

SQUAT
NEW YORK
THEATRE

L-TRAIN TO ELDORADO

Mickey



A SHORT HISTORY OF SQUAT THEATRE

1969: Three people from the University Theatre of Budapest created an independent theatre group called *Studio Kassak*.

1972: They were censored by the Hungarian authorities for political and aesthetic radicalism. Banned from performing in public, they set up their theatre in apartments. In the next four years, 36 different plays, sketches and improvisations were to be seen in apartments, staircases, streets, beaches, etc.

1976: Six people with four children, the majority of the group, decided to leave the country for the West.

1977: While living in Paris and waiting for their immigration to the U.S., the group, called *Squat Theatre*, created their first play for the Western audience: *Pig, Child, Fire!* The play was set in a storefront in Rotterdam, a setting that became a *Squat* trademark for the next nine years. After touring Europe with it, *Squat* settled in New York, renting a building on the West 23rd Street, where they both lived, worked, and performed. They received an Obie Award that same year.

1978: *Summer: Andy Warhol's Last Love* opened on 23rd Street. It went on tour to Hamburg, Rome, Milan, Florence, Belgrade, Rotterdam and Brussels. It won a Grand Prix in Belgrade, and the Italian Critics' Award for the Best Foreign Performance of the Year. Later this year the group worked in Mickery on a new shop-window piece: *Cool King Kong*.

1979: *Squat* opened a nightclub. Jazz, blues, rock and new wave in live concerts through 1981.

1980: A revival of a 1975 adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* was performed in Pittsburgh as well as New York.

1981: *Mr. Dead & Mrs. Free* premiered in Cologne. It had a long year-and-a-half run on 23rd Street. It was awarded an Obie for the Best American Play. It also received a Villager Award. An open-air version of the show, *The Battle of Sirolo*, was performed on a beach near Ancona during the Polverigi Festival (Italy).

1982: *The Golden Age of Squat Theatre*, a retrospective festival of three major pieces, was shown in October in the West 23rd Street building. It also featured guest artists who hosted their own programs (painters, filmmakers, musicians).

1982: Two related painted installations were shown in the same year: *Mr. Dead & Mrs. Free's Cafe* in April at P.S. 1 and *The Moments Before the Tragedy I, II, and III* in October, both using theatrical effects. Between 1983 and 1985 *Squat* ran a movie theatre with a revival movie programme.

1984: Two more installations were exhibited: *Suspense*, in Hallwalls, Buffalo; *A Painted Show* at Postmaster's Gallery, N.Y.

1985: May: *Dreamland Burns*, a work in progress, *Squat's* first show set in a traditional theatre space, was shown in Montreal and then went on tour to Munich, Zurich, Polverigi, Frankfurt and Boston. In the summer, it proved no longer possible to pay the rental of the building on 23rd St., for eight years house and theatre. Two of the original *Squat* members, Peter Halasz and Anna Koos, leave the company. Anna Koos concentrates more on making films. Peter Halasz forms *Love Theatre* with several other *Squat* members.

1986: The finished *Dreamland Burns* had a successful three-week run at the new Kitchen in New York City in March, and then toured Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington from April through July. Eva Buchmuller's set wins a Bessie Award and an American Theatre Wing Design Award.

1987: The Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave festival and Art-Bureau Munchen commissioned *L-Train to Eldorado*. The work premiered December 1, 1987 at the Next Wave Festival. Eva Buchmuller's set for *L-Train* wins an Obie Award and again an American Theatre Wing Design Award.

1988: The San Francisco Bay Area premiere of *Squat Theatre* in *L-Train*. European tour of *L-Train* and *Dreamland Burns* in the fall. The opening scene of *L-Train* is *Squat's* contribution to the Mickery project *History of Theatre (Part II)* in Rotterdam.

1989: A new version of *L-Train* is performed in Hunter College Playhouse (New York), Vienna, Hamburg and Amsterdam. In the summer a new performance is prepared.

