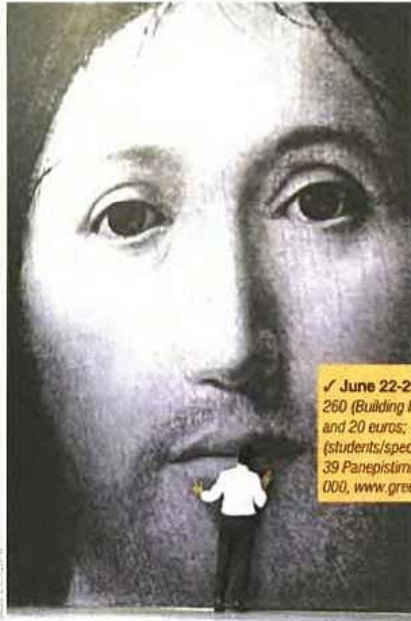


Theatre of cruelty?

Back in Athens for yet another of his challenging performances, the Italian director provocateur uses scatological references to comment on human frailty



✓ June 22-25, 5pm, at Pireos 260 (Building H). Tickets at 25 and 20 euros; 15 euros (students/special needs) from 39 Panepistimiou St (tel 210-3272-000, www.greekfestival.gr)

FOLLOWING his successful staging of Dante's *Divine Comedy* two years ago, versatile stage director Romeo Castellucci returns to Athens, invited by the Athens Festival, to present a not-so-modest play on June 22-25. On the *Concept of the Face Regarding the Son of God* focuses on the relation of man with the divine as much as it talks about corporeal functions that are likely to make viewers go fidgety.

"This is just the beginning. I want to meet Jesus in his long absence," Castellucci, a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters since 2002, has said of the play. "The face of Jesus is not there. I can only see paintings and statues. I know of more than thousands of painters from the past who spent half their lives trying to reproduce the unspoken, almost invisible expression of sadness that could be seen on his lips."

The piece is performed by the Societas Raffaello Sanzio, a theatre company named after the painter Raphael and co-founded by Castellucci and his sister Claudia in 1981. Just like Castellucci's previous works, the play reflects a vision of theatre in which visual, sculptural and sound elements are the primary focus. The set - painted white like hospital walls and made by Castellucci just like the costumes and the lighting - is overpowering in its metaphysical connotations, further accentuated by the colossal face of a serene-looking, occasionally tear-shedding Christ's image projected on a screen.

Before long the immaculate setting will be smeared by synthetic, yet excruciatingly smelly excrement. At first sight the provocative imagery is likely to be taken by the audience as blasphemous.

The visual assault is produced by a frail old man who is unable to control his bowel movement, while his son is repeatedly called upon to clean up the mess.

As the old man pleads for forgiveness in what can be interpreted as a reversal of the father-and-son relationship in the Christian tradition, Castellucci's carnal allusions carry a metaphysical edge. Disgust can give way to sympathy as the play is transformed into an affectionate comment on old age and human frailty.

A follower of Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty according to theatre critics, Castellucci does not opt to shock viewers just for the sake of it. Hailed as "the enfant terrible of contemporary European theatre", the 50-year-old experimental director who has cast a cancer patient as Mark

Antony in his adaptation of *Julius Caesar* is more interested in audience reactions: the more diverse the better.

On a more academic level, the play does not deal with the substance of faith, according to Castellucci, but attempts to highlight the relation between theatre and religion, as both areas interact with people through a set vocabulary of symbols and rules.

Christy Papadopoulou



Katsigras collection highlights in Athens

AS A YOUNG man, Larisa-born surgeon Giorgos I Katsigras (1914-1998), already an amateur painter, used to collect stamps, books and photographs. His "collector's disease" stayed with him for the rest of his life, the result of which is a significant collection of Greek paintings on permanent display at the Larisa Municipal Gallery - GI Katsigras Museum.

