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Divadelná Nitra ’2016: Ode to Joy

A major European event in the field of theatricals and Slovakia’s largest theatre festival, the International Theatre Festival Divadelná Nitra celebrated its 25th anniversary this autumn. Established in 1991, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, as part of a common to the countries in Central and East Europe movement for renewal and opening up to the world and Western European cultures, the festival established itself in its very early years providing a prestigious platform for some of the best directors and productions from both Eastern and Western European stages. Ever since the turn of the new millennium, the festival is increasingly gaining ground with its themed programmes dealing with burning political and social issues or topical theatrical trends. The 25th-anniversary edition held 23–28 September was themed Ode to Joy: Past – Present – Future. By choosing the title of the EU’s anthem as the festival’s thematic focus, the team of the organisers have clearly stated their intention to both recap the expectations and hopes pinned on a united Europe and comment on the present challenges to the continent and to highlight what gives cause for optimism or brings joy to us in contemporary theatre.

Traditionally, the festival’s programme had three sections: international selection; the Festival Plus section (where the domestic Teatro Tatro traditionally built its tent in the square in front of the
who have shown their performances the previous night, with students in Theatre Studies and the young critics attending the event within V4@critic residency 2016 under the leadership of internationally acclaimed theatre theorist and critic Patrice Pavis and especially, his regular comments on the productions as well as his final conclusions on the output at the anniversary edition.

The main programme of selected performances included six productions from Germany, Iraqi/Sweden, the Czech Republic, Poland, France and Ukraine: Why Does Herr R. Run Amok? (stage adaptation of Fassbinder’s film by Michael Fengler) by director

local playhouse of Nitra, where most of the performances on the main bill are played, performing its new production The Circus’ Chram on a daily basis) and a rich accompanying programme of street performances and concerts, films, art exhibitions and discussions. One of the highlights here was the public debate titled after the festival’s slogan and moderated by the festival’s director, Darina Kárová, where renowned Slovakian experts in foreign relations and philosophers conversed about Europe’s present issues. Undoubtedly though, the most interesting were the Divadelná Nitra traditional morning meetings held on a daily basis with the companies,
Susanne Kennedy and Münchner Kammerspiele; *The Pillars of Blood* by Iraqi director Anmar Taha, an admixture of dance and physical theatre by the Iraqi Bodies group in cooperation with two Swedish dance companies; *The Hearing* by Ivan Krejčí and the Chamber Stage Arena, Ostrava; *Kantor Downtown* of Teatr Polski Bydgoszcz, a staging by Jolanta Janiczak, Joanna Krakowska, Magda Mosiewicz, Wiktor Rubin; *Suddenly the Night* by Nathalie Garraud and Olivier Saccomano of Du Zieu company; a recently highly acclaimed female orchestra consisting of six musicians and singers, Dakh Daughters Band from Kiev with their cabaret performance *The Roses*, as well as 5 Slovakian productions.

**The best of the Slovakian stages**

*Back Then in Bratislava*, a powerful staging by Patrik Lančarič and Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin must be highlighted among the five productions presenting the best Slovakian stagings in the last season. An adaptation of a book about the life of Slovakian intellectual of bourgeois Jewish extraction, Žo Langerová telling the drama and the struggle to survive of the woman and her two daughters, after her husband, Oskar Langer was sentenced and imprisoned in 1951 by the communist regime.

Inventive and interesting was also the dance performance *Opernball*, an ‘authentic replica’ of a kind of inputs from the popular across Europe annual ball at the Vienna opera, traditionally broadcast live in Austria and Slovakia and stirring up unflagging interest of several generations. The concept of the performance was devised by the female director and choreographer Petra Fornayová, a major figure on Slovakian independent stage in the field of contemporary dance. Dancers and performers immediately reproduce excerpts from the balls broadcast over the years, screened onstage on a large display behind them. Their enthusiastic but also critical and ironic ‘repetitions’ of dance episodes, of captured by the camera relations and celebrities presenting themselves at the popular TV event evolve into an unexpected and ingenious commentary both on the screened inputs and the present obsession with the virtual reality, produced by the e-media.

**Polish production Kantor Downtown was the centrepiece of the international programme**

This production is undoubtedly among the most interesting recent premieres in Poland. This is evidenced by its selection for and inclusion in the programmes of most of the major international festivals held this autumn: BITEF ’2016; Theatre Confrontations ’2016, Lublin; the festival in Cluj, Romania as well as the 25th anniversary edition of Divadelná Nitra.
or how his theatrical ideas function in a new context and in the conditions of a globalising world.

The crew includes four artists of different generations: Jolanta Janiczak (b. 1982), a dramatist and a playwright; Joanna Krakowska (b. 1965), a theatre historian at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, essayist and editor of *Dialogue* magazine; Magdalena Mosiewicz (b. 1967) has made documentaries and shorts; graduated in Philosophy from the Jagiellonian University and the Department of Cinematography at the Film School in Lodz; and director Wiktor

Staged in 2015 at Teatr Polski Bydgoszcz, the production is part of an array of performances and events occasioned by Tadeusz Kantor’s 100th anniversary (1915–1990), a great theatre reformer and an outstanding representative of the Polish and European avant-garde scene of the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s. *Kantor Downtown* strives to achieve much more than just fit into the celebrations. Actually, it seeks to document the presence of *Kantor’s influence nowadays*, to find out what is left of his legacy outside the museums

*Opernball, Slovakia*
Kantor Downtown, Poland

Rubin (b. 1978), who studied Sociology at the Jagiellonian University and Drama Directing at Krakow Theatre School. To implement their idea of following the way in which Kantor's influence and legacy are felt and function now within the theatrical space, they have opted for a critical moment of his career: his visit in 1979 with his emblematic production of The Dead Class (staged in 1975; film adaptation by Andrzej Wajda in 1977) to La MaMa e.t.c., NYC, which has strongly influenced his own work and the American avant-garde and underground scene during the 1970s and the 1980s. Wiktor Rubin and his crew have built an interesting stage installation, placing the Polish director's students and followers from his stay at the USA in the context of a reconstructed setting of Kantor’s key production of the mid-1970s (the famous two rows of desks, at which the dead classmates are sitting who have perished in World War 2, replaced or confronted or complemented by their dummies). Presently, the installation has large monitors in the stead of the actors and the dummies, screening on monitors at a signal by Tadeusz Kantor (Grzegorz Artman) himself exclusive live interviews with famous and less famous American artists who have belonged to the New York avant-garde scene in the Lower Manhattan (Downtown) during the 1970s and the 1980s, telling about their meetings with Kantor and the influence his
theatre has wielded on them. Such artists as Lee Breuer, Linda Chapman, George Ferencz, Barbara Hammer or Ozzie Rodriguez are among the 12 interviewed.

