

Specifically Latvian Vol. 4



Brodsky / Baryshnikov by Alvis Hermanis

The Native Language

The cultural affairs journalist and editor **Jegors Jerohomovičs** in conversation with **Mikhail Baryshnikov**. The interview first appeared in the October 15th, 2015 issue of *KDi*, a weekly cultural supplement to national daily newspaper *Diena*.

Mikhail Barishnikov doesn't talk much, but it is important for him to talk about his friend Joseph Brodsky. Perhaps it's the first time he does it so openly. What Brodsky thought of Baryshnikov we can learn from Solomon Volkov's "Dialogues with Joseph Brodsky" – the poet admired his mind, intuition, intellect, and analytic skills.

'What he does is not ballet. It's the metaphysics of body,' wrote Brodsky. Joseph Brodsky left Russia in 1972, for life; Mikhail Baryshnikov followed two years later. Their friendship would last until the poet's death in 1996. It seems as if it is still going. 'For me this production is an emotional challenge,' Baryshnikov says about "Brodsky/Baryshnikov", a production by Alvis Hermanis. In it Baryshnikov interprets Brodsky's poetry, although it's not a regular recital. It's a theatre piece where two friends meet in an overgrown orangery.

Can one say that in this production your private relationship with Joseph Brodsky becomes public?

Yes. We were close friends since the late fall of 1974. Our last conversation took place on the late night of the 27th of January 1996; it was my birthday. Joseph called and said, 'It's so sad you're not in New York.' My son and I were in Florida. A few hours later that night Joseph died. I never had an idea to stage, or take part in, a production that would use Brodsky's poetry; I would never dare. Alvis convinced me it was possible. When I received the offer,

my jaw dropped, and the heart started beating faster. I've seen Alvis' works in the opera and the dramatic theatre, and I liked them very much – especially Bernd Alois Zimmermann's "The Soldiers" and the production of "Shukshin's Stories" in the Moscow Theatre of Nations.

This is my eighth or ninth dramatic piece, but it's the first in which I speak Russian from start to finish. Working with Alvis brings me joy; I speak my native language. The language of the poet.

The point is to depart from Joseph's intonation, from how he read poetry. He believed poetry must be read by the poet, not an actor. At the same time, Joseph would make me read not only his own poetry, but everything I knew by heart: Mandelstam, Pushkin, Lermontov, Baratashvili. He'd say, 'Mish, sit down and begin!' Or he would begin first. He would always read poetry standing, with a cigarette in his hand. 'Now you sit down and listen.' Then, 'Why, and what about you? Only by heart!' I'd stand up. 'No, you can sit. Do as it feels right.' He liked the way I read. He would often praise me.

In Bob Wilson's productions, actors always wear thick layers of makeup that resembles a clown's or a fool's mask. Thus it creates a certain distance; Hermanis' productions, however, are openly emotional.

Rehearsals with Alvis are three four hours long; for him the thinking process takes much more time than the actual work with the actor. Alvis works very intensely; he always knows what he must do and why. In this production he left music out; all there is, is grasshoppers chirring. The important thing is the music of poetry, the music of rhymes, the overall dynamic and fulfilment.

Alvis is very strict and restrained; he rejects the refined, overly dramatic way of presenting poetry. The main thing is that the listeners would understand what the poetry is about. It has inner motion, an atmosphere,

and sound. If you burden it with yourself, with your own being, it goes sour. Even the best poetry, if put under pressure, dissolves. Brodsky was incredible at reading, enchanting with and involving everyone into his song. He resembled a rabbi. Even when he swallowed words and didn't keep with the rhythm, it was incredible. Those who didn't understand Russian would listen to Joseph as if it was music.

What did you talk about during your last phone conversation that January night?

He was upset we couldn't meet this time, because he'd usually pay me a visit on my birthday. I never celebrated it, but he always did. He'd have hundreds of guests; in his apartment on Morton Street he'd open the gate to the garden – it's nice weather in May. Joseph liked it very much. He thought birthdays were meant to be celebrated to honour parents – for they gave you your life. That night we talked about this for quite a while.

He asked, 'Did you at least drink something?' I replied, 'I had a beer,' After all, I was with my son – Petya was seven. Joseph said, 'How sad we couldn't make it this time.' We talked about our mutual acquaintances. Then he said, 'Alright, Mish. It's past eleven; I must still go downstairs. You know, I'll tell you one thing: please be good.' He said it so gently. Be good... He could find the right mood. I even got confused. He declared something that was so simple – two words turned into something so important and necessary. It is a concept of life which embodies an attitude toward people and all else. He would never say anything bad about even the most unpleasant people; if only, 'What a nuisance!' He wouldn't lower more.

Joseph's words 'Be good' fell deep into my memory. They don't mean one should become a messiah and help people live their lives; these words are important for oneself. He felt this way; he could not lie.



Brodsky / Baryshnikov by Alvis Hermanis

Brodsky dedicated poems to you. What was your gesture in return?

When he passed away, I dared and wrote a poem to him while in Venice. Yes, this boldly. He and I would often take walks in Venice. We travelled across Italy; he adored it. He would dedicate poems to me and often wrote something funny in the books he gave me for my birthday or Christmas. He took great joy in it. I have some forty books with these inscriptions.

What was the foundation in your friendship? Why did he take to you from among other talented people?

I don't know why he did; I was lucky. One thing was for sure – I did not force myself onto him. Joseph was surprised and amused when he learned I was born on the same day as Mozart. My youngest daughter Sofia was born on May 24th – it was Joseph's birthday. The coincidences like these. My son is called Pyotr Andrei, and Joseph's son is also called Andrei. I held in my hands Joseph and Masha Kuznetsova's newborn daughter Nastya when, in 1972, we were taking her home from the maternity ward.

To Joseph, I wasn't a companion like Derek Walcott or Cheslav Miloš were, yet we talked about everything from the mundane to the extraordinary. My life interested him; his home was always open to me; we would travel together. We have... we had a lot to talk about. Not necessarily about Rilke's philosophy. He told me a lot; I wasn't afraid to ask. He would always tell me, 'If there's something you don't know, be sure to ask; don't pretend.'

The simpler, more natural and curious a person was, the more he drew Joseph's attention. He had a full-blown life of a professor and a corresponding image: a tweed jacket, glasses, many pens in a pocket, but there also was another life. He would call me in the morning, 'What music are we dancing?' He was primarily interested in music. 'Where are we going to? Where flying to?' He would tell me about the parents, friends, Leningrad. We talked about private matters. Joseph treated wonderfully women with whom I had serious relationships. We had it all. Until the last moment. This is what real friendship is.

He was demanding in relationships. Sometimes he would offend people, but it was genuine, not contrived, harshness and directness. Joseph was honest, sensitive, gentle. Of course he wasn't simple. But he wasn't megalomaniac. He was happy when a poem turned out great. 'I think I have it! Sit, sit, sit down!' He announced to me over the phone, 'I have something new. Are you sitting now?' He had post-its on the wall; he'd rearrange them, move verses around. He wanted to know my opinion. I would say, 'Don't ask if I like it. What am I to say, that I didn't? I can't join a debate I am not competent at.' Joseph himself would say, 'This is too long. This is pretentious.' He would correct and edit himself thoroughly; you know his manuscripts. He was very strict with himself.

