



DIVERSE ROMA THEATERS FOR INCLUSIVE EUROPE 2023

METHODOLOGIES OF THE
WORKSHOPS
HELD IN HUNGARY, ITALY
AND ROMANIA
IN THE FRAME OF
EUROPEAN
INTERNATIONAL ROMA
THEATER FESTIVALS

Aspects, tools and
know-hows of minorities
(self) representation in
theater

written by:
Independent Theater
Hungary

Rampa Prenestina

Giuvlipen

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Introduction

We – Independent Theater Hungary; Giuvlipen, Romania; Rampa Prenestina, Italy – in the frame of the project called Diverse Roma Theaters for Inclusive Europe (DiRoThiE), sponsored by Creative Europe, during 2023 we have organized three international Roma theater festivals:

1. Kathe, Akana! X Giuvlipen Festival 'We Share Her Story', by Giuvlipen in Bucharest, Romania, 02-09 September 2023
2. Roma Heroes Festival, by Rampa Prenestina in Rome, Italy, 02-08. October 2023
3. Roma Heroes International Roma Theater Festival, by Independent Theater Hungary, in Budapest, Hungary, 27. November-03. December 2023.

During these festivals we presented European Roma theater performances, made by contemporary Roma artists and companies from different European countries. The events implied concerts, meetings, public debates and workshops hosting Roma and non-Roma artists, with special regard to younger generations, to gain tools, knowledge, share know-hows empowering their artistic work and create artistic cross-national collaboration.

Roma are the biggest ethnic minority in Europe and also the most vulnerable one. The Roma perspective and self-representation is missing from mainstream culture and education, although Roma dramas and stories have the potential of empowering Roma communities and raising awareness among the majority regarding Roma communities. Young Roma theater artists often face discrimination, particularly in theater educational institutes, where they are rarely admitted.

During the festivals held in three different European countries, we organized three different workshops for theater artists:

1. 'Consent and Healing in Theater' facilitated by Mihaela Drăgan in Bucharest;

In this workshop, Mihaela Drăgan discussed her art practice as a Roma futurist theatre maker and the principles and ethics that can make theatre a safer place for everyone, beyond their ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. The workshop encompassed discussions about contemporary Roma theatre, responsibility in art, cultural appropriation, the representation and self-representation of minorities in contemporary theatre and other recurrent themes in the sphere of political theatre.

2. 'Meeting the Mask of the Commedia dell 'Arte' facilitated by Claudio De Maglio in Rome;

The workshop focused on the fundamental basis for activating the expressive code of the mask and bringing to life the characters of the Commedia dell 'Arte, a noble tradition invented by Italian actors in the 16th century and spread all throughout Europe as far as Russia. We experienced how each character represents a human typology and a precise social category that is still very present and recognizable in contemporary society.

3. 'Minorities (self)representation in Theater' facilitated by Márton Illés, Rodrigó Balog (Independent Theater Hungary), Noémi Herczog (Theater Magazine) and the Asian-American Performers Action Coalition (USA)

The workshop focused on the importance, tools and aspects of minority (self) representation in theater in order to support the work of artists, academics and critics of diverse backgrounds to promote inclusion by their work.

In this document we share the different methodologies as an open source to be used freely by artists, social workers, academics, educators and all those who



would like to work with and through artistic expression, performance and theater.

We strive to always question the distorted image used in traditional theater by working with young generations; and why is it so important for us to create space and possibility for a renewed self-representation of today's Roma youth in contemporary theater thus giving them the chance to tell their stories and their times.

Minorities (self)representation in Theater

By Independent Theater Hungary (HU), Theater Magazine (HU), ELTE University (HU), Asian-American Performers Action Coalition (USA)



On 30th November 2023 in the frame of the 6th Roma Heroes International Theater Festival Independent Theater Hungary hold a workshop in cooperation with Theater Magazine (Színház folyóirat), ELTE University and AAPAC (Asian American Performers Action Coalition) focusing on the importance, tools and aspects of minorities (self)representation in theater in order to support the work of artists, academics and critics of diverse backgrounds to promote inclusion by their work. Some of the contexts, activities and aspects you can find below. We believe that by organizing similar events, discussions and collecting aspects and tools can foster social inclusion and the empowerment of different minority groups.

Workshop concept background

14% of Europe's population consists of ethnic minorities, that is approximately 15 million people. 10-12 million of them are Roma, this makes them the largest ethnic minority group in Europe. Still, according to multiple European statistics they are the most underprivileged ones. Being any kind of minority - be that ethnic or sexual - means being different from the majority. Being different often leads to misconceptions, stereotypes, and fear among the majority, resulting in the impoverishment, exclusion, and aggression towards the minority. We believe that through representation and education people can change for the better and together we can make a more safe, inclusive and harmonious society.

