

NWTC Summer School : Munsbach works its magic again by Chris Bearne

This year, the New World Theatre Club of Luxembourg not only hosted at Whitsun the FEATS Festival of European Anglophone Theatrical Societies (FEATS), as readers of the Luxembourg News will know, but also ran its usual residential Summer Theatre School at the Château de Munsbach from Saturday 5 to Sunday 13 August.

This was the thirteenth European Summer School, the twelfth to be organised by NWTC and the tenth to be held in the Château. It was, as always, a burst of intensive training for theatre enthusiasts, and was perhaps not alone in that. But – to gauge from the feed-back from this year's students, which included as always a number of "regulars"- it is quite clear that Munsbach has become something very special indeed. This seems to have something to do with the evolution and integration of the School into a kind of "total experience". There appears to be something almost uncanny about the way the venue serves the venture, and the creative surge and interaction that develops. Students of all ages and abilities and many nationalities have found this a very fulfilling, and in some cases (no exaggeration) even life-changing time.

The school was fully integrated, bringing together fifty theatre enthusiasts, happy to commit almost every waking hour for eight days to developing their skills, their knowledge, their trust, their instincts. The course was as usual run by a team of four tutors, professional theatre practitioners with a passion for teaching, to share their knowledge and experience with committed and enthusiastic amateur practitioners under the admirable leadership of Course Director Mike McCormack, actor, director and lecturer in the Performing Arts at the University of Luton. The other members of the team were Noël Greig (actor, writer, director and much-travelled British Council teacher) and Graeme du Fresne (actor, director, teacher - Guildford University - and musical director) both well known to *habitués* of Munsbach. They were accompanied, for the first time, by Peta Lily, movement specialist, performer and teacher (Central School, London), whose special talents in the area of comedy and clowning were fully deployed.

The whole school revolved entirely around project work designed to accommodate both directing and acting students. The various projects interwove from time to time : there were sessions where staff moved across from one project to another (swaps) ; particular explorations were shared or pooled (shares); there were developments that briefly pulled in the entire student body. By the end of the week, everyone had sampled something of the experience of everyone else – and had had an opportunity to enjoy the enormous range of material taken on board. All this fitted into an very sophisticated but practical timetable, the fruit, apparently, of much deliberation over the years.

The two main projects, with equal time dedicated to each, ran side-by-side throughout the week, offering a choice from four "theatrical skills" options (e.g. directing, music, movement, improvisation etc.), four more thematically-based options and a third project in which the tutors acted as guides and mentors and the student body led.

Mike McCormack divided his time between a directing course, looking especially at the various major innovators of the 20th century, and a leading-edge project working with straight-from-the-net unpublished texts and peering into the fascinating near-future prospects for a theatre that stands to be utterly transformed by the new information age.

Graeme du Fresne took his skills students with him on an exploration of modes of acting, from the Brokers' Men in Panto to recitative in Mozart and, in his thematic project, into the electrifying area of the great Brecht-Weill collaboration.

Noël Greig's chosen areas this year were the Actor as Writer, using a mix of practical writing exercises, on-the-floor acting work, and discussion, and, with Mike, *Fin de Siècle*, looking at the phenomenon of those turning-points in theatre that seem always to have accompanied the arrival of a new century.

Peta Lily's charges were initiated into the mysteries of "installing one's clown" (we all have one, waiting to emerge) ; the craft of delivering comedy in the most simple elemental ways, and the intriguing process whereby the actor transforms the moment, the place and him/herself as (s)he makes the journey through a play.

All this is clearly much helped by the special atmosphere and surroundings of the Château and the enthusiasm with which the group is welcomed there, year after year, to engage in activities that must certainly seem to the staff and locals to be at the very least mildly eccentric ; at most, heroically extravagant ("*mais, dites-donc, que de braves gens*", commented the gardener this year, from his privileged vantage point). The Château is one of the chain of "*Instituts d'Europe*", which are more than youth hostels but less than hotels, used to accommodate various residential courses in the cultural and educational area. Munsbach is much orientated towards the European institutions on the Kirchberg, but by no means exclusively : hence the presence of the NWTC Summer School.

The welcome to the group is extended in person by the Director of the *Institut d'Europe*, Alain Tandel, and this year by Germain Lutz, President. For readers who may still not know it, the Château de Munsbach is a lovely old "*manoir*", with quite a chequered history set in its own park in rolling farmland on the edge of Munsbach village, some 10 kilometres from Luxembourg City. It provides accommodation for about 50 students as well as offering all sorts of interesting working spaces (the *Salle des Vitraux*, the *Grand Salon*, the *Salon Rousseau* etc., not to mention the heart-lifting sweep of the park).

For more about the Summer School, call Chris Bearne at 35 89 77 or John Brigg at 44 66 80, or check into the Munsbach website at munsbach.org ; for more about the Château, call Alain Tandel at 35 96 91.