

# Specifically Latvian Vol. 2



*Mārupīte*, director Valters Silis

## A publication of Latvian Theatre Showcase 2013

Since the first Latvian Theatre Showcase held in 2003, things here have notably changed. Most visibly, a new generation of artists – directors, set designers, dramaturgs, and choreographers – have entered the scene, which, in terms of the artistic energy introduced, matches their counterparts of the faraway 1990s (Viesturs Kairiņš, Gatis Šmits, Dž. Dž. Džilindžers, and Regnārs Vaivars). In between, the development in theatre was decent, but without groundbreaking events, drastic changes in course or artistic endeavors, which would resonate with the farthest reaches of society (with the exception of Alvis Hermanis and his ensemble at the New Riga Theatre). The present generation of young artists, each a strong personality of their own, have not formed a particular artistic group, yet through collective spirit and mutual support they come across as unified, rather than competitive.

Also, it is significant that previously reluctant and sporadic attempts at communication made by the state and independent theatres, has finally taken the shape of purposeful and constructive collaboration. This is manifested in co-productions (the project *Test* by the Latvian National Theatre (LNT) and *Dirty Deal Teatro*), in the opening of smaller stages for experimental work, in the exciting migration of directors and actors between their repertory theatres and other venues (such as participation of LNT, New Riga Theatre actors in independent projects), as well as in the appearance of international collaboration (such as Kiril Serebrennikov's productions in LNT, Konstantin Bogomolov's collaboration with Liepāja Theatre, Jan-Willem van den Bosch's work in Dailies Theatre).

Not only do these developments allow artists to work in a range of creative teams and varying contexts, but the consequently confused (in the best sense of the word) public, is forced to travel to different – including *site-specific* – performance spaces to follow its favorite directors and actors, making theatrical discoveries along the way.

The nature of theatre as a whole also transforms as it finds ways of breaking out of its frames of politeness, traditional aesthetics and conservative taste. Younger directors no longer evade harsh and potentially provocative themes, historically complicated situations or political issues, but, as opposed their predecessors who entered the stage in the 1990s, they are less audacious and scandalous. This tendency can be observed not only in Riga, but has also reached theatres in other cities. In this year's Showcase programme we present theatres from Valmiera and Liepāja with their powerful productions and the remarkable work of young actors.

It is wonderful to witness these changes and partake in them, and yet all the indicated tendencies are still very fragile and uncertain. To a large extent, the reason for this is the drastically cut cultural spending and the mechanism of its distribution, which discriminates against independent initiatives in favor of the repertory theatres, while the subsidized theatres are forced, in turn, to maneuver between their aspirations to be contemporary and innovative and the reality, which demands their share of sold out shows.

In this edition, we have invited writer Pauls Bankovskis, theatre director Māra Ķimele, director and lecturer Zane Kreiberga, journalist Gunta Sloga, theatre critics Silvija Radzobe and Līvija Dūmiņa to interview and portray the six directors whose work has stood out in the last season, and is presented in the Showcase programme: Gatis Šmits, Andrejs Jarovojš, Valters Silis, Alvis Hermanis, Vladislavs Nastavševs and Konstantin Bogomolov (p. 2–4). Additionally, dramaturg Jānis Balodis and Laura Stašāne from the New Theatre Institute of Latvia have sketched current tendencies and developments in the youngest scene of Latvian dramaturgy and contemporary dance (p.5). In the last pages of this publication we introduce the full programme of the Latvian Theatre Showcase (p.6–7).

**Gundega Laiviņa**, director of New Theatre Institute of Latvia



## Vladislavs Nastavševs

Silvija Radzobe, theatre critic

Vladislavs Nastavševs studied acting in Saint Petersburg and directing in London. Ivan Bunin's *Mitya's Love* was his début at the non-governmental *Dirty Deal Teatro* in 2010. In 2012 he already staged three performances: August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* at the Valmiera Theatre, Bunin's *Dark Alleys* at the New Riga Theatre and Daniil Kharm's *The Old Woman* at the National Theatre. All three received significant acclaim from the public and critics alike, earning several nominations and awards in the most prestigious theatre/culture competitions in Latvia. In seven of Nastavševs' performances in Latvia the director has set before himself and accomplished increasingly complex aesthetic and philosophical tasks. This allows us to speak about certain established principles in his directing.

Nastavševs' strategy in directing combines representation of life and presentation of semiotic constructions. Underneath the surface of traditional elements of the theatre lies a system of the post-dramatic theatre, which is no longer concerned with putting the text at its core. A new relationship is established between textual and visual dramaturgy, becoming the dominant force in the making of performance. The semiotic layer of the performance is created in a peculiar way. Primarily

appealing to the central nervous system, his metaphors leave a sensorimotor rather than an intellectual impression upon the audience. The impact of these metaphors is nearly universal. Nobody is beyond their scope, even if the audience is not aware of their influence or resents it. In *Miss Julie* the most distinctive examples of this are the moving log-like plank and a bunch of smashed cherries to symbolize Julie's loss of virginity. In *Dark Alleys*, the audience's nerves are tested by the sheer sensual intensity of the stylized heterosexual intercourses.

Multiple layers of meaning are the second important feature of his performances. The director depicts events in an ambivalent fashion to say the least and sometimes we witness three to four interpretations of a single event.

Two subjects – sexuality and theatre, govern Nastavševs' work. Both of them are intertwined, making an impression that, as far as his performances go, sexuality is theatrical and theatre is sexual.

Moreover, metaphysically secretive and absurdly comical, *Dark Alleys* manifests the relationships between the opposite sexes as a theatre of a kind. The men here are fairly simple objects. They are tempted, conquered, desired and seduced by women in the most sophisticated and virtually bewitched ways. Words of rejection, looks of promise are ever-present in this theatre of hyper-femininity. Unexpected, practically absurd reactions...

*Miss Julie's* interpretation contains several inherent readings of the narrative. First of all, it is a feministic discourse. In the plot Julie is the one who initiates sex with Jean. She uses the boy as an object not only to underscore the equality between genders, but, instead, to rise above and to dominate over the opposite sex.

Secondly, the reading of *Miss Julie* in many ways relates to the use of cross-dressing. According to Jan Kott, in his volume on Shakespeare, a cross-dressed girl has a thrilling appeal for both sexes. As such, Inese Pudža's highlighted boyishness in Julie allows us to discern a woman, yet it is more of a young boy who we see seducing the adult man. The man, in turn, has unexpectedly discovered for himself an entirely new form of pleasure. Being entangled in traditional morality, he however cannot fully embrace the new, alternative sexual experience.