Joseph would never bare his teeth or get into arguments. He wasn't a dissident; he'd never horn in on it all, but he did respect people who'd lost their job or were imprisoned for what they'd said; in some sense they were all cellmates. Joseph knew his influence and talent. Even if he said, ironically, 'dear fatherland', it had a portion of truth in it. He worried a great deal about his parents, about the whole ugly case, about the fact that he'd die without feeling his mother's caress and seeing his father's eyes. But the enemy never succeeded in taking away his language.

He had amazing prescience. It seems he knew he'd die in January – he has a poem called 'Nature Morte'. Alvis included it into the show. Read it.

How important language and speech are to you? How do you keep your Russian alive when you are in a foreign language space?

I love speaking Russian. I talk to Joseph's translators Barry Rubin and Bengt Jangfeldt. One is American; the other, Swedish. They speak wonderful Russian. Now I speak with Alvis a lot; he rarely makes mistakes.

I began seriously reading Dostoyevsky in New York. When I was around thirty, I could already say a word or two about Konstantin Vaginov's "Goat Song" and Turgenev. I began to be able to explain things to myself as well as others; for example, my children, who would learn about "Fathers and Sons" and "The Brothers Karamazov" at school.

Joseph admired Andrei Platonov and Samuel Beckett. 'Just look at what Beckett writes! This is impossible to stage! And they shouldn't. Read this!' Sometimes we would read Beckett to each other.

Joseph didn't love the theatre; he thought it the players' share. 'Mish, you better dance.' He thought Shakespeare wasn't for staging; he must be read.

Would he like "Brodsky/Baryshnikov"?

I don't know. Who knows? Perhaps he even would.

Brodsky admired your skill in reading poetry and emphasized the fact that you knew more poems by heart than he did.

Joseph exaggerated a little. In 1964, when I enrolled at the Vaganova's School of Choreography, I befriended a very beautiful girl named Olga Yevreinova. We lived in the same dorm and sat together in classes. During the very first week – I think it was a history class – she showed me some papers under the desk. I asked, 'What's that?' She whispered, 'Joseph Brodsky'. I said, 'Can I have them?' She agreed, 'Yes, but be very careful.' In the bathrooms at night I would read Brodsky. Olga would be bringing ever new poems.

During those years people came into my life with whom I am still friends. Theatre people, actors, directors, ballet critics. They weren't critics everyone would be afraid of; they were people of art who you would invite to rehearsals to ask for their opinion. Dance is like this: when you begin to understand this art, your body is already weak. That's why conversations with clever people who are 20–30 years older than you are very helpful.

I meet my Russian friends on a neutral ground; it's better that way. The conversation is purer. I never watch Russian TV channels. Here in Riga I turned on "Dozhd". There is a peculiar situation: on one hand, people on this channel speak out freely, but you understand that it can be shut down any moment. They will reach a certain point, and then that's that. But it's interesting to watch. In Riga I know few people, and now I am not able to read much. I have a few books with me, but I hear only Brodsky's poetry in my head. So at night I turn on the TV and watch "Dozhd". Everyone there is witty, explosive; they talk well. Perhaps someday it will come to something.

I used to hope Russia would again become a great country, but not in the military sense. A country of enlightenment, pride, mutual respect, clear intentions,

culture. A great country to set an example, not a country of conflicts, petty arguments, iniquity. In this country a saint can end up in the same bed with a killer, and people get used to that. Perhaps Russians are in this extreme state historically.

When tickets to "Brodsky / Baryshnikov" went on sale, the box office and the internet exploded. Do you feel Riga is expecting you in some special way?

Sure, after all, I was born here. Yesterday I was walking with a classmate of mine and said, 'I grew up here with Misha Maisky, Gidon Kremer, the late Philipp Hirschhorn. For them all, Riga is home, but never for me. I have never felt myself at home here.' I have always felt that for my family and myself – we had a complicated family relationship – Riga wasn't a comfortable, easy, or pleasant place. In Riga, I only felt well in the opera theatre and the choreography school. I was fascinated by the atmosphere in the theatre. Helena Tangiyeva-Birzniece had strict rules in the theatre; she had her own theatre, and everyone was equal. She wasn't an excellent choreographer, but the theatre had personalities; there was a sense of camaraderie, no rumours, no envy. Everyone worked side by side. She was Armenian, but there were Jews, Latvians, Russians; everyone would speak Latvian and Russian.

I was still a boy, but I felt it was all mine; it was my world. The street, however, and all the rest – it wasn't for me. I couldn't stand it. I've been feeling it all this time since childhood.

Are these feelings still with you?

Yes, always. Riga has become more beautiful; I walk, I smile, I remember the Latvian language; I try to speak Latvian in a restaurant. Very sweet. But the only place where my heart starts to really beat is my mother's grave. I crisscrossed the Meža Cemetery, got on a tram, returned to the city centre, and I had a feeling as if I had never lived here. Even when I passed my house on Skolas street.

The same feeling visits me in Saint Petersburg. For me it is more a geographical point. In Riga I spent 16 years; 10 years in Leningrad; the rest – more than 40 years – I spent in New York.

Is this why you have decided it makes no sense to return to Russia?

No, I'm not going there, especially under the current situation.

In his Nobel lecture, Brodsky said of poetry, 'The black vertical clot of words on the white sheet of paper presumably reminds him of his own situation in the world, of the balance between space and his body.' Body has always been your main tool. In the production you will be reading poetry. How important for you is the interaction between the plastic and the verbal languages?

I think it is too pretentious a phrase, too complicated. Joseph wrote a lot about how body moves through space. In this production in no way are we trying to adorn the poetry with movement; rather, it's a reaction to the sense of the poetry. On stage I read poetry both live as well as recorded. Joseph didn't know dance, but he was eager to attend my performances, especially if they played good music. 'Later we eat something,' he'd say. He was excited by the possibility we'd go to dinner afterwards. In dance he liked moments of improvisation, which can be compared to the birth of a poem.

He asked me, 'Why don't you dance Mozart or Haydn?' I explained, 'I can't do it; I need a choreographer.' Joseph said, 'You can. It's all clear. Listen to the music and think what it is about.' Believe it or not, but I've come to this just now. In this production there are several improvised episodes – it's not dance; it's the physical theatre. Each time I do it differently.

Do you still feel a need to perform? Do you feel like you cannot live without the stage?

Yes. Especially if the material speaks to me. The two performances with Wilson were my delight, although the process was very complicated. The Alvis' production is an emotional challenge for me. If I must put all my emotions and feelings in a theatrical framework, I feel slightly afraid. I don't feel like exchanging a friendship for commerce. Do you understand what I am talking about?

If the production goes well, marvellous. If not, I must leave it all or continue working. At this point, Alvis and I are sure we are on the right path; but anything can happen in the theatre. I feel comfortable here; I like the auditorium at the New Riga Theatre. A funny room – everything's so worn down. A democrat of a theatre.

A Play about the Latvian National Traitor Andrievs Niedra

Kārlis Krūmiņš, dramaturg and the leading actor of “Andrievs Niedra”

Based on actual events and historic facts, the performance demands the spectator knows the historic background from the time when, after the WWI, the Latvian State was established. Of course, most Latvian residents have a basic understanding of the Latvian history and its consequences, i.e. the history that is taught at school –, but spectators of other historical context may lack this specific knowledge. However, in order to understand the politically active aspect of the performance, one should acquaint himself with the traditional Latvian historical paradigm, since challenging it is a part of the performance’s value.