In Kantor Downtown, in their accounts of their meetings with Tadeusz Kantor, the American avant-garde artists of the 1970s and the 1980s, comment from various viewpoints and in the light of their different personal experience and their own careers, on the Polish director’s fundamental principles (the concept of the subject, the concept of the reality of the lowest rank (the austere stage reality) and the concept of the autonomous space), with their thoughts inspired by their memories of him wittingly or unwittingly referring all the time to the present situation and the present problems of the independent experimental stage. The unexpected direct relation between the reconstruction of Kantor’s theatre, the multimedia participation of the American artists and the immediate particular audience is ensured by the living presence of Marta Malikowska, who periodically and skilfully switches between an actress under the bold Polish director and a contemporary performer, persistently raising the question about the fees and the standing of an experimental actor/actress these days.

**Why Does Herr R. run Amok?** by resourceful Dutch director Susanne Kennedy (working in Hague and Munich and awarded the prize for a pioneering, artistically innovative achievement at Theatertreffen ‘2014, Berlin) and Münchner Kammerspiele was yet another memorable event at the 26th anniversary edition of Divadelná Nitra that has to be mentioned for the fairly precise and masterly visual solution (stage design by Lena Newt; lighting design by Jürgen Kolb) and play in spite of the production’s tedious monotony.

Returning to the festival’s slogan and recapitulating what audiences and theatre reviewers, attending its anniversary edition, took delight in pertaining to present theatricals as featured in the programme, it should be said that these were first and foremost the excellent professionalism and the high average standards of the selected productions, which though failed at times to satisfy the need for creative surprises and new discoveries. What, Divadelná Nitra ‘2016 reasserted unquestionably and categorically was that the theatre, singled out by the festival as the best and most essential for the life of the people nowadays, in a world fraught with conflicts and tensions, is the topical socially committed theatre regarding the pressing and burning issues of the society.
A full-length production of *La Bayadère* was put on Bulgarian stage for the first time as late as 2012. Until then, only excerpts from the ballet were performed: Act III, *The Kingdom of the Shades* scene or certain variations[1].

The reason for such a late staging in this country is in its monumental scope. Four acts and seven scenes in the original score, involving in fact a large number of performers, both principal dancers and extras, which, accordingly, requires an array of costumes, sumptuous sets and exotic solutions[2]. Statistical data show that 187 new costumes were designed for the recent production. Actually, it was principal dancer Masha Ilieva’s financial support that made the production possible[3].

The staging of the full-length version of *La Bayadère* in Sofia, 135 years after the ballet’s premiere in St Petersburg[4], was the real thing for ballet lovers. Marius Petipa’s choreography was translated by director Pavel Stalinski, and Boryan Belchev and Hristiyana Mihaileva designed the sets and the costumes.

Fortunately, four years later the production, though difficult to maintain, still garners full houses and new performers are engaged. After all, many children, students at the National School of Dance are dancing onstage along with renowned soloists and this necessitates additional coordination in rehearsal.

The performance of end-October 2016 marked 4 years since the Sofia premiere of *La Bayadère* (8 October 2012), and the next is scheduled to
take place as late as 11 March 2017. Still, the maintenance of this grand production is well worth the effort, providing an opportunity both for training in the style of the Romantic ‘grand’ ballet and for contribution not only by the soloists, but also by many understudies and ensembles excellently tutored by coaches Maria (Masha) Ilieva, Yasen Valchanov, Sara-Nora Krysteva, Ivanka Kasabova.

La Bayadère's score by Ludwig Minkus (librettists: Sergei Khudekov, Marius Petipa) suggests an association
with Giuseppe Verdi’s *Aida* (libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni) both in terms of the affinity for fascinating ancient civilisations (India, in *La Bayadère*; Egypt, in *Aida*), and of the storylines. The temple dancer Nikiya’s love for the warrior Solor (very much like Aida’s for Radames, Captain of the Egyptian Guard) is thwarted by her rival, the Rajah’s daughter, Gamzatti in the ballet (and by the King’s daughter, Princess Amneris in Verdi’s opera). Naturally, this traditional triangle hits more potholes: a second love triangle formed in the ballet by the High Brahmin’s secret love for the temple dancer Nikiya, while in the opera, it is an ‘honour triangle’ between Aida’s father, the King of Ethiopia, Aida and Radames. Amonasro wants Aida to glean from her lover the route the Egyptian army will take the next day, so his Ethiopian forces can ambush them. Aida faces a tough choice between her love for Radames and her loyalties to her father and her country, as she is, after all, the Ethiopian Princess. Nikiya also has to choose but in love alone: either to remain faithful to Solor and die from the snakebite (sent by Gamzatti), or accept the High Brahmin’s love. The final decision in both works is made in favour of love. Still, in a romantic pattern, love is possible only in the hereafter, where there are no worldly or social, or religious differences: Nikiya dies for her love for Solor to reunite with him in the eternity as a ‘shade’; Aida chooses to be entombed alive with Radames. This aesthetics of the impossible romantic love render the two works, composed and premiered almost simultaneously, similar (*La Bayadère* had its premiere in 1877, in St Petersburg and *Aida*, six year earlier, in 1871, in Cairo). A parallel may well be drawn between their structures: both the ballet[5] and the opera have four acts.

*La Bayadère* has a typical of its time number structure. Each act of *La Bayadère* opens and closes with a pantomimic scene, and has a divertissement in the middle, solved as a suite of character dances (Acts I and II) or the classical Grand pas d’ensemble (Acts III and IV). The same event is more often than not retold many times by various characters, using mostly pantomimic gestures.

**Act I, scene 1** is in fact the exposition of the action. Two love triangles are given in broad strokes: between Nikiya, a temple dancer, the warrior Solor and the High Brahmin (scene 1) as well as between the bayadère Nikiya, the warrior Solor and the Rajah’s daughter Gamzatti (scene 2). The relationship of Nikiya and Solor is solved by dancing, while the relations between the female protagonist and the High Brahmin, by using pantomimic gestures,
and the preference given by the choreographer to Nikiya and Solor is discernible in this distinction. Curiously, when exposing the second love triangle between Nikiya, Gamzatti and Solor, the latter is not present and the two rivals fight for him in front of his portrait. This confrontation between Nikiya and Gamzatti is in fact the exposition.

**Act II** is, in its present interpretation, the betrothal of Gamzatti and Solor. Dramatically, this is the rising action, the climax and the denouement. The dances offered here are entirely divertissements, not connected with the rising action: a procession of the characters, the scarf dance; flower dance; the dance of the Golden Idol; Manu (the jug-carrier).
solo (dancing while balancing a jug on her head, ably supported by the two charming younger girls); the dance of the men with percussion instruments and of a couple of soloists.

The classical Grand pas d'ensemble of Solor and Gamzatti, accompanied by four women and two men, inserted in Act II, definitely looks utterly irrelevant, which is evidences by the costumes: Gamzatti and the four girls wear classical tutus, while the rest of the characters, including Nikiya wear Indian salwars.

