

## THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE WILL SPONSOR A FESTIVAL OF SPANISH THEATER IN SEVERAL ITALIAN CITIES

The promoter Andres Neumann considers Spain to be in the circuits of the great theatre companies

by Joan de Segarra - Barcelona

The theatrical agency Andres Neumann International has been charged by the Spanish Ministry of Culture with the organization of an exhibition of Spanish theatre during the coming months of October and November. Already known in our country for the tours of the Colomabaioni, Andrzej Wajda (Stary Theatre in Krakow), Jérôme Savary (Magic Circus), Milva, Dario Fo and the Dramaten Theatre from Stockholm, Andres Neumann International will bring to Barcelona the mythical Berliner Ensemble, on its first official visit to Spain. The Berliner company will present at the Mercat de les Flors "The Fat Bitch" and "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" by Bertolt Brecht.

Andres Neumann International has its headquarters in Rome, in Via di Piarione close to Piazza Navona. Its director, Andres Neumann himself was born 43 ago in Cochabamba/Bolivia as the son of an Austrian father and a Polish mother. He studied in Montevideo, where he also began to be interested in the theatre, finally becoming the director of the theatre group of the French Institute of Montevideo. Says Neumann: «In the theatre I have done a little bit of everything except acting.» In 1972 Jack Lang assigns a scholarship to him, which allows him to move to Nancy to study at the Centre Universitaire International de Formation et de Recherche Dramatique (CUIFERD) for a couple of years. In fact the scholarship was used as a cover-up to let Neumann work illegally at the International Theater Festival of Nancy, directed by Jack Lang.

In 1977, the Festival of Nancy was the international capital of the theatre. When the scholarship ended, Andres Neumann moved to Florence in Italy, where he managed a municipal theatre in the Palazzo Pitti and worked as an executive for various Italian public agencies, yet always maintaining his contacts with Nancy. One of the persons who offers him a job as theatre manager is the communist Renato Nicolini, responsible for culture in the municipal government of Rome, who offers him a contract for three years. During this time Neumann "bought" Wajda, Mnouchkine, Richard Foreman, Grotowski, Brook, Krejka, Bread and Puppet, the Squat of New York.... In a very short time Rome changed from being a provincial theatre capital into a center of international interest. All this thanks to Nicolini and Neumann, who considers Nicolini to be his second maestro: «My other Lang», he says.

### 37 countries

In 1978 Andres Neumann becomes independent and starts his own agency, Andres Neumann International. Until 1982 he devoted himself to promoting young companies, to finding a market for artists who didn't have one, and by 1982 he counted a total of 180 companies, 3,000 artists and technicians, 2,000 performances, 250 theatres and festivals scheduled, 37 countries and about a million spectators. All this as a result of his administration.

Starting in 1982 Andres Neumann cut down his field of action, so that the number of projects dropped considerably, but those remaining gained in depth. Neumann, who defines himself an "independent producer", devotes himself to organizing international tours. Among these: Brook (Mahabharata), Gassman, Wajda, Fo (the first North-American tour for Dario Fo, during the coming months of May and June), the Dramaten, the Comédie Française, the Berliner Ensemble.... In total some 80 performances each year.

Question: *How do you view the situation of the theatre in Spain?*

Answer: From the point of view of the theatre market, Spain is today fully integrated in the international circuit. In five years it has passed from the outskirts to the center of the market. First-class performances are coming to Spain, and many more will arrive through innumerable channels. A great number of festivals and theatre events have risen, to the extent that the mechanism is getting out of hand. Even the frame work of the historic festivals has been overloaded, with the appearance of new public festivals such as the Mercat de les Flors or the Centro Cultural de la Villa de Madrid, which are playing the role of veritable theatre supermarkets.... This reminds me very much of the situation in Italy when the leftist coalition (Socialists and Communists) came to power.

### Inexpert management

Q.: *And regarding management?*

A.: Inefficient and inexperienced, as was the case in Italy. The management of a festival, of a theatre is a very delicate thing. It is not enough to organize a big performance of high quality, which presupposes a huge economic effort, if you don't know how to sell it or if you cannot fill the theatre. And this unfortunately happens because the performance has been bought with public money, which does not belong to a single person, there is no risk felt, and the person programming and managing the event is not always the same who has bought the package. And considering it a foreign thing, he is not interested in it.