Before the WWI this territory was a part of the Russian empire. The German nobility held a privileged status here, enslaving the Latvian peasantry. When the war broke out, the frontline crossed the Latvian territory, dividing it into two sections of fairly equal sizes. One part was controlled by the Russian Army, while the other was under German occupation. After the collapse of the Russian Empire, its army was in turmoil, which gave the German Army a chance to invade the rest of the Latvian territories. Meanwhile, after the German Empire collapsed, its army experienced the same unrest, which meant the newly-established Bolshevik Red Army took under control more than 90 percent of the Latvian land. Before they achieved that, Kārlis Ulmanis¹ summoned a People’s Council² in Riga, which consisted of almost every major political party that supported the independent state.

When the German Army, with Ulmanis’ provisional government under their wing, was pushed back to the northwest of Latvia, where the only escape route would be the sea, Bolsheviks in Riga proclaimed the Latvian Soviet Republic and began repressions against the civilians. On the other side of the frontline, the provisional government was collaborating with the German Army. The Latvian battalion was set up, which was subordinated to the German forces, but the friendly relationship was complicated by the fact that the provisional government had in its manifesto a reform which envisioned stripping the German nobility of their privilege and nationalizing their properties. Hence some of the most furious of the German barons organized a coup against the provisional government led by Ulmanis and established their own. It would be fair to add that the reform was obvious and could not be u-turned, since the absolute majority of the population demanded an end to the enslavement.



Andrievs Niedra by Valters Silis



Andrievs Niedra by Valters Silis

Here the name of Andrievs Niedra appears for the first time in a politically important context: he took over the leadership of the new pro-German government. During his time, the German forces pushed the Red Army back to the other side of Latvia. When from the north the united Latvian-Estonian forces came in intending to free Latvia from both the Germans and the Bolsheviks, Niedra directed his men against them. The united forces won; Niedra’s government was overthrown; the Germans and the Bolsheviks driven away, and Ulmanis could return to the post of the head of the provisional government. The Latvian state could exist. Niedra was tried for the collaboration with the Germans, pronounced a traitor and exiled from the state.

Of course not every Latvian knows these events well. Also, not all of the mentioned statements are unequivocal and correspond precisely to the actual facts. Yet from this interpretation comes the division into heroes and antiheroes, which has so deeply established itself in the collective Latvian consciousness. According to it, Ulmanis is the freedom fighter and the only on the right path; the Bolsheviks were oppressors, enemies of the Latvian state; the German nobility were the enslavers of the Latvian nation, while Niedra, Latvian by nationality but German camp follower, was the enemy of the independent Latvian state and a national traitor.



The idea of the performance was born several years ago when, in 2012, Latvia was preparing itself for a popular vote on the Russian language as the second official language. Despite the fact that the result of the referendum was predictable – its goal could not be achieved – the polemics reached a level where it bordered on hateful speeches and calls for violence. Instead of handling the situation politicians yielded to populism, playing the card of the national consciousness.

The hatred experienced at those days seemed like singular nightmare never to return; today, however, one can say that, with time passing and scenery changing, what doesn’t change is the nationalistic and populist tactic which tries to solve situations with irrational ‘arguments’ based on fear and national affiliation, whether it is the refugee crisis, a parliament election, or a public debate about rebuilding the Occupation Museum³. Appealing to the national consciousness takes place ever more often – as often as people are becoming ready to give in to it. There is an increase in nationalistic thought, radicalism

and aggressiveness. It is happening not just in Latvia; it is happening in Poland, Finland, Germany, Russia, and so on.

Meanwhile, we wish to calm ourselves with a thought it’s not that bad. And it indeed isn’t. But still, thousands of people take part in a torch procession organized by the National Alliance⁴ from Kārlis Ulmanis monument; there are civilian activist groups who patrol Facebook and streets in order to guarantee the safety of their fellow compatriots (in Latvia they call themselves The Fatherland Guards or The Dogs of God, in Finland they are The Soldiers of Odin); there is now a preamble to the Constitution that prescribes Latvian national ‘freedom’ over other freedoms; and this can make one uneasy and cautious.

Behind the national consciousness is a sense of belonging to a certain historical paradigm. To challenge the paradigm is to challenge the national consciousness with all its side-effects: national radicalism, aggressive nationalism and chauvinism. With this performance we challenge several faces of the paradigm; therefore I take the liberty to maintain that although the piece is about the events a hundred years ago, it has a politically active subtext.

I also see myself as being Latvian, i.e. belonging to a certain paradigm. When I began the work on this piece, I believed my knowledge of the Latvian history was good enough, but it turned out it wasn’t. Many facts I thought I knew about Latvia turned out to be illusory. Opinions taught in school and which appear in the public space turned out to be one-sided. However, what was interesting was how partial destruction of this paradigm created a sense of satisfaction in me. A satisfaction for not living in a pseudo-national utopian state. A satisfaction that Latvia during Ulmanis’ rule was never an uber-state and its people were never superhuman. A satisfaction that people do make mistakes, even those who founded this state. I am human too and I too can make mistakes. And that people who patrol streets ready to beat up someone in the name of their fatherland, perhaps they also make mistakes.

Whether Andrievs Niedra made a mistake, you can judge for yourself. If I am asked, my answer is I don’t know. On a human level, perhaps he made a mistake against himself. On one hand, he postulates moral norms according to which no one can arbitrarily take over control; on the other hand, he does exactly this. Of course, there were circumstances, but there are always circumstances. And yet the only one who could judge Niedra is he himself. Legally speaking, Niedra did take over the leadership of a government formed by a coup, but Niedra personally had nothing to do with the coup. Judging by evidence and the trial itself, one can say the trial had errors. Our performance doesn’t speculate of Niedra’s trial or its result. It does not offer a single truth. Because the truth is Niedra was a traitor as much as he was not.

The performance follows Niedra’s political career of six months from his perspective. The other, official, perspective is well known and is of little interest to us. On one hand, the play can be said to be a tragedy in which the main hero is in conflict with an unwinnable enemy (the historic events), for which he suffers. On the other hand, Niedra’s battle for his truth is also a battle to re-evaluate the Latvian historical paradigm.

¹ Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942) was one of the most prominent Latvian politicians of pre-World War II Latvia during the interwar period of independence from November 1918 to June 1940. The legacy of his dictatorship still divides public opinion in Latvia.

² A temporary council which declared Latvia’s independence on November 18, 1918 and then acted as a temporary parliament.

³ The rebuilding plans of Occupation Museum in Riga, strongly supported by the government and the museum staff, were challenged by the petition of a dozen of leading Latvian architects who called the reconstruction plans “a populist solution that would sacrifice the architectural qualities of World Heritage Site – historical centre of Riga and realise only a short-term political ambition.” The clashes lasted several months in 2015 and drew a huge media and public interest.

⁴ A right-wing, national conservative political party in Latvia which has the the fourth largest representation in the parliament.



The Lake of Hope by Vladislavs Nastavševs



Guna Zariņa and Vladislavs Nastavševs

Reconciliation

Guna Zariņa and Vladislavs Nastavševs talk about the making of 'The Lake of Hope'

The source of 'The Lake of Hope', a production at New Riga Theatre (premiered on June 5th 2015), was a meeting of two artists – the director Vladislavs Nastavševs and the actress Guna Zariņa – and their personal need to introduce the Russian theme into the Latvian theatre. And this time do it not from the safe grounds of the Russian classics, but by speaking out, personally and openly, of the divided society of the contemporary Latvia.

