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Behind the scenes of the Big Show.

«I, THE FACTOTUM MANAGER»

5,000 performances, two and a half million tickets, a turnover of tens of billions. And to run all this...

ANDRES NEUMANN: *The Wandering Jew.*

Small, with a distant air, eyes hidden behind smoked lenses, a well-groomed beard and a very professional look : blue pin-stripe jacket, light-blue shirt, brown moccasins and belt, and a tie with blue stripes and a border in a paler shade («I own about fifty of them»), this is Andres Neumann — a 42-year old Bolivian who grew up in Uruguay with Jewish parents who had fled Germany, married to Transavantgarde painter Lilli Salvo and father of 14-year-old Mara («she follows me all over the world»), he is the number one theatrical organizer.

«My story? It is that of the Wandering Jew», he tells us in the living-room of his little house in Via di Parione, just off the Piazza Navona. «In Bolivia? At that time there was one coup d'état after another and my father decided to move with the family to Uruguay. Neruda and Rafael Alberti stayed there for a long while. My culture, my passion for music and the theatre were born in that country.»

In Uruguay Neumann attended high school, but at the same time studied to become a sound technician, and in a short while he became the top expert on sound. «I had a passion for the theatre and was a regular patron of the theatre of the French Cultural Centre in Montevideo. It was a double love : for the stage shows and for Bettina, a gorgeous girl who performed with the company. One day a French diplomat asks me : why, instead of watching all of Bettina's rehearsals, don't you lend us a hand? So they appointed me director of the theatre. But then, in 1972, I received an invitation from the Festival of Nancy.»

From this moment on, Andres' new career begins. His job is to discover the world's best companies and bring them to the Festival, which was directed at the time by the "creative" Jack Lang, later to become France's Minister of Culture. And on whom does Neumann fix his attention in Italy? On Memé Perlini, the Magazzini Criminali (the same who recently slaughtered a horse "live" onstage), Remondi and Caporossi. In short, the avant-garde. But in 1972 the contract with Nancy expires, and the wandering Jew settles in Florence, where he is appointed director of the Palazzo Pitti theatre («at a monthly salary of 350,000 lire»), to which he brings the best companies that are to be found. During the summ-

ers from 1976 to 1982, at the Teatro Tenda in Rome, Neumann directs the Rassegna di Teatro Popolare Internazionale.

A great success.

«Finally in Florence the theatrical agency is born. Only three of us work there full-time : myself, my engineer father who looks after the accounting, and a secretary», says the manager.

But even the best-organized people get evicted. So Neumann, who has brought Dario Fo to the U.S.A., is searching for a home. He finds one in Rome and settles there. «My earnings?», he says. «Only ten percent. But things get better when I turn myself from an agent into a producer.»

And on what terms is he with the public institutions? «Nobody ever makes decisions there (board of director meetings are always late, etc.). I prefer to cooperate from the outside. It's easier. I can have a clearly defined relationship : if the contract is not ready within ten days, well then, goodbye.»

This summer? «I have just brought Strindberg's "Miss Julia", directed by Bergman, to Spoleto. A real triumph. But if you knew what happened during the days that preceded it!»

So what happened? «An official of the Royal Swedish Theatre calls and asks me : will it be a problem if the scenery for the show gets to Spoleto with a 24-hour delay? I go berserk. I get on the phone and find out that everything is on a ship which has had a breakdown in Denmark. The ship has been hoisted up by a crane — and the truck carrying the scenery can't leave. I call the Swedish Foreign Minister, the director of the theatre, some Danish politicians.»

The "three musketeers" of the Neumann agency spend a day and a night besieged as in Chernobyl. In the end the ship is lowered and the truck with the scenery arrives in Spoleto on time. «But if you knew what a flow of adrenalin...», Neumann comments ironically.

And what else for this summer? «Between September 2nd and 7th, in Pompei, "La tragédie de Carmen", directed by the great Peter Brooks. I am positive : it will be another success.»