

MOBIUS NEWSLETTER

354 CONGRESS STREET, BOSTON
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The question is not: How much are you going to get out of it? Nor is it: How much are you going to put into it? But rather: How immediately are you going to say Yes to no matter what unpredictability, even when what happens seems to have no relation to what one thought was one's commitment?
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-- John Cage, A Year From Monday

BONGO BONGO: BONGO BONGO

A co-production of Mobius
Performing Group and
TheaterWorks

November 7 - 23

Bringing this performance to birth has involved the largest exercise of sheer desire of any artwork I've created. I'm thankful for the dedication of many people in helping with this lengthy delivery.

From an initial complex of just concepts and obsessions: "I'm going to do a work about alienated labor, commodity fetishism, the Black Hole, Jordan Marsh's 1981 Jack & Jill brochure and call it The Jungle Strut! And I'm really angry about all this! And include a scene where a Cabbage Patch Doll is torn limb from limb, like Pentheus in The Bacchae!" On to reading and notetaking, sitting in the BPL research library, reading Marcuse and False Consciousness by Gabel and notes on astronomy. Then last February, putting some-

thing on its feet in a Works-in-Progress program: two versions of "Civilization (Bongo Bongo Bongo)" by Danny Kaye and the Andrews Sisters.

Enough abstract thought! Enough self-reflection and notetaking! Last spring, a workshop over a few weeks' time with MPG and TheaterWorks members, on a light scale, getting friends on their feet with what they bring to what I've done -- the structure of the piece showed itself to me, its actual content began to materialize. Throughout all this, a constant movement between reflection and action, my personal imagery and the unsettling contributions of friends, the focus of my own loves and anxieties and their constant refocussing through collaboration and accidental encounters (like Hurricane Gloria, which has made its way into the piece, startlingly amplifying what I thought it was about!).

So, from the spring workshops, out to Idaho for the summer -- going back inside for note-taking and more reading: Three Sisters, The Inferno, Breakfast of Champions. And now the final phase: a working scenario of actions which will become a script; an ensemble from all over the city, drawn first from MPG and TheaterWorks, but forging a performance unlike what's commonly associated with either company; notes on paper which are now becoming objects, sound, furniture, video.

The final wrestling match is between "the material" -- what we're actually working on, which is determined to have a life of its own, beyond what anyone can (or should try to) control -- and "the concept", which is what goes into the press releases, what I began with, what the piece is supposed to be about. Between the material and the concept there's a significant area of overlap, so (gee!) it looks like there's a real dialectical process happening!

We're working on: dreams about new consumer products, gestural worlds (from phrases like "Where am I?" and "I need more"), birthday party improvisations, turning advertising texts into dialogue, ensemble Inferno imagery, drawings of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, eroticizing objects and objectifying people, having fits and playing in trash. "And so much more." Now imagine the same thing, on a slightly larger scale. A major challenge of the work now is assembling a body of material which will serve for both deceptively "realistic" acting sequences and non-traditional performance work; stylistically (and this is part of "the concept"), the performance will turn itself inside out, psychological realism falling into the black hole and emerging as near-static tableaux at the last. We're building character out of gesture, writing texts from objects, aiming for a "normal acting" facade that evidently carries the seeds of its own destruction. Developing "given circumstances" and character biographies only far enough to give us places to begin, but not so deeply that they can't be jettisoned as the actors descend through Hell. Likewise there are movement improvisations which look "experimental" in an empty room, and suddenly "traditional" the moment there are a few pieces of furniture to relate to. Our desire is to work the continuum.

And what is this "co-production" idea between MPG and TheaterWorks about? Basically, of course, it comes from my active involvement with both companies, since 1980 and 1981 respectively, and my desire to share the project with both groups. In terms of artistic, and certainly material, resources, the project has been

SOUND ART AT MOBIUS - PART VII

Hans Gefors, from Denmark

December 6 and 7

FREE PUBLIC LECTURE: December 5, 4:30 p.m.
Boston Conservatory, 8 The Fenway

FREE WORKSHOP: December 8, 3 - 5 p.m. at Mobius

Hans Gefors is a Danish composer of opera, music theater and computer music. Born in 1952, he received a diploma in composition from the Jutland Conservatory of Music in 1977; among his composition teachers were Gyorgy Ligeti and Peter Maxwell Davies. His compositions include The Poet and the Glazier, produced by the Royal Opera in Stockholm, 1982; Galjonsfiguren, taped music for ballet; and Me Morire in Paris, a music theater composition.