Guna Zariņa: The reason behind the production was, after all, the war in Ukraine. And also the show "100% Riga"¹ which revealed there are more Russian-speakers in Riga than there are Latvians. Meanwhile, in the Latvian community there is a belief that we are at the centre of the world. Who are these other people? The war in Ukraine reminded us what our society is like.

Vladislavs Nastavševs: We understood that we have to make a work about Russians in Latvia. Both of us – Guna, a pure Latvian, and myself, a classic Russian. Everyone knows it's a problem no one wants to talk about. Russians don't want to become a part of the Latvian society; Latvians can't accept them for various reasons. A large group of Russians here are indeed 'aliens'², like it says in the passport. With this production we wanted to say they are people like the rest of us. That they exist, and there's nothing to be done about it.

Before I started working in the Latvian theatre I had no experience with Latvians; I barely knew the language. I associated Latvians with something monolithic, impenetrable. But then, slowly getting to know certain people I saw they also love, hate, feel, think. In a sense this is my invitation to Latvians to start seeing Russians the same way.

Guna: It is the paradox in Riga that we can be living in these two completely separate spaces.

Vladislavs: The war began; a terrifying paranoia set in. I believe it was Vaira Viķe-Freiberga³ who said Russians in Latvia and the Baltic States are like a bomb with a timer that can go off any moment. I thought it was very precise. It is this weak spot, and we don't have to distance

ourselves from it, pretending it doesn't exist. Something must be done. These people are completely disassociated; disassociated from themselves, first of all.

Guna: We began looking for material, thinking what it could be. The initial feeling was, we needed to make something like "The Latvian Love"⁴. Cut that Russian open, look inside him, and see what there is. Then we got scared and decided to take refuge in Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard", the Russian classic.

Vladislavs: And then came the right impulse. When we were preparing for a redecoration at our apartment, my mother and I went through the stuff in our wardrobe cabinet. A scene erupted. I saw it as if from a distance and knew it was a scene from a theatre piece.

In my life I constantly see theatrical cues on an emotional level. But never so concretely. The point of departure was found. Mother and I, our life. The redecoration became the form through which to tell the story.

Initially the actors tried to talk me out of it. Not to do a piece about myself, my life. To at least change names.

Guna: I was afraid it would do harm to Vlad, to us. I thought it was too personal and Vlad would get frightened at one point.

Vladislavs: Then began the collective work on writing, dramaturgy and directing.

Guna: In "The Lake of Hope" all scenes are from real life. My phone conversations with Vlad are real; they did happen. Mother did fall asleep, it did happen. It all happened and then was compressed into a performance. Those are real interviews; little is made up.

Together we came up with everything. Rehearsals essentially consisted of our editing it all together, writing material, Vlad's giving us scenes and events from his life, while, we, the actors, would get to know the characters. That's why the piece is so special – it is creativity in itself; plus, it's a devised theatre. At that point I really needed that. Both the idea as well as the fact we're creating something new together – that was very important for me. I knew we had to make it despite all the difficulties we had in the process.

It differed from "The Latvian Love": this was a play about a real person, a theatre director, and, respectively, about the theatre, as well. It had a story, not just a sequence of separate episodes.

Vladislavs: While writing the text, it was a matter of principle to leave everything what the actual people said. The sense was as much in what they left out, in the silly things they spat out. Critics couldn't handle it; to them it seemed trivial, mundane. Why show it? But it was important the people were the way they were. Invent nothing. The mother's role came from one interview when Guna visited us for tea. Mom would just go for it. She knew very well she had a performance made after her and that she was going to be the main character.

I have a video in which, during the renovation works in our apartment, an old door arch was being removed. There was terrible noise, quite traumatic. Mom hid behind a corner, and then reappeared knowing I was filming and played like no actress could. Once she told me how hard it was to be a character in a performance. She played the role. She was content with it.

Guna: It's a story about how much your mother loves you. She's ready for such a sacrifice.

Vladislavs: It's not a sacrifice.

Guna: After the premiere I realised: what I, that is, the mother, am dreaming about is that we're going to live in Paris; and it happened on the premiere night. She was on the big stage, the audience applauded, and her life once again had meaning.

Vladislavs: To mom, it was an affirmation of love. She felt happy she was important, that she was played by the best actress in Latvia. I felt as if I'd paid a certain debt to her, knowing how cruel I had been to her. Much crueller than in the performance. Poor mothers – they will always be guilty of something.

Guna: For us it was important the performance was in Russian. If half of the people in Riga are Russians, then the language is right there. It would be absurd to play Russians and speak Latvian. We are doing a piece about you in your language.

I thought about Misha, mom's suitor. During the Soviet times he was lured from one factory to a different one; he was given a flat and so on. Years went by and it turned out he was an invader, a criminal and what not. Today a third of Latvians have invaded Ireland and England...

Vladislavs: We know the history is complicated; everything has two sides, its reasons; but what do we do about it now? What's next? How to get away from this insanity, this radiation? "The Lake of Hope" won't turn back history or undo politics, but it could encourage people to talk. Not hate each other in silence and accept this hate, but talk, get over it. We lack basic respect for each other. It is appearing, but very, very slowly. I felt I wanted to have my say in it.

The key in the performance is the hundred-percent openness. I can't judge Russians as an outsider. The only thing I have is myself, my life. It's more honest and more concrete. As soon as I step away from my personal experience, problems appear. What new can we tell Latvians about Russians? Historical facts? I don't want to do it; it doesn't interest me. What interests me is an emotional impact. I honestly believe it's what stays behind. Not facts.

I myself feel not able to fit in under almost any circumstances. For me it's a normal situation that has little to do with nationality. Then suddenly, being someone from a fringe and honestly telling your story, it works. The whole world can identify with it. It's wonderful.

Guna: Some people cannot accept one can bare himself to such an extent. It means we are not ready to bare ourselves, talk it through. But only by baring ourselves, we begin speaking seriously.

Here both artists and spectators tend to keep a distance and stay safe while experiencing art. And then someone comes out and says, yes, I am marginal, I'm gay, I'm Russian, my grandfather was an invader, my father was unhappy, my mother didn't love my father, I love no one...

After one performance there was suddenly a debate with the spectators, everyone wanted to speak, tell about themselves. The performance challenges people to share their experience. Many said it wasn't about nationality, but about my life.

Vladislavs: Some Russians were surprised we could talk about this under this regime, because Russians think of this as a regime. They don't even think in other terms. One comment about the piece said, 'Thank you! At last we are looking at one picture, and not remain in our own corners looking at our own pictures.' I also wished Russians would come, find out more about New Riga Theatre, because it's a good theatre. What else if not culture could do something for the cause?

Guna: We wanted to do a piece that would reconcile Latvians and Russians, but in the end it was that it reconciled people with themselves, with their mothers, relatives. Many later said they felt ashamed for their parents; they couldn't accept them; but after the show they would go to their moms and dads, and see them in their council flats and thought it was O.K. to accept your life.

Vladislavs: Not to be ashamed of where you come from. Of your neighbourhood, of the council high-rise. Of the fact your grandfather, whom you don't even remember, was an invader.

Guna: To reconcile with your past, with your history.

¹ A "Rimini Protokoll" production in December 2014.

