

IHRE SORGEN MÖCHT' ICH HABEN

Liebe Kolleginnen und Kollegen!

Obwohl der Titel dieses Artikels auf Deutsch ist, handelt es sich um ein ungarisches Sprichwort, das ungarische Leute, sogar die, die kein richtiges Deutsch sprechen, auf Deutsch zu sagen pflegen.

Auch ich bin einer von ihnen und werde von nun an Englisch sprechen.

Dear Friends,

as I have just said, I'd like to have your problems. It is not in vain, that the above-mentioned proverb in Hungary is always said in German. For the Hungarians, the culture, the cultural life, the cultural and political institutions of Germany in general, were always an important model.

Before I speak about your situation, I must give you a few facts that you are supposed to bear in mind, when I speak about Hungarian theatre.

Hungary is as big as any of the German provinces. Among the ten million inhabitants of the country there are presumably one million theatre-goers – around four million tickets are sold every year. Compared to the economical possibilities of the country, theatres are heavily supported, both by the state, through the Ministry of Culture and by the local governments. The whole amount of money given to all the theaters including the Opera and the smallest provincial theatre is about 60 million Euros. The box-office income of all these theatres together may be around half as much as that. The total turnover of Hungarian theatre is less than 100 million Euros, that is, it equals the turnover of a medium-sized Hungarian enterprise. This is exactly the turnover of the firm my son works for. His firm employs twenty people. Hungarian theatre employs a few thousand.

What would you say, after having heard these numbers? Is Hungarian theatre rich or is it poor?

Listening to what Hungarian general managers say, it is poor. However, I am convinced that our theatre system, which is a small copy of the German system, is probably the best ever existing in history. Since our systems are so close to each other in their structure, what I say about Hungarian theatre can be said about German theatre as well. American colleagues, even most English colleagues, are simply envious of what they see. They are amazed at the advantages of the repertory system which they can't afford. They are amazed at the rate of theatre-goers. They are amazed at the prices. And, last but not least, they are amazed at the average artistic level of theatre in Hungary, and Europe in general.

So, if I compare the investment, that is, the support, with the box office income, theatre is a very poor business. If I compare the complete turnover of Hungarian theatres with the cultural result, it is probably one of the best investments that the country has ever made.

Reading german theatre papers in the last few months, I hear practically one voice. And that is the voice of a child crying for help. In a way, I can only agree with that. The system described above is an important cultural heritage of Europe. The price of this system, presumably even in Germany, is incomparable to its advantages.

On the other hand, you are supposed to know that your behaviour is an example. As far as I can see, and in this respect I can see fairly far, the German theatre industry is the top industry of the world. If you begin to cry, as a helpless child, you will look a little bit funny. All right, say whatever you are supposed to say to short-sighted politicians. However, a crisis is never only a financial crisis. It is always the crisis of models, of ideas.

From Hungary, I can't tell you what is your share in the present crisis. What I can add to what I have read recently is this. You, the theatre people, are supposed to find those problems which can't be solved by politicians. You are supposed to find possibilities which don't depend on money. You are supposed to find your creative sources in a situation which is much better than in any other part of the world. Your possibilities are rare even among the most developed countries. You are right in defending it, you are supposed to defend it, but you won't be able to defend it if you only complain.

Think of your colleagues across the ocean. Did those directors staging the plays of Tennessee Williams or Arthur Miller 50 years ago get any support from their state? Be careful in complaining and please, go ahead in being a model for us. Be proud of your culture, be proud of your results and don't let people think that theatre depends only on money. Theatre, this wonderful human institution is two and a half thousand years old. It didn't die when the movies opened a hundred years ago. It didn't die when radios began to broadcast. Neither did it die when the television stations began to broadcast. It will live and its life will depend upon those people who will be ready to create even among less than comfortable circumstances. Don't tell my words to your local politicians, because they are supposed to think you will die of hunger if they don't act. But please, remember, that even we, Hungarian theatre people, who live and create in fairly good circumstances, are very envious of your problems. Ihre Sorgen möcht' ich haben.

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