In Boston, Mr. Gefors will perform The Creation #2, a new work (described below), The Figurehead, a computer-generated piece, and Me Morire in Paris. Following is a letter we recently received from him:

DK - Copenhagen, 30.9.85

Dear friends,

Right now I am completing a large-scale opera for the Royal Opera in Stockholm, a 3 hour performance for a big institution. You may ask, what has that to do with "The Creation #2", a 25 minute performance for 3 actors, tape and slides, created specially for MOBIUS in Boston.

I am working in parallel with "The Creation #2" and Christina. The text, by the avantgarde author Erik Bechman, is ready. Ann Susan has begun working with the slides and I have just agreed with a composer and computer expert, Bo Rydberg at EMS in Stockholm, that he will help me make the music in their computer-studio.

From an opera to a performance, from 150 musicians to 7-8, from a traditional form to one that is undecided (Laurie Anderson calls her works performances because nobody knows what that is), it may seem an impossible step for one composer. I see it as a challenge and I have done so before. The other dramatic piece in the concert in December, "Me Morire in Paris", was composed at the same time as my first opera, "The Poet and the Glazier". I find it fruitful for both forms to work with them in parallel.

"The Creation #2" began with a book sale in 1981, where I bought Erik Bechman's "Den Kommunals Kroppen". I immediately recognized the personal, original expression in the poems. I said to myself, "Here is material for a work!" but how, when, in which form -- I hadn't the slightest idea.

When I got the commission from Richard Lerman and MOBIUS, it struck me, here is the occasion. Meanwhile, I had been toying with the idea of a large scale work with dancers - a thought I have given up. I wrote to Erik Bechman. He was very gener-

ous -- in his youth he wanted to be a composer -- he told me which stories he found worthwhile and gave me material on an unfinished play and said, "Put it together after your own intentions." To seal this extra-ordinary agreement, we drank a Schnaps and had lunch in a restaurant in Stockholm.

That the author gives the composer a free hand is not very common, but, I liked the libretto immensely, as I have a knack for words (having worked as a journalist), but no ambitions of being a writer. Doing an "arrangement" is fine with me. The result is a work with 3 strata.

There is God's spokesman, who, through the loudspeakers, announces what God has created in a long list, one table and one chair, one stone and one sling, and so on.

There is a storyteller, facing the audience, and there is a couple who has only eyes for each other. I will not tell you how it all works out; you will see in the performance in December.

Ann Susan is doing the stage and costume design (in Scandinavia it is called Scenography). She is very experienced in theatre, and we have worked together in some small theatre projects in Copenhagen. She has done some beautiful exhibitions in galleries with music and slides which have attracted the Danish critics, especially as it is so rare that Danish artists work with the fusion of the arts.

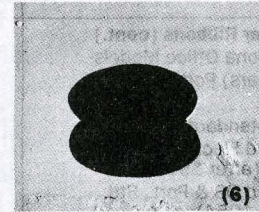
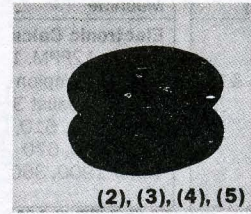
The main reason for choosing Ann Susan to do "the stage picture," as we say in Scandinavia, in direct translation, is that in this way I can have an active, living scenography. It is not only a background, but just as much an integral part of the work. Through the use of semi-transparent curtains with a focal point, she will be able to change the character of the room in a thousand ways. We have agreed that she herself decides about the content of the photos and I will poke my nose in the rhythm of slide changes that is programmed on the tape.

Musically, I will work with my Yamaha DX7 and the voices I have on a tape. I will design computer programs together with Bo Rdyberg in Pascal for my Microbee 128 K computer, that will take care of the operations on the parameter of the DX7. Bo Rydberg has been working a lot with the big VAX-11 computer in the EMS studio, and it is now ready to be used in filtering and other operations on the musical material.

I will not say more about technicalities. "The Creation #2" is about man's relations to the created world, the relation between personal feeling and un-reasonable facts. In Swedish the text is very funny. I hope that we will be able to carry this humour over to Boston. The text will not be sung, its density forbids it, and I am quite happy not to have to write more songs after a whole opera. Instead, the text will come in focus.

That suits me fine. There is a lot of music in Beckman's words.

-- Hans Gefors



(continued from pg. 2)

greatly strengthened by this coming-together. To put it too simply, from TheaterWorks I'm taking the liberation of text through unashamed theatricality, both in design and acting terms; from MPG, the controlled expression of physical impulse (or movement in free-association) and the integration of diverse media in a single work. All of this catalyzed by my personal return to pop culture and love of collage in performance.