Representation matters. Having Roma, Black, Brown and Queer characters or actors in any type of public media form is crucial. But the who's and why's are equally as important. We know plenty of examples of negative representation from our history. It is important to acknowledge and learn from these mistakes, that benefitted poorly not only the said minorities, but the majorities as well by reassuring stereotypes and creating hatred.

In 2022, with the support of IETM, Independent Theater Hungary held a workshop series titled 'What is Theater Worth If it's Roma?' to start an open cultural dialogue about Roma representation in Hungarian theater. The workshop targeted Roma and non-Roma theater makers, theater journalists, academics and students. During the three sessions of the workshop we discussed issues regarding the representation of Roma minorities such as:

- Who can and are making performances, art products about the Roma and what themes can we observe?

- Who can play a Roma character; what characters can a Roma actor play; formal and stylistic questions in performance (ex. the usage of authentic Roma music, accent, stereotypes)?
- What is the impact of theater representation; who are the general target groups of Roma theater; what role does theater criticism play in creating a dialogue between Roma and non-Roma Theater and the audience?

Based on the pleasant experience and the interest in this topic we wanted to continue the work and widen our horizon. During the VI. Roma Heroes International Theater Festival in Budapest alongside the invited performances of European Roma artists, we organized a workshop/panel discussion about the representation of minorities in theaters.

Besides the local focus, in the first part of the workshop the participants took part in a semi-online roundtable discussion with three representatives of the Tony Award-winning Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC). We invited them to share their activities and aspects, which can be inspiring also for European initiatives: what problems and stereotypes do ethnic minorities face on New York's mainstream stages? Is American theater as inclusive as we imagine it to be? We discussed the representation of minorities on mainstream stages (Broadway), with practical perspectives based on AAPAC's observations and personal experiences. The roundtable discussion was held in English and streamed on [Howlround's platform](#).



Asian American Performers' Action Coalition (AAPAC)

The mission of the Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC) is to expand the perception of Asian American performers in order to increase their access to and representation on New York City's stages.

AAPAC was started by a group of Asian American performers who came together in the summer of 2011 after this question was posted on Facebook: "Where are all the Asian actors in mainstream New York theater?" The flood of comments elicited by this question could not be contained online; it quickly became clear that Asian American performers felt we were largely invisible in the mainstream, and that this was getting worse, not better. We at AAPAC took on the responsibilities of organizing forums for the artistic community to discuss minority representation in New York theater, and of garnering statistics from the 2006-2011 theater seasons to see whether our feelings were validated by numbers.

Video presenting the context of their work: '[Beyond Orientalism](#)'

Description of the Speakers

Christine Toy Johnson

Christine Toy Johnson is an award-winning writer, actor, director, and advocate for inclusion. Her written works have been produced and/or developed across the United States and are included in the Library of Congress's Asian Pacific American Performing Arts Collection (Playwrights Division). She is an alum of the BMI Musical Theatre Writing Workshop, was a 2016 fellow of The Writers Lab (supported by Meryl Streep, Nicole Kidman, and Oprah Winfrey), serves as Treasurer of the Dramatists Guild and is host of the Guild's podcast "Talkback" on Broadway Podcast Network. As an actor, Christine has appeared extensively on Broadway, National tours, Off-Broadway, in regional theatres across the country and nearly 100 television and film appearances. Co-founding member of AAPAC (Asian American Performers Action Coalition – 2022 Tony Honors for Excellence in the Theatre, 2020 Special Obie Citation for Advocacy), and founder of the Asian American Theatre Artists Collective. Recipient of Rosetta LeNoire, JACL, Asian American Arts Alliance awards for advocacy in diversity and inclusion as well as 25 grant awards in support of her work. For details, please visit www.christinetoyjohnson.com





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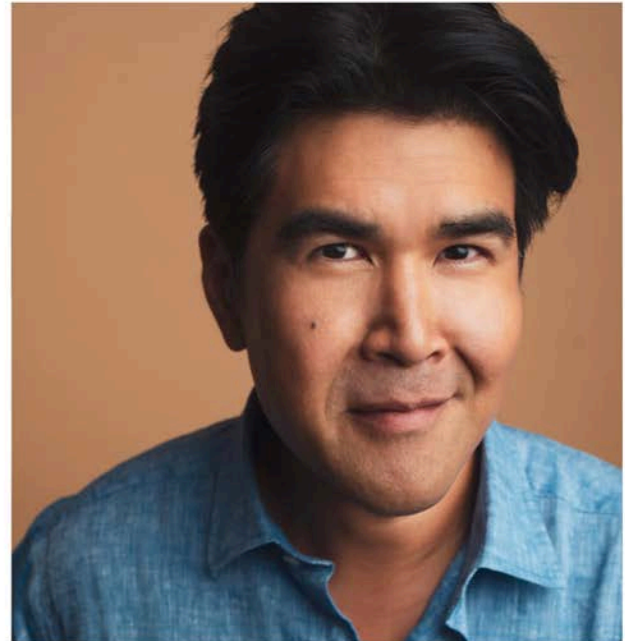


