

FEATURE

and snapping, conveying hope that a different discourse is possible. While one critic judged this production less intense than Tranter's past ones, I'd call it more optimistic.

In Essen, the large audience for *Carniculus* seemed to have no problem with the fact that the production – Tranter's eighth at FIDENA – was in English.

'We've gotten no complaints. Germans start English in the first grade,' Dabs told me. French is usually translated, but that wasn't always the case in this year's production of the Swiss Théâtre de la Poudrière, *La Populace villageoise tremble d'effroi* ('The Common Folk in the Village Tremble with Fear'). Judging by comments that I heard from the audience in Bochum, some Germans had trouble understanding the irony with which director Yves Baudin treats mass hysteria. When signs reading 'sang' (blood) and 'froid' (cold) were joined by a hyphen to produce 'sang-froid', they didn't all get the joke, which works in English.

Yet such clues are essential to Baudin's art. Through them, he suggests that many terrors are self-generated. Constructing an atmosphere of fear and undercutting it at the same time, he has produced a sophisticated and subtle work. The varied and ingenious use of long rods – to pick things up, to attack, to divide and join, etc. – functions as an alienating device, distracting the audience from the ostensible threat that the villagers are so worked up about.

How to bring a play to foreign audiences is a notoriously difficult problem. It seems to me that *Chair de ma chair* ('My Own Flesh and Blood') by Ilka Schönbein and Theater Meschugge of France was not well-served by the English translation as spoken by Nathalie Pagnac. Pagnac began on an intense pitch and stayed there, like a circus barker, whereas Schönbein's German varied in loudness and colour. Perhaps Pagnac's tone was intended to bring us into the milieu



where the story is set: this production is an adaptation of Aghya Veteranyi's autobiographical account of her childhood with a pathologically self-involved mother: a circus performer. More effective, however, are the visual images which transmit a young girl's fears for her mother's life and for her own. A half-mask, a false leg set sideways on a cane, extensions on Schönbein's feet or an umbrella that resembles a spider's web are moved slowly and carefully by Schönbein, a trained dancer with tremendous control.

While Dabs did not look for plays that present subliminal threats, she agreed that they were prominent in

this year's event. Ten days long, this was the longest FIDENA to date, and a brief article like this one cannot touch on all aspects. But I hope to have conveyed the high artistic quality that is attracting festival directors from other parts of Europe.

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Opposite page: *La Populace villageoise tremble d'effroi* (Théâtre de la Poudrière). Above: *Chair de ma chair* (Ilka Schönbein/Theater Meschugge).