The Latvian Theatre Showcase is back after a break in 2014. Last year Riga was the European Capital of Culture, a perfect frame for introducing Latvian performing arts to international professional audiences. Yet the previous theatre season turned out to be not sufficient to put together a good showcase programme. The most remarkable events in the performing arts field in 2014 were the excellent guest performances, as well as collaborative projects such as “Blackmarket for Useful Knowledge and Non-Knowledge” devised by Hannah Hurtzig and local experts, “100% Riga” by Rimini Protokoll, city-specific dance productions created by local dance artists in cooperation with Koen Augustijnen, Contact Gonzo and Willi Dorner. Among Latvian repertoire and independent companies only the National Theatre devised a special project for Riga – European Capital of Culture: the festival “The Glory and Shame of Schengen” curated by director Valters Sīlis and dramaturg Janis Balodis invited young artists from the Netherlands, Iceland, Lithuania and Portugal to create new works with actors of the National Theatre. The shows were presented only during the festival and not included in the season repertoire, yet this small festival managed to reveal new potential of the cast and the audience of the National Theatre.

In 2015 Latvian theatre is formally structured around theatre houses and fixed companies. Its identity, however, is increasingly defined by personalities. With a few exceptions, directors, set designers and even actors work in different theatres and have possibility to collaborate in different artistic companies and meet audiences both in the capital and regional cities. The directors who were young and emerging artists during the last Showcase two years ago, have matured and developed their individual artistic language. As a result Latvian theatre scene is now more diverse and contemporary than ever before.

Vladislaw Naustavevs who is presented at the Showcase with two shows, have polished to perfection his unique style where all the elements – set, sound, lights, props, performers create an integrated universe of the performance. Valters Sīlis in ongoing collaboration with dramaturg Janis Balodis continues to explore urgent topics such as geopolitical turmoil and climate issues and builds direct and profound dialogue with the audience in independent venues, as well as repertoire theatres. He feels equally comfortable on a very intimate scale of Dirty Deal Theatre and on the big stage of the National Theatre, because his primary interest lies in questions raised by the performance rather than aesthetic choices.

Elmārs Seņkovs has created a set of works where performances may radically differ from one another as he never stops experimenting with dramaturgy, media application, visuality, and the acting method. Recently his work has evolved towards minimalism, highlighting actor’s presence on stage. After a short sabbatical another noteworthy director Viesturs Meikšāns is back in theatre determined to introduce the work of dramaturg Marius von Mayenburg by staging three different plays in three different theatres – New Riga Theatre, regional Valmiera Theatre and independent Dirty Deal Teatro.

A few years ago it was still unusual for Latvian repertory companies to invite directors from abroad. After first successful collaborations it turned into a kind of trend with a slightly competitive touch. Nowadays foreign directors and choreographers working in Latvia is a reality. Several of the invitations has grown into thematic programmes and series of works. There are few performances that were selected for the Showcase programme before they were actually premiered: “Martyr” by Viesturs Meikšāns, “The Idiot” by Vladimir Naustavevs, and “My Blaster Has Discharged” by Konstantin Bogomolov. This decision was based on our confidence that this festival is not a presentation of the perfect productions but an introduction of individuals who are the driving force in the contemporary theatre of Latvia, their position and artistic path. This is also the reason why in this publication instead of theatre scholars we invited artists to write essays and reflect on their experience of working together with the Showcase directors and choreographers.

We hope you will enjoy your time in Riga and will come back next spring for the Showcase 2016 to see just released and highly appreciated performances “We” by Valters Sīlis, “Antigone” by Elmārs Seņkovs, and the big surprises of the next season – return of the theatre, film and opera director Viesturs Kairišs on the big stage of the National Theatre, staging of the Russian classic Ivan Turgenev’s play “A Month in a Country” by Konstantin Bogomolov, and last but not least – a solo performance by Mikhail Baryshnikov based on Joseph Brodsky’s poetry and staged by Alvis Hermanis in New Riga Theatre.

Gundega Latvīva, director of New Theatre Institute of Latvia
Alvis Hermanis

Fragments from the interview in January 2014 with Gints Grube, producer and author of documentary film on Alvis Hermanis “More Than a Life.”

After your first production “Homecoming is Like a Calm and Peaceful River” here at the New Riga Theatre, an actor said: “we did everything ourselves, we didn’t have a director.”

Alvis Hermanis: I’ve always said that director’s work is much more productive if the director uses their position only to stimulate the creativity of his colleagues. The director only has to push them in the right direction, provide a frame, and then, as a general rule, the result is much more interesting.

On the other hand, the work of a director is extremely rational, yet intuitive on the other. Yesterday I heard a theatre scholar expressing with touching naiveté her indignation that a director calculates everything, he’s only manipulating us. I’d like to see a director who only sits at rehearsals and weeps and doesn’t understand what is going on or what he is doing. . . You could call it manipulation, but the role of the director is to assemble and prepare a performance so that it does something to the spectator. I wouldn’t want to think it’s as cynical as, say, Hollywood movies, where each tear is perfectly calculated. Of course it is better if the director pours it out from his own heart.

There is theatre that you can only do here in Riga and only at the New Riga Theatre. In what sense is putting down roots important or necessary for you?