Rampa Prenestina



Pun Bandhu

Pun Bandhu is an award-winning actor who has worked on Broadway, Off Broadway, in TV and Film. He can be seen in the Oscar-nominated films *Michael Clayton*, *Burn After Reading*, *Frozen River* and *Can You Ever Forgive Me?* among others. In TV, he has guest starred on *NCIS: New Orleans*, *Gotham*, *Difficult People*, *Orange Is The New Black*, *FBI*, *Madam Secretary*, *Blind Spot* and recurred on *Blue Bloods* among many others. He is the recipient of The Bowden Actor Award from New Dramatists and a Henry Award for Best Supporting Actor. Pun is also one of the first Broadway producers of Asian descent to receive multiple Tony Awards for producing the first revival of *Glengarry Glen Ross* (2005) and the original musical *Spring Awakening* (2007). Lastly, in addition to his work as an artist, Pun is also a passionate advocate. He is the recipient of an Obie Award and a Tony Honor as a co-founder of the Asian American Performers Action Coalition, awarded in recognition of the group's impact in increasing diversity for artists of color over the last decade. Pun has been brought in as a guest speaker at numerous colleges and institutions to speak about the intersection of race and the arts and is often quoted in periodicals. He serves as a nominator for the Tony Awards and is on the Advisory Board for the Yale School of Drama, where he received his MFA in Acting. www.punbandhu.com



Caption

Nandita Shenoy

Nandita Shenoy is a New York-based writer-actor who loves hearing an audience laugh. Her play *The Future Is Female...* received its world premiere at the Flint Repertory Theater last winter. It was a Finalist for the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, and her *Rage Play* was named to the 2020 Kilroys List. Her *Washer/Dryer* has been produced multiple times nationally after its world premiere at LA's East West Players and an Off-Broadway production in which she also starred. Her first full-length, *Lyme Park: An Austonian Romance of an Indian Nature*, was produced by the Hegira in Washington, DC, and *Satisfaction* had a developmental run at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. One-acts, *Marrying Nandini*, *By Popular Demand*, *Rules of Engagement*, *You Are Here*, and *A More Perfect Date* have been produced in New York City and regionally. Nandita has acted in world premieres of new plays by Richard Dresser, Madhuri Shekar, Chelsea Marcantel, Adam Szymkowitz, and Eric Pfeffinger as well as a season at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. Nandita won the 2014 Father Hamblin Award in Playwriting, a 2018 Mellon Creative Research Fellowship at the University of Washington School of Drama in partnership with Ma-Yi Theater Company, and 2022 Hermitage Fellowship. She is a proud member of the Ma-Yi Writers Lab, dtfwaw, and the Dramatists Guild as well as Actors Equity and SAG-AFTRA. She sits on the Steering Committee of the Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC) which received Tony Honor for Excellence in Theater last year. Nandita holds a BA in English literature from Yale University. www.nanditashenoy.com



In the work of AAPAC as well as the roundtable discussion the speakers focused on the questions below:



- What is the compounded effect on a group of people when those in the mainstream only view you based on your stereotypes?
- How does bias or racism affect your career opportunities and what you are able to do?
- How can artists change how they are perceived?
- What ways can artists empower themselves and their communities?
- How can data be used to reveal structural racism?

AAPAC has been regularly monitoring the Racial Representation of NYC Stages for 18 years. Their reports show that the non-white artists are still underrepresented on Broadway stages. The 2/3 of the roles are still played by White actors, the presented plays are written mostly by white writers and directed mostly by white directors (80-81% of the total presented performances in 2018-2019). The stronger representation of other ethnic groups would be important in the future in order to ensure adequate visibility for all ethnicities living in NYC. Their reports can be found here: <http://www.aapacnyc.org/>



Minorities (Self)representation in Theater – viewpoints collected in Hungary

The second part of the workshop was a face-to-face discussion continuing the questions of the previous workshops - initiated by Independent Theatre Hungary in 2022 - on ethnic (self)representation on stage. During this part, in small groups, we discussed and analyzed excerpts from Herczog Noémi's text on writing theater criticism on performances about Roma characters/topics and from the viewpoints we gathered on how to do authentic representation on stage of Roma stories.

Short version of the texts in English:

Noémi Herczog: [Should We Write Differently About Roma Theater?](#)

Tímea Éva Bogya-Márton Illés: [Viewpoints for Achieving Authentic Representation of Roma Communities on Stage](#)

Full versions of the texts in Hungarian:

[Milyen színű a roma a színházban?](#) (What Colour is the Roma Theater?)

Noémi Herczog: [Romákról jól vagy semmit?](#) (Good or nothing about the Roma?)