Nastavševs continues to explore sexuality and death in the *The Old Woman*, his most theatrically spectacular performance thus far. By using a virtuoso cut he manages

to organically combine the aesthetic of horror films, ironic interludes in the manner of agitprop, Christian symbolism and Freudian allusions. These convincingly portray the schizophrenically split psyche of the protagonist – a writer overwhelmed by a creative crisis.

### Are there any theatre directors you look up to?

Vladislavs Nastavševs: There are people who influence me. Take, for instance, the film directors Almodóvar and Tarkovsky. While they are seen as polar opposites, their work may be less conflicting than it appears. And then there is Alvis Hermanis, the embodiment of contemporary Latvian drama. It is through his work that I got to know Latvian theatre in the first place. His *Government Inspector* (2002) at the New Riga Theatre was the first performance I ever watched in Latvian.

### What principles guide you when you choose the script for performance?

Vladislavs Nastavševs: The script usually finds me. It either moves me or it doesn't. I first need to be able to relate to it myself. Then I ask myself if it is going to be interesting to express my ideas through this script? As far as the staging goes, it is crucial to find a point where the energy of the text intersects with that of the director and that of the actors.

### Do you consider actors as the executers of the director's will or as collaborators? And what, in your opinion, is the professional level of Latvian actors?

Vladislavs Nastavševs: Both. It is through actors that I test my ideas and come to realize what it is that we are doing on the stage. At home I hardly ever think about the performance. Rehearsal is a work in progress and we work together to develop the performance. I, of course, need participants for this kind of method. I need people who are willing to experience the world similarly to the way I do.

Actors in Latvia are very professional. If I should single out an issue, it would be the manner of psychological realism that actors have embraced in their work. They are very experienced in this field. This is not to say that this is good or bad, that's just the way it is. If anything, my performances are in a way limited by the very framework of this psychological realism.

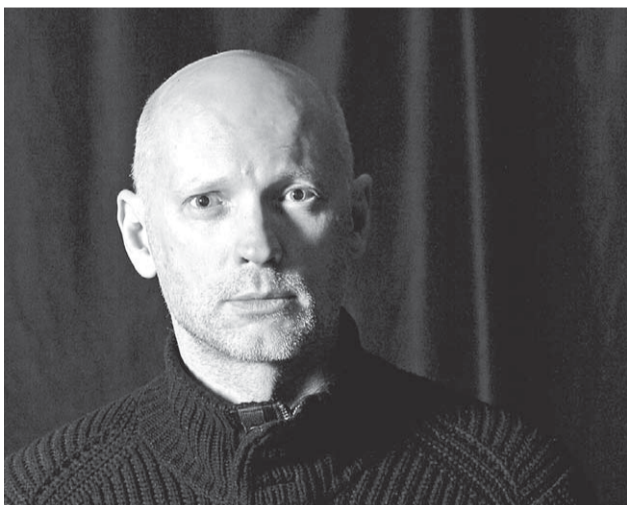
### What interests you about opera as a genre?

Alvis Hermanis: Non-specialists in Latvia sometimes reproach me for being repetitive. But specialists understand that each new performance broadens my application of theatrical means of expression and acting techniques. So, the opera is my reason to learn so much new. I am an autodidact in directing and opera pushes me to return to fundamental questions of directing, which the modern theatre, by the way, takes the liberty to ignore. For instance, laws of composition, which exist in nature independent of peculiarities of taste. But above all – beauty. Irrational and metaphysical. Historically the basic characteristic of art has always been beauty. Drama theatre in this sense has become numb and blind. The aesthetic category has simply been amputated. It was not like that in the olden days. In that sense theatre used to be more related to opera.

I remember another statement made by an actress that Alvis resembles an animal ("in a good way," – she would add), because he "works a lot with his instincts". I suddenly realise that a surprising number of his performances have animals on stage – pigeons, hens, a donkey, an iguana, dogs...

### What do animals mean to you in the context of performance? Why is their presence important to you?

Alvis Hermanis: Animals always fit well onto the stage. The stage is generally a sort of sensuous, somatic place. And good actors are always a bit like animals. A bit of a zoo smell fits well into a theatre.



## Alvis Hermanis

Zane Kreicberga, theatre director and lecturer

"He asks us to forget about our ego and to only play our character. Nothing like that really ever happens in Western theatre," – this is how the outstanding Dutch actress Elsie de Brauw describes her work with Alvis Hermanis in his performance *Wassa* (2012) at the Münchner Kammerspiele. The Schaubühne Berlin actress Ursina Lardi, who has worked with Alvis on the interpretation of the Maxim Gorky's play *Sommergäste* (2012), says: "He believes in theatre. With Alvis we are just acting, performing. We are making theatre." The unabashed joy and the deep respect, with which actors refer to working with Alvis Hermanis, leads me to think that the 'old-fashioned' psychological realism style of play, from which Alvis has removed a solid layer of dust, activates something very significant for theatres and perhaps something partly forgotten in our era of technologies and information. A human being and the story about what he feels (or no longer feels) always stands central to the theatre of Alvis Hermanis. In my mind Alvis himself is a contemporary thinker, who, instead of writing philosophical treatises, is staging

performances. And if for philosophers the main tool for embodying an idea is the word, then for Alvis Hermanis it is most certainly the actor.

### What kind of qualities and skills should actors possess for you to find it interesting working with them? Have you ever considered a pedagogical career?

Alvis Hermanis: The more professional the actor is, the more his co-authorship is present. Good actors are themselves interested to be active and to take responsibility. In the past years I have only worked with good actors both in Riga and abroad. I avoid bad actors. And I do not have any pedagogical talents. I do not have such patience. To be fair, I also tend to avoid young actors. I do not really know how to handle them.

Alvis Hermanis has been trained to be an actor and calls himself an autodidact of directing. It seems as if he possesses a special theatrical instinct, which works equally well in the most diverse expressions. Besides, Hermanis goes against the stream and at times mainstream actually turns in his own direction. Yet, once we have gotten used to and understood that "this is the Hermanis theatre", he all of a sudden changes course, as if once again reminding us that theatre is a living art and unpredictability is its essential attribute. At the moment Hermanis is reminding Europe about the inexhaustible wealth of Russian classics and rehabilitates the Stanislavsky method at different theatres of the German speaking countries. But just a while ago he together with the actors of the New Riga Theatre devoted himself to anthropological studies of his contemporaries, which manifested itself as a series of performances throughout several years, making the method of story telling a real tendency in the contemporary theatre. Alvis has just announced that he refuses all offers of theatres from abroad and would only stage operas outside Latvia. In plan for the next season there is Birtwistle's *Gawain* at the Salzburg Festival, *Così fan tutte* at the Komische Opera in Berlin and Janáček's *Jenufa* at the La Monnaie in Brussels.