Alvis Hermanis: It is absolutely true that theatre is an art form which is happening here and now. It’s like constructing a mandala and then expecting the wind to lift it up into space. It’s a very Buddhist sort of art. If a performance is rooted in a local context, in the context of a local city dweller, it’s a bonus, of course. But the whole thing can function without it as well. For example, at the New Riga Theatre, more or less the same group of actors and I have been going in and in hand with our audience for 20 years already, and we can develop that. Elsewhere, in the German-speaking theatre world, for example, where actors rotate frequently, this is harder to do. Hence, while working abroad it has been important for me to trust the actors’ intuition. Only an actor like a Stalker or medium can connect to the local context and codes, which to me, as an outsider, is unknown, and will forever remain unknown.

At various stages of your creative journey both your language on stage and your interests have changed. What happens to your productions years later, when they are still being performed? In what respect do you continue to be their director?

Alvis Hermanis: I am one of those directors who lose not only their connection to the performance, but also any interest in it, after the opening night. This is not good or bad, it’s just another way of doing it. But I am also a director who recognises that once a performance is released, in a way, the audience takes over the director’s function. I mean it in a good way. The performance has a structure so rigid that it can’t fall apart; the spectator can’t unhear it with their attitude. At least it hasn’t happened to me. But the live contact among the actors can be adjusted and it can improve the performance, and make it more powerful over time.

Are there things in theatre you can say you discovered?

Alvis Hermanis: No, it would be incredibly naive to think so. As I’ve said before, it’s very easy to be innovative if you have a short memory. If someone calls me a modern director, I take it as an insult, not at all as a compliment. The shift to an obsession with constantly having to invent something new occurred in European art only a few centuries ago. Prior to that the objectives of art were entirely different.

You often talk about being more a 20th century than the 21st century man. You represent a generation that grew up and was educated in one system, yet works in another. Does that hold any meaning?

Alvis Hermanis: Yes, because only memories, individual or collective, and only the past fertilises the soil. Only the past has value. How can the future have value? There’s nothing in it, only emptiness.

I am seriously considering a rather radical development model with the New Riga Theatre – we would love to grow old with our audience. To be blunt, on this side of the stage we are not interested in young people. Young people coming to watch our productions is great, we are very happy about that. But adjusting ourselves to them somehow, having young boys and girls running around the stage, solving their issues. . . I don’t think we are going to do that.

Why are your productions always so sad?

Alvis Hermanis: Well, the audience does giggle fairly often, and they laugh as well. I’ve always said that the most proper yet difficult thing is to achieve a smile and sadness simultaneously, at exactly the same time. The French say that when the audience understands the play, it is much more interesting.

The director provides a frame, and then, as a general rule, the result is much more interesting. To put it simply, our bodily existence on this earth is truly wonderful. It really is God’s gift to live this life in a body at least once, and to enjoy it, but at the same time our body is also our tragedy, as our spirit and our vertical dimension are limited. We are imprisoned in this bodily life. Music, and I’m talking about real music, gives us the chance to leave the confines of our body and live in the vibrations that only music can offer. Theoretically this can also be achieved in dramatic theatre, just theoretically.

Koen Augustijnen

Kristine Vismane, choreographer and performer

I got to know Koen Augustijnen in the autumn of 2013. He came to Riga to meet dancers for an upcoming performance about the Vecmīlgrāvis neighbourhood, and I was among those dancers. I didn’t know what the performance would be about or what the process would be like, but, to be honest, those were not the top things on my mind. I wanted to find out who is this Flemish choreographer from the world-renowned dance company “les ballets C de la B”, and what is he like.

Koen Augustijnen studied history at Ghent University. While he was a student, his intention was to become a guitar player and a journalist. But one day he went to see a dance performance, and . . .

Tell us how you got into dance?

Koen Augustijnen: I was 20. I was studying history, but I had no connection to dancing at all, instead I played a lot of football and other sports. One of my good friends invited me to see a performance by Wim Vandekeybus. I didn’t understand all of the performance, but I was fascinated. Afterwards I found myself jumping, and dancing, and doing other such things on the street. Then, two months later, my friend said that Vandekeybus is holding the audition and that I have to go. I told her I didn’t have the right education, but she convinced me to go. I remember that I had just arrived from Turkey that day. I was in my new Kurdish pants, and I went directly to the audition. Wim chose me, and suddenly I was at the heart of Belgium’s new wave of contemporary dance, and this whole new world opened up to me.

Koen is simple, always a bit dishevelled, smiling and energetic. I was fortunate to work with him on the performance “From Vecmīlgrāvis With Love”. The impression I got of Koen was that for him, anything is possible! He takes stock of the situation, of the resources available, and uses them very considerably. He doesn’t get attached to ideas, and, if necessary, is ready to let them go. If he knows that time is limited, Koen prefers to work on the quality of performance rather than fulfilling his conceptual ambitions. He often says “less is more”, and that refers not only to the execution of the performance, but also his own choices. I am most fascinated by Koen’s optimism. When an outline of the Vecmīlgrāvis show had already taken shape, he often exclaimed “it will be fantastic”. And it was! His enthusiasm inspired me and the other dancers. He fully believes in what he does and wastes no energy or time on unnecessary self-criticism.

What is a typical day for you as a choreographer and as a person?

Koen Augustijnen: Meeting and working with people from various backgrounds and with different mentalities. Going to see performances, films, all kinds of art. But sometimes I just need to do something completely different – to travel with friends, to do things which are new for me. For example, now I have a dream to work with boxers. New experiences sustain me.