In between the material and the concept, what's the piece now about? Still, it's about a birthday party in Purgatory (better: Limbo) which descends into Hell and ascends into Paradise. It's still about the man who said that if he couldn't find a love relationship he could always go home to his VCR. It's about how we need to reach out and touch someone, but can't bear to say, "Reach out and touch someone." It's still about junk, and still about love.

-- David Miller

INTERVIEW: GINA MULLEN ON FESTIVALS, PARTIES, POLITICS AND GEOGRAPHY

- DM: You work a lot with festivals and the passage of the seasons and those cyclical, natural rhythms, as important themes that move what your work is. How is it that you got started on that?
- GM: Well, I think that a lot of it has to do with being raised in my particular family context. My mother was always interested in the seasons. I grew up in, mostly, the mid-Atlantic states or the New England states, so seasons were really apparent sorts of things. And I started, well, celebrating seasons. While I was a child I celebrated them with my family. But in the case of the Vernal Equinox Celebration, I was asked by Don Burgy to come up with an art form that would go into the future for the longest possible duration along with Rick, which was to be based on our relationship. So we thought that, if you're going to go into the future for the longest possible duration, you should tie it into something that's even more fundamental than, say, your personal situation and interests. It's an old technique to use seasonal changes, religions do. Also, when I was first in art school, there seemed to be this kind of, "Well, you know, the seasons, eh, you know, who cares, we'll just plow through them, whether it's winter or summer or fall." Also about that time, they changed the holidays to the Monday holidays, and all of a sudden it seemed to me that calendar days were really something you could just mess around with. It sort of bugged me, because I thought that holidays should be time out from the normal, weekly routine, and to just make it convenient by making a Monday holiday sort of takes, for me, some of the magic out of holidays. And then, too, there was this overlayer of growing up, I was raised Irish Catholic, and I became aware that most of the holidays were actually founded on seasonal changes, and that it had been sort of glossed over, people stopped talking about it. You know, it was "Christmas", but it wasn't really the Solstice. And the older I got and the more I started to do research about other religions, I found out that the cardinal points of the calendar -- the two solstices and the two equinoxes -- were a universal for most religions, as an important date. I think of the cardinal points of the year as being so universal it doesn't really matter what religion you are. It has to do with your physical realities. We're in this physical reality, in this world, and we just don't spend much time considering how it really acts on us.
- DM: So then, in terms of getting the Vernal Equinox Celebration going, did you have a sense of challenging the blasé attitude toward seasons?
- GM: I wanted people to be more aware of what was really happening. That there are cycles, and that they come back and that there's something to look forward to. And the Vernal Equinox seems to get lost for a lot of people because around here it's still pretty much winter. But it's magic, the days slowly getting longer, until you really have a real sun and warmth again.
- DM: Over the years, with the Vernal Equinox parties, when does it happen for people that they connect in the party with the Vernal Equinox?
- GM: Yeah, it does happen quite a bit. I find that I'll be walking around, a lot of people come up to me and talk to me about how great it is, they're discovering it for the first time. It really does get them excited, because -- well, everyone's ready for the spring, they go, "God, Thank God." People do connect, and the nice thing about it is, where there used to be no one celebrating it in this city, there's now about 200 people who have the consciousness of, "It's the Equinox." And a lot of them have gotten sophisticated enough to notice the other cardinal points. It's a seed, two hundred people that are involved in a celebration, to know about it. And also you know we give out these little pins, the half sun and moon. I've even seen people in the streets wearing them that I don't know, which I think is really exciting.
- DM: How about some of the performances or events that have happened?
- GM: Well, though it's not absolutely mandatory that you do a piece about the spring, most of them are. Ron Wallace was famous for a lot of performances that dealt with the spring or the end of winter. One piece he did was called "Lecture With Plant". He used to tell these extended stories in multi-parts, and it had a lot to do with spring imagery. Ron's work is never just straightforwardly something you could stamp, you know, "Spring Performance." But most of the images, things he was saying had to do with that context. And then there was a piece that Alex Grey did called "Concrete Hat and Concrete Shoes", where he had dressed himself like, he was totally naked except for these huge blocks strapped to his feet and a skeleton over his head, down to about half his torso. He was sort of the end of the winter concept, and also like Death, which is also an Equinox theme. And he walked across the