## Valters Sīlis

Gunta Sloga, journalist

Strikingly large numbers of politicians and high-level officials have lately been spotted at the independent theatre *Dirty Deal Teatro* (DDT). Some of them may have set foot in the DDT before, but this has never happened to such a large extent. And there is but one explanation to this, which is last year's premiere of the performance *National Development Plan* (NDP), an ironic attempt to address the government-produced document of the same title aimed at facilitating national growth until 2020.

By making use of hyperboles and exaggerations, the performance's director Valters Sīlis along with its author and the only actor Jānis Balodis, quickly manage to prove the absurdity of the ultimate task this bureaucratic document serves – to make the society happier. Inspired by the *Occupy* and *The Yes Men* movements popular in the US and Europe, in their lecture-performance Balodis and Sīlis set out to find an answer to the question: Is it possible to create a 'humane' national development document and to understand what is going on with the Western society hit by the economic crisis and a crisis of values?

The intertwining of the personal and the global is equally typical to the performance-walk staged in 2012

*Mārupīte*, which was inspired by a local-level ecological catastrophe as chemical pollution flew into this small Riga river. While at first this seemed to be a nice stroll along the childhood trails of Valters Sīlis, the walk along the coast of the river eventually turns not just into a story about ecological tragedies of Mārupīte river and tragedies of a more global scale, but also poses urging questions about each individual's attitudes to the environment. The director uses the performances *NDP* and *Mārupīte* to fill a gap in the mass media, which as a result of the crises of the past years, no longer engage in in-depth research. Both performances have become a kind of a niche medium to those interested to see analysis and an intellectual discussion.

*NDP* and *Mārupīte* are the next steps in Sīlis' experiments in the field of documental and political theatre, where the projects *All My Presidents* (2011) and *Legionnaires* (2011) have already gained wider attention of the audience and critics. If in the former case the director found it important to address the role of a politician as well as the inability of the society itself to take responsibility, then in the latter he has looked at the still polarizing World War II history in Latvia.

Yet socio-political questions, history and environmental issues are not the only themes of importance to the director. Valters Sīlis, who ever since childhood has been living near the Mārupīte river and has studied at the English Gymnasium lying at its coast, has been actively directing for the past seven years. Sīlis studied directing at the Latvian Academy of Culture and the Aleksander Zelwerowicz Theatre Academy in Poland and initially he would stage his plays at independent theatres, while in the past four years also at the Latvian National Theatre. Two big stage performances have been created in this theatre, which are meant for audiences less used to experiments. Here we can mention Tracy Letts' *Osage County* (2012) and *Jasmīns. Pārdaugava* (2012) by the Latvian playwright Inga Ābele, as well as the most recent staging in the small stage – *Indrāni*, which marked the 150th anniversary of the Latvian writer Rūdolfs Blaumanis.

At the same time the director still loves to experiment, try out different spaces and stages, and to play with themes and forms. Especially in the case of *NDP* critics have reproached Sīlis for his bright and

provocative way of highlighting problems without providing any solutions. The director however does not seem to hide that he has no answers. It is the process that matters to him the most.

### Why was it important for you to talk about the pollution of Mārupīte river and the NDP?

Valters Sīlis: These issues are very close to me. I took the Mārupīte tragedy highly personally and I chose to talk about it in a documental way. Documentary film excites me a lot and of all kinds of cinematography this style emotionally speaks to me the most. The same goes for *NDP* – it fascinated me with the fact that the government had produced an entirely utopian document. A serious document approved by the Latvian parliament tells us that we will be happy and that we will have changed as a society.

The existing regime is very dangerous, it devours any kind of protest and attempts to put everything in a place of convenience to it – an enemy without a face. We wish to show that something is very wrong.

### What should the existing 'regime' be like?

Valters Sīlis: We have not yet chosen to become a political organisation [laughs]. Through our performances we wish to ask questions, to smile and be ironic, yet simultaneously to state some kind of truths.

### What is your aim? It is impossible to believe that the audience would be impacted by the performance to the extent they would take action.

Valters Sīlis: I think we are encouraging people to think. Our performances are a conversation, and we do end up convincing someone as a result of a conversation, don't we? We ask questions, we allow the audience to learn something new and to understand it better. People who sense that something is not right no longer feel lonely in these emotions after our performances.



## Andrejs Jarovojis

Māra Ķimele, theatre director and professor at the Latvian Academy of Culture

Andrejs has a funny surname – stemming from the Russian word "yarost" (fury, rage) he could pick up a nickname "Furious". His acquaintances will say this is not really about him. Quiet and collected for the most part, when reluctant to speak up he chuckles instead.

Actors and especially his course mates however know very well that Andrejs can "come down hard". In a peculiar way he manages actors to do utterly eerie things, including those, which are not characteristic to them at all.

Andrejs is from Naukšēni in the Latvian countryside – a village with anything but a theatre in sight. During my time at the Valmiera Drama Theatre, I remember we went there once, 20 years ago or something, to perform *Someone Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

### How and where from does a country boy beget an idea to become a director?

Andrejs Jarovojis: Theatre drew me as an uncharted territory. I am still attracted to things that are unfamiliar and I enjoy doing things that I am not good

at. I became interested in theatre through film and music. It was probably through Goddard's *Pierrot le Fou* and a performance by *Absolute Ensemble* in the summer of 1998, during which pieces by John Adams, Charles Mingus and others were performed. Both of these were crucial encounters with something unexpected and novel. These, without a doubt, changed my views of life and opened up a new world to me. Later on I discovered Joseph Beuys' performances and Joseph Kosuth's chairs. To be fair, a classical, traditional theatre is of no interest to me.

I am still puzzled as to how this 19 year old country boy convinced the admission committee that he should really be accepted to study for a director? As far as reciting poems goes, he was no good! That said, ten years down the road he staged poetess Inga Gaile's *Skin*, which, to my mind, is the best poetry performance in Latvia right now.

How so? 1) They managed to avoid turning poetry into fiction, which, in case of Latvia, happens every single time when poetry is staged; 2) the musicality of the text in no way tampered with its meaning; 3) narration naturally transformed into singing and returned back to narration again; 4) none of this overshadowed the relationship, or casual interaction between both of the actors; 5) everything fit together so well, inch by inch, without a pause or the loss of vitality; 6) and last but not least, they were beautiful, these young people.