When I was working with Koen on “From Vecmīlgrāvis With Love”, I had the chance to work on the quality of performance. Koen is interested in life, people and the relationships that form between them. In his creative process he tries to discover what’s hidden in each dancer, to open up parts of their personality, which they may not even suspect they have. When working with Koen, you have to be lively and open, you have to catch the impulses he throws, let them in, and let things happen. Each dancer determines how much you work in the process, to open up, to express. That is what the performance material depends on. In creating a performance Koen is like a coordinator, giving the dancers tasks and impulses. Then together with us he analyses what we have done and, having heard our opinions, he creates the story.

What is the meaning of contemporary dance theatre?

Koen Augustijnen: Theatre makes life and society richer. It is a kind of safe space where you can do things which are not necessarily possible when you are on the street, or elsewhere. It inspires people to think going to a dance performance or being a dancer is better than joining the army. The army destroys society, whereas theatre brings people together.

Konstantin Bogomolov

Gatis Maliks, Liepāja Theatre actor

A few years ago I had the chance to see Alexander Vampilov’s “The Elder Son” directed by Konstantin Bogomolov in Moscow, and I was very impressed. I remember bursting into tears at least twice during the show and laughing out loud. I jumped to my feet the minute the applause began, and applauded for a very, very long time.

When I later found out that Bogomolov was preparing to direct his first show outside Russia and it was to be in Liepāja, I was excited, of course, and hoped that I would
I had never before worked with a director whose ambitious intentions, presented in the initial stages of work, were so close to the result that was eventually delivered on the stage. Usually the rehearsal process brings about adjustments, which we recognise as circumstances, options and the limits of technical and acting abilities. Kirill Serebrennikov senses these limitations in an incredibly precise way and, as a result, is able to give the team simultaneously ambitious, precise and, above all, most cases, achievable tasks. Though, initially this does not seem to be the case, general confusion sets in and warned glances are given not only by the actors, but also by the administration.

What inspires me in this collaboration is the incredibly convincing rhetoric of the director, the clarity of his vision, and his ability to communicate it in a precise and polished way. This is a feature of intellect with which he has been endowed not only in the field of art, but also as a specialist in mathematics. His mind has been polished by this technique at an academic level, and this has undoubtedly left a mark on his approach to theatre and film. Irrespective of Kirill Serebrennikov’s rational creative method, his general philosophical aims are always based on an emotional impulse, and an idealistic notion that art can make humanity better on both a personal and societal scale.

This clear stance against nihilism and endless generalization does not lead his works into the trap of didacticism. Kirill is one of the most interesting aspects of contemporary art – subjectivity, individualism, originality, the impossibility of understanding another person while possibly identifying with them in certain experiences. Unfortunately, I do not possess the talent to express myself as clearly as Kirill, so I will explain further – his work is concrete in the construction of direction and content, but abstract and multi-dimensional from the perspective of multiple interpretations of the spectator. The language of Serebrennikov is contemporary. By this I mean that instead of attempting to out-do others with untested methods, Kirill’s work focuses on a sensitive, intuitive tracing of the transformations in art, society and his own personality.

The two production by Serebrennikov at the Latvian National Theatre which I was involved in (“Dreams of Rainis”, 2015, and “Wayzweck”, 2012) were incredibly intense. The director was demanding and, I would say, pushed me and the actors (and presumably also other theatre staff and resources) to our limits. This would not have been possible if he was not able to formulate his idea and captivate everyone with it. A person can only work with true commitment if they believe in the task at hand. Kirill achieved this perfectly.

It is precisely this intense and motivating work process that I benefited from the most. I felt like I had completed a refresher course, and I don’t doubt the actors felt the same way. Similar to music production, a rehearsal with Serebrennikov is a laboratory in which you reveal the content of the work and its multifaceted nuances. The listener cannot know our joy of discovery, because they hear only its application. If it were possible to communicate this joy of discovery felt in rehearsals, Latvian audiences would be much fonder of this director.

The detail that I personally feel among Latvians when experiencing the artistic language of Serebrennikov is explained mainly by differences in culture, mentality and temperament. Personally, I very much enjoy the fact that with his artistic expression, Serebrennikov represents the Russian temperament and aesthetic traditions alongside a deep understanding – or at least an active interest – in Western European art and culture. These differences are a sound justification for the invitation of any guest director, because we are interested in acquiring ourselves with a fresh or gaining a new perspective on things that we already know. We cannot look upon ourselves from the outside it seems, so is there a better way to do it than through the eyes of another, honest person?

By the way, most people are only interested in themselves, and as ancient wisdom reveals – to know oneself is a precondition for a successful existence.
There's always a moment when you have to return to yourself and very honestly look at what’s about, what are the themes. Therefore I chastise myself, because I sometimes get carried away with the fact that I want to produce a show, rather than say something very important through the language of art. This is only possible if you are just friends with theatre, rather than two parts of a whole. I hope that the time will not come when I say that theatre is everything that I have. I don’t want this to happen because it can’t be everything. Of course it is not just work. It’s something more, but I want to view it in a healthy light. I like it, when I get the chance to go somewhere and watch real people, rather than live through the theatre.

