

Published in Canadian Theatre Review - Issue 117, Winter 2004

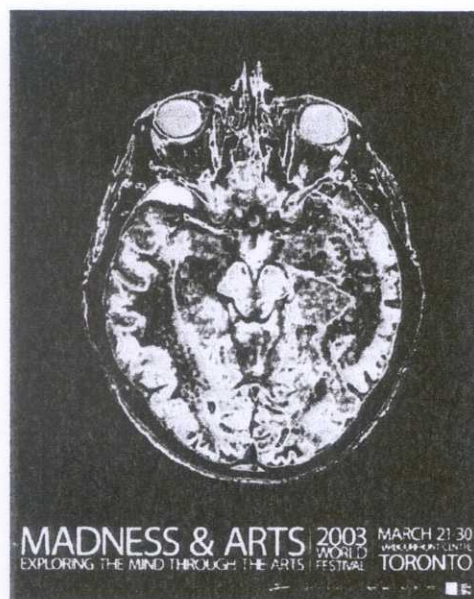
Disability Arts and the Place of Mental Illness on the Stage

The Madness and Arts 2003 World Festival

Kirsty Johnston

In March 2003 a festival at Toronto's Harbourfront Theatre featured a wide variety of theatre and other performing arts groups all committed to the project of re-imagining the place of mental illness on stage.¹ The Madness and Arts 2003 World Festival, organized by Toronto's Workman Theatre Project (WTP) and co-presented with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, operated with an activist mandate: to gather artists from around the world who involve people with mental-illness experience in their work, who write about and perform plays with mental-illness themes or problems at their core and who actively seek to address assumptions about and the public stigma attached to mental illness. This is an activist agenda because it seeks both to connect artists with mental illness experience and interests and also to challenge negative stereotypes about mental illness.

Broadly, this activism parallels a disability-arts culture network that has gained attention and advocates for several decades and that seeks to promote new ways of supporting the artistic talent and expression of people with disabilities or illnesses. The Madness and Arts 2003 World Festival drew in part from the concerns and networks of this disability-arts culture and contributed, in turn, to making its networks broader and deeper. The Festival also had local roots, however, in the particular aims and mandates of the WTP and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. It is best to begin, like the festival, with these local concerns and then build outward and observe the formation of an activist network.



Poster for The Madness and Arts 2003 World Festival
created by saatchi and saatchi; courtesy workman theatre project

Am Anfang ist mir meine Rolle fremd und da ich von Augenblick zu Augenblick auf das Ende sehe, bleibt das auch so; ich verstehe immer nur Teile, die mir über die 'Improvisation'/das Ausprobieren vertraut **geworden** und situationsgebunden sind. Ich bin überrascht/'perplex', wenn mir nach der Aufführung eine Interpretation des Ganzen geliefert wird, die ich so nicht erwartet hätte bzw. Verständnisfragen gestellt werden; ich verfolge meine eigene Logik, quasi eine 'innere' Macht des Stücks, in der mir vieles selbstverständlich, vertraut und lieb-
~~geworden ist und habe den Blick eines 'kritischen'~~

Menschen, der von außen auf das Stück schaut, nie besitzen. Mein Verständnis geht von der Erfahrung aus, von dem, was geworden ist und nicht von dem, was ~~sich~~ (objektiv) sagen läßt; da bin ich stumm. Ich sehe Querverweise, Verästelungen und Abzweige/Kreuzugen, die ich aus dem Augenblick gewonnen habe und auch nur im Augenblick/in der unmittelbaren Erfahrung lebendig sind.

Das paßt gut zu der Arbeitsweise von Paula und Manfred; zwar gibt es Texte und Rollen, aber ~~sie~~ gehen von der einzelnen 'Szene' aus, in der wir Ideen (zu dem Stück) ausprobieren ('inszenieren' sozusagen - in 'Szene' setzen) und so wird also von 'Szene' zu 'Szene' fortschreitend das ganze Stück gestickt/entwickelt. Dann kommt Musik hinzu, mitten in der Arbeit etnwirft Banni Ideen zum Bühnenbild und zum Schluß gibt's Kostüme;

der 'verrückte' Arzt, zu dem die Journalisten kommen, um über sein berühmtes 'System' etwas zu erfahren und am Ende selbst durchdrehen (Dr. Goudrone) oder einer der 3 Märze Oder eben Antoine, ein ebenfalls 'verrückter' Sonderling, der an der Verlogenheit der vornehmⁿ und feiⁿ Gesellschaft und an der Eifersucht um seine bildschöne, ihn aber betrügende Frau zu Grunde geht, immer gibt die Rolle ein neues Päckchen zu verstehen und auszuprobieren auf und so geht es von Stück zu Stück weiter im Verstehensprozeß. Es lebe die allgemeine und angewandte Hermeneutik!