Nikiya’s Variation (Dance with a Flower Basket) comes only after the classical Grand pas d’ensemble of Solor and Gamzatti. Moving the Grand pas d’ensemble of Solor and Gamzatti from Act IV into Act II just makes the construction heavier rendering it much more awkward and after so many dances, the Dance with a Flower Basket fails to have the effect of a climax. The Variation has five parts: the temple dancer mourns her lost love, hoping for a miracle and for Solor to find the courage to speak of his love. Nikiya is given a basket of flowers, which she thinks are from Solor, but which have actually been sent by Gamzatti with a poisonous snake hidden among the flowers. The snake bites Nikiya as she lifts the basket to smell the flowers. The High Brahmin offers her an antidote to the poison, in return for marrying him. Nikiya refuses, as there is no point to live further without Solor. Solor’s response comes only after Nikiya’s death. This scene feels like a climax and denouement, as with Nikiya’s death the two love triangles coercively fall apart. Still, since such a denouement is solved by using pantomimic gestures, another act is added to reach a denouement through dancing.

Act III is in fact the dance climax of the performance: Grand pas d’ensemble in The Shades scene is preceded by the appearance of Solor in the temple, where he smokes opium, falls asleep and the entire Grand pas d’ensemble in The Shades scene is presented as unreal one, as Solor’s hallucination.

Grand pas d’ensemble or The Shades in La Bayadère is independent in form to such an extent that it may well be performed as one-act ballet not bound up with a storyline. It is a standard one in terms of its from: a general entry of the ensemble (32 ballerinas), the three coryphées and the soloists, Nikiya and Solor; first and second adagios of the soloists; variations of the three coryphées and only after that, of the female protagonist Nikiya (a variation of the male protagonist, Solor is missing); a coda, preserving the succession in the entry: the ensemble is dancing first, then the three coryphées and in the
end, the soloists.

**Act IV** is a continuation of the cancelled betrothal of Gamzatti and Solor. The dances (as in Act II) are of divertissement nature. It was here where the classical Grand pas d'ensemble of Solor and Gamzatti accompanied by four women and two men was meant to be as the ballet’s dance denouement and generally, of the two love triangles. The Grand pas d'ensemble of Solor and Gamzatti is standard in form: a general entry, adagio of the soloists, variations and a coda. It is in Act IV that Gamzatti wears a tutu. An earthquake and a fire hit the wedding ceremony. The infuriated gods destroy the temple, burring everyone, including Solor and Gamzatti under the ruins in revenge for the death of their priestess (the bayadère Nikiya). The spirits of Nikiya and Solor are reunited in the netherworld. This is also the conceptual denouement of the story: for the protagonists love is possible only after death.

Following the revolution in Russia, part of the sets of Act IV was destroyed beyond repair in a fire and some of the dancing episodes were forgotten, the classical Grand pas d'ensemble of Solor and Gamzatti accompanied by four women and two men had to be moved to Act II.[6] *La Bayadère* was then staged without the final Act IV and *The Shades* scene was used as a finale. *La Bayadère* though seemed incomplete as Gamzatti and the Rajah were not punished for committing outrages and the temple dancer’s death was not avenged.

The score evinces no music themes or leitmotivs uniting the acts. Choreographically, a uniting theme of a kind is discernible in Nikiya’s part alone. The movements of Nikiya’s choreographic theme are outlined in the variation in front of the temple in Act I, while in the basket scene in Act II these have already evolved into entire combinations and in Act III, in the Grand pas d'ensemble of *The Shades* scene, Nikiya's choreographic themes (modifications or quotations of her combinations from the previous acts) are developed in the dances of the ensemble, the three soloists and the duets of Nikiya and Solor. This gives grounds to think of *La Bayadère* as of a quite extended theme and variations regardless of the fact that musically, this musical form has a very different rendering.

*Nikiya* is presented with four variations: in front of the temple (Act I, scene 1); in the palace as an entertainer of Gamzatti (Act I, scene 3); at the wedding ceremony (this variation makes a connection with scene 1 through the similar choreographic thematic invention and some literal quotations of Act I); the final variation is in Act II, in *The Shades* scene.
There are two duets of Nikiya and Solor: in front of the temple (Act I) and in Act III, *The Shades* scene.

**Gamzatti** has a final duet with Solor in Act IV, during the interrupted wedding ceremony. This duet has later been moved to Act II, where it is apparently irrelevant, as following the logic of the action, Gamzatti is still uncertain about her success for she has not eliminated her rival. As a result of the translation of this duet into Act II, the performer of Gamzatti confronts a dilemma, as she ought to sound triumphant in her duet, and before Nikiya’s elimination too, while after the latter’s death, she leaves the stage in indignation, which does not chime with the logic of the image of her earlier triumph. Gamzatti has one variation.

**Solor** traditionally has no variations. He is a partner of the two rivals. His giving preference to Nikiya is built on the larger number of duets with her.

The High Brahmin is solved entirely pantomimically, which conditions Nikiya’s choice in favour of Solor as the latter dances, while the High Brahmin, regardless of his demonstrated power, is in fact a walking character. In the second love triangle between Nikiya, Gamzatti and Solor, Nikiya is dancing much more than Gamzatti.
The Golden Idol is brilliantly rendered by Alexander Alexandrov. The variation is very difficult with its many powerful leaps and turns. Alexandrov, however, excelled both in the premiere and the regular performances.

Boryan Belchev’s sets are sumptuous with oriental motifs typical of the staging. Given the specific situation, the costumes by Hristiyana Mihaleva are a delightful treat: the advertisings have it that 187 new costumes have been designed and tailored, impressing with their rich colours, but also comfortable to dance in, a requirement not necessarily met in ballet productions. Especially striking are the new tutus for The Shades scene and the oriental costumes in Acts I and II.

The stars of Sofia Ballet were drawn as tutors: Maria (Masha) Ilieva, Yasen Valchanov, Sara-Nora Krysteva. The outcome is an even ensemble, pure lines, and precisely perfected details.

The production impresses with its magnificent oriental splendour and spectacular dances (especially in Act II), with the translucent whiteness and unreality in the Shades scene.

Boris Spasov, a conductor of long standing, leads the orchestra steadily, in suitable dancing times and varied colours. La Bayadère has enjoyed warm reception, garnering full houses for four years now (it was premiered
in October 2012). The new members of the crew as well as the maintained high standards of performance that have never lowered also make difference.

Now we are looking forward to the next performance of *La Bayadère* on 11 March 2017.

[1] *The Kingdom of the Shades* scene choreographed by Marius Petipa was brought to Bulgaria by Russian ballerinas Feya Balabina (1978) and Irina Kolpakova (1987). Excerpts from *La Bayadère* would be performed on and off in concerts given by the National School of Dance or were staged for tours abroad by Lubov Fominykh (1995) and Zhelka Tabacova (2003).

[2] The ballet has its setting in ancient India.