² A description in permanent resident passports.

³ The President of Latvia 1999–2007.

⁴ A New Riga Theatre production by Alvis Hermanis that examines the Latvian character.

You Are Not Alone

Laura Stašāne in conversation with choreographers **Elina Lutce, Kristīne Brīniņa, Krišjānis Sants** and **Erik Eriksson**

Elina Lutce, Kristīne Brīniņa and Krišjānis Sants are former fellow students at the Contemporary dance department of Latvian Academy of Culture, which they graduated from in 2011 (Krišjānis Sants continued the education in P.A.R.T.S. until 2014). Today they are some of the most active performers in the contemporary dance scene in Latvia. In this conversation, which was also joined by Erik Eriksson, Krišjānis Sants' fellow student from P.A.R.T.S. and the co-author of "Vērpēte", we spoke to the young artists about the conditions and situations in which they work, and how it influences their choices and interests.

What are the ideas each of you is currently working on?

Krišjānis: Erik and I are continuing from the ideas we worked with in "Vērpēte" about audience participation. Our question is how to create new experiences that are not scripted in advance. It's rather how to generate a



Elina Lutce

situation where the audience would create experiences to itself. It's about the moment where roles become less fixed, where the audience becomes more like participants and we become more like facilitators of what is going on in the piece.

Erik: We are looking for ways how to relate to audiences, bring them to use their own minds, eyes and bodies in ways they maybe haven't done it before without necessarily presenting a narrative or specific story behind it.

Kristīne: I am interested in daily life and the way it can be transformed onto stage. In my previous works I began using what I call the documental dance method which I now continue researching and developing. It's a bridge that is creating a relationship between me and people around me, because people are who interest and inspire me. I now live in a small village Cirava in western Latvia and the new environment has left a big impact on me; it's a completely different way of life. I am now looking for a way to involve local people in my creative work and to establish a direct contact with people I share my environment with.

Elina: Recently I've been thinking a lot about the verbal communication of a performance – how much the viewer has to know and how many questions I as an artist can answer about my work.

Besides that I am now working on a new solo performance where I have discovered I need to return to the theatre, which, ironically, a few years ago I strictly promised to myself not to do. I don't want it, but I can't produce myself. It's my bitter experience with "Corpus". It's a question about the sustainability of a performance. While the work is still fresh, it's fine, but as if it goes on it's as if suddenly loses meaning to exist. In the end I get support to do only these two premiere performances. But I think a work must be given time to live. The works I create are not just for me; I want to show them and get involved in a dialogue. It's extremely important for me that it is seen by more people.

Krišjānis: Perhaps it's just the way it should be. The true value lies in the research process. You show a piece twice, and there are people who have taken something out of it, like your colleagues, for example. To compare with scientific conferences where only scientists participate, this is how a collective thought is built. Two or three conferences are enough to cover the entire group of people interested in the issue.

Do you also think about how your work influences the Latvian dance scene?

Kristīne: I am no longer part of many things due to the geographical distance, which gives me an outsider's perspective and I am thinking a lot about my role in the dance scene. In Latvia the dance environment is not clamoured with information and events; there is space to breathe. Being here, I realize that everything depends on me; it's my choice to produce my own work. It's not easy for me because it stands in the way of the creative process, but it makes me answer questions why I do this work. On the other hand, I can involve people who want and can help; I can give a chance to a young producer, for example. Partnerships like these are very important, because we are, after all, each other's employers.

How do you feel being young dance artists in Latvia?

Krišjānis: As an artist I feel great here. Latvia has the perfect ratio between comfort and discomfort. The scene is widely accessible here; work as much as you want. If in the West there is an overproduction of dance artists, and even the excellent ones receive no support, then it's different in the Eastern Europe. Finally, thanks to the previous generations, things start happening here. I feel hopeful because right now is when the energy is born. We



Kristīne Brīniņa

don't feel the weight of the existing infrastructure; we don't have to create just for the sake of creating. We feel lighter here, and we have a chance to go where no one's been before.

Elina: We've never had a perfect situation, so we have little to get disappointed with. We're used to have a small space to work in, and if someone gives us more, we're happy.

Krišjānis: Besides, here performances are born from specific contexts. We have no black box productions because we don't have any black box. Each performance comes with great effort and therefore you can afford to invest a lot.

Elina: Well, actually you can't afford...

Kristīne: I don't know. I think it's normal we invest our own resources while we're young artists. Because we also pay for school. I think thank God I have something to fight for because it forces me to invest more energy in it. Of course there are things that should function in a professional scene but here they don't. Yet, I agree with Krišjānis; I also feel good here, but for large part because we create the scene ourselves.

Does the fact that the Latvian dance scene is small and self-made create an illusion which makes us feel safe and comfortable because we don't know what happens elsewhere?

Krišjānis: I travel much abroad and also stay here. Yes, until now the scene was more about itself; even on the Baltic level there was little exchange of ideas. Contacts and relationships were mostly on a personal level.

Kristīne: That's where the challenge lies. On one hand, this is a clean environment and every little thing we do is noticed. On the other hand, we have to go out there; we have to invest a lot in order to learn what is happening elsewhere. Meanwhile you're not working, not creating.

Elina: And it needs money.

Krišjānis: I think as soon as we are able to support ourselves not just on the local but also on an international level, the money issue gets easier. In Latvia, doing performances will not make you a living, unless you also teach.

Kristīne: For me it's a very personal question. I can't combine my professional development with my family life which is a great priority for me. Either I leave Latvia and go where there are people from whom I'd like to learn, or I stay and learn things in a slower pace. In such quiet

circumstances I have to seek out problems, because they challenge and force me to do things.

Elina: It's good if problems make you do things. But what if there are so many problems they make you back out? We have an entire generation of thirty-somethings who've literally disappeared from the scene; only one or two are left. The rest have gone abroad and not just to dance but to literally look for any job there is. I am worried whether we're following in their steps. How much our choices – the family, the career – will influence us? How much impulse will there be from outside to give us the conviction to work? I know I work in the right medium and the right place. But how does one keep it in the long-run?

Krišjānis: I think the answer is to work on the international level, or on the Baltic level, or on the Nordic level, and this must begin in school. Stepping away from complaining and thinking of things I'd like to change here, I'd like to make the scene more radical, or at least my own work. Dance as a think-tank, a radical environment where artists, thinkers, activists experiment with certain models later to be implemented into the wider public. A second idea is to start a process which would involve more of the public. Not increase the number of viewers, but use their capacity to think.



Krišjānis Sants and Erik Eriksson

Kristīne: In my opinion, in order to change the environment, it is important to understand what medium contemporary dance is and why we do what we do. If your motivation is to dance on stage, it's not surprising many soon give up and leave because there's no inner motivation. If everything were fine, if there were spaces, producers, would these people continue working? Is this the real reason people leave the scene?

Erik: It is a twofold thing. On one hand, in Western Europe, there is encouragement for producing. Here, where the community is relatively small, there is a possibility for each individual artist to actually make a difference on a bigger scale in the community. While, in Brussels, if someone has this kind of wish, it doesn't make the same difference because there are too many other people in the community.

Here the possibility for each performance to have an impact, good or bad, is much bigger. And that relates to yet another thing which is the dialogue between people. Since you have these opportunities to have influences on each other, I think it's a good aim to try to establish a dialogue system that separates one's artistic work and one's eternal soul. When I'm working, I don't know what I'm doing, I'm figuring stuff out and if everyone were more honest about it and not pretend to be a lone genius, it would create a different kind of potential.