List of the questions discussed during the workshop:

1. Good or nothing about the Roma? Who speaks and what?

- What is my point of view? Is it important to clarify how I relate to the topic I want to portray? What can I talk about if I am not part of the represented group?
- If I have little information about the topic or group I want to represent, do I need to get more information or consult an expert?
- Is it necessary to educate and raise the awareness of my co-creators on the topic or group I want to represent?
- To what extent do I treat the members of the vulnerable groups as partners, as data providers or as collaborators during the work?

- What story/society/situation/people do we want to portray and what is our aim? Is there such a thing as a Roma story? If yes, what makes it so? If no, why not?

2. Who can play what role? And who is the audience?

- Which actors can play Roma characters? Besides their origin, what other factors are taken into consideration in making this decision?
- What can be done to encourage people from different ethnic backgrounds to join the profession of theater?
- To what extent does it influence the creator's work when they know who will watch the performance and what their relationship or knowledge is regarding the topic, story, or group?

3. Stereotypes and the question of form

- Should I relate or avoid the use of stereotypes in my work?
- In what case and in what manner is it acceptable to present stereotypes (e.g. is there a counterbalance, are all characters presented in a stereotypical way, am I consciously drawing attention to stereotypes?)
- In what cases might the stereotypical formal elements (e.g. musicality, dress, language) be used or avoided?

4. The workshop participants justifiably criticized the current trend in Hungarian press and theater criticism of portraying performances by Roma artists or Roma theater in general as social issues rather than as works of art. Why do you think this happens?

5. Should a critic consider whether certain members of an oppressed group within society are offended by a performance because it portrays their already disadvantaged group in a negative light?



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6. As critics and cultural journalists, we often need to be able to work in different genres. What happens when we conduct an interview with a Roma creator?



Closing remarks

Our aim was to gather various approaches to creating authentic representations, without asserting a 'single correct way' since there can be many. The most important goal is that more artists, academics, and critics become open to these topics in their work, and to approach them with greater awareness and self-reflection. If open dialogue continues, we believe the (self)representation of historically misrepresented, vulnerable groups can improve and become more widespread.

Meeting the Masks of Commedia dell 'Arte

By Rampa Prenestina (IT), Claudio De Maglio (IT)



A week-long workshop was held between 2nd and 6th of October 30th 2023, by Master Claudio de Maglio, in the frame of the 1st Roma Heroes International Theater Festival in Rome. In this workshop we approached the "universe" of Commedia dell 'Arte, supporting the work of artists of diverse backgrounds with particular attention to Young Roma artists. For centuries, Roma history and artistic production have been part of and have strongly influenced European cultural history. With this workshop we wanted to provide young artists tools for self-representation and to create new cultural horizons.

We chose to work on with Commedia dell 'Arte since it is the first organized form of theater in which companies toured the courts of Europe, often independently; these characteristics of freedom, itinerant community life, created a closeness and a similar way of experiencing life with a part of the vast Roma culture. The masks, the fangs (il Zanni), in particular, give voice to the poor, the servant, the low class and the marginalized society, in an expression of our primordial instincts, they bring to light the hidden mystery of our being; voices from a depth that humanity needs to recover and rediscover. Artistic

expression is a valuable tool for the new generations of Roma to foster integration and multiculturalism in the future.

Aims of the Workshop

The workshop focused on the fundamental basis for activating the expressive code of the mask and bringing to life the characters of Commedia dell'Arte, a noble tradition invented by Italian actors in the 16th century and spread throughout Europe as far as Russia. We studied how each character represents a human typology and a precise social category still very present and recognizable in contemporary society.

There is something magical about meeting the mask because it works on energy, amplification and transformation, asking the body to be ready and available. The training will stimulate the development of an imagination that only the precise work of an actor will allow to rework and put into shape. The relationship with the mask is an enriching and exciting experience. It promotes the creation of an intimate relationship, not entirely explainable or translatable in logical and rational terms as it reveals deep roots, gives a great sense of well-being as well as renews the sense of necessity for an actor who wants to define themselves as complete.

The opportunity for every actor to work with masks is always something special and mysterious; it requires extra energy to master their use. During the workshop, we practiced reaching this level. This approach offers a chance to uncover human archetypes through the main characters and also allows us to experience something deeply rooted in the essence of theater and acting.

Workshop Concept - Notes on “The Secret of the Mask in Commedia dell’Arte” by Claudio de Maglio

We have plenty of information written about the period of the Commedia dell’Arte. There are the descriptions about the lives and adventures of many actors and companies, about historical and social ups and downs, descriptions of the amazement and admiration they received. In a few words, we know a lot about the effects, a lot of what surrounds this great theatrical phenomenon which presents many innovations, marking, as it does, the birth of the theater seen as a profession and therefore of the modern, western theater.