[3] ‘The staging of this ballet has been postponed on more than one occasion due to the costly production’, Sara-Nora Krysteva, Deputy Director in charge of the ballet said at today’s press conference. She went further to say that the production was financed by Masha Ilieva, ex-director of Sofia Opera. Cf. Sofia Ballet Presents a Grand Production of *La Bayadère* for the first time, in: Manager. news, 8 October 2012. http://www.manager.bg/%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82-

[4] *La Bayadère*, first performed in St Petersburg on 23 January 1877, was choreographed by Marius Petipa (to music by Ludwig Minkus). The original cast featured Ekaterina Vazem (Nikiya), Lev Ivanov (Solor), Maria Gorshenkova (Gamzatti).

[5] *La Bayadère* is running 195 min, which is almost the duration (about 240 min) of the full-length version of the ballet *Sleeping Beauty* with its introduction and four acts.

[6] The same costumes, tutus are, however, meant to be worn by the soloist and the four women; still, these attires almost fail to match the rest of the costumes: Indian salwars worn by the other performers, including Nikiya. Even the garments indicate that the classical Grand pas d’ensemble of Solor and Gamzatti does not belong here.
THE INGLORIOUS ARROGANCE OF THE POWERS THAT BE

Andronika Martonova

Glory by Kristina Grozeva and Petar Valchanov continues the trilogy started with The Lesson. And is definitely better, too. May this trend be sustained in the years ahead! The recent awards (among an array of and increasingly scooped awards) received by Glory at the Gijón International Film Festival, Spain, a prestigious film event having a long tradition and boasting over 50 editions, were the Best Feature Film Best, Best Script and the FIPRESCI Prizes.

European film has recently witnessed an established trend, that of hyperrealism, though the palette of artistry in rendering the style in the light of film language is, of course, varying from film to film. Film hyperrealism may be didactic, dull, boring or quite the contrary. The negative would happen more often than not. Why ‘hyperrealism’? Because the camera is used to multiply the ugly realities of life as such and beyond, to the point of becoming oversaturated with veracity. The main message conveyed by this type of movies is always related to such subjects as discontent with the System and the status quo; the deformations of the ‘democracies’; the complete failure of the civil society; the chasms in the social domain; the insatiable greed for political power, the lot of those humiliated and insulted; committing crimes that go unpunished; the cynicism of dehumanisation; amputation of empathy; the agony of knowledge and of the ability to think adequately; holding human dignity in servile ridicule; disgust at otherness (he/she is not one of us); intellectuality reduced to poverty and sin; the hollow snobbism of the mob type genus; substitution of values and making a mockery of them; money and power as an all-consuming (to the point of
Tsanko Petrov is a humble railroad linesman, a countryman, but not a country bumpkin. Unpretentious. Diffident. Exact and as regular as clockwork, just like his old *Slava* Soviet era timepiece, his *never-failing* guide, which he ritually winds at the same time every morning. Tsanko is a stutterer; a hobbyist rabbit breeder; making no fuss, but having deep respect and affection for life and nature; watching his workmates periodically siphoning diesel for sale on the black market. When walking the tracks one morning, Tsanko discovers bundles of banknotes scattered from a sack. He does the right thing and reports his find to the police. A service is arranged to express the gratitude of the Minister of Transport. The Ministry’s PR spin doctor, Julia Staikova is the central figure in the process of mounting the award ceremony: arrogant, ambitious and maybe—greedy, going too far and having an over-inflated ego, bulling all and sundry; an unscrupulous 40-year-old, who measures all things self-abandonment) cesspool; the invisibility of the grassroots … etc. The thematic diversity may be drawn on and on.

Most of these elements of the plot are, in fact, a more or less integral part of the storyline of *Glory*. 
by money, manipulations and power; a domineering wife of a henpecked husband, she purportedly wants a child, but just to live up to her reputation, because this is the way it is done in her image-conscious milieu. Prior to the ceremony, Julia Staikova takes away Tsanko’s family heirloom watch Slava (Glory) and the latter goes missing. Big deal! It is where the movie reaches a tipping point unleashing absurd, cruel or tragic at times vicissitudes, which the railroad linesman grapples with in an attempt to get back his old watch with a time-darkened scratched glass, Simply because it is a meaningful keepsake given him by his father and bearing a inscription on its caseback, which reads: ‘To my son, Tsanko’. And that’s that.

Glory (Bulgaria/Greece film coproduction), is based on a true story of a railroad linesman, Kolio from Kurilo train station, who found in 2002 a bag on the tracks, containing BGN3mln cash and reported it to the police. That is where the idea was taken from to be further developed fictionally into different storylines. No good deed goes unpunished, is the main point in the story. It is the find of money and the award that are non-fictional. The rest is a product of our imagination. Glory is not a documentary
and the characters depicted in our movie are entirely fictional’, Kristina Grozeva underscored.

Unlike The Lesson, which I happened to dislike strongly, though I did my best twice to see it, (well, I managed the second time to make myself sit it out.) Glory has made it because this time the directors, Kristina Grozeva, Petar Valchanov have taken a more artistic approach involving more flair for film, more precisely selected cast and even more cunning (in the finest sense of the word) interpretation of the plot. The conflicts are rendered more contrastable by using elements of absurd, dark and even sardonic in places, sense of humour or situations both ridiculous and typical of Bulgaria’s, or rather of this the-Stans-like country’s hyperrealistic way of being. In a word, ‘mentality’, as Tsanko Petrov would have stuttered, articulating the word in a way that would leave viewers astonished by the fact that such a character might know such sophisticated words. So far so good! Well done for that matter! Sugarcoating the rather bitter pill of hyperrealism to swallow.

At times though Glory sounds a bit trite, superficial, void of a psychological insight, particularly when delving into the glitzy world of the Ministry’s spin doctor. At times the tempo-rhythm gets bogged down either; neither is it strongly conditioned dramaturgically nor strongly motivated and is incomplete in terms of acting performance. Well, it seems somewhat unbelievable that such a high-handed character as Julia Staikova (Margita Gosheva) would all of a sudden get cold feet over the thought of Tsanko taking his own life and go on the booze, feeling twinges of guilt. Or, in distress, would go after him. It doesn’t quite add up. Such a reaction seems illogical and untrustworthy. People like Julia are brutal and never take anything to heart. Never! Such humans are void, a priori, of the milk of human kindness. They wouldn’t show empathy, compassion or mercy even if their survival is at stake and not just because they are unable to, but also because such a ‘moral degradation’ disgusts them. Unfortunately.