Of course, this is not a festival performance. Without grasp of the text it cannot be understood, really. The whole point lies with the connection. However, the performance did not raise heads in Latvia, either among critics or the committee of the Annual Theatre Award, not even as a case of adaptation of Latvian literature.

### What is it like to be a director whose work is not recognized by a professional jury? Are they unto something? Should you be doing something else?

Andrejs Jarovojis: I don't feel overlooked. I think and work in a wider context. Becoming an artist is a

long process and not everyone has enough strength and courage to make one's individual signature decipherable to others. Not losing the track takes time, patience and endurance. There has to be a strong will at hand and certain settings at play for directors to find their own signature or a capacity to make these settings.

Not particularly athletic, Andrejs is unwaveringly attracted to staging dance performances and does it convincingly. I still like his *Di@logs* made for the festival *Homo Novus* in 2005. The dance-movement took place among the audience, who in turn looked at the exhibition of drawings made by the performers. And then there is his last dance performance *Good Enough*, overlooked yet again, with great dancers, who also happen to be super-virtuoso narrators. It summons the audience to reflect upon what each of us hides, what triggers a conversation, and the question: Is conversation even possible?

### And now, the most important question: What is the point of theatre?

Andrejs Jarovojis: The audience is the point of theatre. Theatre has no existence without an audience. Theatre is like an intersection between two realities – that of the artist and the audience – a lively, unmediated interaction. At this very moment, through their experience the spectators are invited to seek their own interpretation of that, which takes place on the stage. It is a moment of a concurrent 'togetherness', which to my mind brings people closer rather than sets them apart, as is the case in contemporary forms of networked communication.



## Gatis Šmits

Pauls Bankovskis, writer and publicist

In 2007 the film and theatre director Gatis Šmits together with six New Riga Theatre actors created and staged the performance *It Happened to Them*. This was a *film noir*-based minimalistic situation comedy. Both its title and the chosen method of staging – by finding its springboard in perhaps somewhat surprising motifs of the past in the context of theatre – well describe the general activities of Šmits.

And as for his professional career, with regards to both his film and theatre performances – I can say that these are based not so much on previously written play material, but on things that ‘happened to them’. And among ‘them’ there are of course all of us and Šmits himself.

The most recent performance *First Applause* staged by Šmits at the New Riga Theatre in 2013, is no exception to this. Only this time ‘them’ or ‘us’, who are at the centre of these events, were looked for in a very distant past. Together with historians, linguists, musicians and experts of other fields, Šmits created a performance based practically on a single sentence written in the 13th century.

In the notes of the Medieval chronicler Henry of Livonia we find a few lines about the “marvellous play

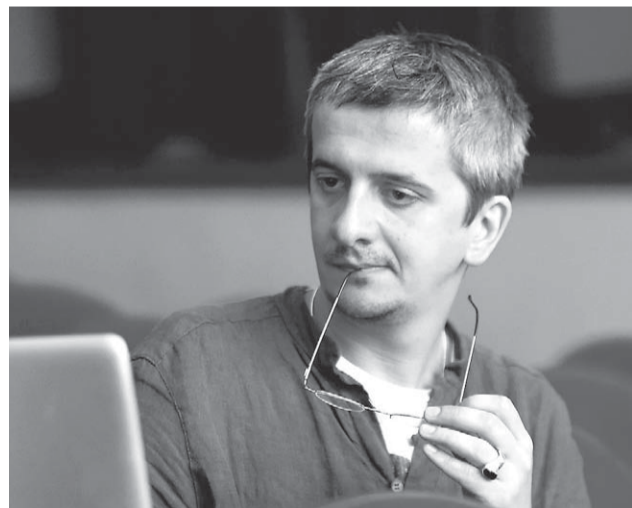
about prophets, so that pagans would learn about the origins of the Christian faith from that (..)”, which was shown in the recently established city of Riga in the winter of 1205.

An integral theme of the current activities of Šmits are memories lost in increasingly distant past or even those that are irrevocable, and which in a moment of necessity can be played out both as a peculiar absurd comedy (the film *The Return of Sergeant Lapiņš* about the efforts of a soldier who has returned from a foreign mission to get on with the regained reality) and as a painful absorption into the past – this was Šmits’ interpretation of the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers by staging the opera of the Latvian composer Ēriks Ešenvalds *Joseph is a Fruitful Bough*.

The opera was set in a compressed and horizontally fully extended scene of the set designer Rudolf Bekič, by creating what is known among film viewers as the widescreen effect. The presence of film can be felt in nearly each performance of Šmits and he seems to not so much be interested in maintaining ‘clarity’ in different media, as in the breaking down of boundaries. So was the case with the *It Happened to Them*, and the performance *Theatre Classes for Adults* (based on a play by Annie Baker *Circle Mirror Transformation*) at the New Riga Theatre and Jim Thompson’s *Wild Town* in Dailes Theatre.

After graduating from a theatre directing course at the Latvian Academy of Culture Šmits went to the USA to study film directing at the Tisch School of Arts at the New York University and received a Master’s degree in film directing in 2005. Yet, the presence of theatre in the biography of Šmits is logical, if not so to say inherited, as his grandfather was the well-known Latvian theatre and film actor Luijs Šmits (1907–1987).

With *First Applause* Šmits comes even closer to theatre than in any of his works. By going back nearly 700 years in the past in his imagination, he has come to a point, at which it becomes possible to ask questions about the borders of theatre and reality or life, about game, its meaning and its intertwining with reality. Actors speak a language, which really is not German or Latin anymore, and is not a contemporary Latvian or any other Baltic language either, and the text is rather a sound-based means of transferring emotion.



## Konstantin Bogomolov

Livija Dūmiņa, theatre critic

Konstantin Bogomolov is one of the most recognizable and interesting Russian theatre directors at work right now. Being only 40-something, he has been directing for 10 years and staged more than 20 performances. As of late his workplaces include Oleg Tobakov’s Theatre–Studio, the Chekhov Moscow Art Theatre and other. He is regarded as a bit of a brawler, a provocateur and a cynic. Konstantin Bogomolov does not seem to hide his lack of understanding for people who attend theatre for pleasure. He purposefully annoys the audience and insists that in this regard he will not compromise himself. For what could be worse than an audience united by the joys of performance? A theatre, he posits, should explode and divide. And he achieves this goal, for every new performance splits the audience in two – those who denounce and those who congratulate him.