L-Train to Eldorado was premiered at the BAM Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on 1 December 1987. The show was to have been performed soon after in Stuttgart, Brussels and Amsterdam. That tour did not take place.

Squat, the group – for the moment, not the theatre that they make – is organised despair for a producer.

You know something is coming; but you never know when or how. And that's about as true as it is false. You know a first performance is never finished. You know it still has to grow. You know you have to live with the chaos. You also know that, whoever you talk to about it, it is eventually worth it. You never get what you expect, you always get what *Squat* is.

What is *Squat*? A name. A reputation. A family, a collection of Hungarian theatrical wanderers now long Americanised. You have to be to keep your head above water in New York City. Anyway, what is the Big Apple but a melting pot of different nationalities which together represent the essence of – if not America – then certainly New York. The undertone of Hungarian is ever present: a miraculous mixture of melancholy and thick skin.

What do we see? A group of American theatre-makers who evolved a pretty hard-handed visual language into which the icons of America are incorporated. The perspective is that of a sharply observant outsider. The end result is that melancholy puts in an appearance, that normality is too prosaic for words.

Is *Squat* still *Squat*? *L-Train to Eldorado* is, as far as I am concerned, a clear consequence of a line which I have been able to follow for years. Just as one stares in fascination at an accident. It never happens when you expect it, you can't believe your eyes, and yet... Their work was made impossible and they were forced to leave Hungary for ever in 1976. (The last performance I saw there was in the flat of friends in Budapest.) Key concepts were: ritual, family, living room, voyeurism. The first performances in Amsterdam reflected that (First audience in the set, the acting outside; then the transposition, through the window of a house, looking what the family was doing inside.) Making theatre, but also making the mechanisms dramatically simple. Chekhov's *Three Sisters* became the still picture of three silent men smoking a water pipe and endlessly drinking tea. The text only whispered from the prompter's box. Terrifying loneliness.

The voyeuristic element then became the group's trademark for a long time. Looking into the street from the theatre, the street, the street-scape, alive and kicking, overtaking the performance. What is real? Who is the real passer-by? Where is the picture distorted and manipulated. You only find out much later, when it is no longer relevant. Real and unreal were also introduced into the performance through the reality of film. The film screen is then lifted to reveal the family, sitting trapped between acted commentaries; when the backdrop was raised, then reality – the street outside – became fantasy. Your understanding of a situation was manipulated like a yo-yo until a complete transposition had taken place.

L-Train to Eldorado, the most recent of a long series, is theatre in two dimensions. The set consists of backdrops with a New York Street painted hyper-realistically. The street itself is no longer. The film is also unreal, the cameras continuously filming the play are obviously artificial; even the family is no longer, they have been torn apart. You hear and see the people chattering straight through each other. About nothing. Or even terrifyingly about everything left. About the meaning of life. A camera crew consisting of devils glides past from time to time. As an outsider you look at a mythical film set from a distance. It looks as if everything has a reason, all that activity, all that tidying up, but you don't find out. You remain outside. *L-Train to Eldorado* is like an ant-hill with a camera pointing at it which we in turn are watching. It doesn't help to cheer you up.

Ritsaert ten Cate

CAST AND CREDITS

Script, director:

Stephan Balint. Writer, director and founding member of the Squat Theatre. He co-created the Squat productions 'Pig, Child, Fire!'. 'Andy Warhol's Last Love', 'Mr. Dead & Mrs. Free' and wrote and directed 'Dreamland Burns' and 'L-Train'. Author of a selected book of poems, Mr. Balint has also published several essays on theatre.

Set:

Eva Buchmuller. Set designer, managing director and founding member of Squat Theatre and has been awarded four major set-design awards. Her painted installations in collaboration with Stephan Balint have been exhibited in individual and group shows.

Music:

Arto Lindsay, musician and composer, is a member of the band the Ambitious Lovers, and a former member of the Lounge Lizards, Golden Palomino's and Don King.