Krišjānis: In this group we recognize our conditions as a bonus and see the lightness of not having a heavy past. Yet, I am surprised that many people still have the wish to get exactly the kind of structure as it is done in the West.

Elina: For me there is the question of going back to the repertory system, even if it's within an independent theatre. Because it helps my artwork. If you are alone as a self-producing artist, it takes much more time, and by the time I reach my venue, this artistic idea that I have now, is gone.

Krišjānis: Maybe we just go back to medieval troubadours, the kind who invent and programme themselves, carry the stages with them, etc.

Elina: I think this could be a great name for the our choreographic scene: "Back to Troubadours"!

Brodsky / Baryshnikov ①

Tuesday, May 24 19.00

Main stage, New Riga Theatre, Lāčplēša street 25
1h 30min
In Russian with English subtitles

Based on the poems of Joseph Brodsky

Director Alvis Hermanis

Performer Mikhail Baryshnikov

Scenographer Kristīne Jurjāne

Light designer Gleb Filshinsky

Producers New Riga Theatre, Baryshnikov Productions

Premiere October 15, 2015

The Nobel laureate, poet Joseph Brodsky and the great ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov maintained close friendship for 22 years until the death of Brodsky in 1996. Now they meet again on stage in a production by Alvis Hermanis. “Brodsky / Baryshnikov” is an emotional journey deep into the poet’s visceral and complex compositions. Performed in Russian, Brodsky’s mother tongue, Baryshnikov recites a selection of his long-time friend’s poignant and eloquent works.

Alvis Hermanis (1965) is considered as the most important Latvian theatre director since the early 1990s. In 1997 he became the artistic director of the New Riga Theatre (NRT), turning this state repertory theatre into the most interesting contemporary theatre company in Latvia. Between 2003 and 2011 Alvis Hermanis with NRT troupe staged a series of performances exploring contemporary Latvian life. Then he abandoned this anthropological interest in favour of staging the great Russian classics and focusing on the reconstruction of the past as a context for further explorations of the human mind and soul. Since 2005 Alvis Hermanis has been staging work internationally, notably in some of the major theatres in the German speaking countries, while also touring extensively with NRT productions. His works have been seen in over 40 countries and featured at several major festivals including the Avignon Festival, the Edinburgh Festival, the Wiener Festwochen, and the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels. In 2012, the Swiss cultural magazine Du, named him one of the ten most influential personalities in contemporary European Theatre. His productions have received numerous awards, including the Europe Theatre Prize for “New Theatrical Realities” (Thessaloniki, 2007), The Stanislavski Award (Moscow, 2008), and the Baltic Assembly Prize for Arts (2014).

Since 2012, Alvis Hermanis has been increasingly devoting his time to staging operas for the Salzburg Festival, Berlin Komische Oper, La Monnaie in Brussels, Paris Opera and Milan’s La Scala.

Me Me Generation ②

Tuesday, May 24 15.00, 16.00, 17.00

Wednesday, May 25 10.00, 11.00, 15.00, 16.00, 17.00

Thursday, May 26 10.00, 11.00

Aristida Briāna street 13

50min

In Latvian with English subtitles

Director Elmārs Seņkovs

Set designer Evija Pintāne

Dramaturg Dāvids Keišs

Camera: Kristians Riekstiņš

Authors and performers: Olivers Vincents, Edvards Francis Kuks, Vīts Vidulejs, Patrīcija Keiša, Inga Bušaite, Zane Čivle

Producer New Theatre Institute of Latvia

Premiere on September 4, 2015

“The children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise”, Socrates has said in the 4th Century BC. The statements of different times consider the youth as incomprehensible and graceless. Young people have been addressed as the golden generation, the hippies’ generation, or, for instance, the generation of awakening. Nowadays teenagers are called the *Me Me Me Generation*. This performance -video installation is a conversation with five real school children who belong to it.

Director Elmārs Seņkovs (1984) has studied pedagogy and theatre and is one of the most productive and active theatre makers of the young generation. He started his professional career at independent theatre, and was soon invited to work in the National theatre, Valmieras theatre and Russian theatre. For Elmārs the theatre stage is like a playground where he constantly tests new forms and ideas, each time coming up with unexpected results. His long-term collaboration with scenographer Reinis Dzudzilo and visual artist Krista Dzudzilo has created some powerful visual metaphors and spatial propositions. Recently, his creative approach has matured and become minimalistic.



Antigone ④

Wednesday, May 25 12.00

Small stage, Latvian National Theatre, Kronvalda blvd. 2

2h 30min

In Latvian with simultaneous English translation

Author Jean Anouilh

Director Elmārs Seņkovs

Set designer Evija Pintāne

Costume designer Marija Rozīte

Composer Edgars Mākēns

Light designer Oskars Pauliņš

Performers: Maija Doveika, Marija Bērziņa, Gundars Grasbergs, Artis Drozdovs, Sanita Pušpure, Uldis Siliņš

Producer New Theatre Institute of Latvia

Premiere on April 23, 2015

The tiny stage where Antigone story is played by the young cast of the National Theatre reminds of a cage with no exit. The conditions for performers’ existence on stage are extremely complicated – there are no props or decors to hide away from the gaze of other protagonists, performers, and the audience. The presence is complete, naked. The whole setting reminds of a laboratory, where cruel experimentation with the humanity and among each other is taking place. In Elmārs Seņkovs’ interpretation there are no heroes to be imitated in Antigone. It’s rather an invitation to choose one’s own path.

The Lake of Hope

Wednesday, May 25 18.30

Main stage, New Riga Theatre, Lāčplēša street 25
3h 20min

In Russian with simultaneous English translation

Author, director, set designer Vladislavs Nastavševs

Composer Toms Auniņš

Co-authors and performers: Guna Zariņa, Intars Rešetins, Andris Keišs, Vilis Daudziņš, Kaspars Znotiņš, Inga Alsiņa-Lasmane, Edgars Samītis

Producer New Theatre Institute of Latvia

Premiere on June 5, 2015

The main source of inspiration for this production came from the refurbishment of Nastavševs’ own flat in the tower at Imanta neighbourhood, one of the “sleeping districts” of Riga. The director has lived there all his life together with his mother Nadezhda (in Russian it means ‘hope’). Lasting renovation process builds tension between the two and reveals complex relationships between the past and the present, the normality and the marginality, the centre and the periphery, two generations, two ethnic communities. The turmoil ends with a delicate moment of reconciliation and forgiveness. The parallel narrative of “The Lake of Hope” unfolds the nature of theatre, inviting audience to witness the process of staging.

Vladislavs Nastavševs (1980) announced himself on the Latvian theatre stage in 2012, vividly and unexpectedly, after returning from studying acting and directing in Saint Petersburg and at Central Saint Martin’s College of Arts and Design in London. Seemingly quickly and organically he found his place among the so-called New Wave of Latvian directors (Valters Silis, Elmārs Seņkovs, Viesturs Meikšāns to name a few). However, it was more his age that identified him with this group, since his style bore its own signature. It is determined by his personality and the artistic capacity to transform humour, melancholy, the tiniest details of the everyday into existential experience and the ability to see a show as an integrated work of art in which performers, space, design, words, objects, sound, light and all that can break into the universe of the performance from the outside world play an equal role from the very start. Nastavševs’ debut in Latvian theatre introduced a new relationship between the linguistic and the visual form of the performance. This tension became the dominant force in his work and a challenge to the traditional Latvian approach to staging. Nastavševs brings carefully selective, detail-conscious, radically laconic aesthetics back to the performance. By minimal yet effective tools the artist transforms empty stages into imaginary rooms, playfully overcoming any obstacles which would inhibit the process of thought or imagination and spatial perception, activating, along with audial senses, the viewer’s sight, tactility, their bodies and instincts.