As for the *Stavanger (Pulp People)* at the Liepāja Theatre – the first performance outside of Russia and the first one to be based on a contemporary play – Bogomolov is blunt: it is an outright mockery of people who will try to take this story seriously. Inspired by

Marina Kravipina’s play, the director sarcastically objects the consumer culture of the 21st century wherein the world of human emotion is dead. The individuals have become more or less adept functional objects operating at a purely physiological level, eliminating any trace of emotion. In theatre the mind matters over the heart, emphasizes Konstantin Bogomolov. He opposes overt focus upon psychology and takes issue with Russian actors who fancy a sensuous spree and manipulate emotions. The Liepāja Theatre actors after the *Stavanger*, delighting in the director’s style of work, confessed that in his next staging they would even be willing to perform a handle bar.

As much as he demurs at exalted emotions, Konstantin Bogomolov also disapproves of bigotry on the stage and considers that Russian culture suffers from its excess. Setting a diagnosis for contemporary society, be it in Russia or Latvia, his take on social issues is candid and straightforward. The plot of many of his performances (*Wonderland 80*, *The Elder Son*, *The Seagull*, *Lear*, *Year I Was Not Born*) is based in the Soviet times because for him it remains a reality in Russia to this very day. *Lear*, after William Shakespeare’s tragedy, equated Nazi regime to that of Soviet. In Alexander Ostrovsky’s *Wolves and Sheep* Russian nobility is viewed in the light of Nazism and Totalitarianism, and in Alexander Vampilov’s *The Elder Son* nostalgia turns into irony. Bogomolov stands in opposition as he contends – Russia continues to be an authoritarian state.

Born into a film critic family, graduated from the faculty of Philology and Department of Directing at the Russian Theatre Academy (GITIS), he dazzles with erudition, intellect and fantasy. By making textual connections between the likes of William Shakespeare and Friedrich Nietzsche, Carlo Gozzi and Fyodor Dostoevsky, Sergey Dovlatov and Lewis Carol, he emerges as an author who unmistakably creates rather than interprets. His performances, for the most part, are theatrical in the best sense of the word. He likes them to be a show. Bogomolov considers the theatre to be a game. Since the theatre and taboo are not compatible, he plays ignoring the rules.

Each of the actors takes up several roles, which in a kind of mystery of “revived archaeology” smoothly pass from one to another. And at the climax of the show characters fully embraced by the actors embody characters of a biblical shadow theatre staged in 1205. A while before, as the audience logically live the part of the first spectators and applaud for the very first time, it becomes clear that Šmits has come to an extremely important point. Similar to the 19th century geographers, who set out to look for the source of the Nile River, he has come to the theatrical origins, behind which there might not be anything else. Now we have to wait for the miraculous stories his return journey might bring.

### What is the main difference between theatre and film?

Gatis Šmits: Theatre is addressed to an audience – to many spectators at once, whereas film is created for a single set of eyes. In theatre everyone sees a slightly different performance (even if this is just a matter of the front row and last row), while in film everyone is seeing the same thing.

### What do you expect from the works of other directors?

Gatis Šmits: I expect that the performance will keep my attention and let me ‘forget myself’. I expect the director to surprise me with interesting, risky choices. I expect the performance to have an emotional effect.

### Is there a performance created by another director, the author of which you would want to be?

Gatis Šmits: From what I have seen lately I liked *Dark Alleys* by Vladislavs Nastavševs and *Onegina*. *Commentaries* by Alvis Hermanis. I would not want to have created them, but I highly appreciate the directors’ skills and taste.

### What was the creative goal behind staging *Stavanger (Pulp People)* at the Liepāja Theatre?

Konstantin Bogomolov: There were several. First of all, this is my first performance in a foreign language. Second, this is my first experience working in a different cultural environment and society. Third, I had a chance to work in a city with a beautiful drama theatre, yet with an audience completely unprepared for an experiment. It is the most demanding task to be able to relate to the troupe, the potential audience and the cultural environment, all at once. The first set of tasks was to touch people’s nerves, hearts and minds, not to leave them indifferent, to strike up a dialogue. In a way this is the objective of any given performance, yet in this case it was particularly difficult.

### Speaking of *Stavanger (Pulp People)* and artist’s freedom – what was it like to work in Liepāja compared to what you do in Moscow?

Konstantin Bogomolov: No matter how restrained the society, freedom is ultimately determined by the level of your own inner freedom. You can only be free to the extent you liberate yourself from the inner censorship. It is all too easy for artists to complain about the pressure from above or from the society. By acknowledging this, I try to work in line with my personal sense of how I can justify my artistic endeavours. As such, I ceased to worry about censorship. And the censorship stopped worrying about me.

## Less authorship, more authors: the new generation in Latvian drama and dance

Jānis Balodis, dramaturg

Laura Stašāne, New Theatre Institute of Latvia

Last season an unprecedented number of new generation artist works emerged on the independent stages of Riga. In any case this can be said of the contemporary dance scene, where to this point there has been less activity and only a couple of authors were visible. The entry of the new Latvian dance generation into the scene is linked to the 2011 graduation from the Contemporary Dance department at the Latvian Academy of Culture, to certain favourable conditions and to the different attitude and moods of the new generation itself.

Despite or, quite the contrary, thanks to the virtual lack of dance stages in Riga, the young dance artists are forced to try their hand everywhere else and, in the first instance, to 'break into' the theatre venues, in which they have succeeded quite well, contributing to continuous presence of dancers both at *Dirty Deal Teatro* and the theatre *Ģertrūdes ielas teātris*. This, in turn, has led quite naturally to a mixed audience of theatre and dance lovers, as well as new cooperation models among artists, where roles are often changed and the notion of authorship becomes collective. This tendency in fact can be attributed to all genres, not just to dance alone.

Last season the performance *Legionnaires* was awarded the annual Latvian theatre prize for the best staging of a work by Latvian author. Its director Valters Silis, as he received the award, pointed at the young team of this performance – to the both actors, the stage designer and himself, saying: "The new Latvian authors" and thanked director Alvis Hermanis for showing how all of us could be authors.

With or without the help of Hermanis, the new generation of artists has grown to see collective work as quite commonsensical. It is unlikely that creating things in a group and abandoning personal authorship testifies of lack of individual ambition. This seems rather to be the *zeitgeist* and the desire of young artists to learn and to try out as different experiences as possible during their careers.

In such a small professional environment as Latvia, it seems like everyone eventually manages to collaborate with everyone, yet wherever collaboration has been sustained, you did not have to wait long to see results.

### Desire to be themselves

A vivid example is the creative partnership between the director Valters Silis and the playwright Jānis Balodis. Initially both were faithful to the traditional role division and in tandem created the political performance fresh to the Latvian environment *All My Presidents* (2011), which was staged by Valters and the scripts of which was created by Jānis. But in the next performance-walk *Mārupīte* (2012) the walls were broken down and both figured as co-authors of the performance and its texts, as well as the performers (just like the other participants of the creative team), until the solo performance *National Development Plan* (2012), when Jānis would get onto the stage and play the only part himself. Their next idea, inspired by the study of The New Economics Foundation titled *The Great Transition* also is a group project. Its material will be created in the course of a group experiment, where the creative team will test upon themselves the possibility to live in today's Latvian countryside without any money or economical means.

