

Theater

For Poland's Teatr Zar, hearing is believing

Alternative troupe uses polyphony to tell the story

By Joel Brown
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

"There's a lot of great traditional theater in Boston, and we like to offer something that is alternative," says Jennifer Johnson, co-director of the Charlestown Working Theater.

You likely won't see anything more alternative this year than Poland's Teatr Zar, which performs "Caesarean Section" in its East Coast premiere Sunday through Wednesday at the Charlestown Working Theater. The troupe combines early Christian polyphony, onstage musicians, and concepts of theater and movement developed by the late Polish innovator Jerzy Grotowski. Oh, and there's a 20-foot line of broken glass in the middle of the stage. (Thanks, Diablo Glass School of Roxbury.)

CAESAREAN SECTION

Created by Teatr Zar

Presented by Charlestown Working Theater in partnership with Double Edge Theatre. At: Charlestown Working Theater, 442 Bunker Hill St., Charlestown, May 29-June 1. Tickets: \$25. 866-811-4111. www.charlestownworkingtheater.org

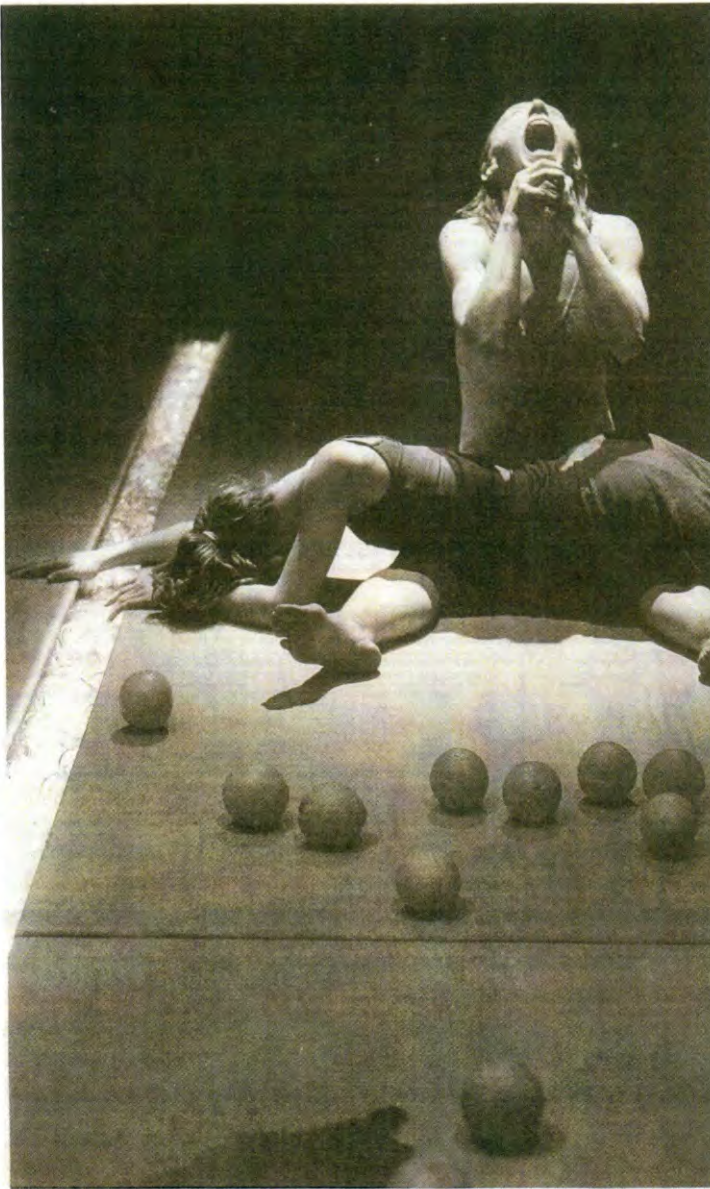
Boiled down to its essence, the idea here is that at its deepest level, theater is about hearing as much as seeing, and that the body of an actor singing communicates on a more profound level.

When pushed, those who know "Caesarean Section" say that it has to do with oppression, freedom and our right to choose how our lives will end.