und wenn sie nicht gestorben sind, so leben (und verstehen) sie noch heute.

mit freundlichen Grüßen, *Flaume*

In der Regel treffen wir uns einmal die Woche für 3 Stunden, um etwas Neues auszuprobieren und müssen uns aushalten lernen (d.i. das Schwerste: nicht auszubrechen, sondern Stand zu halten, am Ball bleiben und bei der Sache und nicht den Zeitbezug/den *Kontext*- den Gegenwartsbezug verlieren: Was verlangt der Augenblick von mir). Da ist es egal, ob wir am Stück arbeiten oder ob wir gerade Pause machen - schon wieder hat die Situation sich verändert und einer bzw. etwas *gibt einem* neuen Wink/Hinweis auf einen anderen Zusammenhang und die ~~Geschichte nimmt eine neue Wendung und einen neuen~~ Verlauf.

Tatsächlich stehe ich in der Pause in der Küche und nehme wahr/beobachte, was die anderen machen - lasse die ganzen Eindrücke der bunten Wirklichkeit und des ^{um mich herum} bunten Treibens an meiner ~~Kassette~~ unbewegten Fassade abprallen/abperlen, bis sich mir ein 'Konkreter'/genauer Eindruck (- Gedanke) vermittelt. Auch während der Probe stehe ich meistens am Rand des Geschehens und beobachte. Aber ich bin auch gefordert zu handeln - zu agieren und zu reagieren in einem: ich handle und empfangen zugleich Nachrichten (- Winke/Hinweise) über mein Tun, meine Rolle im Augenblick und in der Welt allgemein, wie mich die anderen verstehen, was gemocht und was abgelehnt wird. Und vor allem stellt sich mir die bange Frage: was soll ich (im Augenblick) tun?

Die Jeweilige Rolle tut ihr übriges - ob ich nun der aus Eifersucht mordende Liebhaber bin (Woyzeck) oder

Münster, den 13.7.2004

Für Rita:

"Kunst ist schön,
macht aber viel Arbeit" (Karl Valentin).

Arbeit ist Selbstverwirklichung (nach Karl Marx),
es ist also egal, ob ich erwerbstätig bin oder meiner
Freizeit nachgehe; für mich steckt ein und dieselbe
Anstrengung darin, nur an einem anderen Ort, mit anderen
Leuten und einer anderen Aufgabe/Herausforderung. Als
'Psychotiker' lebe ich in einem Film: "eins steckt im
anderen, kann vieles bedeuten, billionenfach" (A. März);
das, was ich ~~mach~~ tue und erfahre, macht Sinn; deutet
auf anderes, Übergeordnetes und Hintergründiges hin,
ist vielschichtig, ich muß es nur entschlüsseln/ent-
rätzeln (sogenanntes 'Ganzheitserlebnis') - "cogito,
~~ergo sum~~ (Descartes), das ist meine Aufgabe, egal ob
ich auf der Arbeit bin oder Freizeit habe. Arbeiten,
Schauspielen ist: etwas in Gruppe tun, zu einem nach-
prüfbar bzw. vorzeigbaren Ergebnis führen - d.h. die
Anstrengung; Arbeiten wie Schauspielen ist ein Gruppen-
prozeß.

Sicher jeder hat seine Aufgabe/Rolle, aber erst im
gegenseitigen Hinhören und aufeinander Achtgeben fügt
sich 1 und 1, Teil für Teil, das Kleine mit dem Großen
zu einem neuen Ganzen ineinander Und zusammen. Ich
muß also meinen Mann stehen und die Kräfte aushalten,
die an mir zerren; auf der Arbeit zerren das frühe
Aufstehen, die unbequeme Haltung (etwa im halbwachen
Dämmerzustand Eier in eine Schüssel schlagen), der
Lärm und die Geräuschkulisse der anderen - beim Schau-
spielen sind es wieder die anderen und die Übungen
beim Warm-up und beim 'Improvisieren'.

