the communication typical of theatre with audience involvement. With this in mind, a general manifest was conceived stating the following basic rules of interactive theatre for children:

- the audience must turn into participating "spect-actors"
- all the participants' senses must be activated
- our daily conception of reality should be shifted and challenged
- set, space, players and objects must have the ability to be transformed before the eyes of the audience
- the show must challenge the participants to ask questions and use their curiosity as a constructive driving force
- the participants must be given the opportunity to experience something that can be of use in real life
- the participants must go through a personal process of acquiring skills
- the story must originate from and be shaped in interaction with and dependent on the actions of the participants

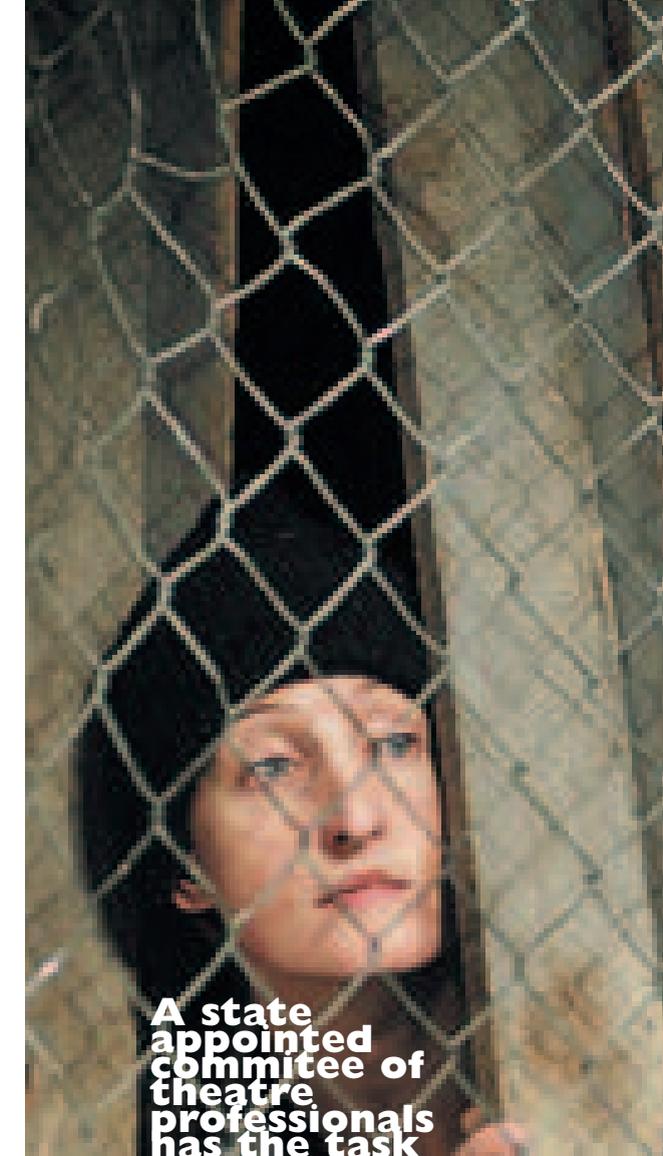
These were the common grounds from which the three theatres continued working, each according to their own artistic ambitions and convictions. The general platform was developed further through shared artistic workshops, discussions and excursions.

The productions were the result of the project. "Undreland" (Wonderland) and "Kaleidoskop" (Kaleidoscope), Limfjordsteatret and Carte Blanche's two shows, were presented at the Danish April Festival. Thy Teater's production "Dukketeaterscenariet" (The Puppet Theatre Scenario) was a large-scale event – a puppet and animation "experimentarium" that was too large to present only a couple of times. All three have toured extensively in Denmark and abroad at international festivals.

In conclusion Kulturprinsen published a book describing the process, the ideas behind the project and the parallel background research.

Here are a few of my own afterthoughts as a participant theatre manager and director of "Undreland": From an artistic point of view I started with the notion of a computer game. The audience was supposed to be able to participate in the play, both experiencing it and influencing its development. During the process we came up with a kind of board game, which proved simpler for us to navigate in. As a director I have learned that boundaries must be defined very precisely when you want the audience to participate interactively as a group. A situation that may be interesting for one active member of the audience is not necessarily interesting for the rest. This fact alone distinguished the process from that of a normal production. We constantly needed an audience at rehearsals to test the interactive boundaries.