Kristīne Vismane
Ieva Kauliņa, set designer

I distinctly remember the first time I saw Kristīne, and I thought that a curious creature had entered our ranks. I saw her among sheepishly uneasy guests of a theatre premier – utterly untrained, so different, turning cartwheels, and doing backbends, and laughing almost indecently loudly and with too much sparkle. Later I worked together with the young choreographer and dancer at the Theatre Gerritse iljas teatris for director Andrejs Jarcovs. Enthusiasm and explosive energy were my first impressions of Kristīne. It was also clear that there is now someone among us who is keen on searching for a new language of theatre and choreography. In her work Kristīne searches for ways of talking to her audience, rather than offering abstract images to stir up their associations.

Kristīne’s performance “Interview With Madonna”, in which she attempted a socially significant and simultaneously very personal dialogue between herself and the audience, seemed to me to be too extreme, too violent a way of inciting a discussion on socially important issues (single mothers). But, I must admit, the performance made me think a lot about the issues it touched upon, as well as the role of an artist, their opportunities and courage.

Working with Kristīne on the performance “Catch Me”, I have discovered an extraordinary person. At times, I listen with admiration to the way Kristīne substantiates her creative choices, and I understand that nothing in her life happens for no reason, out of sheer momentum. This performance is based on an archive of movement, built during workshops with children throughout Latvia. Kristīne has this astounding talent of kick-starting children’s creativity. Later we looked at the movements, behaviour, mutual relations of particular children in children’s creativity. Later we looked at the movements, behaviour, mutual relations of particular children in children’s everyday lives and captivate them so strongly that they agree to become a medium of art themselves. Everything that happened between these kids when they were given freedom made us contemplate the nature of grownup society. Children in their natural mischief leap so quickly from emotions of love to manifestations of hate and intolerance, and, without even noticing it, create a story that makes you wonder about current events and processes in the world.

During the next stage, when Kristīne started working with the parents of the children who had to study and learn the ways their kids express themselves, turned out to be more complicated and challenging. I saw Kristīne’s doubt, and the way she felt forced to write her idea off as a failure. But, I think, the process in and of itself has been a great success for her – it takes a special person to drag people with no connection to the art of theatre out of their everyday lives and captivate them so strongly that they agree to become a medium of art themselves.

One of your favourite questions to the kids in workshops is “what is dance?” Kristīne Vismane: Kids usually say: “dance is movement, performed in the rhythm of music.” But when thinking of what movements exist, what is music and rhythm, in the end we arrive at very philosophical conclusions, and realise that all movement can be dance. And, as everything in perpetual motion, you could think that everything is a dance, but that is so?

Look at these people, these fish, trees, birds, ants and other living creatures whose actions look like an intricately produced dance. To me dance is something never-ending, and open to anyone. What is and what isn’t dance is determined by the boundaries of each individual’s perception, their style and interests.

What is a conversation with a spectator/observer for you?

KV: A conversation is a consciously created event in which during the performance an action by the performer triggers an internal process for the spectator. It can be reflection, insight, questions or desires. The results of a conversation can be numerous. Equally, a conversation may not happen, it may be one-sided. It’s possible that my conversation partner (the spectator) may also fall asleep and miss my “thoughts”. Anything can happen, and that is really great. What’s most important is the event itself, when people come together to listen, watch and react. I’m very interested in the live process, in which, on the one hand, there are clear boundaries between the spectator and the performer, but on an intangible level during the course of the performance these boundaries are erased.

Do you imagine a specific conversation with a spectator when performing?

KV: I don’t imagine conversations during a performance. Even when I’m asking specific questions to the audience, like I do in “Interview With Madonna”. Besides, the Latvian audience (I’m sad to say) don’t give direct answers. More often you can read their answers from the look in their eyes. The only thing that has something to do with an imagined conversation is the interpretation of the performer of what silence, or a tiny gesture of a spectator, could mean. What is most important is this moment between the question asked, and the expectations. Uncertainty and the desire to find out is what urges you to move forward.

Valters Silis
Jānis Baldiņš, dramaturg and performer

In my opinion, Valters Silis is not just a director. Since 2012 we have worked on seven performances together. The process of creating these performances has mostly gone something like this – Valters has an idea, he tells me about it, and I say: “well, we could do this.” What does that mean? It means that Valters as the initiator of the story ensures that it’s as alive and interesting as possible. A great deal of the time I operate as the technical dramaturg – I search for, collect, and compile information, and share it with Valters. Whereas Valters works as the conceptual dramaturg, who never drowns in the abundance of available information and is therefore able to look at the collected material and choose the main anchor points. Our latest collaboration project “Trip to Kiev Two Days before Christmas” was presented as a part of “War Notes” at Dirty Deal Theatre. Thanks to Valters, the ceasefire, which was supposed to be agreed that month but never was to a full extent, became the central event of these notes on war in Ukraine, and Jānis, who goes to Kiev to visit his father, became the main character.

Valters wants to create new stories, but he chooses not to take a direct route. His work asks big and important questions, but he chooses to arrive at them inspicuously, by taking a side road. Sometimes even concluding one story, and then starting a new one, thus leaving the audience with two aftertaasts, and letting them choose which one to keep.
In order to experience a real revelation and transformation, spectators have to free themselves from fear of straying from the familiar. In each of his productions, Meikšāns plays with our perceptions: if the audience surrenders, he reveals the infinity of the spirit and along with it, the peace, which, let’s be honest, everyone is searching for.