Westfälische Klinik Lengerich

Psychiatrie ■ Psychotherapie ■ Neurologie

Der Ärztliche Direktor

Ihr Fachkrankenhaus im
LWL-PsychiatrieVerbund

Bielefeld ■ Bochum ■ Datteln ■ Geseke ■ Hamm ■ Jansen ■ Mette ■ Lengerich ■ Lippstadt
■ Menden ■ Münster ■ Olpe ■ Paderborn ■ Rheda-Wiedenbrunn

Madness and Arts

Seit vielen Jahren begleite und verfolge ich mit großem Interesse und Anteilnahme die Arbeit der Theatergruppe Sycorax, das Theater von – aber nicht nur – Menschen mit Grenzerfahrungen, welches mir und anderen Personen in der Vergangenheit immer wieder besondere intellektuelle, emotionale und Sinnenfreude bereitet hat, in einem breiten Spektrum von Ernst bis Heiter.

Es war und ist die eindringliche Kraft der Sprache, der Mimik, der Gestik und der Bewegungen im Ganzen, die die Schauspieler vermitteln, der Bühnenbilder, der anrührenden, sorgsam ausgewählten begleitenden Musik, der Videokollagen und Lichteffekte, die die charakteristische Handschrift des Spiels der Regisseure Paula Artkamp und Manfred Kerklaun und ihrer Schauspieler kennzeichnen, einschließlich der begabten Auswahl der Stoffe. Ich fühle und fühlte das harmonische und das solidarische Miteinander der Regisseure, ihrer großartigen Ideen und des spielerischen Gestaltens der Schauspieler, der Menschen mit Grenzerfahrungen, die in besonderer Weise befähigt und befugt sind, Intensives, Tiefempfundenes, Freudiges und Bedrückendes in Worten und Bewegungen auszudrücken.

Die Theatergruppe Sycorax ist daher in besonderer Weise dazu berufen und befähigt, das zweite internationale Festival „Madness and Arts“ im Jahre 2006 in Münster zu initiieren, zu organisieren und durchzuführen. Ein solches Festival wird die Gelegenheit bieten, Theatergruppen aus aller Welt mit ähnlichen Anliegen und Fähigkeiten wie Sycorax intensiv kennen zu lernen. Wir haben allen Grund, uns darauf zu freuen und sollten, jeder in seinem Bereich, - mit aller Kraft – dazu beitragen, dass das Festival gelingt.

Lengerich, 09.09.04

Prof. Dr. med. Andreas Crome

Gruppen für das Madness and Arts World Festival II

The Workman Theatre (Toronto, Canada)

Since its bold launch in 1991, the Workman Theatre Project (WTP) has become known for putting a human face on mental health issues. By producing professional theatre that not only focuses on mental health but is staged by a company comprised of professional actors and people who receive mental health services. WTP is able to get to the heart and soul of the issues while maintaining a high standard of theatre. This unique arts company, led by founder/artistic producer Lisa Brown, has attracted national and international attention. Based in Toronto at the Joseph Workman Auditorium, at the Queen Street Site of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, WTP has performed to audiences in Canada and has connected to the rest of the world through its international festivals: **Madness and Arts 2003 World Festival and the Rendezvous with Madness Film Festival**).

Mazarra Institute (Musicians - CUBA)

An orchestra whose members all have experience with mental illness. Facilitated by the Psychiatric Hospital of Havana, Cuba, the musicians perform regularly as both a full orchestra and a smaller band of 5-8 people. The groups have a lot of performance experience – playing at national events, the PanAm games and psychiatric conferences. Nuria Varela, who is from Cuba and familiar with the group, is acting by proxy for the festival to contact and arrange the smaller band's participation.

RAG Theatre Troupe (Australia)

The Recreation Access Group (RAG) is an initiative of the City of Port Phillip which promotes participation in arts and recreation by people with psychiatric disabilities. Founded in 1993, the RAG theatre troupe develops opportunities for people living with a mental illness.

Most Recent Production: The Mad House, Oct. 2000. "Mismatched residents battle over cocoa pops, fire drills and dead cats as they discover that sharing a house brings out the worst ... and best in you. A chaotic comedy about the struggle to find and keep a place to live. Featuring live music by the BiPolar Bears.