Nevertheless, this amazing quantity of documents reveals at the same time the lack of something which is very precious and important. The paradox is that at a certain point this tradition was interrupted. So, what we can do today offers me two opposite feelings. On the one hand there is the desire to search for something that is now lost forever, which makes any attempt of recovery subjective if not arbitrary, therefore always questionable, relative, partial. On the other hand, there is the freedom to explore, supported by the responsibility that this freedom should imply, recognizing the risks! To claim a vague freedom, not supported by an authentic search of an essence which somehow has to be able to reveal itself and make itself known for its expressive power, could contain a form of early removal and lead to a vague indecision where everything and the opposite of everything are possible. Andres Gide says: “Art dies where there is a lack of rules”.

Therefore, if there are many ways to approach and to get in touch with the masks of the Commedia dell’Arte, there is a procedure which cannot be eluded and has to do with the energetic countenance that the mask requires from the body of the actor – a true “quantum leap”, from the ordinary to the extraordinary. The attitude of someone who is trying to link up with a tradition, without wanting to reproduce it just as it is, helps us to penetrate into the essence of the mask and to deliver the meaning that, over the centuries, and

beyond different forms, still appears extremely rich and vital. These dynamics also have an extreme need to be recognized.

The skill of generations of actors who succeeded in this form of theater must be connected to something very special, something that takes us back to the expressive power of the mask and to its wonderful communicative power. This is something that we can recognize but that eludes comprehension which relies only upon logic, something that disturbs us and surprises us, that amazes us, that reveals to us an intimate and hidden part of us, manifesting its deeper nature. All this helps us to explain also the strong attraction and the numerous approaches of some great artists of the 20th century towards this mysterious world of masks.

The magnetic allure of the mask was exerting its power, and perhaps, due to the absence of a codified tradition, it seemed even more appealing. It presented those pioneers with the thrilling adventure of uncharted research. By brilliant intuition, believing that in this world something mysterious, unspeakable and magic was hidden, something connected to life and to the role itself of the actor, they were encouraged to initiate an experimentation process extremely important to the theater, developing a thought that inspires us even today because, besides having had the aim to structure techniques, it has redesigned the very role of the actor connecting them to a source capable of giving them life-blood, to feed them and nurture them, not so much for the results, as for the methodology capability of facing ever-new challenges.





Below you can find the notes on the methodology written by Roxana Ene, singer and actor of Roma origin, performer of the play 'Romnia', production in the frame of the present project by the local partner's theater company Rampa Prenestina. She was one of the enthusiastic participants.

Workshop on the mask in Commedia dell'Arte with Master Claudio De Maglio, October 2-6.



Commedia dell'Arte was born on February 25, 1540 thanks to 9 actors who went to a notary to have a contract signed where they were identified as professional actors.

Physical Training and Body Expression

Work on the body to discover all the joints: feet, ankles, knees, legs, hips, pelvis, chest, shoulders, head, face, elbows, wrists, toes. Physical training using all parts of the body, exploring one's physical limits through free but controlled movement. Parts of the work involved the body to delve deeper into the physical technical part. With the mask, every movement of the body, movement in the space or recognition of odor (in the case of Zanni, animal), object, person, etc. must be amplified.

Mask: Character, Plot, Improvisation Exercises

Each participant selected, or was selected by, a mask, initiating their first experience of wearing one. They explored the personal sensations the mask

conveyed to them by moving through the space, playing, and interacting with other participants arranged in a circle, taking turns being in its center.

An exposition of the rules that must be observed in commedia dell'arte: balance versus imbalance, the logic of opposites, and surplus energy.

In the second part of the workshop, the actors gathered in a circle, each sharing their thoughts on their experience with the mask. They reached an important shared insight: to understand and recognize one another through careful observation of the details.

Introduction to the First Character of Commedia Dell'Arte: the Zanni (Gianni)

A Zanni is a servant belonging to the lowest class of society, considered a survivor, he moves for only two reasons that are essential to him: hunger and sex (in a totally primordial way).

Each mask is closely related to an animal. In Zanni's case, there are many animals linked to his character. The most recognizable one is a bird, in particular the pheasant, an animal that does not like to fly except in situations of strict necessity such as the danger of an imminent attack.

There are two types of Zanni: Social and Animal. The posture of the two Zanni is particularly articulated and involves every part of the body. The animal Zanni is correlated to hunger and sex, to voracity and immediate erection at the mere sight of any being of the female gender (the aesthetic aspect is not fundamental). The social Zanni is instead linked to a childish wonder (the first time he sees the sea and the Venetian palaces lying on the water).



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Each mask is deeply connected to an animal, but it's not intended to imitate it. Instead, the connection taps into the primal and instinctive part of ourselves that we each harbor within. By wearing the mask, we can access these archaic and instinctive emotions.

Introduction to the Second Character of Commedia dell'Arte: Pantalone (Lion Plant)



Pantalone is a wealthy and powerful elderly character. The name is thought to derive from the lion symbol of Venice and the flag flown after a war victory. Another possible origin of the name relates to the harem trousers, a symbol of commerce. The animal associated with Pantalone is the elderly eagle: controlling, rigid and fictitious. He often plays the role of the master, greedy and tightfisted, trying to lure the female servants while expecting to be served and revered. The physical posture to depict an elderly man includes amplifying the



body's peripheral movements. The posture is hunched, but the head remains straight as if pulled by an invisible thread, reflecting the logic of opposites.