Q.: *How do you judge the presence of Spanish theatre abroad, does it have any possibilities?*

A.: Spain has some important companies: Comediantes, Joglars, Nuria Espert.... Lluís Pasqual, who is the Spanish Strehler of tomorrow, if he isn't already today.... But the possibilities would be bigger if those responsible for the

Spanish theatre would show their readiness to invest huge amounts of money in large productions, such as those of Chereau, Grüber or Ronconi. You must have the courage to bet a lot of money on a few horses — few, but good — instead of practicing the policy of "pioggia" (rain), as we say here, that is to say giving a little bit to everybody.

Now, these big productions, with a real international repercussion, have a lot in common with the cinema or television. They begin in the theatre, but they do not end there. They begin in the theatre, and the time you spend working with the actors, even the costumes they wear, will later on be needed for another job, either in cinema or in television, with the same show, to do it better and cheaper. Since time in cinema and television is very expensive, the big productions have to point in that direction.

Q.: *How did the project to organize an exhibit of Spanish theatre in Italy come about?*

A.: It is an initiative of the Spanish Ministry of Culture, similar, I think, to the one that is being held at the moment in South America with some theatre companies. It is exclusively an exhibition of theatre which will be held during the coming months of October and November in Rome, Milan, Florence and probably Genova. I do not know for the moment the exact number of performances proposed by the Ministry of Culture, performances that have to be accepted by the Italians, but I can cite among them the new company of Adolfo Marsillach which will be dedicated to the classical theatre. On the whole I think that it will be a representative scale of Spanish theatre, from the Golden Age to the most modern or even post-modern events. To mention one name only: La Fura dels Baus. My management consists in organizing the exhibition and in convincing the Italian authorities to give us as much financial aid as possible.

### The Italian situation

Q.: *How does the organization of theatre work in Italy?*

A.: It's a disaster. The famous "teatri stabili" (permanent theatres), which have never really worked perfectly well, except for the Piccolo di Milano, the theatre founded by Giorgio Strehler and Paolo Grassi, have been turned into monster-institutions with a president, an administrative director, an artistic director, each of them belonging to a different political party. The result is that nobody gives orders, nobody directs. On the other hand, the Italian theatre people, who are today about 40 years old, have not had the same opportunities as the French of the same age did. There was no Jack Lang in Italy who would give them a theatre where to work. The generation before them just slammed the door in their face. Today, after overcoming the confusion of the Left, we are living a sort of "reaganian hedonism", to use an expression by "Quelli della Notte" (Those of the Night), a group of young artists who are having a great success on Italian television. The choice between "being" and "having" has found its solution in a cynical "seeming". And the theatre, too, is feeling this situation.

### The Berliner

Q.: *Finally, how did the visit of the Berliner Ensemble to Barcelona come into being?*

A.: At first it was the Ministry of Culture that was interested in this visit, and was thinking of programming it at the Festival de Teatro de Madrid. But the dates of the festival did not coincide with those of the Berliner, and therefore the company is coming only to Barcelona, to the Mercat de les Flors, the week of May 5th, with three performances of *The Fat Bitch* and three more of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. This is the first official visit of the Berliner to Spain. It is true that some of its members took part in the Festival of Zaragoza prior to this visit, but never the group as a whole (120 members, counting both artists and technicians), which, being an official institution (the Berliner Ensemble is a state theatre of the German Democratic Republic) needs to have two of its productions on the program. The tour is the same that was organized for Italy in December 1985, with the same productions, but this time the visited city will be only one: Barcelona.

Costs? Something like 10 million pesetas or more for the six performances.

A very low cost, since the government of the German Democratic Republic is paying for the travels of the company and the stage decorations. As to whether this visit is a suitable thing, I think that the period of renewal of theatre language has been overcome (this was actually the main objective during the sixties and the seventies), and what people are now interested in, in Spain as in other parts of the world, is the preservation of values, the direct contact with the great tradition of European theatre, the purifying contact in contrast with the brainwashing to which Tvis submitting us. The Berliner Ensemble is an important part of this great European tradition. It has been a mythical theatre for a number of generations, and I think that its presence in Spain, in Barcelona, could also rouse the interest of a young public who does not know who Brecht was, who has seen little or nothing of theatre, but who knows that the compositions by Kurt Weill are being rediscovered by the rock groups.