

Award ceremony Goethe Medal 2014

Renate Klett: Laudatory speech for Krystyna Meissner

(Check against delivery)

Krystyna and I met for the first time in the early 1990s in Toruń. She was the founder and director of the theatre festival there and I was on the jury. We quarrelled immediately. I've long forgotten what we argued over, but do remember quite well that it was a "good quarrel," one without cantankerousness or malevolence, but full of passion for our opposing sides. After that I did not hear from her for a while.

In 2001, Krystyna Meissner established a new festival, this time in Wrocław, where she had taken over the Teatr Współczesny (contemporary theatre). Thus, Kontakt Toruń was followed by Dialog Wrocław. She invited me to the first season and then to all the ensuing ones as well. Every two years, I travelled to the beautiful city, saw unusual productions from many countries and wrote about them for the FAZ. Dialog became my favourite festival (and it was not only mine). It was more inspired, more daring, fresher and more significant than Edinburgh, Avignon and Adelaide put together because it did not ride on waves of fashion, but made statements, was uncomfortable rather than smooth and, based loosely on Günter Eich, aimed to be the sand and not the oil in the world's gears.

The hospitality and the fiery debates, the dramaturgical consistency and the commitment to the young, obstreperous directors, plus a captivating audience that was very awake and critical yet quite enthusiastic and hungry for art. It is Europe's best audience and Krystyna Meissner made it that by challenging and fostering it. Oh, Krystyna, please come to Berlin and educate our undiscerning festival audience that cannot tell the difference between quality and nonsense and only ever cheers because it thinks it is cosmopolitan and cool to do so.

It is different with Dialog. It takes place in panels and in pubs, in the theatre and on the tram and sharpens the senses and the mind. And they know their Goethe: "Dirt that we tread isn't hardened, but spread." When they get wind of that, they simply, quietly, politely and adamantly walk out. It happened rarely at Dialog, but when it did, then glaringly. But, usually it's like this: the foreign audience marvels at Polish theatre, the Polish audience marvels at the international and all together marvel at Krystyna Meissner for her courage and her skill. She has a knack and enough radicalness for that which points, heaven and hell assailing, to the future.

Those from Germany that she invited were also mainly those who swam against the tide and in those seven festival years she probably invited more German productions than all the German festivals here ever presented Polish productions. This speaks for the curiosity of the one and against the ignorance of the many, one could claim, for Dialog also reveals that Polish theatre is currently the liveliest, maddest, most serious, most intelligent and simply best theatre in Europe.

Krystyna Meissner helped to raise the young lions of Polish theatre and made every effort to promote them. All of the Warlikowskis, Jarzynas and Klatas have much to thank her for and they know it. She always gave preference to the new, if it was good, over the old (the only exception is Lupa, but he is both old and new and good in any event). She meddled, co-produced, defended and thus made her theatre, which is not called contemporary for nothing, the talk of the city and the country.

For she is not only a festival director, but also a theatre manager and was so for a short time at the famous Teatr Stary in Krakow (but that means 'old theatre,' which could not have boded well). She also worked as a director in the theatre and television, received countless prizes and awards, represented Poland on international juries and cultural committees and throughout all of that, she never wavered, which is certainly also due to the intellectual compensation provided by her festival work.

Dialog is not a wealthy festival, but a successful one. That is not a contradiction, nor is it a precondition, but the result of the hard and clever work of Krystyna Meissner and her small, top-class team. The women are successful and that sort of thing, as everywhere, is the source of envy. There have been a few ugly incidents; Meissner is not called the Iron Lady of Polish Theatre for nothing. Anyone who read Alice in Wonderland in the Warsaw bomb shelters and marvelled on the streets at the snow-white gloves of the invading SS swinging smartly at eye level will have learned how to deal with absurd situations for their whole lifetime.

She lost her theatre, but kept her festival. Iron only becomes pliable in the fire and Krystyna Meissner is at her best in the fire. Keep it up! On behalf of art, opposed to small minds, on behalf of the risks, opposed to the comfortable! "Wenn weiter strebend du dich mühst, dann kannst du sie erlösen!"