In the production “Wine and Weeds” (based on the films “American Beauty” and “Magnolia”, Valmiera Theatre, 2010) the tangles of human relationships are woven together so tightly that it seems this status quo can be changed only by death. In the final scene a parallel world is unveiled to the audience, a large hall, which has stood alongside the dysfunctional families and their decisions to live locked in the cages of their own assumptions, the entire time.

Meikšāns throws himself, the viewer and the actors from the conceived tower of prior knowledge. In “The Golden Horse” (Valmiera Theatre, 2009), the main protagonist, a third born son, rides up the glass mountain in order to wake the princess. Meikšāns makes a principled decision to extinguish the ability of the main hero to experience a spiritual awakening, leaving him in tortured apathy. Thus, a frighteningly, socially uneasy paradox is illuminated: that we discover the deepest form of life only in the presence of death. Having felt this, we become immune to fundamental change, and accept that the intense and vital quality of existence is the only confirmation of reality.

When working with the actor, Meikšāns does not allow them to logically build their character. He indicates two points between which the actor has to build a bridge over a bottomless gorge – crossing it is a process of self discovery, that demands a change in thinking. He also demands the same bravery of himself, viewing dramaturgy as a stake in the production. In the performance “Seven Fausts” (based on “Faust” by J.V. Goethe, Latvian National Theatre, 2011), the meeting with Mephistopheles is played out twice, widening the space and time for the interpretation of the actors, and breaking the assumptions about the continuum of space and time in our existence.

Meikšāns uncovers the gaps in our world view, and it is up to us to examine and examine them. As the performance progresses, the actor can suddenly interrupt it and remind the viewer that they are watching a play, thus destroying another illusion in order to get closer to the truth. The comparison of how Vlad and me are working is very interesting piece.

Why is the joke important?

VI: Wittiness can only emerge when the idea is a bit different, when it’s presented as a joke. I think the theatre needs wittiness. Without it we’re just sadly looking at something that’s slowly moving ahead, but you need something to kick you about a bit all the time, no matter whether it’s comedy or drama.

What is not a joke?

VI: A lot of things aren’t. If you’re talking about people in your performance, and you humiliate them, that’s not a joke. Although jokes can make yourself humble. A joke humbles someone who has grown a bit too big for their boots. For example, in political satire you joke so that it’s shaming, but not an outright offence. In political satire is very necessary, so that, hopefully, the shame works on the politician and they can’t bring themselves to do something criminally stupid. But if you just humiliate them, they won’t understand why. What else is not a joke in art? Often enough what started out as a joke, will not be one in the end.

Viesturs Meikšāns

Viesturs Meikšāns studies the uncomfortable and sensitive aspects of our existence, buried in the depth of our ego, ones which would cause unease and anxiety if addressed openly. Yet the path through the deformed human nature, which Meikšāns has chosen to lead his audience through, is not painful, rather it emboldens, and is playful, like luring an exhausted and wayward animal out of a swamp.

Vladislavs Nastavševs

Inese Pudža, Valmiera Theatre actress

Saint Petersburg, London, Riga. In my opinion these are three significant landmarks in the life of Vlad. Just Vlad, that’s how we’re, actors, address him.

After not having seen him for a long time we meet at the cafe to talk about life (though less about that and more about theatre, as always). Vlad has just finished work on a production of Dostoyevsky’s “The Idiot” at the Latvian National Theatre, and rehearsals have started at the New Riga Theatre. Since I’ve known Vlad, and that’s been quite a few years already, he has always been working. It seems there’s not a single moment when he’s not directing a production somewhere. As Vlad himself admits – I don’t really have anything else besides theatre... I think it says a lot about how Vlad relates to theatre, to himself – everything is at stake, no exceptions, no allowances. As an actress I’ve worked with Vlad several times. When answering colleagues’ questions about how Vlad works, as there are different legends about working with him, over the course of time I’ve arrived at the conclusion that each actor hits their own wall when working with Vlad, both in the human and the professional sense. Vlad has this knack of captivating people. He often makes you follow him where you haven’t ventured before, he demands hard work, he demands that you create and search together – at the rehearsal, on the phone or during working hours, at the lunch table. He seldom lets attention stray from the role, the abacus in his head is never quiet, except, I assume, when he is asleep, but even then, as we know, there are dreams.

After my own experience with Vlad I’m always happy for the actors who have just started working with him. I believe the experience is worthwhile, and the next choices are up to each actor themselves. When working with Vlad, an actor will never be comfortable – you won’t be pampered with an educational approach, you’ll never know, often even up to the premiere, whether what you’re doing even counts as something or not, rehearsal times are occasionally outside the realm of time as such the world is not monotonic. And besides all that, at the back of your mind, at least for me, there’s always this feeling that the very reason why there is a meaning in the actor’s profession is going to show itself. I don’t want to call it inspiration, too pathetic. And parallel to all that is the harsh and unreleenting assembly line system of the repertory theatre, grinding everyone into a uniform soup, like in a hamster wheel. In that case it’s undoubtedly better to make this grinding wheel work towards some meaning, which Vlad is always tirelessly Championing for, to comfortably teeter to the theatre and back without really knowing whether what you’re doing as an actor has substance.

How are you doing?