The financial background of the collaboration project, its focus and its forum were all prerequisites for Limfjordsteatret's ability to spend so much time and energy on developing the form itself. We had partners that were close to our process, yet not a part of our actual production. Accordingly we had the opportunity to follow similar productions, which proved important to the process of "Undreland", whose form puts traditional dramaturgical structures to the test in every way. Yet the form also generates still more creativity and a desire to continue. The very driving force behind our work!



A state appointed committee of theatre professionals has the task of deciding, at special showcases, which shows may be deemed professional and thus eligible for state reimbursement.



Denmark is probably one of the only countries that has a magazine exclusively devoted to Theatre for Children and Young People. The Children's Theatre Magazine (Børneteateravisen) contains articles, reviews, reports, etc. The publication is financed (indirectly) by the Danish Ministry of Culture, and edited and published by the Danish Theatre Centre.

The Challenges

by **Jørgen Carlslund**, Chairman of the Danish Children's Theatre Association (BTS)

More than 50 of the professional children's theatres in Denmark are organised in the Danish Children's Theatre Association. The general aim of our association is to work, locally and nationally, towards securing the best possible improvement of the individual member theatres' conditions for creating and playing TYA. But what do these conditions look like now in 2008?

Even though we have a Minister of Culture in Denmark who commends the type of theatre we make for children and young people, there is a lack of will and ambition to follow his good words with action. The financial support has long since stagnated and the only innovation in recent years – the plan for a National Ensemble for Children's Theatre – still awaits its ultimate fate. In many ways Danish TYA has been a success, and although success may be interpreted in the sense that we are already doing enough, it is imperative that the recommendations and visions of the TYA community are put into political effect.

For years the children's theatre community has been well organised. Locally, in many regions of the country, we function well, and we have also been able to make our mark internationally. However, on a national level we still fail to hold a central position in the media and in the priorities of the politicians dealing with culture. These politicians seem to be satisfied that their predecessors have

created fairly good opportunities for children and young people in Denmark to see stage art specifically targeting them. Therefore the biggest task for BTS in the coming years will be to contribute to giving TYA a central position in Denmark, since we cannot live on praise and commendation alone. We need more money to ensure proper working and developing conditions for Danish TYA and our children need to be given better opportunities to see good theatre.

On the path towards strengthening living conditions for children's theatres, some current issues will have an impact on their future ability to survive. A recent reform initiated by the government has reduced the number of municipalities in Denmark by half through a merging process. In these new, larger municipalities there are still no established structures for the purchase and distribution of TYA. In the first period of transition this has led to a marked decline in the sale of shows. At the same time we are following, with some concern, the effects of a cut on the overall state budget for regional theatres coupled with regional restrictions on the state reimbursement given when municipal institutions buy TYA. Both factors can put a limit to the supply of TYA, however there is still hope that the new municipalities, due to their size and mutual competition, will give higher priority to art offers for children in order to promote themselves.



The Secretariat of ASSITEJ Denmark works closely together with the Danish Theatre Centre and shares office space in Central Copenhagen also with the Children's Theatre Association.

In Denmark we have had a flexible labour market that combined with good social security has enabled theatre professionals, among others, to pull through despite poor wages and fluctuating job opportunities. This flexibility has been undermined with the increased practice of the Danish job centres to force unemployed artists into full time employment outside the theatre business. If this practice is not harnessed it will become a problem in itself for children's theatres and for the whole stage-art community.

As one step on the road to improving conditions for Danish TYA, BTS has taken part in an effort to present in 2008 a comprehensive mapping of professional stage-art produced for children and young people outside the major theatre institutions. The so-called "Children's Theatre Report". Its aim is to contribute to documenting and clarifying the unique aspects of the art form and its production conditions, and to formulate both its great inherent qualities and the difficulties and challenges it faces.

The Children's Theatre Report will prove to be a very important documentation in our political work, yet concurrently, as theatre people and the children's theatre community, we also need to challenge our self-understanding, discuss how we can become even better, and dare to question whether the way we have done things in the past is the way we should continue doing things in the future. This will enable us to keep one step ahead of the politicians. We must deliver the visions, so we do more than simply react in defence to the consequences of decisions made by our politicians.

As a part of our internal development work we have commenced a series of dialogue meetings and seminars for the BTS member theatres, in which we take up issues of current interest; for example a debate about the Danish theatres' activities abroad and a renewal of the quality development work that previously formed part of the identity of the Danish children's theatre movement.

