

Acceptance gives the proof

The society of Hungary is strongly structured for several groups according to social, educational and exchequer aspects. This and the silently fixed prejudice-system in today's society makes the members of the groups which are not clearly known learn their societal stigmas, secondary citizenship quite early. Disabled people can't gain acceptance like the healthy members of society do – before they could take a single step they have to prove they are worthy enough to be handled as human beings. Fighting with all social sandbags and fences are usually breaking the energy and will of disabled people to reach what they could.

The Baltazar Theatre, founded in January 1998, is the one and only professional theatre company in Hungary whose members are mentally disabled actors. The Baltazar Theatre Foundation, which runs the theatre company, breaks new ground by putting actors' disabilities in the background and emphasizing their talent.

We started our educational programme in 1999 - at first only for a closed group, the members of Baltazar Theatre. Through this we introduced a completely new approach. Unlike the usual projects with social background, Baltazar Theatre's starting point is the question „What can disabled people do for themselves and for the society?” – instead of asking „What could society do for disabled people?”. According to this the base of our educational programme is not therapy. Handling disabled people as equals, we've formed unique artistic education which runs in high quality also among the ones for „healthy” people. Several years of artistic work with the actors of Baltazar showed us that the word „disabled” means completely nothing when one steps to the way of Art. This made us found the Baltazar Artistic Centre in 2005 – an artistic education program available for everyone.

As disability is strongly different from any norm this effects the everyday life of disabled people as well as their social state. Children with disability can choose only from markedly segregative schools in which they learn their societal stigmas, secondary citizenship at their school desks. We think these conditions are insupportable. Our purpose to get disabled and non-disabled part of society closer to each other. So the long-term goal of Baltazar Artistic Centre is to indicate the false prejudices and maladjustment of disability, to give people a chance for looking to each other as equals. This is important for both societal groups as their lives are both influenced by this problem. The main target groups are the groups of children and youth, whose attitude of life can be formed to prevent fixation and inheritance of prejudices to the following generations. The base of our educational system is to neglect societal stigmas and instead prepare our students with real human value-based self-confidence for life by using opened, emotional communication of arts.

Disabled people can live their emotions far richer than others – that's a difference which can be a disadvantage if one can't express them in a way that society can accept. By using traditional school system combined with exceptional methods and do all this through arts children of our Artistic Centre can learn the rules and forms of society and a way through which they can freely live and express their emotions without worries. So learning arts is not a passion or hobby at all: this way – the way of arts – can give the chance to get part of the society, teach how to communicate emotions and expressions acceptable for everyday's people. With all of these we believe that our students will live a happier and balanced childhood with less misunderstandings and more joy which is surely a strong base for their whole life.

The way to gain society's acceptance leads through being part of their cultural life. Theatre Baltazar is participatig in Hungarian and European theatre life since several years. These years brought that now actors of the Theatre are respected members of Hungarian public life.

After years of working together with celebrated artists who helped from the background – such as Ferenc Darvas composer, Kriszta Tóth and István Vörös writers – a new page was opened in 2008. By creating performance Stone Choice Theatre Baltazar showed that disabled and non-disabled actors can work together in one show as equals.

They were guest artists in several “healthy” productions such as the concert of Péter Sziámi Müller on Sziget Festival 2009 which is one of the biggest summer festival in Europe. At the end of 2009 they were also invited to give their face to a calendar in which well known and respected members of Hungarian cultural public life – like Mari Töröcsik, Tamás Vitray and Gábor Presser – stood up for the noble purpose of saving lost animals.

Universities are also inviting Theatre Baltazar to speak about it's unique educational method. Also important point that “disabled” dance and musical companies are also eager to invite the actors of the Theatre – but they do it like they do with several other “healthy” artists. As Theatre Baltazar is working just like other professional theatres its social reputation depends on the quality of the performances – all other things are secondary. According to this the achieved acceptance and success of Theatre Baltazar means that society can accept values irrespectively of disability.

But even with all these achievements it would be early to say that our job is finished. Theatre Baltazar was able to break the resistance of the society against mental disabilities but the main part of the job is just beginning. The aim is to reach all available levels of society by creating artworks which can touch people and break through preconceptions and general apathy about the notion of disability.

To reach those who'd like to have cultural experiments but the crates of classical theatre are too strick or takes too much time we've created a performance which can be played also in popular public spaces where people just sit in to have a little rest like clubs, caffe houses, etc. *Boys, girls* is the name of the performance which was created to reach people by an easily consumable „stand-up cabaret”. This performance is planned to be combined with an additional conversation where actors and audience can talk about current questions of life – apart from the fact that some of the actors (or audience) are living with disability.

Indirect communication is also important part of our further plans. We're creating a momentous poster exhibition named *11 Commands*. The theme of each picture is not disability but human values. Actors of Baltazar Theatre are on the pictures but the fact that figures are disabled people is not the purpose, only a concept of creators. All pictures are using the symbols born from Theatre Baltazar's performances. The face of presenting each values are using the tools of advertisement: values are the products which are have to be advertised – 11 pictures, 11 values.

Another new performance will be also organic part of the exhibition, wearing also the name *11 Commands*. The texts of the performance are based on the pictures. Three famous Hungarian contemporary authors - Krisztina Tóth, Péter Sziámi Müller, István Vörös - are writing texts in 3 several ways (poem, lyrics, prose). Their work is just like advertisin creative team's: they're inspiring each other but creating separate pieces. These pieces will give the

final textbook summarized by director Dora Elek. All three authors are in contact with the company since ages. Krisztina Tóth is the author of our performance *Fading Rouge* (2004). István Vörös is the writer of performances *Flying Licence for Angels* (2003), *One Who Born Laughing* (2005) and *Stone Choice* (2008) and our book the *Eternal Calendar*. Péter Sziámi Müller is playing role in performance *Stone Choice*.

We're also up to expand Baltazar Artistic Centre. Although there are several difficulties both in material and technical aspects the final aim is to establish an alternative artistic education system for both disabled and non-disabled people not to replace official/governmental educational possibilities but to complement it's faults. To achieve this we'd like to ensure an alternative daily education for school-aged children based on arts and aiming the highest level of integration both in the composition of each groups and in integrating each individual to the society. Preparing children for school system is also should be part of our system in where children who are not yet at school-age, and also those who are not ready for going to school – because of the nature of their disability, learning/behaving discomposure.

Societal role of Theatre Baltazar is also well presented by several participation requests from all significant civil and governmental initiatives which are in connection with the role of disabled people in society. An actor of the Theatre played in one part of a governmental societal advertisement-serial which was created to call the attention of society for disability. As for civil area Theatre Baltazar is also participant of the preparing and creating team of this year's MediaUnion activity which is an alliance of hungarian media representatives to stand up year by year for certain social causes – this year for disability in society.

Baltazar Theatre is working technically also just like all other professional alternative theatre groups in Hungary. Incomes for main activity are coming after performances and from governmental support but to cover all the costs we need several additional sources – social and artistic tenders as well as the generous work of our volunteers and teachers who are giving lessons far below its current value.

By the growing radius of our activities also the costs are bigger. But since the beginnings none of Baltazar Theatre Foundation's planned projects had to be finally cancelled because of financial matters thanks to several loyal partner organizations and the work of volunteers.

All parts of our further project elements are concentrating on making disabled people feel from their childhood that they have all the rights and possibilities as 'healthy' members of society do. We're showing positive examples, succesful lives to those who may think that they have to live according to the roles given by their societal stigma. This message is both for disabled and non-disabled people – positive fates can be set as examles for everyone. Today's society needs emotional communication more than ever which nothing can transmit better than arts.