Vladislavs Nastavševs: I haven’t really recovered after “The Idiot”. I’m already sitting in rehearsals at the New Riga Theatre, where the actors are wonderful, they offer suggestions left and right, and I do understand it’s possible this way and that way, but there’s weariness above all of it. “The Idiot” was difficult for me, it was not bad, but it has to be brilliant, I always want it to be brilliant. I realize I should now step aside from that production, let the actors breathe. But it’s hard... What’s important is for the actor to allow everything to simmer inside, technique alone is not enough, maybe the spectator doesn’t always notice, but nevertheless, you have to allow it to happen. It’s not easy, but it has to be done.

What do you do these days, when you’re not at a rehearsal?

VN: I’m refurbishing my apartment. It’ll be beautiful. I’m looking for antiques. The floor is probably going to be parquet. It’s what I’m working for, and right now I’m doing a new production at New Riga Theatre about my refurbishing experience.
DANCE OF DEATH
Wednesday, May 20 / 17:00
Teatre Ģertrūdes ielas, Ģertrūdes street 10a
Duration 1h
In Latvian with English translation
Author August Strindberg
Director Elīzabete Seņkova
Set and costume design Arina Zarnovska
Music Rihards Jeļčens
Dance of Death
Premiere on May 22, 2015
Presented last summer in one of Riga's most remote places, Dance of Death is a shocking and grotesque drama. In 1906, Serbian Karl Wilhelm is a man who has devoted himself to the eradication of the plague. His methods are brutal and inhumane, but his intentions are pure. The play explores themes of sacrifice, morality, and the nature of good and evil.

TRAVELLERS BY SEA AND LAND
Thursday, May 21 / 19:00
New Riga Theatre, Lāčplēsda street 25
Duration 3h
In Latvian with English translation
Author Mikhail Kuzmin
Director Vladimirs Nastavševs
Set and costume design Monika Pormale
Music Vladimirs Nastavševs
Performers Viļis Daugžirīns, Mārtiņš Upenieks, Girts Jurjevs, Sandra Klavžu, Marta Āpina, Ilze Ūkste, Andra Kaila, Girts Kūrmēns, Ineta Pole, Edgars Saatmanis
Producer New Riga Theatre (www.nr2tv.lv)
Premiere on January 29, 2014

Lost Antarctica
Thursday, May 21 / 21:00
Dirty Deal Teatro, Maskavas street 12k-2
Duration 1h 30
In English
Based on the book “Lost Antarctica” by James McClintock
Dramaturg Jānis Balodis
Director Valters Sīlis
Set design Ieva Kauliņa
Music Edgars Rajēnšs
Light designer Alekša Strikerse
Performer Toms Liepājnieks
Producer Dirty Deal Teatro (dirtydeal.lv/teatro)
Premiere on February 5, 2015

THE IDIOT
Thursday, May 21 / 17:00
Latvian National Theatre, Kronvalda boulev. 2
Duration 3h
In Latvian with English translation
Author Fyodor Dostoevsky
Director Vladimirs Nastavševs
Set and costume design Vladislavs Nastavševs
Performers Arturs Ļuknopa, Dārja Lārska, Līga Zēļa, Anta Alīņa, Kapars Damburs, Girts Lišinskis, Jānis Vīma, Imants Štraķs
Producer National Theatre (www.teatris.lv)
Premiere on April 7, 2015

The Idiot: It is about our relationship with God, it is also a story about Russia”, says director Vladislavs Nastavševs. “Each one of us would like to call God and have a chat. Whether we admit it or not, our lives are ongoing conversations with God. Some choose to call it a conversation with one’s alter ego or consciousness. For Dostoevsky, it is God people are talking to. Russia today disseminates a feeling of apocalypse similar to the one we all felt in 1989 before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Times are changing, Russia is not. This is another topic important for Dostoevsky, who cared about the destiny of his country”. Vladislavs Nastavševs’ (1978) directorial début on the Latvian theatre stage in 2010 marked the start of a new relationship between the linguistic and visual forms of the performance. He takes great care of the production as an integrated art work where the space is shared equally by performers, the set, objects, sound and light. In most of his productions Nastavševs is also the set, costume, sound and light designer. Nastavševs studied acting at the Academy of Theatre Arts in Saint Petersburg and directing at Central Saint Martins College of Arts & Design in London. He has worked at Dirty Deal Teatro, Valmiera Theatre, National Theatre, New Riga Theatre in Latvia, Teater NO99 in Estonia, and the Gogol Center in Russia. Last season his performance “Travellers by Sea and Land” at the New Riga Theatre received the annual Latvian Theatre Award for the Best Large Stage Production.

MY BLASTER HAS DISCHARGED
Wednesday, May 20 / 20:00
Latvian National Theatre, Kronvalda boulev. 2
Duration 1h 30
In Latvian with English translation
Author and director Konstantin Bogomolov
Set and costume design Larisa Lomakina
Video projections Andris Vētras
Performers Agnes Pīksa, Jāks Zilgalis, Novalis Čeļumov, Andris Tīre, Gatis Galis, Dāmas Johans
Music Girts Utenieks
Producer Liepāja Theatre (www.liepajatheatrs.lv)
Premiere on April 17, 2015

Following his debut production “Stavanger. Pulp People” at Liepāja Theatre, Russian director Konstantin Bogomolov returns with his own piece “My Blaster has Discharged” – a sequence of scenes featuring strangers of different ages, professions, and world views brought together by unbelievable coincidence of circumstances. It is a story about people, relationships, worries, and that strange pastime – life.