Introduction of the Third Character of Commedia dell'Arte: Harlequin (Hellequin, Devil)



Also considered the second Zanni, Harlequin belongs to the lower social class and is always in contrast with Pantalone. His body movements are more complex, involving jumps and varied positions to express different emotions. He is primarily associated with two animals: the monkey and the cat. He has an accelerated heartbeat and is shrewd, vain, and agile. He constantly struggles to serve his master while scheming to satisfy his thirst, hunger, and lust.

Introduction of the Female Role in Commedia dell'Arte

Where masks were not traditionally used, it aimed to explicitly promote the female role in theater, which was considered inappropriate at the time.

Colombina, Smeraldina, Corallina, Olivetta

Colombina: a servant, she is the one who manages the household. She drives, cleans, cooks, and governs the house, wielding considerable power despite her subordinate social class.



Colombina is complicit with Pantalone to win the favor of her master, yet she is also Harlequin's lover and the object of Zanni's lust. She represents sensuality, not strategically, but with a blend of naivety and mischief, while still maintaining purity.



A short performance based on the improvisation of the actors was video recorded for documentation and can be fundamental for a future international collaborative production.

At the end of the workshop, a session was opened to the audience where each actor had the opportunity to explore the masks, their movements, emotions,

and interact with one another. The session was followed by an evaluation round among the participants.

The workshop had 13 participants, including three international guests from the partner organization and ten local young artists.

Description of the Trainer: Claudio De Maglio



An actor in both Italian and international productions, he has performed at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord and appeared in productions as an actor and dancer at Gran Teatro La Fenice in Venice. After teaching 'Expressive Activities' and 'Psychomotricity and Mime Techniques' in Udine from 1998 to 2008, he participated in the laboratory at La Sapienza University of Rome, where he joined a tour in Argentina and Uruguay and the International School Festival of Theater in Warsaw in 2006 and 2009. He conducts numerous master classes and seminars, both in Italy and abroad, including in Tokyo, Helsinki, Moscow, and Sweden. He has received various awards both domestically and internationally. He was honored at the Cinéma Méditerranéen Montpellier in 2004, in Belgrade in 2006, and at the Theater Schools Festival in Warsaw in 2007. Additionally, he has participated in various festivals. Currently, he serves as the Director of the Civica Accademia d'Arte Drammatica of Udine.

Consent and Healing in Theatre

By Mihaela Drăgan (Giuvlipen, RO)

In the workshop titled “Consent and Healing in Theatre”, Mihaela Drăgan (Giuvlipen, RO) discusses her art practice as a Roma futurist theater maker as well as the principles and ethics that can make theater a safer place for everyone, beyond their ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. The workshop encompasses discussions about contemporary Roma theater, responsibility in art, cultural appropriation, the representation and self-representation of minorities in contemporary theater and other recurrent themes in the sphere of political theater.



Mihaela examines the landscape of Roma artists, and the institutional framework that neglects Roma theater and that has laid the ground for creating an independent company. She discusses her artistic practice as an actress, playwright and organizer of Giuvlipen’s performances, which among other

things talk about: the hyper-sexualization of Roma women by non-Roma men, sexuality and gender issues in Roma communities, power abuses in theater and film, and Roma Futurism (science-fictional narratives about a safe future lead and controlled by Roma women).

1. Self-representation in Roma Theatre vs. Cultural Appropriation¹ of Roma Culture

In theater, art or literary discourses, Romani people are often represented in a negative way. Our stories are frequently appropriated by non-Roma people, and many times the Roma characters are presented in a stereotypical way, falling into the archetype of villains who need to be punished. The most common representations of Roma people place them in the victimhood and/or exotic category, like noble savages or members of an abject race. Always at the margin of society like thieves, illiterate people, criminals, romanticized or hypersexualized Roma women, lazy or in best case as victims. All these representations dehumanized and continue to dehumanize Roma people in the history of theater, cinematography and art, in general.

These dehumanizing caricatures have been assimilated in public discourse, paving the way for both the rampant cultural appropriation of Romani culture today and the anti-Roma sentiment that has historically led to the oppression of Roma in the whole Europe. Due to the absence of Romani theaters in Europe and the consistent marginalization of independent Roma theater groups, cultural appropriation and the utilization of our stories by non-Roma producers and artists are among the most significant challenges faced by Roma creators.

