



More than a touch

by Tristan Berger

Review of: Spielplatz 26. Autoren in der Schule: Fünf Theaterstücke aus Kooperation von Schulen mit Carsten Brandau, Paul Brodowsky, Lorenz Hippe, Jörg Menke-Peitzmeyer und Andreas Sauter. Edited by Henning Fangauf and Thomas Maagh, Frankfurt (Main): Verlag der Autoren, 2013, ISBN 978-3-88661-355-7, ca. EUR 15

Most people looking back on the time they were in school – and it makes no difference if this was fifty years ago or relatively recently or whether you lived in Kiel or Berchtesgaden – will be able to describe one and the same experience: Reading and analysing plays always meant written plays. You could count yourself lucky if you even once came across a living author. But the one thing you never learnt was how to write a play yourself, and nothing has changed in this respect.

Nothing? – Well a little anyway! For something called „TAtSch“ has existed since 2009. „TAtSch“ is short for „Theatre Authors take to Schools“. Not for nothing does the German acronym sound like the English „touch“. For this annual initiative started by the Frankfurt Children’s and Young People’s Theatre Centre is all about established professional playwrights coming into contact with school students and teachers, and getting acquainted with everyday school life.

The idea behind TAtSch is for a playwright to take over the patronage of a school class for a school year and to be on hand for any questions on literature and theatre. The main aim of the patronage is to work out a theatre play together. The playwrights lead writing workshops, give advice during theatre lessons and help young people to learn a little more about the techniques of writing a play.

The Frankfurt publishing house „Verlag der Autoren“ has now selected five exemplary plays for its unique anthology „Spielplatz“ (English: „Playground“). The

published plays have been written during TAtSch projects. Alongside the texts the playwrights who have supervised the work talk about their approaches and experiences.

For example Carsten Brandau who lives in Hamburg worked with students in the Bugenhagen school on a text entitled “Head theatre or everything always starts with movement”. In this project Brandau put the focus on writing “from the belly”, intuitive creation using fragments of words and sentences. Amazingly the composition of these bits and pieces made some kind of sense in the end. This could be said to hold true for all the texts gathered here: Because “every voice should be allowed to express itself” (Brandau) the result is mostly a montage with no main character or linear story. Plot-orientated storylines exist alongside associative slabs of text and the young people’s thoughts which consist of snapshots of their experiential horizons: their parents, family, school and the weirdness of the other sex.

The Freiburg playwright Paul Brodowsky took a different, somewhat more “classical” approach. The first thing he did was to acquaint his students from the Brandenburg Ernst Heckel Gymnasium more closely with successful plays of the present dramatic art. In this way he was able to give them some ideas about the craft of writing plays and in next to no time he could enjoy the surprising quality of the results.

In this way the students created a play by the name of “...3..2.1 Happiness!” which is faintly reminiscent of Fassbinder’s movie “Welt am Draht”. Indeed the play could very well be rehearsed and performed by other groups.

Not all the plays selected for the anthology offer such a possibility. They are mostly too “private”. It was clearly not yet possible to put personal experiences into an artistic form to create a work of literary quality.

But to make such a demand would be unfair to the intentions behind TAtSch. “Can we not just agree that if we are only going to talk about ourselves here, then we should do it as well as possible?” This question was asked by a character in the play “21 girls”, supervised by Jörg Menke-Peitzmeyer at the Vicco von Bülow grammar school in Falkensee. The Berlin playwright added that the best way to be true to the

work was to regard it “not as written in stone for all eternity but as a continually changing, and at any time changeable, experiment!”

It is worthy of note that the partner schools mainly came from big cities in northern Germany – and that the participants were mostly female. It is desirable to develop the project also in rural areas and that we could consider how to break through the striking shortcomings of male students in their everyday school life, especially in creative subjects.

“Spielplatz 26” is recommended to all those who want to develop, write and produce theatre texts with children and young people. Anyone wanting to know more about TAtSch can get the necessary information on the well-made website www.textflug.de. Here you can also read about all the 31 playwrights in the TAtSch authors’ pool.

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