Konstantin Bogomolov (1975) is among the most distinct theatre practitioners in Russia. His productions present a polemic and non-orthodox vision of reality, often provoking heated responses. In his works Bogomolov challenges the traditional approach to literary text and the very understanding of the nature of theatre. He has staged performances in all the leading theatres in Moscow, and received numerous awards. His staging of the contemporary play “Stavanger. Pulp People” at Liepāja Theatre in 2013 won the annual Latvian Theatre Award for Best Production and Best Director, and was shown at Wiener Festivalen in 2014.

FROM VECMĪLGRAVĪS WITH LOVE
Thursday, May 21 / 14:00
Teatre Gārsnedz ielas naktī, Gārsnedz street 10a
Duration 1h
Some spoken text in English
Author and choreographer Koen Augustijnen
Co-authors and performers Eva Vancāne, Dmitrij Gaitjukevičs, Aida Liepīte, Evija Bírute, Kristīne Vīmane, Katrīna Aitkule, Erika Lūce
Producer New Theatre Institute of Latvia (www.theatre.lv)
Premiere on March 21, 2015

This piece follows the production conceived and presented last summer in one of Riga’s most remote neighbourhoods – Vecmīlgavīš. Flemish choreographer Koen Augustijnen collaborated with a group of young Latvian dancers to produce a physical and energetic piece blending impressions from the neighbourhood, tradition of Latvian folk dance and popular culture.

Koen Augustijnen (1967) has been working closely with “les ballets C de la B” since 1991, initially as a dancer and somewhat grotesque approach. In 2014 Sīlis staged three works in three different theatres that focused on painful and embarrassing events in Latvia’s recent history, showing a challenging, non stereotypical portrayal of the pollution of a local river and the institution of absurdity of state bureaucratic documents, consequences of the marine biologist, explorer, and one of the leading polar expeditions in Antarctica. Sīlis presented an audiovisual journey to see Antarctica through the eyes of the marine biologist, explorer, and one of the leading polar expeditions in Antarctica. Sīlis presented derived from the book “Lost Antarctica” by James McClintock and somewhat grotesque approach. In 2014 Sīlis staged three works in three different theatres that focused on painful and embarrassing events in Latvia’s recent history, showing a challenging, non stereotypical portrayal of the pollution of a local river and the institution of absurdity of state bureaucratic documents, consequences of the marine biologist, explorer, and one of the leading polar expeditions in Antarctica. Sīlis presented an audiovisual journey to see Antarctica through the eyes of the marine biologist, explorer, and one of the leading polar expeditions in Antarctica.
be in-house director at the Valmiera Theatre, eagerly experimenting outside the conventional theatre frame. In 2012 Meklīns worked at the Moscow Art Theatre. He returned to the Latvian stage last year with “Mikhail and Mikhail play chess”, a sophisticated production of the complex opera by composer Kristaps Petersons and librettist Sergejs Timofejevs about the famous chess match between Mikhail Botvinnik and Mikhail Tal in 1960.

CATCH ME
Saturday, May 23 / 17:00
Teatre (Gerrard St Ieais teatris, Gerrard St 10A)
Duration 1h
In Latvian with English translation

Idea and directing Kristīne Vīsmane
Choreographers Lukas Gronskis, Tasjoma Timofejeva,
Emīlija Ane, Dakars Stolite, Karēta Sīte, Sarbote Bērziņa, Kristīne Vīsmane
Performers Ieva Valdeko, Evita Bērziņa, Nauris Beizētie, Andris Vīķotis Freimanis
Composer and musician Rihrads Libietis
Set and costume design Ieva Kaļuje
Lights Dāvis Burmeisers
Producer Zane Ezenie Gunātme
Production assistant Laila Jokste
Producer PIGEON-BRIDGE (www.pigeonbridge.com)
Co-producer Theatre (gerrard St Ieais teatris (www.gilt.lv)
Premiere on May 18, 2015

“Catch Me” is about six parents daring to attempt mimicking the movements of their children in dance. For several months the behaviour and movement of their children was observed, the parents worked on their physical endurance and precision, and struggled with their inner fears. Will the parents succeed in reflecting the movements of their own kids? The children will be present at the performance and be able to answer that question themselves.

Kristīne Vīsmane (1987) is a choreographer and performer, one of the most active young generation dance artists in Latvia. She has created several solo pieces, but also works collectively. Two of her pieces were nominated for the annual Latvian Theatre Award in 2013. Kristīne Vīsmane regards choreography as a lifestyle, drawing inspiration for her work from everyday experiences and people she encounters.

THE TWELVE CHAIRS
Saturday, May 23 / 17:00
New Riga Theatre, Lielajā street 25
Duration 4h
In Latvian with English translation

Based on the book “The Twelve Chairs” by Ilya If and Evgeny Petrov
Director Alvis Hermanis
Set design Alvis Hermanis
Costumes Kristīne Jurjāne
Performers Andris Kaldi, Gundars Ablodīns, Girts Krūmiņš, Baiba Broka, Gunā Zariņa, Sandīta Kļaveņa, Emīlija Āne, Vija ĻVelē, Vilsis Auda, Ieva Kļavīne, Māra Auda, Ieva Kļavīne, Ilona Ļēdrina, Ineta Bīķe
Producer New Riga Theatre (www.jrt.lv)
Premiere on December 7, 2014

In his most recent theatre production the internationally acclaimed Latvian director Alvis Hermanis adapts “The Twelve Chairs”, the iconic Soviet satirical novel from the 1920s. In this story about unlikely companions on a treasure hunt in post-revolution Russia, Hermanis was familiar with the text, focusing on its sharp and witty satire of Soviet life into a tale of Jewish jokes.

