

BALTIC RAMPA, Birstonas, Lithuania -- September 2013

The most recent BALTIC RAMPA Festival was held in the small town of Birstonas in Lithuania, a 90 minute drive by car from the capital Vilnius.

The 3 Baltic countries took part with a variety of performances, selected by the respective National Centres.

It was very interesting to see groups of the 3 countries, to see the differences and the similarities in their work, to compare their theatrical work not in a competitive way, but in a researching way.

The host country showed us an interesting rhythm performance (“Musical notation”), by 3rd year students ‘acting’ of Klaipeda University. In this unusual performance with rhythm, song, chairs, papers and tuning forks the group attempts to convey the Lithuanian folk songs in such a way as they hear and understand them.

The groups look for new shapes and forms on stage, works with drama, music, rhythm and lights.

And they succeeded to create a very intriguing performance, disciplined and perfected to the littlest details.

The same group did a performance with shoes, piles of shoes (“Shoe stories”). Shoes know everything, in shoes live the stories of people. In this performance the shoes played their own role, they were seen as separate characters. Dancing, singing and with various musical sounds the actors created, with the shoes, expressive stories that made the imagination of the audience get to work.

There were several more groups from the host country, showing good, solid performances.

Estonia showed a parody of the soviet time in the play “Lemonade ETS”: a soda firm where the workers drink more (alcohol) than they work, where is a lot of fun, where is no dedication to or enthusiasm for the work and where a light panic breaks out when an inspector is coming while the boss is away on a business trip. His charismatic presence is missed; however, the vice-boss will solve the problem. He attempts to let the factory and the workers make a good impression, at which effort he completely fails.

Always a good theme to put on stage and a good opportunity to show acting and directing abilities.

The policeman playing live on the guitar was a great hit.

Another Estonian group presented “The maxims of Pantelei Karmanov”. A stage and on it a man. This man knows that he will die at the age of 32, which gives him another 11 years. A long death sentence. What he thinks about, how he goes through this long time is written by an author who sits at his desk on the side, while the actor acts out the text.

The actor virtually has a monologue and he presented his text in a captivating way and with a strong stage presentation. No emotions were shown though, clearly a choice made by the director who told me that he wanted to focus on ‘do not ask which room is your last, it is the one you are in’

Latvia was represented by groups from Rezekne and Limbazi.

Personally I was surprised about this choice because I have recently seen other Latvian performances of higher artistic quality. The reason might be that the plays I mean are well-

known classic plays which are performed more often by various groups, amateur and professional.

Groups from the towns of Limbazi and Rezekne performed “Shameless old men” about a few Latvian old men living in the USA since the end of WWII. Together they do the things their families disapprove of, but which they always dreamt of: fishing, playing golf, climbing mountains. In a pleasant way these men showed that we must enjoy life while it is possible; and “Kurt turns evil” about a happily married truckdriver with three children who turns evil after being rewarded with a diamond = big money after saving a drowning soldier. That money does not always make happy was shown in a childish, energetic way.

Discussions followed the performances, officially and un-officially. The festival offered an excellent opportunity to talk, to exchange ideas, to meet new people, to renew contacts.

The next BALTIC RAMPA will be held in Estonia in 2015.

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