The Black Sperm ③

Thursday, May 26 19.00

Ģertrūdes ielas teātris, Ģertrūdes street 101a

2h

In Latvian with simultaneous English translation

Based on stories by Sergey Uhanov

Director, set and costume designer Vladislavs Nastavševs

Light designer Jūlija Bondarenko

Performers: Reinis Boters, Marija Linarte, Jana Ļisova, Āris Matesovičs, Kārlis Tols

Producer Theatre “Ģertrūdes ielas teātris”

Premiere on November 13, 2015

“I was a very curious child and decided to use every chance that destiny offered me to explore people and their peculiarities, because every human is unique and one-of-a-kind, but life can be so interesting and sometimes so short,” Sergey Uhanov.

It is no coincidence that Vladislavs Nastavševs has chosen to stage “The Black Sperm” – a collection of short stories, written by a Russian writer of his generation, Sergey Uhanov; in his previous productions the director has already embraced topics favoured by Uhanov. The short stories, whose main characters are extraordinary loners and outcasts, conjure up absurd, multi-layered and provocative scenes, in a manner that resembles Russian surrealist Daniil Kharms. Revealing naivety, tenderness, and sexuality, “The Black Sperm” speaks harshly about realities of life that aren’t always proper and politically correct; nevertheless the heroes of these stories don’t hide themselves and are not ashamed. These are stories about relationships, feelings and self-realization of young people growing up.

Andrievs Niedra

Thursday, May 26 12.00

Dirty Deal Teatro, Maskavas street 12–2

1h 40min

In Latvian with simultaneous English translation

Director Valters Silis

Dramaturg Kārlis Krūmiņš

Performers Kārlis Krūmiņš, Emīls Kivlenieks

Set designer Uģis Bērziņš

Composer Toms Auniņš

Producer Dirty Deal Teatro

Premiere December 16, 2015

“Several generations in Latvia have grown up believing that the declaration of the independent Latvian state in November 18, 1918 was the best and the only solution at that time to secure the democratic values which we are proud of now. It may have been the best solution, but not the only one,” say the creators behind “Andrievs Niedra”.

Andrievs Niedra was a writer, pastor and the PM of the German puppet government in Latvia during the Latvian War of Independence in 1919. Believing that society can only develop through evolution rather than revolution, Niedra was a fierce opponent of socialism and came to be seen as a reactionary in an increasingly revolutionary society. In this performance focusing on the complex personality of Niedra, the director Valters Silis and dramaturg and performer Kārlis Krūmiņš set out to create a thriller about the establishing of Latvian state. With good measure of humour and irony they look into the tragic fate of the person that is known in the Latvian history as a traitor of the nation.

Valters Silis (1985) graduated in stage directing at the Latvian Academy of Culture in 2010. He works successfully both in small independent theatres (Dirty Deal teatro, Theatre “Ģertrūdes ielas teātris”) and on the big stage of the National Theatre. Still early in his artistic career, in just one year Valters Silis staged three works in three different theatres that focused on painful and embarrassing events in Latvia’s history, showing an approach that was free of stereotyping, slightly grotesque and always inquisitive. He has kept this interest in the critical moments in historical perspective but also turning attention to current social and ecological issues. Silis’ latest work, a piece with Finnish actors is a road story of three musketeers crossing borders in present day Europe.

Silis has been nominated several times for the Latvian Theatre award as the Best Director and has in the past received the prize of Best Staging of a Latvian Author for his performances “All My Presidents” and “Legionnaires”.

I’m a Really Shy Person ⑦

Thursday, May 26 15.30

Former factory VEF, Brīvības gatve 214

20min

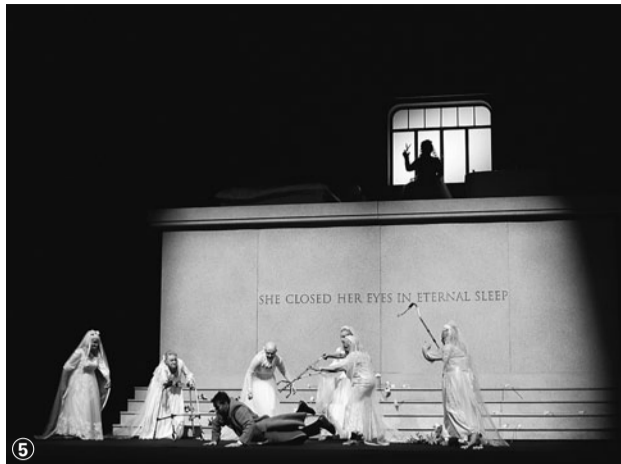
In English

Author, choreographer and performer Kristīne Brīniņa

This performance is inspired by the Latvian conductor Andris Nelsons. “I would call him my hero at the moment. The fact that he has received Grammy does not really matter. This is not a story about professional success but about the ability to live with an open heart”, says Kristīne.

With movement, spoken text and imagination, Kristīne strives to impersonate her favourite artist with the hope to see her own reflection in him.

Kristīne Brīniņa (1987) graduated from the Latvian Academy of Culture in 2011 and has since worked actively as a freelance choreographer and dancer. She has created several solo pieces but also works collectively and has participated in international projects in Latvia, Cyprus, Turkey, Norway, Iceland, USA and Korea. She is very inspired by the people and searches for ways to bring everyday experiences on stage. In her work she wants to erase the boundaries between performing art and daily life, to move away from the elitist context towards a more essential, direct way of expressing and experiencing art. Since last year Kristīne lives and works in a small village of Cirava in the western part of Latvia.



Corpus ⑧

Thursday, May 26 16.00

Former factory VEF, Brīvības gatve 214

40min

No text

Authors: Elīna Lutce, Krista Dzudzilo

Choreographer and performer Elīna Lutce

Costume designer Krista Dzudzilo

Premiere April 2015

Our bodies are used to a life with limitations either imposed by outside norms or by own decision. In this solo performance, which the choreographer Elīna Lutce has conceived together with the visual artist Krista Dzudzilo, Elīna explores the restrictions of the body using the baroque form as a hyperbole for the body and its freedom in the conditions where it’s not only hard to move but almost impossible to breathe.

Elīna Lutce (1987) studied dance and choreography at the Latvian Academy of Culture. After the graduation in 2011 she has worked as choreographer and dancer, presenting her work in the independent venues in Riga. Elīna has been regularly collaborating with theatre directors Elmārs Seņkovs and Viesturs Kairiņš on several drama productions in National Theatre and National Opera. As a performer Elīna has worked with choreographers Koen Augustijnen, Willi Dorner, Heine Avdal & Yukiko Shinozaki and *contact Gonzo*.