Alvis Hermanis (1965) is recognized as one of the most significant directors of his generation in European theatre. His productions differ from each other markedly in terms of style and content. However, they are consistent in being oriented around the work of the actor, and showing scrupulous precision in the choice of their form and theatrical vocabulary.

Since 1997 Hermanis has been the artistic director of the New Riga Theatre where he has staged numerous productions, building a devoted audience and receiving critical acclaim. Since 2003 his company has been touring intensively in Europe and beyond, while Hermanis was regularly invited to create performances in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy. For the last three years Hermanis has been staging productions in European opera houses occasionally returning to dramatic theatre. His most recent theatre production is “Die schönsten Sterbesszenen in der Geschichte der Oper” at Schauspielhaus Zürich.
Latvian Theatre Showcase 2015, Riga, May 20–23

Wednesday, May 20

17:00–19:40  
**Theatre Zirgu pasts**  
Deziravu street 46  
Elmārs Senķevs  
**Dance of Death**

20:00–21:30  
**Latvian National Theatre**  
Main stage  
Kronvalda boulv. 2  
Konstantin Bogomolov  
**My Bluster Has Discharged**

Thursday, May 21

13:00–13:45  
**Introduction to the Showcase programme and artistic selection at Theatre Gertrūdes ielas teātris**  
(Gertrūdes street 101a)

14:00–15.00  
**Theatre Gertrūdes ielas teātris**  
Gertrūdes street 101a  
Koen Augustijnsen  
**From Vercingetorix With Love**

17:00–20.00  
**Latvian National Theatre**  
New Stage  
Kronvalda boulv. 2  
Vladislavs Nastavievs  
**The Idiot**

19:00–22.10  
**New Riga Theatre**  
Main stage  
Lāčplēša street 25  
Vladislavs Nastavievs  
**Travellers by Sea and Land**

21:00–22.30  
**Dirty Deal Teatro**  
Maskavas street 12 block 2  
Valters Silis  
**Lost Antarctica**

Friday, May 22

11:00  
Meeting with directors Konstantin Bogomolov, Valters Silis, Dmitrijs Petrenko, Elmārs Senķevs, Vladislavs Nastavievs at Kaspina Kultūras centrs (Koka street 15)

13:00–15.00  
**Dirty Deal Teatro**  
Maskavas street 12 block 2  
Valters Silis  
**War Notes / reading of the play “Try to do something two days before cease-fire”**

17:00–18:40  
**Daile Theatre**  
Brivibas street 75  
Dmitrijs Petrenko  
**All Her Books**

19:00–20:45  
**Latvian National Theatre**  
Main stage  
Kronvalda boulv. 2  
Kirill Serebrennikov  
**Dreams of Rainis**

Saturday, May 23

12:00–13:45  
**New Riga Theatre**  
Museum stage  
Talus street 1  
Viesturs Meikšāns  
**Martyr**

15:00–16.00  
**Theatre Gertrūdes ielas teātris**  
Gertrūdes street 101a  
Kristīne Vismane  
**Catch Me**

17:00–21:00  
**New Riga Theatre**  
Main stage  
Lāčplēša street 25  
Alvis Hermanis  
**12 Chairs**

Farewell drink after the show at New Riga Theatre

The Showcase organiser New Theatre Institute of Latvia (NTIL) is a non-governmental, project based organisation working in the field of contemporary performing arts on local and international level.

In 1995 a group of Latvian theatre artists and professionals organized the first international theatre festival in the newly independent country. It was also the beginning of the New Theatre Institute of Latvia, which has since expanded its activities far beyond the festival scope, yet the biennial International Festival of Contemporary Theatre Homo Novus is still at core of our work. The Festival presents performances by established artists and emerging talents, produces new work by young local artists, and offers a programme of seminars, workshops and other activities while broadening the notion of theatrical space. The next edition of Homo Novus will take place in Riga on September 4–10, 2015.

The Latvian Theatre Showcase is one of our regular activities focused on professional international audiences and done in collaboration with Latvian repertory theatres, independent venues and dance companies. The Showcase gives an overall introduction to the current developments in Latvian performing arts and offers a meeting place for presenters, critics and artists.

We also produce and present local and international projects during the season, serve as a platform for information sharing and develop long term collaboration programmes together with local and international partners. Our interests lie in the expanding of the borders for creation, presentation and perception of artwork and supporting the development of versatile, innovative and committed independent performing arts scene in Latvia. Our work has been to a large extent propelled by active partnership in international networks, and currently we are partners in four networks: Shared Space: Music, Weather, Politics; [DNA] Departures and Arrivals; FIT (Festivals in four networks: Shared Space: Music, Weather, International Networks) and currently we are partners. The next edition of Homo Novus will take place in Riga on September 4–10, 2015. The Latvian Theatre Showcase is one of our regular activities focused on professional international audiences and done in collaboration with Latvian repertory theatres, independent venues and dance companies. The Showcase gives an overall introduction to the current developments in Latvian performing arts and offers a meeting place for presenters, critics and artists.

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