Even with the best intentions, discussing Roma culture without the authentic voice of Roma individuals—particularly when non-Roma actors portray Roma

¹ Cultural appropriation refers to the adoption of specific language, behaviors, clothing, or traditions originating from a minority culture or social group by a dominant culture or group in a manner that is exploitative, disrespectful, or stereotypical. An essential aspect of this concept is the presence of an imbalance of power between the appropriator and the appropriated. Cultural appropriation is often understood within the context of the postcolonial world, with the term commonly used to describe instances where Western or white populations adopt aspects of non-Western or non-white cultures.

characters—can be dangerous and detrimental. The erasure of Roma voices perpetuates marginalization and hinders the ability of Roma artists to have their experiences heard and respected on local stages. Romani people have a long history of oppression and silence behind them, such that no non-Romani artist has the right to represent us in their artistic projects without our voices and input. This approach only helps to preserve the status of marginalization and precariousness of Roma theatre and Roma artists and does not advance our necessary presence in the mainstream art spaces.

As Romani artists, we do not consent to our history, culture and stories to be used, exploited, commodified and appropriated by non-Roma. This practice is hurtful, offensive, not in our benefit but only for the social or monetary benefit of the appropriator. For us, as a community who has faced systemic oppression, we have the right to self-representation and self-determination in art and culture.

Exercise with the work group: *Give a few examples of self representations of Romani art in your country or region, analyze them if they contained internalized stereotypical views or were examples of good practice. After this reflect on the cultural appropriation examples from the same region and expose them to the group.*

2. How Can We Create Responsible Art? Themes, Topics in Roma Theatre

Many Roma artists create works that address political issues, such as inequality, racism, sexism, or topics related to our history of slavery and genocide. This type of art can raise awareness, provoke thought, and inspire dialogue among our audiences. Because art can serve as a tool for expressing ideas, criticizing political systems, and inspiring change, it can be a very effective vehicle for political influence.

Explicitly or not, art is inherently connected to the sociopolitical context in which it is created. The choices artists make in terms of themes, topics or style

can be influenced by their cultural, social, or political backgrounds. In this sense, even art that is not explicitly political may hold implicit political meanings or reflect the society's values or prejudices.

The idea that all art is political has been expressed in different ways over time. Karl Marx believed that art, like other aspects of society, is influenced by the prevailing economic and political systems and it cannot be separated from the power structures and ideologies that shape the world. Arguments such as “aesthetic autonomy” is essentially the depoliticization of art—a failure to admit that all art is political. If social relevance is art’s mission, then art should be made of something more than mere aesthetics. Aesthetics is political, and “talent” or “quality” are subjective, a standard that has been set by the holders of power and the makers of rules.

While we reclaim our Roma cultural identity, we reject the biased Eurocentric views on art. Historically, the dominant narrative in arts and culture has favored mainstream European art and aesthetics, which has often marginalized or excluded non-European artistic traditions. This Eurocentric bias has contributed to the perpetuation of white supremacy by positioning European (and, by extension, white) art as superior to that of other cultures.

In the last years, as more Roma theater companies have become visible, the Eurocentric perspective has tried to label them as “social theater”, “activist theater”, meaning “less of an art” as our themes and topics are many times related to discrimination, inequality or racism. I prefer the term “responsible art” to all these labels and an openly leftist perspective in the theater I create together with my Roma colleagues. Our theater opposes right-wing discourse seizing power within artistic communities and we consider that deploying arts to incite theater audiences to prejudice and hatred is a dangerous act.

As professionals, we are interested in using theater as a way to speak about our experiences, as a response and as a recourse to the lack of inclusion and

marginalization our people have faced. Through theater, we celebrate our identity and resistance, we take a lot of pride and joy from being Roma on stage and we want to contribute to a new type of drama that is more inclusive with minorities and non-white theater makers.

Exercise 1: *Initiate a discussion on reformation and re-contextualization in art, such as the proposed revision of the movie '[Gone With the Wind](#)' by HBO, or the reconsideration of street names honoring fascists and statues of white supremacists, which are often seen as symbols of culture.*

Exercise 2: *Describe the differences between freedom of speech in the arts and hate speech, the latter being a form of discourse often censored due to its harmful nature. However, it's frequently misrepresented as free speech by white supremacists.*



3. Ethics in Theatre. How Do We Make Theatre a Safe Space for Real?

Any art group should strive to create and maintain a work environment in which people are treated with dignity, decency and respect. The environment of the workplace should be characterized by mutual trust and the absence of

intimidation, oppression and exploitation. Theatre should not tolerate unlawful discrimination or harassment of any kind.

As a co-founder of a theatre company, I recommend a written deontological guide to any art group whose principles and amendments can be invoked in case of situations of lack of consent and sexual consent, abuse and abuse of power. In Giuvlipen Theatre Company we try to create a safe space for each person by following the principles of zero tolerance for discrimination, harassment or bullying.

The following examples of harassment are intended to be guidelines and are not exclusive when determining whether there has been a violation of this policy:

Verbal harassment includes comments that are offensive or unwelcome regarding a person's national origin, race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy, appearance, disability, gender identity or expression, marital status or other protected status, including epithets, slurs and negative stereotyping.

