

Current Dance Work Saison 2011-2013

## **“Disabled Theater”: Theater HORA / Jérôme Bel**

### **“Now people can see that we exist”**

*Sara Hess, how did the dance that you perform in “Disabled Theater” come about?*

The choreographer Jérôme Bel told us we should invent a dance. I was at home, I saw a towel, and then I had the idea for my dance. I didn't have a model for my movements, the thing with the towel just happened. I spent ages trying lots of things out. But I don't have a dancer that I'm desperate to imitate. I think breakdancing is cool, but we were told it wouldn't be so exciting if we watched dance films on YouTube and then imitated them. Our directors reckoned we should try to invent something of our own.

*But making something of your own takes more courage than imitating someone else, doesn't it?*

Yes, it took courage at the start. Jérôme wanted us to be ourselves on the stage. That made me uneasy. For a long time I wasn't sure whether people would like the piece. Actually I felt a bit uncomfortable generally on the stage at first. Then my mother wrote a long mail to Michael Elber and talked up the piece. I think she was the only one who thought it was good from the start. Other parents said it was too much, but my mother always thought it was good.

*Do you dance in private even when no-one sets you the task of dancing?*

In the HORA theatre we once did a dance theatre piece called “Tanzpalast”. When we're at the HORA generally we often move in time to music. I guess that might look like dancing to an outsider. When I go out, I only dance when I really like the music. Techno's my favourite, I like listening to “Nightwish”, Michael Jackson isn't bad or DJ Bobo. But techno is what I like best.

**Sara Hess is 28, and one gets the impression she wants to avoid saying the wrong thing in the interview. After an apprenticeship as a bookbinder, she trained as an actor at Theater HORA – Stiftung Züriwerk. She has been a member of HORA since 2007, and “Disabled Theater” is her thirteenth production.**

*Where do you feel most at ease when you're not on the stage? When you are the private Sara Hess?*

I like painting wooden chairs. Sometimes they're as colourful as carnival! But that's something I do in my free time. During the week I go to the theatre at 9 o'clock every morning from the home where I live in an independent living group. In the theatre we start off by warming up together. Then we do some acting, we work on the piece, improvise or do run-throughs until midday. After lunch, at half past one, we continue with a concentration game, then we carry on doing some crafts or work on the piece until 5 o'clock. Evenings at home are always over far too quickly. Weekends are

always over much too fast as well. Especially when I'm painting my chairs. I've exhibited them in the past too, and even sold them. Our cook at the WABE disabled centre in Wald has six of my chairs. He has them at home now. But I don't want to earn money with my chairs, I have a profession. When I sell a chair it's just for a bit of pocket money. I've got a euro chair in my room. There are hundred-euro notes printed on lavatory paper that I've pasted on. There are two real notes among them. Yes, you can see the difference. I once had a chance to show my chairs at a real market. But somebody saw them and reckoned anybody could do that. It was a new experience. Since then, I only show them where people are interested, to people who like art. One day I'd like to build up something artistic myself. But as long as I'm working full time that's not possible.

**Suddenly the words start to flow and the faltering, the nervousness has vanished. When Sara Hess talks about her art she knows it's something she can do and others can't.**

*On the stage at HORA you work very closely with a lot of very different people. Is that difficult?*

Sometimes we argue, but we always make up afterwards. It's really not good to have conflicts on the stage, because then you can't act together any more. We don't all have to be friends, we just need to be able to get along with each other somehow. I always try to settle conflicts myself first, and I only go to the directors if that doesn't work.

*What have been the high points of your work at HORA?*

I really enjoyed travelling with this piece. A lot of people say, "Wow, travelling, Korea, New York" – I'd never have been there if it hadn't been for the theatre. New York was great, everything's just so *big*! And I'm a fan of Berlin, I like the little man on the traffic lights; I got about on my own in Berlin, because it was easy to find my way. But travelling is very tiring too. With some cities we were there for such a short time that we didn't have time to sightsee - Milan, for example. When you're travelling you're always together too, there's no escape. Or you have a day off and do lots of things, and then you really notice it when you're supposed to get up on stage in the evening - or you're allowed too. All those impressions make you tired. Travelling took a lot of energy. It's nice to just stay in Switzerland again for six months. Then you have an ordered day.

*What does the Swiss Dance Award mean to you?*

I'm proud that HORA has received this award. It means people see that we exist. But we owe it all to Jérôme Bel. It's his name that makes us interesting. Without him no-one would invite us for guest performances, and we wouldn't have received an award. If they just saw the name "Theater HORA" next to our piece, people would wonder what it was.

*What do you think about that? Is it right?*

It's a shame that people just say "Wow, Jérôme Bel", that they only see Jérôme Bel and not Theater HORA. Mind you, he liked us too, he thought we were good. He'd

never worked with disabled people before. And initially he didn't want to work with us. But then Michi [Michael Elber] sent him a video of us. He came and spent a week with us and things just took off from there. He's also someone who likes to be provocative on the stage. And then he adapted the piece to avoid shocking the parents, and so that we could show it on tour. I don't think he could have done that with untrained actors. He saw that we knew what we were doing. Other actors might have been less willing than we were to go along with what he wanted.

*What does success mean for you?*

Getting this award is definitely a success. But completing a new piece is a success too. Or when we perform something and the audience enjoys it. Or when the rehearsal goes badly and the performance goes well – that's success too.

*You are a successful actor – does that mean that acting is your favourite profession and one you'd like to keep doing for a long time?*

I like being an actor. But in the more distant future I think I might want to do something different. I really like working with my hands. And acting with HORA gives me the chance to travel a lot. But I'm interested in art too; in a workshop I'd have to do the same thing all the time. In the last workshop I often collected voting slips and did work that I didn't find challenging. But theatre is something I want to do one hundred percent, which means there is less time for art right now. In the HORA ensemble we're people with all kinds of disabilities. My colleagues with Down's syndrome sometimes do things I'd never have the courage to do; I'd love to be as brave as them.

There are actors who say they want to die on stage. That's not for me. There are other things in life.

Interview conducted by Daniele Muscionico