Peter Scherer wrote and composed with Arto Lindsay for Koscha's 'Murder, Hope of Women' and various soundtracks for commercials.

Cast:

Alexandra Auder has been an actress since she was very young. She was in Wim Wenders film 'State of Things' with her mother, Viva, and in the films 'Hiding Out' and 'Clean and Sober'. She performed in several Squat Theatre productions.

Eszter Balint, actress, has been a member of Squat Theatre since age ten, and has performed in all of its plays and was musical director for the last two. She starred in Jim Jarmusch's 'Stranger Than Paradise'. Mrs. Balint stars in the soon-to-be-released film 'Bail Jumper'.

Stephan Balint

Mark Boone Jr, (James) appears in 'L-Train' in his first association with Squat Theatre. He has long maintained a writing/performing relationship with Steve Buscemi, producing such plays as 'Dead Reckoning', 'In Your Mind', 'Yap Thaw' and 'The Mechanic Strays Of Lust'.

Peter Berg, actor, is founding member of the Squat Theatre and co-creator of its productions 'Pig, Child, Fire!', 'Andy Warhol's Last Love' and 'Mr. Dead & Mrs. Free'. Principal performer in all of Squat's plays and films, Mr. Berg also starred in Janos Jansco's 'Season of Beasts' and Zoltan Kezdi Kovacs' 'The Absentee'. He also appeared in Love Theatre's 'The Chinese'.

Jan Gontarczyk, actor, has a Masters Degree in architecture and art. He has worked as an architect in West Germany and North Africa for several years and is also an interior, set, silver and ceramic designer. As a member of Squat Theatre, he creates special sets and stage props.

Ivan Jakovits, actor, studied art and theatre and has performed as a puppeteer in Hungary and America.

Rebecca Major, actress, member of Squat Theatre since an early age. She has performed in many Squat productions. She will graduate this year from high-school.

Klara Palotai, actress and member of Squat Theater since 1978, has performed in all the company's major pieces. She has studied archeology and art history (B.A. & M.A.).

Lindzee Smith, founding member of Australian performing group Nightshift. Innumerable productions throughout the world.

Jane Smith has performed in several Broadway productions, and sung in operas in Austria and Germany. Her Off Off Broadway credits include performances at BAM, La Mama, Wooster Group's Performing Garage, The Kitchen, Limbo Lounge, Home Theater, etc. She has been in several independent films.

Light Designer:

Michael Chybowski. His designs include 'The Boys Next Door', 'K', 'My Unknown Son' and others. Environmental design includes the adaptation of the 'Odyssey' in the Yale Gym and 'The Sinking of the Titanic'. His work on Broadway includes assisting on 'Into the Woods' and others.

Sound Engineer: Robert Bielecki

Creative Consultants: Mark Boone Jr., Peter Berg,

Jan Gontarczyk, Klara Palotai

Music Coordinator: Eszter Balint

Technical Director: Andrew Douglas

Stage Manager: Eva Buchmuller

Assistant Stage Designers: Jan Gontarczyk, Jim St. Clair

Special Props Construction: Jan Gontarczyk

Special Costuming: Benedicte Leclerc

Neon Work: Rudi Stern/Let There Be Neon

Red Dress Design: Novobatzky Couture

Choreographic Consultant: Jo Andres

Photography: Gabor Sztanyai

Agent: Lisa Booth, Deirdre Valente: Lisa Booth Management, Inc. 276 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10025, tel. (1) 212-662-7256.

With production and technical assistance from the Stadsschouwburg and Mickery staff

Artistic Director Stadsschouwburg: Cox Habbema

Artistic Director Mickery: Ritsaert ten Cate

Acknowledgements:

Squat Theatre gratefully acknowledges the help of Cornelia Lauf, Joseph Kosuth, Joseph Baer, Louise & William McCaggs, Anna & Katalin Buchmuller, Alan Belcher, Werner Buttner, Sarah Charlesworth, Braco Dimitrijevic, Lili DuJourie, Clegg & Guttmann, Joseph Kosuth, Roy Lichtenstein, Glenn O'Brien, Claes Oldenburg, Wolfgang Stehle, Eran Shaerf, Haim Steinbach, and Jon Tower.