Nonverbal harassment includes distribution, display or discussion of any written or graphic material that ridicules, denigrates, insults, belittles or shows hostility, aversion or disrespect toward an individual or group because of national origin, race, color, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, pregnancy, appearance, disability, sexual identity, marital status or other protected status.

Sexual harassment occurs when unsolicited and unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature:

Verbal sexual harassment includes innuendoes, suggestive comments, jokes of a sexual nature, sexual propositions, lewd remarks and threats; requests for any type of sexual favor (this includes repeated, unwelcome requests for dates); and

verbal abuse or "kidding" that is oriented toward a prohibitive form of harassment, including that which is sexual in nature and unwelcome.

Nonverbal sexual harassment includes the distribution, display or discussion of any written or graphic material, including calendars, posters and cartoons that are sexually suggestive or show hostility toward an individual or group because of sex; suggestive or insulting sounds; leering; staring; whistling; obscene gestures; content in letters, notes, facsimiles, e-mails, photos, text messages, tweets and Internet postings; or other forms of communication that are sexual in nature and offensive.

Physical sexual harassment includes unwelcome, unwanted physical contact, including touching, tickling, pinching, patting, brushing up against, hugging, cornering, kissing, fondling, and forced sexual intercourse or assault. Consensual, mutually respectful, pleasant, noncoercive interactions between employees that are appropriate in the workplace and acceptable to and welcomed by both parties are not considered to be harassment, including sexual harassment.

All people working in Giuvlipen Theatre will not:

- sexually harass, assault or abuse another person
- physically harass, assault or abuse another person
- emotionally abuse another person, such as engaging in behavior intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade
- condone, or participate in behavior which is abusive, discriminatory, illegal, or unsafe
- develop, encourage or fail to take action of relationships with children or other vulnerable people which could in any way be deemed sexual, exploitative or abusive
- act in ways that may be violent, inappropriate or sexually provocative.

The complaints will be treated with confidentiality and respect for the dignity of the person who reports an abusive behavior. The persons who will not respect the ethical guide will be subject to an investigation and an eventual termination of collaboration with the group.



4. Manifesto For the Future of Theatre - Healing in Roma Theatre

As a Roma Futurist artist, I many times use the idea of a "safe future" in my art practice, healing being a key element of Roma Futurism concept. Healing is inextricably linked with how politics and policies have traumatized (and/or protected) a person. We can not talk anymore about oppression, discrimination, judgment, or being "othered" without including the idea of healing for our communities.

Our transgenerational trauma and mental health are a reflection of the uneven political landscape and how it has impacted us as individuals and as a group of people – acutely, and over time. Historically being an oppressed group, Roma

people deserve healing in this world and the comfort of a safe future where we can act not out of trauma but out of our resilience.

Though the idea of self-care is nowadays most largely seen as a part of the wellness industry, it's important to acknowledge that the conversation around self-care was led by civil rights activists. These activists recognized that inequalities in healthcare (systemic racism), as well as the traumatic impact of racism and the fight for equality, affects one's physical health. Healing and being well as a non-white person is a radical and revolutionary act of caring for one's body, when others have not and will not. Seeking healing is an act of liberation and resistance for bodies who experience oppression and discrimination because of skin color, culture and ethnicity.

Being actors and theater makers, we work a lot with our own experiences, personal life, our stories and multiple identities. We need to understand how the pain and suffering of the individual (or family, community) has been impacted by systems and policies. I do not want to exaggerate the role of theater and art in general, but as creators we know that art can be healing. Art should address an idea of collective healing and how theater can contribute to a society that values and supports safety for all bodies and peoples. Instead of being a place of exclusion and harassment, the theater of the future can become inclusive and diverse but we have to do the work.

Exercise: Work with the creativity of the participants and ask them to answer the following questions: How the theater of the future looks like in your imagination? What policies will be adopted by the theater in order to include different bodies, non-normative bodies and sexualities? What will be the technological advancements used in the art of theater? Will these be accessible for Romani theater creators? How an utopian theater looks in the imagination of a Roma theater artist?

Below you can see the outputs of the participants at the workshop held at the Jewish State Theatre in Bucharest, during the Kathe, Akana! X Giuvlipen 'We Share Her Story' Roma Theatre Festival:

The theater of the future will be:

- *A space where we can see people of different ethnicities and color, non-binary performers, performers with disabilities.*
- *A work environment where actors, directors and other theater makers know the meaning of consent and value it, where people's boundaries are communicated and respected.*
- *A non-hierarchical space where the power relationships and abuses of power are confronted.*
- *An intimate couch for actors when they work with nudity or in shows that involve intimate scenes between the actors. A therapist that can deal with possible situations of conflict among the art group or when artists work with delicate themes and topics.*
- *Political education for artists in order to become aware of different realities and to create art that is not offensive or hurtful towards a group of people.*
- *Access of state funding for the Roma theater groups and the institutionalization of Roma theaters.*

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