Bohnice Theatre Company (Prag Tschechien)

Die Bohnice Theatre Company wurde 1991 als eine offene Gemeinschaft für Schauspieler – Patienten gegründet. Tanzelemente, archetypische Themen wie Kindheit und Alter oder Jahreszeiten, das Studium von Gesten und Tönen, spielerisch umgesetzt, sind Ausgangspunkt jeder ihrer Arbeiten. Mehrmals als bestes Stück prämiert, vom Fernsehen aufgezeichnet und bereits auf verschiedenen Gastspielen gezeigt wurde **VERA, MARIE DANCE...**

Notes

1 I came to be involved in the festival in the course of my graduate study of the WTP and, in the capacity of research director, helped the company to discover other groups internationally who might be approached to participate. My perspective, therefore, is that of a participant observer who has had occasion to study the WTP's history and the development of this festival.

2 The festival was also supported by an Honourary Council which included Harbourfront CEO William S. Boyle, dancer Robert Desrosiers, recording artist Molly Johnson, dancer Karen Kain, Soulpepper Theatre Co. Artistic Director Albert Schultz, AGO Director Matthew Teitelbaum and Senator Michael Kirby. For further information on festival sponsorship and other details, see Exploring.

3 These figures are drawn from the WTP and CAMH final report on the festival sent to Senator Michael Kirby and other festival supporters, August 2003 (Brown).

4 "10 Days in March" documents the process of the festival's international theatre collaboration, "In the Room". Barna Apher is the producer and TVO has purchased the licensing rights.

5 In addition to the performing arts, the festival sponsored two art exhibits in the York Quay Gallery: inSANITY and Untied in Time. The former featured the work of artists from the WTP and CAMH-sponsored Being Scene exhibit, Toronto's Creative Arts Studios, Vancouver's Gallery Gachet and New York's The Living Museum. Untied in Time showcased straight jackets, which The Living Museum artists had re-formed as canvasses and sculptural objects.

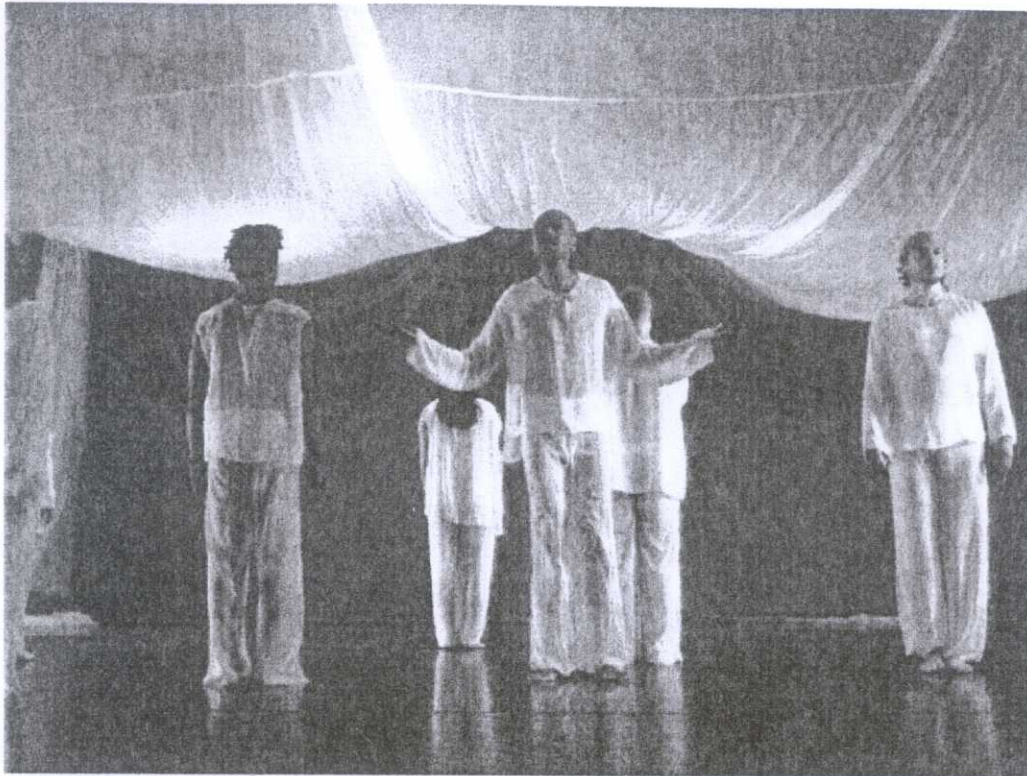
Works Cited

Brown, Lisa. E-mail to the author. 28 Aug. 2003.