The desire to speak own texts and to maintain the self in the context of performance, as it can be seen in the works *Mārupīte* and *National Development Plan*, as well as in performances by several young directors, is a relatively new trend in the theatrical environment in Latvia. Here the educational system of performing arts remains very traditional and it is the professional skills and the technical virtuosity of performers that is valued above all.

This new trend is especially visible in the work of young choreographers, who in their performances have begun to reflect upon their own professional issues. Young creators like Kristīne Vismāne, Elīna Lutce, Eva Vancāne, Evita Birule have started open conversations on what it is they actually do in creative process and on stage (performances *What Is Zeir?*, *The Hours*, *Reservists*). Their pieces are self-ironic, yet in their honesty also disarming. They tend to build closer relationships with the audience, which also lies in the scope of these young authors' interests.



*What Is Zeir?*, by and with Kristīne Vismāne and Rūdolfs Balčiņš



*The Hours*, by and with Evita Birule, Kristīne Vismāne, Eva Vancāne

For instance, in the Showcase programme's performance *Good Enough* (director Andrejs Jarovojš and choreographer Kristīne Vismāne) one of the questions is how to create a contemporary dance, which would be "good enough" in the context of European and global contemporary dance. At the same time it plays with clichés and standards present in performances and which gets public response, and this way the performance somehow becomes "good enough", as it is responded to by the audience. Yet maybe one should act differently?

### Young, therefore independent

Collectively created performances possibly serve as a solution to the age-old problem of Latvian theatre about the lack of new plays. But the young writers of plays seem to have perked up. For the second season the Latvian Playwrights Guild together with *Dirty Deal Teatro* organizes the very popular reading sessions of new Latvian plays *10 Minutes of Fame*. Each month all writers of plays can send to the jury the first pages of their upcoming work. They would then have a chance to participate in the readings, where the monthly winner is chosen based on the audience voting. In the season finals authors with readily finished plays participate and the audience picks a winner. The first season of *10 Minutes*



*Reservists*, choreographer Elīna Lutce



*Mārupīte*, director Valters Silis

*of Fame* resulted in six new plays and an array of new authors (Agnese Rutkēviča, Edgars Niklasons, Rūdolfs Miķelsons), entering the field.

The fact that projects of this kind take place in a small, independent theatre is rather symptomatic. In the environment of Latvia these are naturally the independent theatres *Dirty Deal Teatro* and *Ģertrūdes ielas teātris*, as well as the New Theatre Institute of Latvia and the International Festival of Contemporary Theatre *Homo Novus* with particular projects, which have started to take care of the new generation performing arts professionals and offer them a platform for creative work and experiments, allowing them to make mistakes and to start again. This applies to young dancers and playwrights, as well as to directors. State repertoire theatres, which do not wish to take such risks, largely spot the young authors already after they have showed themselves, while the cultural policy devoted to Latvian drama or contemporary dance remains in the making. Yet, the general mood suggests that the snowball has started to roll. Just like in the Latvian theatre scene there are talks of "the new wave of directing", the merits of independent theatres and the *Homo Novus* festival in its creation, so, too, the new generation of dance artists approach readiness to mark their own presence and to do so internationally as well.



## First Applause

Gatis Šmits / New Riga Theatre

**Thursday 25 April 19:00**

New Riga Theatre Main stage (Lāčplēša street 25)

1h 45min

No translation needed

**Director, Author** Gatis Šmits

**Set designer** Rudolf Bekič

**Costume designer** Keita

**Performers and Co-authors** Baiba Broka, Guna Zariņa, Kaspars Znotiņš, Vilis Daudziņš, Andris Keišs, Ģirts Krūmiņš

In the 13th century, the territory of present-day Latvia was known as Livonia; it was populated by various Baltic tribes and ruled by German crusaders. A man from the Latvian tribe ends up in German lands, learns to read, and returns to his native country as a representative of European culture. He becomes an interpreter between the local Latvian inhabitants and the Germans, who, guided by joint interest, invite the Latvians to Riga for a performance that praises the Christian God.

Director Gatis Šmits (1973) and six actors from the New Riga Theatre have been consulting historians, linguists and other experts in order to learn about the 13th century Livonia, and to be able to create a performance – not a historic account, but a fictional narrative about the origins of Latvians, and an attempt to see life as it was back then.



## The Old Woman

Vladislavs Nastavševs / National Theatre

**Thursday 25 April 22:00**

National theatre (Kronvalda boulevard 2)

1h 30min

In Latvian with English translation

**Author** Daniil Kharms

**Director, Set, Costume and Sound designer** Vladislavs Nastavševs

**Set designer assistant** Artūrs Arnis

**Light designer** Lienīte Slišāne

**Performers** Artūrs Krūzkops, Kaspars Dumburs, Anta Aizupe, Kārlis Krūmiņš, Dmitrijs Petrenko, Artuss Kaimiņš

Based on Russian surrealist and absurdist writer Daniil Kharms' *The Old Woman* (1939) and other short stories, the performance by Vladislavs Nastavševs (1978) is itself a true masterpiece of absurdity, combining laughter and horror. The intricate set design literally leads spectators into the dark labyrinths of the subconscious. The story of the old woman is interpreted in a grimly mystical Kafkaesque style, interrupted by absurd and light-hearted sketches played in front of a curtain of white bed sheets, introducing a naive DIY style theatre but also denoting a hospital and echoing Daniil Kharms awful death in a psychiatric ward of a Leningrad clinic in 1942. "Maybe this performance is a kind of madhouse theatre because for its main protagonist the separation between consciousness and unconsciousness has been clearly lost," writes the prominent Latvian critic Silvija Radzobe.



## National Development Plan

Jānis Balodis & Valters Sīlis / *Dirty Deal Teatro*

**Friday 26 April 12:00**

*Dirty Deal Teatro* (Maskavas street 12/2)

1h

Performed in English

**Author, Dramaturg and Performer** Jānis Balodis

**Director** Valters Sīlis

**Set Designer** Uģis Bērziņš

*National Development Plan* (NDP) is a lecture-performance about an actual 68 page document\* the implementation of which should in seven years, in theory, make the population of Latvia twice as rich, educated and happy as now. Because the anticipated economic breakthrough can only be achieved with the engagement of the entire population, this performance attempts to achieve two things: 1) to encourage the spectators to create their own personal development plan on the basis of the NDP, and 2) to record the current state of happiness, so that in seven years we can compare whether we are twice as happy. Will Latvia have managed to become the kind of country it wants to be, like Sweden? It's not an impossible mission – the NDP document opens with a famous quote from the great Latvian poet Rainis: "We are as big as our will" – and indeed, we are. Just how big do we want to be in 2020?