Special Thanks:

Milady and Katalin Mezei, Eleanor Ambros, Scott Macaulay, John Ittner, Patrick Moore, Richard Fantina, Stephen Sondheim, Jerry Ordover, Rudi Stern, Joseph Mellillo, Robert LoBianco, Bonnie Sue Stein, John Voorhees, James M. Clark/NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, Robin Foster, Debra Mileski, Mary Michael, Cindy Sherman, Jeannene Booher, L.B. Dallas, Jonathan Williams, Brian McNelly/Indochine Restaurant, Peter Grass, Alan Sussman, Anna Koos, Laszlo Dus, Laszlo Kutas, Daniel Wolf and Richard Haas.

LETTER FROM ELDORADO

Dear mother,

I got lucky.

The Devils are making a documentary of my soul: you know I always wanted to be in showbiz, and with no job or lover to hold, I couldn't dream of a better way to keep myself busy and please don't laugh at me, maybe to become a little bit famous too. Not that I care too much but I always wanted you to be proud of me and they say I've got some unusual talent.

Dear Mother, I don't want to scare you, but I changed: I changed a lot! My skin is thick and dry, my inside is hardened, my limbs have gotten much longer. Remember, I was balding before; now I am completely bald but, believe it or not, every spring my hair grows back. What didn't change is the cold sweat every morning and my strange disposition to move with the wind.

I know you wouldn't call where I live here, home. But I like it: the trash in the moonlight, the noise of the living around me, freedom sort of....

Everything has become much more simple, Mother, and sometimes I wonder if anything is going to change... and don't you agree that the idea of New is obscured by the new? There is so much to tell you, Mother, but I see a dog walking toward me and I must finish now to get ready, they are coming, we start the shooting.

with love,

your Son.

COLOPHON

Ontwerp programma;
Roon van Santen

Foto's:
Bob van Dantzig
Gabor Sztanyi

Drukwerk:
Den Ouden

Zetwerk:
Graphic House

Vertaling:
Martin Cleaver

Mickery wordt
gesubsidieerd door het
Ministerie van WVC.

Tijdens de voorstelling
mag niet gefilmd of
gefotografeerd worden
en mogen geen
geluidsopnames worden
gemaakt.

De voorstelling duurt 90
minuten. Geen pauze.

De Nederlandse
premiere van L-Train to
Eldorado vindt plaats op
27 juni 1989,
Stadsschouwburg
(Amsterdam),
gepresenteerd door de
Stadsschouwburg en
Mickery in het kader van
het Holland Festival.

L-Train to Eldorado is
geproduceerd in
opdracht van Brooklyn
Academy of Music (Next
Wave Festival) en
ArtBureau Munchen.

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Mickery

MICKERY PRESENTS:

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Needcompany (B)
Production: Theater Am Turm (Frankfurt)/
Kaai (Brussels)/Mickery (Amsterdam) with
the Gulbenkian Foundation (Lisboa)
Presented in Holland Festival
Brakke Grond (Amsterdam), 6 to 29 June
(except Sun/Mon)

ENCLOSURE FOR CONVENTIONAL HABIT

Noel Harding (CAN/NL)
Balie (Amsterdam), 21 June to 9 July

MICKERY IN THE INTERNATIONAL SUMMER FESTIVAL

Mickery presents John Jesurun, Needcompany
and Noel Harding
Kampnagel (Hamburg), 12 August to
2 September

GODODDIN

Brith Gof & Test Department (GB)
presented by Mickery and N.L. Centrum,
de Frieslandhallen (Leeuwarden), 31 August, 1
and 2 September.

CONTINUING:

FRAU HOLLE

A club for making theatre, Rozengracht 117

TWO AND TWO

Quarterly Magazine