Glory is all about the reckless frivolity of vesting with unbridled power and the flagrant violation of what is human in humans. Still, the main reason for the movie’s success is, in my opinion, Stefan Denolyubov’s screen presence. A formidable actor! His incredible getting into the contemplative and folksy, but perfectly organic character of Tsanko Petrov, propels Glory far ahead. (Which Margita Gosheva, alas, failed to do in The Lesson, given the ridiculously theatrical and stagy Ivan Barnev at her side, while Denolyubov, playing the role of a pawnshop owner, built a powerful and memorable
And that is that: the whole gamut and depth of Stefan Denolyubov’s methods render Glory an enduring aftertaste of a good movie, a film brutally sending piercing pangs throughout your mind and making you mull it over and over for days. Well done! One couldn’t even imagine another performer of the role of Tsanko. (See Stefan Denolyubov in While Aya Was Sleeping by Tsvetodar Markov, where he wore a different hat!). So, hopefully he would not be routinely typecast into such roles to perpetuate this stereotype, as is often the case with Bulgarian movies.

Kristina Grozeva, Petar Valchanov’s film poses challenges in more global strands of thought too: ‘For its sarcastic look at the corruption in all the spheres of society and its simple yet powerful story that exposes universal issues related to class struggle’, the FIPRESCI jury explained their rationales for awarding the movie at Gijón International Film Festival. Clearly and categorically enough. I wonder though if our Western colleagues (this line of division will not be blurred in the foreseeable future!) are really aware that we are experiencing live this film in Bulgaria (yet another characteristic of cinematic hyperrealism!) Supposedly, that is the reason why such films
would find it difficult to attract the general public. The savvy cinemagoers and professionals might well dismiss it—and some of them already do it too—by saying: 'Reality, surrounding us to the point of suffocation, when shown also onscreen is too much to bear'. That said, I categorically don’t mean that Bulgarian films ought not to deal with reality in this particular manner. Quite the contrary and Glory is an excellent example! These reflections just warn against a danger of prompting a glut and repulsion and even delicately call for genre diversity where both worth-seeing, box-office hits and arthouse films will earn a place in the sun.

Socially and politically committed film (the line of Grozeva, Valchanov’s trilogy) is a scream meant to result in a social change. These processes were especially strong within the film industries of a number of twentieth-century countries and in the 1970s they were defined as an aspect of the so-called Third Cinema. Some of the film industries have not been part of the Third Cinema for quite a while now, but rather have advanced significantly in the matter. Now, it’s our turn to fit into the minefield of contemporary socially and politically committed film. Still, isn’t it coming too late with the Romanian new wave or the Dardenne brothers, etc., far outpacing us? Can we be different? Or will we slide into the all-forgiving: ‘Better late than never’. Or:

Why not give it a try? More questions are inevitable: what’s the point of and why this type of film should dominate European screens? That is definitely not the way for European film to win the struggle against the American monopoly. Shouldn’t art rise above this (hyper)realism? Who is eventually the addressee of the message: aren’t different spectators supposed to wake up to what is retold onscreen? Yes, they are, but such spectators will not go to see the movie and if seeing it, they will not make sense of it. This brings us to the vexed question: aren’t we eating masochistically our hearts out through film? It is not for nothing probably. See Glory and think it over.

Glory

Dirs: Petar Valchanov, Kristina Grozeva
Writs: Kristina Grozeva, Petar Valchanov, Decho Taralezhkov
DoP: Krum Rodriguez
Music by Hristo Namliev
Prods: Abraxas Film, Graal Films
Supported by NFC, BNT Greek Film Center
Cast: Margita Gosheva, Stefan Denoljubov, Kitodar Todorov, Milko Lazarov, Ivan Savov, Hristofor Nedkov, Mira Iskarova, Deyan Statulov

Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eM_4yMzgcgU
Alfredo Casella are full of promise of a major cultural event rather than just the Festival’s successive edition. 

*Cavalleria Rusticana* is a popular work staged on a regular basis, but it is the set and costume design by Salvatore Russo that make it a treat for the senses. A weathered brick wall with vaulted niches and strongly contrasting white columns, remnants of ancient cultures, is used instead of the traditional curtain. The wall ‘opens up’ to a vista of a square with a massive stone church at the far end, Alfio’s two-storey house in the right and the tavern in the left: the authentic ambience of a southern village, in which the masterly set design places Sicily’s architectural symbols or that is what the brochure says.

Costumes: Usually, both in Bulgarian and foreign productions of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, the sole more or less brightly coloured attire is that of Lola, while the rest of the villagers are clad in garments in greyish-brown-black. Here though, we witness the advent of modern urban men’s and women’s clothing and the typification of the strata within this miniature society. The presence of children of all ages at the festivity...
gives the performance unadulterated colours and authenticity. The little miss with the lady and the mister wearing a topper (probably, visitors from the nearby city (R) is a far cry from the country children, the hosts, the maidens. They differ both in their clothing and manners and in their choices of dainties and entertainments, which directly suggests the complete unanimity among the producers and the directorial tasks assigned to every performer (bar none!). Even children are looking at each other’s clothes and manners excitedly. Neither have the typical of that period and of the Mediterranean beards, moustaches or sideburns escaped the designer’s notice, while Lola (Desi Stephanova) is like a doll on display in a shop window: pretty, attractive, shining. Such a dazzling beauty wouldn’t sit at home waiting for her husband; her entire look indicates her striving for entertainment and admiration. Visiting singers: Kamen Chanev (Turiddu), a tenor with an international career; Olga Romanko (Santuzza); award-winning Stara Zagora Opera House prima donna of long standing, who has performed at a number of European opera houses Eudokia Zdravkova-Horozova (Mamma Lucia). Olga Romanko is an established Russian opera singer with rich stage experience. Her operatic repertoire includes a large number of roles and interesting and exciting engagements with the best conductors are in store for her at major opera houses across the world. She also teaches singing at Giaccomo Puccini Conservatory in La Spezia, Italy; associate professor at Academia Arena, Rome. Besides,
The orchestra’s richness of sound was subjected to the onstage developments. Conductor Carlo Donadio, director Ignazio Occhipinti and the set/costume designer Salvatore Russo are all Italians. Initially, the choir is slightly shattered as though lacking heights of pitch, but the spectacular scene in the square with all the vendors’ stalls, children and even a bird cage are spellbinding, Spectacularity in the finest sense of this word has been achieved also in the religious procession carrying a statue of the Madonna and gonfalons. Both the clerics and the two groups of

she conducts masterclasses. Valeri Turmanov plays the hard-working village carter, Alfio.

The deep feelings of Eudokia Zdravkova-Horozova, whose Santuzza though in a concert performance delighted and filled the audience with admiration at the Stars of Stara Zagora Opera House matinee paying homage to her, are especially perceptible. Still, her unadulterated emotions just ‘warmed’ the character of Mamma Lucia, rendering her human empathy with Santuzza’s agony.

The strings and the harp achieved very fine nuances as early as the introduction.
children—the left wearing cadmium orange robes, long satin blue belts girdling their waists, white lilies in hands; the right wearing white lace tunics over red robes—look like taken from paintings by the greats.