"To me it's about repression of women," says artistic director Stacy Klein of Ashfield's Double Edge Theatre, which is co-presenting the performances. "It has the metaphor of Kristallnacht. The whole set is related to that night, glass breaking, glass shattering. It's very strong in the whole piece. It takes that into the interior, where two women are trying to become free and realize themselves and they're being repressed.

"It's very touching. You really feel emotionally engaged with these women, and that's also unusual for this kind of theater. It's very human," Klein says.

But Klein and Johnson say



Dittie Berkeley and Kamila Klamut in "Caesarean Section," created by Teatr Zar.

theater-goers should experience the show for themselves, because what Teatr Zar does is not easily explained.

"Out of that series of images and sounds, every spectator could create his or her own story," Teatr Zar founder Jaroslaw Fret says on the phone from

San Francisco. "Sometimes people ask me about 'Caesarean Section': 'What's it about, the story, the narration?' I say, 'Come on, if you are listening to music, you are not asking what it's about.'"

"Finally, if I have to answer to a spectator, 'Caesarean Section' is about what you as spectators, as

our guests, what you feel watching the 'Caesarean Section' performance. . . . It's just staging pure emotions, our emotions, linked with your emotions," says Fret, who is also director of the Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw, Poland.

"Zar" is the name of funeral

CRITICS' PICKS

THEATER

Now playing

RICHARD III and THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

Talk about your mood swings. Under the expert direction of Edward Hall, "Richard III" presents a shiver-inducing portrait of a silky psychopath (the excellent Richard Clothier) who kills his way to the top. By contrast, "Comedy" (also directed by Hall) delivers the simple pleasures of knockabout farce. "Richard III" is a must-see, "Comedy" is a should-see. Through June 19. Production by Propeller Theatre Company, presented by Boston University School of Theatre in association with Huntington Theatre Company. At Boston University Theatre. 617-266-0800, www.huntingtontheatre.org

THE DROWSY CHAPERONE

Karen MacDonald, Thomas Derrah, Will McGarrahan, McCaella Donovan, Kerry A. Dowling, and the rest of the cast shine in this joyously goofy — or is it goofily joyous? — musical within a comedy. Extended to June 19. SpeakEasy Stage Company. Roberts Studio Theatre, Boston Center for the Arts. 617-933-8600, www.speakeasystage.com

ANIMAL CRACKERS

There are periods of sluggishness when this 1928 musical comedy shows its age, but verbal sparks fly when Ed Hoopman holds center stage as Captain Jeffrey T. Spaulding, a.k.a. Groucho Marx. Through June 4. Lyric Stage Company. 617-585-5678, www.lyricstage.com

DON AUCCIN

Last chance

PETER PAN'SY

In this bawdy, adults-only musical version of J.M. Barrie's classic tale, Ryan Landry steps back and lets other performers shine, including regular members of his Gold Dust Orphans troupe and some new faces, such as Michael Wood in the title role. Through today. At Machine. 617-265-6222, www.brownpapertickets.com

TERRY BYRNE

songs performed by the Svaneti tribe of the Caucasus, lamentations said to touch on something essential about life and death. Members of Teatr Zar visited the region and other early- and pre-Christian cultures over several years, researching polyphony that became the basis of their theater.

The music in "Caesarean Section" was developed from pieces gathered over two or three years, mostly from Corsica and Georgia, with bits from Bulgaria, Chechnya, and Iceland. The movements and staging were developed in parallel, then brought together in a short, intense period of a couple of months, Fret said.

Klein and other Double Edge members were at a festival in Poland in 2008 when their hosts announced they would be taken to see Teatr Zar perform the piece. Klein was less than enthused about going but didn't want to offend her hosts. The combination of early music and second-hand Grotowski technique sounded unappealing, she

says.

"We went in thinking we weren't going to like it, and we came out totally blown away," Klein says. "I've never seen that kind of old music used in such a contemporary fashion, something that meant something to me today, not that took me back to my roots or ritual or whatever. That's not what this piece did. This is here and now."

"Caesarean Section" is the middle piece of the "Gospels of Childhood" triptych, which the group performed in its entirety in San Francisco this week. Charlestown is their only other stop on this, their third visit to America. Johnson says people have been calling for tickets from New York and Washington, D.C. Teatr Zar is beginning to get bookings all over the world, says Klein.

"It will be hard to repeat this," Klein says. "I hope everybody storms the doors and sees what I see."

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