Exploring the Mind through the Arts: Madness and Arts 2003 World Festival. 21 Nov. 2003 <www.madnessandarts.com>.

Kirsty Johnston is an Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia Department of Theatre, Film and Creative Writing. Her current research focuses upon illness representation in theatre.

2386912



Lovesickness performed by Rosanna Gamson / World Wide
photo by Stephen Simeon

The festival formed a new activist network by laying the organizational foundations for future international collaboration and by providing the opportunity for artistic exploration and cooperation among different theatre companies. Prior to the festival many of these groups had been operating in isolation, unaware of each other's activities. The festival had been planned as a means to connect the WTP with other like-minded groups internationally. It did this but also produced new connections across and between groups, shaping a network at once unified and diverse.



In the Room performed by actors from Denmark's Billedspor, Australia's RAG Theatre Troupe and Canada's Workman Theatre Project
PHoto by Stephen Simeon

Educational Activities and Public Discussions

Artists and other festival participants were given several formal opportunities to share their ideas, through a range of educational activities and public discussions, running throughout the festival. A series of three panels featured representatives from the various participating arts groups reflecting on key aspects of the festival's themes and goals. The first – entitled *Mental Health Where?* – built upon the idea that different cultural communities understand mental health in different ways and invited a range of international panelists to reflect on the role of the arts in shaping such understandings in their homelands. A second panel – entitled *Art Work: Conversations with Festival Artists* – asked festival artists to describe the challenges and benefits of representing mental illness and explain the motivations behind their respective artistic explorations. The final panel – entitled *Making it Work: Conversations with Artistic Facilitators* – invited facilitators from the various festival groups that create artistic development opportunities by, for and with people who have received mental health services to discuss best practices for funding, training, dealing with the media, promotion, conflict resolution and networking. Beyond the panels, a series of workshops allowed individual visiting artists to share aspects of their craft. Finally, festival symposia included a lecture on media images of mental illness by Dr. Otto Wahl of George Mason University; a CAMH Grand Rounds presentation by Stanford researcher Dr. Connie Strong, one of the researchers involved in recent groundbreaking controlled studies that have discovered a link between bipolar disorder and creativity; and what was described in the festival brochure as a discussion of “voyeurism, narcissism, obsession and hockey” by filmmaker Guy Maddin, in a co-presentation with the Power Plant International Lecture Series, as part of Maddin's *Cowards Bend the Knee* installation (17). Offered alongside the festival's performances and exhibits, these events invited festival artists to share strategies and reflect on their respective connections to broader questions concerning mental illness representation in the various artistic media.

Building Networks through Collective Performance

The drive to build networks among various national arts initiatives was most evident in the festival's closing performance: an international collaborative theatre performance called *In the Room*. The performance, organized by collaborative workshop director Ed Roy for the WTP, involved two actors and a director from each of three companies: Australia's RAG Theatre Troupe, a five-year-old company very much like WTP, which involves theatre professionals and provides theatre training and opportunities to people with mental illnesses; Denmark's Billedspor, a company focused on mask work and also dedicated to providing training and performance opportunities to people who have received mental health services; and the WTP itself (two WTP members directed by Ed Roy). In the year leading up to the festival each of these groups developed a ten- to fifteen-minute production, based on the phrase *In the Room*. During the festival, the three groups came together and collaborated for ten days, with the aim of adding to and linking all three productions into a one-hour performance to be presented at the festival's end. The individual group productions each offered strikingly original and idiosyncratic approaches, while the whole presentation blended masks, properties, and performers together to create a new shared performance language. For many of the festival artists and participants, this occasion proved to be the most moving and inspirational, as it capped the festival's explorations and pointed to future collaborations.