**La Giara (The Jar)**, a choreographic comedy in one act composed by Alfredo Casella and set to Pirandello’s *The Story of the Girl Seized by Pirates*, was told through dance in Bulgaria for the first time by choreographer Flavio Bennati, assistant choreographer Silvia Tomova, ballet pianist Alida Boneva, rehearsal pianist Mauro Fabbri and the same set/costume designer Salvatore Russo and conductor Carlo Donadio. Though set in Sicily once again, the general air and colour gamut are a far cry from those of the *Cavalleria: much sunnier* nevertheless all the moonlit scenes.

A rich landowner, Don Lollò Zirafa (Alexander Zhelev) has a big oil jar of which he is inordinately proud. The jar breaks in two pieces and he engages Zi’ Dima Licasi (Petia Vuneva), a hump-backed crippled mender of crockery to glue it. Unfortunately, after the work is done, his hump prevents his egress through the mouth of the vessel. Don Lollò’s daughter Nela (Yuchen Iizuka), the latter’s fiancé (Stoian Furtunov) and their friends make their best to calm the enraged landlord. Zi’ Dima takes the idea of spending the night inside the jar in good part, philosophically smoking his pipe. Don Lollò refuses the vessel to be broken to release the incarcerated hunchback…

Moonlight. Nela’s fiancé (Milko Mikhailov) sings *La storia della fanciulla rapita dai pirati*, the story of a girl seized by a young pirate. The happily dancing lovers are joined by peasants, who make so much noise with their carousing that Don Lollò can’t sleep a wink. Infuriated, he rushes from his house and sends the jar rolling downhill against an olive tree. It breaks,
the hunchback, delivered at last, is carried in triumph on the shoulders of his rejoicing friends.

Alexander Zhelev and Petia Vuneva, very popular with aficionados for a while now, are again surprising in their new roles. It is even difficult to say who of them is better! It is gratifying and promising to see more company members engaged in the production, and younger too, as well as the effortlessness and synchronization of their dance performance.

The happy smiles of the performers, the armfuls of flowers and a tremendous ovation were a well-deserved finale of the Festival's opening night.
The Organ Grinder introduces the developments to the spectators as early as the first melodious number, assuming the role of a narrator[3]. He gradually befriends the Little Match Girl, protecting her against the Bad Cop and being imprisoned in her stead. The duet of the Little Match Girl and the Organ Grinder is underpinned by the fact that they are ‘singing to keep themselves warm’. Still, the Bad Cop decides to detain them for ‘disorderly conduct’. When he takes the Organ Grinder, the lonely girl sings her first aria giving it a clear lyrical line. It is at this point that the White Chimney Sweep appears, a mysterious and memorable character in the vein of the White Rabbit (Alice In Wonderland). He inspires hope in the Little Match Girl.

Children’s operetta The Little Match Girl has been devised as the opening of The Music of Our Time trilogy to include also Ali Baba (based on The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights) and The Ice Queen (based on Andersen’s The Snow Queen)[1].

Librettist of The Little Match Girl is actor Venelin Metodiev. The libretto follows the storyline of Hans Christian Andersen’s tale [2], but the action is set in a Christmas night, including new characters such as the Organ Grinder, the White Chimney Sweep and the Grandmother for the story to take on a ‘wonder’ dimension.
He also sings an aria reminiscent of that of a lead male character of the Second Viennese School. The trio between the Little Match Girl, the White Chimney Sweep and the Organ Grinder is built as a conversation between her and the two male characters, with the middle part in swing like a scene from a Broadway show.

In the stage version, unlike the original story, the girl has several visions of her **Grandmother**. In the finale, her Grandmother guides the Little Match Girl up into a better place, much prettier and warmer. The operetta shows death as enlightenment.

Though meant to represent the *realistic* line in the story, the invented characters of the **Grande Dame** and the **Bad Cop** would whip up rather negative emotions as they destroy the girl's matchbox, causing indirectly her death.

**The Cop** is a funny character presented as a fool[4]. He appears almost always together with the **Grande Dame**. In her aria, the latter bursts into *cascades of coloratura* typical of someone *putting on artificial airs*. The Grande Dame is reminiscent one way or another of the Queen of The Night (Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*).

The libretto features also the visions, which the girl has: a fairy-tale Christmas tree pops up during one
of her Grandmother’s appearances, while a giant roast turkey is served among a range of Christmas meals for the Grande Dame and the Bad Cop living by the motto ‘let’s have a good square meal’.

Rumen Boiadjiev Jr’s music[5] is beautiful. The composer’s approach is a rare occurrence in Bulgarian pieces for children. Bulgarian authors would more often than not opt for themes (mostly in $\frac{3}{4}$), which are suitable for children, easy to remember and sing after leaving the theatre. Rumen Boiadjiev Jr takes approaches and thematic invention typical of film music to translate these into the genre of operetta.[6]

The Little Match Girl’s is Hollywood-style music. The goodies: the Little Match Girl, the Grandmother, the White Chimney Sweep and the Organ Grinder are built in such thematic imagery with clearly highlights melodious lines, accompanied by intricate chord complexes. With a symphony orchestra with a double woodwind section, the orchestration provides an enormous range of timbres. All the sections of the orchestra are performing to the full with the harp and various percussions rendering a special aroma to the overall sound.

The Grande Dame and the Bad Cop are also represented in the vein of the overseas film music. What differs them from the goodies is the lack of the richness of harmony typical of the rest of the characters and their musical characteristics are not that richly orchestrated either.

Children’s operetta The Little Match Girl initially had a concert version premiered on 12 December 2012 at Bulgaria Hall with the participation of soloists from the Musical Theatre, Zvunche vocal group from 144 Narodni Buditeli Comprehensive
School accompanied by the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra. A couple of years later, in December 2014 it was staged at Stefan Makedonski National Musical Theatre with the cast including most of the performers in the concert version.

**Staging: roles and performers**
The production crew[7] distributed the roles in *The Little Match Girl* between a principal cast, whose members are playing almost all the solo parts in the
Musical Theatre’s repertoire, and understudies.

Brilliant Dobrina Ikonomova, participating in the central lyrical soprano repertoire[^8], plays the role of the Little Match Girl. An accomplished actress like her renders her performance both childlike innocence and kindness and stability of the play and the vocal tasks, which are rather tricky too.

I’d rather choose the understudy Anna Vutova, a very young actress, over Dobrina Ikonomova as the Little Match Girl for her natural youth and innocence combined with perfect vocal and performing skills.

Alexander Mutafchiiski is a principal performer of stock characters, who has received twice the Crystal Lyre award of the Union of Bulgarian Musicians and Dancers. The Organ Grinder is unlike the characters he is being typecast as, but he performs brilliantly both vocally and dramatically.