Vērpete (Whirl) ⑥

Thursday, May 26 17.00

Former factory VEF, Brīvības gatve 214

1h

No text

Authors, choreographers and performers Krišjānis Sants and Erik Eriksson

Musician Mārtiņš Miļevskis

Producer New Theatre Institute of Latvia

Premiere September 8, 2015

In “Vērpete” the young choreographers bring together their keen interests about body in movement, research of traditions and new way of perception. Building on rhythmic structures of folk melodies and one single movement common in traditional dances of many nations, Krišjānis and Erik bring pure physicality in focus and create a picture of perpetual movement of body in space and time.

Krišjānis Sants and Erik Eriksson are recent graduates of P.A.R.T.S. dance school in Brussels and this is their first collaborative project. Krišjānis Sants (1989) is a Latvian dancer who since the graduation of the Latvian Academy of Culture (2011) and P.A.R.T.S. (2014) works both in Latvia and Belgium, collaborating with several acknowledged artists like musician Laima Jansone and choreographer Daniel Linehan. In his own work Krišjānis explores ways to transmit the rhythmic codes of Latvian ornaments and folk songs into movement.

Erik Eriksson (1989) is a Swedish dancer based in Sweden and Belgium. Deriving from acrobatics and breakdance background, he is passionate about the moving body in every possible aspect. After having graduated from P.A.R.T.S. in Brussels, he continues to work as performer and teacher in Europe.

Le Villi. Gianni Schicchi ⑤

Thursday, May 26 19.00

Latvian National Opera and Ballet, Aspazijas blvd. 3

2h 30min

In Italian with English subtitles

Music: Giacomo Puccini

Director Viesturs Kairiņš

Set designer (Le Villi) Reinis Dzudzilo

Costume designer (Le Villi) Krista Dzudzilo

Choreographer (Le Villi) Elīna Lutce

Set and costume designer (Gianni Schicchi) Ieva Jurjāne

Producer Latvian National Opera and Ballet

Premiere May 8, 2015

The first opera of Giacomo Puccini “Le Villi” is a dance-strewn tale of spirits, broken hearts and ruthless revenge. Viesturs Kairiņš has let his relentless imagination and love for parody and farce to run free in this production while masterfully keeping it within a clear concept.

Reinis Dzudzilo received the Latvian Theatre award as the Best Set Designer in 2014/2015 for his creation in “Le Villi”.

“Le Villi” is presented together with yet another, earlier staging of Viesturs Kairiņš, the comic opera “Gianni Schicchi”. Initially conceived to spring from the plot of “The Divine Comedy” by Dante, it reveals human greed and avarice with ironic touch. Amidst squabbles and intricate plots of deception among family members over an inheritance, a love couple manages to stumble into their sweet share of happiness.

Viesturs Kairiņš (1971) graduated as theatre director from the Latvian Academy of Culture in 1997. In the last year of his studies he and two other emerging directors founded an independent platform for work and produced several pieces that quickly established them as a strong force in the Latvian theatre scene. Later Viesturs staged several productions in New Riga Theatre and National Theatre that were also presented internationally. At the same time he started to work in opera and film. His career in opera has included the production of Wagner’s “The Ring of Niebelung”. Viesturs has made several documentaries and feature films that have received Latvian cinema award and been shown in the festivals abroad. His latest theatre production “Fire and Night”, a staging of the major play by the iconic Latvian poet Rainis, premiered in Latvian National Theatre in September 2015.

Latvian Theatre Showcase 2016, Riga, May 24–26

Date	Venue	Address	Director	Author	Performance	Language
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Tuesday, May 24

15.00–15.50 16.00–16.50 17.00–17.50		Aristida Briāna street 13	Elmārs Seņkovs	Dāvids Keišs	<i>Me Me Generation</i>	In Latvian with English translation
19.00–20.30	The New Riga Theatre Main stage	Lāčplēša street 25	Alvis Hermanis	based on the poems by Joseph Brodsky	<i>Brodsky / Baryshnikov</i>	In Russian with English translation
20.45	Welcome drink / New Riga Theatre courtyard					

Wednesday, May 25

10.00–10.50 11.00–11.50		Aristida Briāna street 13	Elmārs Seņkovs	Dāvids Keišs	<i>Me Me Generation</i>	In Latvian with English translation
12.00–14.30	Latvian National Theatre Actors Stage	Kronvalda blvd. 2	Elmārs Seņkovs	Jean Anouilh	<i>Antigone</i>	In Latvian with English translation
15.00–15.50 16.00–16.50 17.00–17.50		Aristida Briāna street 13	Elmārs Seņkovs	Dāvids Keišs	<i>Me Me Generation</i>	In Latvian with English translation
16.00	Meeting with Showcase artists and producers / Kaņepe Culture centre, Skolas street 15					
18.30–22.00	The New Riga Theatre Main stage	Lāčplēša street 25	Vladislavs Nastavševs	Vladislavs Nastavševs	<i>The Lake of Hope</i>	In Russian with English translation

Thursday, May 26

10.00–10.50 11.00–11.50		Aristida Briāna street 13	Elmārs Seņkovs	Dāvids Keišs	<i>Me Me Generation</i>	In Latvian with English translation
12.00–13.40	Dirty Deal Teatro	Maskavas street 12 block 2	Valters Silis	Kārlis Krūmiņš	<i>Andrievs Niedra</i>	In Latvian with English translation
15.30–15.50	Former VEF factory	Brīvības street 214*	Kristine Brīniņa	Kristine Brīniņa	<i>I'm a Really Shy Person</i>	In English
16.00–16.40	Former VEF factory	Brīvības street 214*	Elina Lutce	Elina Lutce, Krista Dzudzilo	<i>Corpus</i>	No text
17.00–18.00	Former VEF factory	Brīvības street 214*	Krišjānis Sants, Erik Eriksson	Krišjānis Sants, Erik Eriksson	<i>Vērpete</i>	No text
19.00–21.00	Theatre Ģertrūdes ielas teātris	Ģertrūdes street 101a	Vladislavs Nastavševs	Sergey Uhanov	<i>The Black Sperm</i>	In Latvian with English translation
19.00–21.30	Latvian National Opera and Ballet	Aspazijas blvd. 3	Viesturs Kairiņš	Giacomo Puccini	<i>Le Villi. Gianni Schicchi</i>	In Italian with English subtitles

* Enter the former factory territory from Brīvības str. and walk to the 2nd building on the right side from Godvil club

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

The founding of NTIL dates back to 1995 when a group of Latvian theatre artists and professionals organized the first ever international theatre festival in the newly independent country. NTIL has since expanded and diversified its activities beyond the festival scope, yet the International Festival of Contemporary Theatre Homo Novus remains the backbone of our organisation.

Homo Novus has been taking place in Riga over six days every second year and presenting an extensive programme of performances, workshops, installations and discussions, creating a meeting point for artists and audiences to share opinions on the world and society. Homo Novus has been crucial in introducing some of the most important theatre artists from the international scene along with emerging talents to Latvian audiences. The festival also supports local artists by commissioning, producing and premiering new work.

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 artists. The aim of the Showcase is to introduce the current developments and artists from the Latvian performing arts scene and offer a meeting place for presenters, critics and artists.

We take active part in the artistic processes of the performing arts scene in Latvia. We curate several long term collaboration programmes and yearly organise a number of different events together with local and international partners and artist teams. Our interest lies 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 partnership in international networks. Currently we are partners in four networks: [DNA] Departures and Arrivals, Urban Heat, Imagine 2020 (0.2): Art, ecology & possible futures, Theatre Expanded.

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