- stage, just with a spot on him.
- DM: We were talking about family experiences and family celebrations when you were younger, having to do with the seasons. I was wondering if there were particular things that stand out from your childhood.
- GM: Well, as I said, my mom was an anthropologist and so, God, she had a million different little rituals, almost every month had something special that she would do. Hallowe'en was always a very big event in my house. There were five kids. I was very fond of Hallowe'en, because back in the good old days, you could be left to yourself to go out.
- DM: Right, and you could get good stuff, too.
- GM: Right, and it was a real Hallowe'en in that you went out into your community and you got dressed up and you looked strange, and you got the whole thing of tricks or treats. It was really an old Mummer tradition, to go from house to house, and perform for treats. Hallowe'en is really brought over from Europe originally as a custom. And the thing about my mother is, that she would tell us all the background behind Hallowe'en. It wasn't that you just get dressed up and you go around, she'd even tell us why Hallowe'en was and where it came from. It was never this sort of uninformed celebration, everything had its roots. And I guess that's where I got this obsession, that everything had come from somewhere before. So she used to have a lot of little customs, like, oh, Jessie trees for Advent, where you get these bare branches and you paint them and then you hang little symbols on them that have to do with Old Testament precursors of Christ and all this stuff. She'd have St. Nicholas day parades and puppetry and we used to do things like Twelfth Night celebrations. She'd always have a party for Twelfth Night.
- DM: Another important thing is the historical and political material in your work, particularly in the "un-Titled" piece. Artificially speaking, ritual and politics might be regarded as two different types of concerns. Yet for you, that doesn't seem to be the case. How, for you, do you move from one to the other?
- GM: Well, I don't know if anyone caught it: "un-Titled" means being without land, untitled, quite literally. The whole piece has to do with territorial instinct, and this tie between geography and culture. The stuff about the Irish Famine was an example of how land was misused basically, and also how people who were indigenous to a particular land, who had lived with it for thousands of years were displaced. How they were thrown out of a balanced eco-system, what was normally an environment that sustained them, because of human manipulation. There was a blight on the land, but it was because they couldn't count on their other food resources that people starved, and the reason why they couldn't count on their other food resources was because England was using that as trade. So I chose that particular example because it had to do with Ireland and it was a major fact of Irish history. It affected Ireland forever. I'm here because of it. As I said, about half the population moved or died during that time, and it still affects Ireland.
- DM: Yeah. Many of my friends are here because of it.
- GM: Most people think of that historically as just a natural occurrence, which it just wasn't, if you understand all the political ramifications of it. Those people could have easily stayed on and lived on and gotten over it. But the English landlords would not allow it, they saw the land as something you just used, it wasn't something they lived with or on. There's also a part in the text where I talk about the blowing up of Ulster, the blowing up of Beirut. The piece is really about politics, and how we are very much still animalistic in our territorial instinct. And we have yet to give over this concept of cooperation in a small eco-system.
- DM: One big thing that's happening there is an expression of the direct effect on political reality of sensitivity, or lack of it, to what your actual environment is about, what's really going on with the earth that you live on. Which is a connection that doesn't often get made.
- GM: A lot of times people see that as separate. It's something I imagine I'll keep wrestling with, because I haven't really found answers to it. It's something that really fascinates me. It's funny too, when you think of politics and geography, there's lots of great cases of people who didn't take geography into consideration, and got slammed right up against it. Napoleon in Russia, Hannibal and the Alps. The military mind is into, "Let's march right over those goddamn Alps." Some times you just can't do it.

PERSEPHONE AND HADES

Mobius Performing Group

December 13 and 14

This December's performances of Persephone and Hades are actually the 6th annual performances, having been postponed this past spring due to Mari's ankle injury. The 7th annual performances will occur this spring, when we take it to Nine One One in Seattle, as part of our new Northeast/Northwest Exchange.

We first performed Persephone and Hades in May of 1980, at the Helen Shlien Gallery (in the space we currently occupy). Written by Steve Lydenberg, the piece represents some of our earliest work in 'audience-activated' performances. For those of you with long memories, it is the direct descendent of Tantalus, and predates Recombinant Moboids, Theater Invaders, and Orpheus.

Our decision to perform Persephone and Hades had very much to do with the myth itself. Persephone's descent to and ascent from the Underworld are eternal, marking the seasonal cycles. As David Miller and Mari Novotny-Jones developed the personae of Persephone and Hades, and their relationship, we assumed that, in eternity, they had gone through every experience that two people living together forever could possibly have. That meant that whatever occurred between them, in and out of rehearsals, could be considered part of their history together. Nothing was outside of it.