Jānis Balodis (1987) is a dramaturg and this is his first solo stage appearance.

\*The National Development Plan 2014–2020 is hierarchically the highest national-level medium-term planning document in Latvia, and has been ratified by the government.



## Miss Julie

Vladislavs Nastavševs / Valmiera Drama Theatre

**Friday 26 April 14:00**

*Zirgu Pasts* (Dzirnavu street 46)

2h 15min

In Latvian with English translation

**Author** August Strindberg

**Director, Set, Costume, Light and Sound designer**

Vladislavs Nastavševs

**Performers** Inese Pudža, Anta Aizupe, Mārtiņš Meiers

It is the third time young director Vladislavs Nastavševs directs the famous play by August Strindberg, attempting to unravel the enigma of Miss Julie. He explains: "At the end of the day most of the productions of *Miss Julie* focus on Jean. I wanted to make a performance about Julie. Usually she is presented as a gentle, fragile, noble and fallen creature. Looking at Julie this way, her enigma will never be solved. To me, Julie is only partly a woman. Her father raised her as a boy and so she was never able to choose her true identity. This is the cause of her predicament; it determines her relationships with people. Julie is not looking for a strong and self-confident men, she is looking for a subordinate. I have created a performance about a person who is searching for a way out instead of suffering because there is no way out."

Vladislavs has previously staged *Miss Julie* in the UK and Australia. He has chosen to work with the same play again as "the material is too bold, containing too many meanings and connotations to be unravelled within the same production". This aesthetically simple, yet emotionally and physically powerful performance features a brilliant trio of young actors, with Inese Pudža as Miss Julie – a role for which she received the award of Best Young Actress last season.



## Good Enough

Andrejs Jarovojš & Kristīne Vismane / Theatre *Ģertrūdes ielas teātris*

**Friday 26 April 17:00**

Theatre *Ģertrūdes ielas teātris* (Ģertrūdes street 101a)

50min

Performed in English

**Director, Author** Andrejs Jarovojš

**Choreographer** Kristīne Vismane

**Performers** Kristīne Vismane, Katrīna Albuže

Doubting the possibility of an audience unequivocally receiving the message meant for them, the authors of *Good Enough* have set out to illustrate paradoxes in the relationship between the performance, the performers and the audience. On stage two young dancers engage in a concentrated and playful dialogue with each other and the audience, showing the challenge of truly opening up to someone else, and maintaining an honest conversation. This is a first time collaboration between director Andrejs Jarovojš (1981) and up-and-coming choreographer Kristīne Vismane (1987).





### Secrets of Kabbalah

Alvis Hermanis / New Riga Theatre

**Friday 26 April 19:00**  
New Riga Theatre Main stage (Lāčplēša street 25)  
2h 50min, one intermission  
In Latvian with English translation

**Author** Isaac Bashevis Singer  
**Director** Alvis Hermanis  
**Set and costume designer:** Monika Pormale  
**Video artist** Katrīna Neiburga  
**Performers** Elita Kļaviņa, Regina Razuma, Gundars Āboliņš, Andris Keišs, Jevgeņijs Isajevs

The performance is based on five short stories by Nobel prize winner Isaac Bashevis Singer focusing especially on the leitmotif in his writing – that there is no death and the human is immortal.

“This Jewish writer, who wrote in Yiddish, is one of my favourite authors. I have already staged two performances in Germany (Schauspiel Köln un Münchner Kammerspiele) based on his stories. And I am quite certain that this performance in Riga will not be my last staging of this writer.

The son of a Rabbi, raised in pre-war Poland, he moved to the USA in the mid 1930s. For most of his works he drew inspiration from the Hasidic communities where he had spent the first half of his life.

Hasidic Jews are orthodox communities who inhabited pre-war Eastern Europe and were almost entirely killed during WWII. The survivors re-established Hasidic communities in different parts of the world (the biggest ones can be found in New York, Antwerp, Montreal, Zurich). The lifestyle of Hasidic Jews is thoroughly interwoven with faith, but their everyday life follows numerous guidelines and rules aimed at increasing happiness. Followers lead a very isolated and enclosed lifestyle. We encounter them only occasionally, mostly in airports where they attract attention with their particular appearance.

In this performance we also encounter Amy Winehouse (a singer of Jewish origin whose resemblance to the mythological Hebrew figurines like Lilith is just too striking) and Klezmer music. As for Kabbalah, no further explanations will be given, as suggested by the title.”  
(Alvis Hermanis)

“I believe that Hermanis as an artist likes to hide the traces of his conceptions and disguise himself, while talking during interviews about everything else but his true intentions for the creation of the performances. Similarly the Hasids, in my opinion, is just a disguise,” writes critic Silvija Radzobe.



### Mārupīte

Valters Silis / Dirty Deal Teatro

**Saturday 27 April 11:00**  
Site-specific performance, meeting point at *Dirty Deal Teatro* (Maskavas street 12/2)  
3h (including travel time to the site)  
Performed in English

For a limited number of spectators.  
**NB!** Please wear boots and clothing suitable for a walk in the forest.

**Director, Author** Valters Silis  
**Dramaturg** Jānis Balodis  
**Set designer** Uģis Bērziņš  
**Music** Edgars Raginskis  
**Performers** Inga Tropa, Edgars Raginskis, Valters Silis, Jānis Balodis

“The pollution in Mārupīte river in July 2011 was considered to be the second most serious ecological catastrophe since Latvia gained independence in the 1990s. Yet, just a year later this awful event seemed to be a thing of the past. The water was as clean as before and the fish, let into the river by the Mayor of Riga, were swimming around peacefully. Maybe the catastrophe had a happy ending and locals just got lucky in gaining access to the central water supply with a discount. But maybe the catastrophe is simply very well hidden. We invite you on a tour to look for traces of the catastrophe and to find those responsible for this crime against nature. However, it’s fully possible that we will find something else entirely.”  
(Valters Silis)



### Stavanger (Pulp People)

Konstantin Bogomolov / Liepāja Theatre

**Saturday 27 April 15:00**  
*Zirgu pasts* (Dzirnavu street 46)  
1h 50min  
In Latvian with translation into English

**Director** Konstantin Bogomolov (Moscow)  
**Set and Costume designer** Larisa Lomakina (Moscow)  
**Video artist** Roberts Vītols  
**Performers** Laura Jeruma, Kaspars Kārklīņš, Anda Albuže, Gatis Maliķis, Sandis Pēcis, Rolands Bēķeris, Agnese Jēkabsons, Everita Pjata, Viktors Ellers, Signe Ruicēna

Kristine starts a relationship with Odd online. The young woman is bored of her husband and sick of looking after her paralyzed father-in-law. She goes to see Odd in Stavanger, but it turns out that Odd too has his share of skeletons in the closet.