Denko Prodanov is the understudy playing the Organ Grinder. Though I failed to see him in this production, I have seen him as Koloman Zsupán in *Gräfin Mariza/* Countess Maritza, shared by the two soloists. Alexander Mutafchiiski fits perfectly into this baritone part, while Prodanov definitely has vocal
difficulties, particularly on low notes. But then again, in spoken dialogues he is Mutafchiiski’s peer. Supposedly, he is the same with The Little Match Girl.

The Grande Dame is played by Katerina Tuparova, known both as a lyrical and soubrette actress. She sang the vocalises in her aria brilliantly. The understudy, Hristina Pipova, though young, is in no way inferior to Tuparova either dramatically or vocally.

The Bad Cop (Ivan Panev) has no special singing tasks. His villainous laughter produces a strong effect and his play is remarkable, particularly so in the episodes with the Grande Dame. Dragomir Stoiov impresses with his manner of speaking. The role does not offer enough vocal qualities to judge the vocal abilities of the performers.

Penio Pirozov is the Musical Theatre’s principal lyrical tenor, who is assigned the role of the White Chimney Sweep. His splendid soft timbre enraptures the audience with each of his vocal performances. The understudy Marcho Apostoov makes a truly aristocratic and fantastically unreal chimney sweep in his white tailcoat and white topper. Besides, he meticulously works out his mise en scène and musical tasks to the last detail.

Ludmila Kozareva, the principal performer in musicals and operettas [9], plays the Little Match Girl's
Grandmother. In my opinion, she makes the best of her otherworldly character fulfilling her artistic and vocal tasks with her entire onstage presence. The understudy Olga Mikhailova-Dinova matches the role as perfectly as the principal performer. I don’t see any difference between the two actresses’ performance for each of them meets the expectations of the producers equally well.

As for the cast, I can’t remember other children’s production of the Musical Theatre starring so many celebrities and I have been frequenting the playhouse ever since my childhood. An actor or actress would begin their careers by playing in children’s shows to then switch to more ‘serious’ roles leaving children’s productions behind. It is a privilege to see a company’s stars engaged in a production for children. It is a commendable endeavour of the Musical Theatre’s management to familiarise the kids with the company’s best performers.

The participation of Pim-pam children’s choir (choirmaster: Irena Hristova) is a breath of fresh air. They sing mostly vocally and the director has seated most of them in the box beside the stage. Some of the kids appear on the stage to play the angles assisting the White Chimney Sweep or accompanying the Grandmother.

Director Deliana Hadjiyankova is an actress, who has made a well-deserved success of her directorial debut at the Musical Theatre. Delving deep into the nature and development of the characters, she creates working mise en scenes fitting both into the musical dramaturgy and the characters.

Conductor Grigor Palikarov, under whose baton the concert version of the operetta was given in 2012, is an experienced musician of long standing. He exposes to the last detail the score’s magnificence to the audience leaving no unvoiced theme, while the sound in the polyphonic moments is so sculptured that feels like being visible and allows all the elements of the score—melody, accompaniment, the overtones created by the pedals, countermelodies, etc.—to be highlighted. The sections of the orchestra sound balanced depending of the textural task they are fulfilling. The brilliant strings impress both with their active pursuit of the themes and their accurate accompaniment in the rest of the episodes. The woodwind and brass sections are literally formidable in the high, soft and uniting in the middle and stable in the bass registers. The percussions
and the harp sound with filigreed subtlety. 

**Evgenia Raeva**’s set and costumes and **Nikola Nalbantov**’s animation add yet another fairy-like dimension to the ambiance. With the low roofs everything feels like earthbound, downtrodden and dead-end. The bench and the lantern just specify the location, while the animation takes the spectator into fantastic scenes over the skyline.

I would recommend the ballet’s more active participation in a future production of the same operetta as for the time being there are few dancing fragments[10]: during the introduction ballet dancers clad in white to feature dancing snowflakes mix up organically with the angels; in the number with the Little Match Girl’s new hat, when she imagines herself to be a Broadway actress and the actress dances on a par with the dancers wearing black garments in contrast to the wintry setting of the operetta.

The audiences are enthralled by this production offering a wonderful opportunity for getting in the Christmas mood. I sincerely hope that with the children’s operetta **The Little Match Girl** a long-established tradition of the Musical Theatre to premiere a Bulgarian work each season will make a comeback, especially as scores of children’s pieces with a contemporary edge or that could be given a modern twist are kept at the Theatre’s archives!

[2] Cf. „Малката кибритопродава..."
Miroslav Danev recorded the Bulgarian National Radio Symphony Orchestra’s performance of Bulgaria tone poem commemorating the greatest Bulgarian composer Pancho Vladigerov, composed by Rumen Boiadjiev Jr, conducted by Grigor Palikarov, concertmaster Galina Koicheva: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKkBTn9GXqA

Director: Deliana Hadjiyankova: conductor: Grigor Palikarov; set/costume designer: Evgenia Raeva; choreographer: Antoaneta Alexieva; animation: Nikola Nalbantov; Pimpam choirmaster: Irena Hristova

Dobrina Ikonomova plays Sylva (Die Csardasfurstin/ The Czardas Queen), Annina (Eine Nacht in Venedig/ A Night in Venice), Hanna Glavari (Die Lustige Witwe/ The Merry Widow), Lila (Bulgarians of Olden Times), etc.

Ludmila Kozareva plays the Narrator (Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat); Eliza Doolittle (My Fair Lady), Prince Orlofsky (Die Fledermaus/ The Bat); Maria Magdalena (Jesus Christ Superstar); Evita (Evita); Grizabella (Cats), etc.

Choreographed by Antoaneta Aleksieva
workshop in Sofia focusing on Gurdjieff dances for awareness: Here and now

Certain groups or schools were formed across the world over the years; still the legacy of Armenian- Gurdjieff (1866–1949), a mystic of Greek extraction, was disseminated as an established practice in the last decade and a half (J.Sunder). Gurdjieff has toured Asia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt and countries in Western and Eastern Europe for 20 years in a quest for traditional and esoteric knowledge, movement techniques of various ancient schools such as Sarmoung Brotherhood, Imastun Brotherhood (Crete), etc. Gurdjieff called his teaching The Fourth Way (Ouspensky) and created 250 short dance fragments meant for ensemble dance compositions. Using them and their variations, complete choreographic works may be built (e.g. Gurdjieff’s ballet

The quests to enrich, to upgrade and use dance and its purely physical expression as a therapeutic method eventually end up in the rhythm-plastic practices of one spiritual school or another. In spiritual schools man has ever since olden days searched to find human’s divine nature in an attempt to harmonise the psychophysical processes and achieve a more conscious presence in the physical world. Jivan Sunder, a follower of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866–1949), who teaches Gurdjieff sacred dances, held his thirteenth workshop on Gurdjieff sacred dances for awareness: Here and now, conducted by Jivan Sunder

Iliana Salazar
are an ingenious synthesis of sacred ritual movements, postures, rhythmic plasticity and breathing techniques. The emphasis is put on the necessity of consciousness and precise positioning of each part of the body according to the respective tilt, amplitude of movement, position and direction. It might seem on the face of it easy to be performed, but Gurdjieff always keeps an element of surprise for his disciples and takes them out of their comfort zone putting them in different patterns and situations[2]. This approach of including ‘illogical’ elements finds its application in the dance fragments as well.