Over 70 highlights from Katsigras' collection will go on display at the Theodorakis Foundation of Arts and Music this month. These include the portrait of Konstantinos M Melas as a child by Nikiforos Lytras, an early oil-on-canvas nude by Yannis Moralis, Thessaly painter Agenor Asteriadi's egg tempera on board *The City* (photo top) depicting Larisa's river, train station, houses and horses, and Yannis Psychopedis' political work *The Protest*.

One of few individuals to collect art in postwar Greece, Katsigras built up his collection between 1950 and 1965. In 1981 he addressed a letter to Aristidis Lambroulis, Larisa mayor at the time, offering to donate his precious collection to the city on the sole condition that a municipal gallery be founded.

Comprising oils, watercolours, etchings and drawings, Katsigras' collection - part of which had been exhibited at the Athens Municipal Gallery and the National Gallery before the opening of the Larisa Municipal Gallery in 2003 - includes 781 works. In addition to paintings, the collection also features German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann's furniture from the Iliou Melathron Mansion (his residence) that was incorporated into the GI Katsigras Surgical Clinic, from where the Medical School of the University of Thessaly now operates, as well as 1,250 art books and 4,500 volumes of literature and poetry.

✓ Masterpieces of the GI Katsigras Collection from the Larisa Municipal Gallery is on at the Theodorakis Foundation for Arts and Music (cnr 9 Vas Sofias and 1 Merlin sts. tel 210-361-1349) from June 23 to September 18 CP

Painting by Vassilios Hatzis



in brief



Zongolopoulos' works wanted

IN PREPARATION for an exhibition and a catalogue dedicated to the art and life of Greek sculptor Giorgos Zongolopoulos (1903-2004), the Benaki Museum and Zongolopoulos Foundation are extending an open call to private collectors for works by the artist in their possession. Those interested can contact Maria San of the Benaki Museum daily 11am-3pm through to the end of September on 210-367-1011 or san@benaki.gr

Zorbas at Megaron



THE THESSALONIKI Megaron Mousikis will celebrate International Music Day with a Thessaloniki State

Orchestra performance of Mikis Theodorakis' work *Zorbas* on June 21 featuring mezzo lines Zikou and conductor Loukas Karytinos. Theodorakis provided the score for Michael Cacoyannis' 1964 film *Alexis Zorbas*, which starred Anthony Quinn and was based on Nikos Kazantzakis' novel of the same name. Performance time is 9pm. Tickets at 50, 40, 30 and 20 euros (students 10 euros)

Zanella at Opera Ballet's helm



DISTINGUISHED Italian choreographer Renato Zanella, 50, was appointed new director at the Greek National Opera Ballet (GNO), starting September 1. The Verona-born choreographer has collaborated with prestigious companies around the world, the ballets of Stuttgart, Monte Carlo and San Francisco included. He has created over 70 choreographies and served as director of the Vienna State Opera from 1995 to 2005. In January 2010 he created the choreographies for the GNO's Ballet Gala, which was presented at the Athens Megaron Mousikis. His *Medea's Choice* ballet will be part of Syros' festival

Aegean Festival key events

THE SEVENTH Aegean Festival running on the island of Syros on July 12-25 this year includes opera, music, dance and theatre. Organised by Greek American conductor and producer Peter Tiboris, the annual festival will be held at Ermoupolis' Apollon Theatre, modelled in 1864 after Milan's La Scala, and public spaces around the city including Miaouli Square and the Agios Nikolaos Church in the Vapona neighbourhood. This year's highlights include the staging of Verdi's classic *Traviata* featuring Russian soprano Natalia Ushakova (photo) in the title role (July 12), Pan-European Philharmonia Orchestra's tribute to Austrian composer Gustav Mahler on the occasion of a centenary from his death, under the baton of Tiboris (July 15), Martin Sherman's moving monologue *Rose*, starring Olympia Dukakis (July 19-20), and the international premiere of Italian choreographer Renato Zanella's ballet *Medea's Choice* set to the music of Mikis Theodorakis' opera *Medea* (July 22-24)

(Athens News)