Under the direction of one of the most sought after Russian directors, Konstantin Bogomolov from Moscow, the story by contemporary Russian playwright Marina Kravtchenko has undergone significant change, with the final script created during the rehearsals in the Liepāja Theatre. The absurdity of the story and alienation creates a purely theatrical reality on stage, which the young cast embraces with remarkable ease.

Konstantin Bogomolov (1975) seeks to challenge the traditional approach to literary text and undermines the very understanding of the nature of theatre. He has staged performances in all the leading theatres in Moscow and received numerous awards. *Stavanger (Pulp People)* is his first production in Latvia.

### Dark Alleys

Vladislavs Nastavševs / New Riga Theatre

**Saturday 27 April 19:00**  
New Riga Theatre stage on Talsu street (Talsu street 1)  
3h, one intermission  
In Latvian with English translation

**Author** Ivan Bunin  
**Director, Set designer, Music director** Vladislavs Nastavševs  
**Costume designer** Ieva Veita  
**Performers** Baiba Broka, Guna Zariņa, Vilis Daudziņš, Kaspars Znotiņš

“Every story in this book is solely about love, about its ‘dark’, and most often very murky and cruel alleys.”  
(Ivan Bunin)

On an empty stage four brilliant actors of the New Riga Theatre bring to life nine different stories about love and passion; passion seen as a deadly infection. How can we catch those fleeting moments, which we ultimately call life? Ivan Bunin, a Russian writer, poet and Nobel prize winner, wrote *Dark Alleys*, considered to be his masterpiece, between 1937 and 1944.

Director Vladislavs Nastavševs notes that he has grown up with performances by the New Riga Theatre. Through his first work with its actors, he questions his own perception of theatre and its means of censorship and self-censorship. “The performance is about the dark and ruthless side of love. Yet how do you perform love on stage; what is love? How do you perform sex? What is good taste and what is bad taste? We juggle these notions here. This is my dialogue with the actors, Bunin and myself,” says the director.

# Latvian Theatre Showcase 2013 Riga, April 25–27

Time	Place	Address	Directed by	Performance
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## Thursday, April 25

19.00–20.45	New Riga Theatre Main stage	Lāčplēša street 25	Gatis Šmits	<i>First Applause</i>
22.00–23.30	National Theatre New stage	Kronvalda boulevard 2	Vladislavs Nastavševs	<i>The Old Woman</i>

## Friday, April 26

10.30–11.45	Brunch at the New Theatre Institute of Latvia	Maskavas street 12/1	Learn what's new in the Latvian performing arts scene and meet artists	
12.00–13.00	<i>Dirty Deal Teatro</i>	Maskavas street 12/2	Valters Silis & Jānis Balodis	<i>National Development Plan</i>
14.00–16.15	<i>Zirgu pasts</i>	Dzirnavu street 46	Vladislavs Nastavševs / Valmiera Drama Theatre	<i>Miss Julie</i>
17.00–18.00	Theatre <i>Ģertrūdes ielas teātris</i>	Ģertrūdes street 101a	Andrejs Jarovojš & Kristīne Vismane	<i>Good Enough</i>
19.00–22.00	New Riga Theatre Main stage	Lāčplēša street 25	Alvis Hermanis	<i>Secrets of Kabbalah</i>

## Saturday, April 27

11.00–13.00	<i>Dirty Deal Teatro</i>	Maskavas street 12/2	Valters Silis	<i>Mārupīte</i>
15.00–17.00	<i>Zirgu pasts</i>	Dzirnavu street 46	Konstantin Bogomolov / Liepāja Theatre	<i>Stavanger (Pulp People)</i>
19.00–22.00	New Riga Theatre stage on Talsu street	Talsu street 1	Vladislavs Nastavševs	<i>Dark Alleys</i>

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**Latvian Theatre Showcase 2013 is organized by the New Theatre Institute of Latvia in collaboration with the theatres and with the support from the Culture Capital Foundation and Goethe-Institute Riga.**

The New Theatre Institute of Latvia (NTIL) was established in 1998 to organize the first international theatre festival in Latvia, and the International Festival of Contemporary Theatre *Homo Novus* is still at the heart of our activities. It takes place every second year (next edition in 2013) for a week in early September. *Homo Novus* presents established and emerging artists from Europe and beyond, produces new work by the younger generation of Latvian artists and international teams, and serves as a lively platform for meeting, exchange, and testing of new ideas and practices. Since 1995, nine festivals have been organised and more than 100 performances presented and produced.

Between 2000 and 2012 NTIL organised nine editions of a smaller scale, theme based Experimental Theatre Festival *Homo Alibi*. We also present international work during the season and recently have done it in collaborations with venues in different European cities.

We run the annual Latvian Theatre Showcase and every April invite professional international audiences to Riga for a selection of last season's performances from Latvian theatre houses, independent venues and dance companies with a special focus on the emerging scene. The Showcase gives an overall introduction to the current developments in Latvian performing arts and offers a meeting place for presenters, critics and artists.

As a part of our regular activities we also produce local and international projects, provide training programmes, serve as a platform for information sharing and international collaboration with a focus on emerging ideas, innovative work and responsible actions. Our work has been propelled to a large extent by active partnership in international networks, and currently we are partners in one Nordic-Baltic and five European networks.

Locally we work in close co-operation with professional performing arts community, and take an active position as an intermediary organization, advocating the interests and issues of independent performing arts sector in Latvia. On a day-to-day basis we operate as a small management team of four people. NTIL office contains a library collection of performing arts books and DVDs for public use.

Team: Gundega Laiviņa (director), Laura Stašāne (project manager), Sandra Lapkovska (project co-ordinator), Zane Kreicberga (project co-ordinator of Imagine 2020 and BaNd: expanded)

**Upcoming events:**  
10th International Festival of Contemporary Theatre *Homo Novus*  
Riga, September 2–8, 2013  
www.homonovus.lv

Art and Economics Festival  
*Imagine New Economics*  
Riga, November 8–10, 2013  
www.theatre.lv

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