Jivan Sunder teaches Gurdjieff dances and his teachers have been basically from the Bennett (who was a direct disciple of Gurdjieff ) lineage. He has been practicing the Movements for over 25 years now, conducting workshops and training courses across the world (Taiwan, Israel, China, etc.). ‘What they are for me – and why they are such a powerful practice – are, quite simply, truth embodied in movement: Truth…. dancing: they are the work of an enlightened man, Gurdjieff.[3]

In every shorter workshop, Jivan Sunder emphasises the mastering of just a few dance-rhythmic fragments. Respectively, these are not arranged in a particular system.
sequences from the beginning, but rather arranges them simply by numbers: first exercise, second exercise, etc. After the dance is over, the sequences receive names that may bring up associations with thematic lines as in *November Dervish* dance fragment. Here, however, contrary to the associations with the dervish dance *sema*[4], the lines of the hands are sharp and rapid, the legs are executing at times dance element like closing ‘scissors’ and quick steps (in place or crossing to the left or right side), but without any whirls.

A principal approach of Gurdjieff’s methodology is to accentuate the constant following of the rhythm and the conscious positioning of the performers in space, for instance:

that can eventually prepare the participants for stage performance, but rather they are independent dance sequences. The lessons of J. Sunder in Gurdjieff movements are in their essence a full-day lesson ending with a one-hour meditation with all the participants. Some of the movements are smooth and ‘meditative’, others are more dynamic and sharp, but they are absolutely deprived of external or internal emotional expression. Perhaps this is the reason that gives the feeling of military rigor and hypnotic environment of the performance though the sequences seem so slender and harmonious in the stupendous synchronicity of the participants. Jivan Sunder doesn’t give the names of the dance
the elbow should form 90 degrees, the hand to be placed at 45 degrees in front of the chest, precisely fixed diagonal positions are abided by, etc. (Precisely the same positioning of the body and the limbs may be found and traced in the ancient techniques of Mesopotamia and Ancient India (Natyashastra and Bharata natyam), the Hermetic principles, the Pythagorean School’s exercises, Rudolf Steiner’s therapeutic eurythmy and Peter Deunov’s Paneurhythm).

Contrary to the suggestopedia practices, based on suggestion, Jivan Sunder requires each performer to use their own energy and mental resources absolutely consciously, by gaining command of their thoughts, emotions and actions, consciously excluding the subconsciousness. Music and melody, of course, affect the emotions and the unconscious processes so they can easily distract the performer. Therefore, Gurdjieff involves in the musical accompaniment to the exercises a distinct rhythm, which, according to him, is the best organizer of the mind, emotions and body. ‘That is why I say that I am not teaching you to dance. Because when we hear “dance” the mind and the thought goes in the emotion instead simply to follow and count logically the numbers: 1, 2, 3...’, Sunder said.

Still, preliminary physical preparation of the body—warming up the muscle groups, joints and tendons—is what performers miss. Everyone gives the necessary time to do this in their own way before the lesson, but if they do not have enough physical culture and approach this can lead to incorrect loading and unpleasant consequences. That is the reason why his lessons cannot be defined as a form of dance exercise. The preparation of the participants is geared towards their consciousness and awareness. Before doing each of the dance sequences the performers sit on the ground focused on the sounding musical introduction. This engages the mind and prepares for proper organisation and synchronicity of the actions during the performance. Sunder carefully and logically distributes the complexity of executing the
movements, with each lesson increasing consecutively their complicity. Gradually, the dance fragments are enriched with a variety of footwork, including spins, changes of direction, giving names to the dance fragments, focusing the attention of the performers. In some exercises, specific words are added to certain movements such as ‘Christ’, ‘Buddha’, ‘Mohammed’, ‘Lama’ in the Four Religions dance fragment. The purpose of each exercise is to teach participants’ minds and bodies to follow the beat and the sequence of movements outlined by the music.

Jivan Sunder reminds the participants that they are not attending a dance workshop, neither is he a dance teacher: ‘This is not a dance lesson. This is a workshop for awareness of the moment--here and now--through dance-rhythmic sequences and structures by Gurdjieff’.

Gurdjieff sacred dances/movements develop person’s ability to find, control and transform poorly functioning psycho-physiological models lying unconscious in one’s mind and body. ‘I cannot call them healing or therapeutic movements, but they give you tools for life. How you will benefit from them depends on the person…. The effect is like therapy, because seeing, experiencing and realising... you see your habits, your personality, your life strategies that have reflected in the way you move through life’, Sunder said.

Accuracy requires noting that the so-called sacred dances of Gurdjieff are actually his personal selection and synthesis of dance, music and rhythmic breathing techniques. Gurdjieff has made an impressive logically held fusion of ancient dance movements, practices and rituals. Principally, every movement and musical tone/phrase taken out of the context of a ritual or practice do not carry, of course, the same power and sacred act as if they were performed successively in their sense and meaning in the ritual. Thus fragmented and extracted from the sacred practices, they lose the meaning they have had in certain ancient rituals and are put into service to the new originator’s purposes.

Gurdjieff sought practical and applicable aspects in the particular movements, when structured in dance-rhythmic fragments, i.e. how these would help to reach the centre of one’s being and grasp the ‘true reality’. Gurdjieff (and hence Sunder) transform them into a successful practice of self-awareness here and now with a strong impact on the modern
Gurdjieff movements schools. Here lies one of the major contributions of Gurdjieff dance/movement practices leading to mastered self-awareness, while ancient occult techniques are used as a basis for practical developments designed to lead to self-knowledge rather than having a therapeutic effect.

I believe that in view of my own dance-therapeutic work, Gurdjieff’s legacy is indispensable in terms of the material gathered by him. His methods and approaches though lack specifics when it comes to the very movements, their meanings and the vibes flowing from them and if incorrectly interpreted and mastered, these may have a detrimental effect on the performer. This particular workshop conducted by Sunder is yet another proof of his exceptional psychological approach to and professionalism in his long-standing work with Gurdjieff movements. Consequently, each participant should know better than to rediscover his or her true self and become self-aware in this particular way. This, of course, is true of any contemporary practice, dance-therapeutic including, meant to achieve self-awareness, inner balance, etc. It should be noted that historically, there have been other spiritual schools and/or teachers that have mastered and used sacred movements and music without even moving physically, but rather through the strength of mind, augmented cognition and concentration.


[2] Even risky such as crossing a border where there is a war.

[3] From the front-page from J. Sunder’s website: http://www.gurdjieff-movements.co.uk/.

[4] Almost motionless hands placed in one surface and gradually hurried on circular movements of the performers around their centre.
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