We are interested, then, in seeing the effect of time on the work - on the performers' memories, and on their relationship to the piece, to their own personae, and to each other. We are also curious to see how the audiences' interactions with the piece change over time.

--Marilyn Arsem

It is not very often in one's performing life that one can grow in a part over the years. Even more infrequent is a piece that allows personal growth to shape it along with artistic growth.

As I approach my sixth year of performing Persephone, I think of growth. It is a piece unlike anything else I have performed. When I began working on it, I tried to keep the work habits for Persephone separate from my other theater work. Now I cannot imagine working without that simplicity and awareness. It is that orientation of allowing the audience to be with me, not demanding it, that affects my performing life.

I remember my first attempts with the persona of "black". She demanded the attention of the audience. Now she allows them to be there, she knows they will be there, and that is more powerful than any physical "grab" an actor could do. Actually, this year, I want to work on a new internal monologue for black.-I read The Spiral Dance this summer and found much of it relating to the triple goddess. I want to bring how that material affected me to our work.

The most amazing realization for me is that I feel that the choices I can make in the three colors (white, red and black) are infinite. I may have used only 1/8 of the thousands of possibilities from the card combinations. So I no longer worry about not having a response to the cards. I never feel lost in the piece. It is home. It is our world, Hades', the audience's, and mine. It is always an extremely emotional moment for me when I walk in and the objects are there and Hades is there waiting for me.

The relationship between Persephone and Hades continues to grow and change. David has added some of his own text, and vocally he lives a full life, as well as emotionally.

I imagine that people think I am the most active, I have the most effect, because I move. Ah ha: David has the most effect too. Sometimes I am not sure - who is affecting whom? The text is like music to me as I move through space. It is Hades, moving with me or against me. The fragmented passages of text travel through me, even in my everyday life. He is a strong presence. We are connected and the void is great when we are separated.

-- Mari Novotny-Jones

"Hades" has always been a pretty direct expression of "David Miller", under unusual circumstances: sitting more or less still, facing a bank of mirrors, watching the reflections of Persephone and the audience, and playing back my "tapes" in the form of 15 or so speeches which I speak over and over, in fragments of different sizes, down to the isolated phonemes. Developing Hades since 1980 has been a process that lies somewhere between conventional characterization, and the self-revelation of Time Against Time.

Once, P & H was for me an experiment in speech, in letting passion flow through a narrow channel, in playing one part in a starkly beautiful theater. It is still these things, but thanks to the onward march of my personal life (darn it anyway), it's now much more for me about: what does this piece say about men and women being together, and what can we do about that? "Hades" would like to terminate P & H and give it all back to the matriarchs, but "David Miller" wants it to continue because there's got to be more to find out. Now I write new texts to mix with Steve Lydenberg's originals: questioning just what the hell this Underworld is all about.

-- "David Miller"

November 7 - 23

BONGO BONGO: BONGO BONGO

Thursdays - Saturdays

8:00 P.M.

\$6.00

A co-production of Mobius Performing Group and TheaterWorks

December 13 & 14

PERSEPHONE AND HADES

Friday and Saturday

8:00 p.m.

\$5.00

Sixth annual presentation Mobius Performing Group

December 6 and 7

SOUND ART AT MOBIUS - PART VII

Hans Gefors, from Denmark

performing

THE CREATION #2 / THE FIGUREHEAD / ME MORIRE IN PARIS

Friday and Saturday

8:00 P.M.

\$6.00 / \$4.00 students

4:30 - 6:00 P.M.

Free public lecture: Thursday, December 5
Boston Conservatory of Music, 8 The Fenway, Boston

Free informal workshop:
Sunday, December 8

3 - 5 p.m. at Mobius

EVENTS

MOBIUS

354 CONGRESS ST.
BOSTON

542-7416

INSTALLATIONS AT MOBIUS: Mobius has applied for funding to present a series of sculptural installations at Mobius in the 86/87 season. Artists interested in being considered should submit slides and a proposal to Mobius. The series will be curated by Helen Shlien, who plans to making studio visits and meeting with artists.

A FAMILY ALBUM and NEW WORK

Performed by Tamara Jenkins
October 31 / November 1 8 PM
Boston Film/Video Foundation
1126 Boylston St. \$6.00
Co-sponsored by the Artists
Foundation and BF/VF

Theatre S. is looking for performers and technical help for a December 7 performance of Ghosts at Mass. College of Art. Call 625-6087 if you're interested.

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MOBIUS

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