Woyzeck performed by Germany's Theater Sycorax
photo by Stephen Simeon

The Festival Program

The festival program was marked by a heterogeneous collection of performances, actors and languages on stage, united by a shared sense of exploration and purpose. The festival opened with Japan's Ryuzanji and Company performing *Educating Mad Persons*, a hyperkinetic interpretation of Shuji Terayama's puppet play about a family in which one member has been diagnosed as mad. The festival closed with the Los Angeles-based dance group Rosanna Gamson / World Wide, whose production *Lovesickness* explored Freudian concepts of hysteria and unsatisfied desire. Other performances included Madison Wisconsin's TAP IT / New Works' production *Soul Journey*, which used tap-dance, jazz music and monologues to explore one woman's journey through depression. In a similar vein Vancouver actor Victoria Maxwell performed her one-woman show about manic-depression, *Crazy for Life*. Productions for young audiences included Nicola Baldwin's play about teenage depression and suicide *Cracked*, produced by London, England's Ytouring Theatre Company; and *Iris the Dragon*, a WTP production of Gayle Grass's play investigating the early warning signs and coping strategies for children with mental illness. Other WTP performances included *The Climps*, which combined improvisation and clowning by WTP members, facilitated by clown John Turner and improviser Kate Ashby; and a remount of Terry Watada's play *Vincent*, an exploration of the challenges facing people diagnosed with schizophrenia and of the difficulties encountered by their families and by the police.⁵ Germany's Theatre Sycorax, perhaps the theatre company most akin to the WTP in terms of mandate and process, remounted its fourth production, Buchner's classic story of mental illness, *Woyzeck*. The performance drew upon company members' contemporary experiences and professional expertise to give the drama a new aspect and modern resonance.

munity – work that is key to preventing problems, finding more effective treatments and improving the quality of life for people struggling with mental illness and addiction. The festival offered an opportunity for the Centre to make further international connections and provide leadership in the area of arts and mental illness research. CAMH provided the seed money to begin research on the project. After a successful further application to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Foundation, a Volunteer Fundraising Committee, chaired by Sandra Pitblado, enabled the organizers to raise a further \$650,000.00 to produce the festival in March 2003.²



Educating Mad Persons performed by Japan's Ryuzanji & Co.
photo by Stephen Simeon

While there were a few important international precedents for disability-arts festivals, there was little precedent for a broadly international gathering focused solely on connecting artists with mental illness experiences or interests. The Madness and Arts World Festival mandate was to build an international network of artists with mental illness experiences and interests, with the hope of becoming a regular forum in which artists could learn from and be inspired by each other. To this end, the festival organizers hoped to discover and bring to Canada as many international artists as possible. Through a combination of Web-based research, community outreach and word-of-mouth, researchers discovered more artists than anticipated, from such disparate countries as Cuba, Germany, Zaire, Iran, Denmark, New Zealand, Iceland, Japan and others. Selected from this range of possibilities, festival artists were chosen on the basis of artistic merit, with the additional goal of including a broad range of artistic disciplines and international representation. Over the ten-day period the festival featured over one-hundred artists from eight different countries who shared their works with an estimated total audience of over ten-thousand people.³ Two documentaries about the festival are currently in production. The first of these is entitled *10 Days in March* and will premiere in the fall of 2003.⁴ Other festival legacies – a database of all the participants and related groups is being prepared by the WTP for broader use and Theater Sycorax, a ten-year-old German company, plans to host the next festival in Munster in 2006.

From March 21 to March 30, 2003, Toronto's Harbourfront Centre hosted the first Madness and Arts 2003 World Festival. For ten days the festival showcased the work of over one-hundred international performing and visual artists whose only prior connection was a shared interest in mental illness and the arts. The inspiration for WTP's artistic director, Lisa Brown, to create the festival was simple: After ten years of successful growth and practice locally, she wondered if there might not be opportunities to connect with and learn from other international groups, with similar goals and practices. Although she was unsure about the existence of such groups, she hoped to discover other companies, with similar mandates, with whom WTP could network to share artistic ideas and professional strategies.

The Workman Theatre Project of Toronto

The WTP has operated out of the Joseph Workman Auditorium at Toronto's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Queen Street site since 1989. WTP provides performance training and creative opportunities to people who have received mental health services. It has created over twenty theatrical productions exploring mental health issues and narratives; toured interprovincially; produced an annual film festival called *Rendezvous with Madness*; presented eight art exhibits; and developed a theatre training program run by actor Ed Roy, whose instructors have included such distinguished Canadian theatre professionals as John Turner of *Mump and Smoot* and playwright John Palmer. All of the company's main productions have been developed with an even split between theatre professionals and company members. Members are active at all levels of the company and are defined as people who have received mental health services and have an arts interest. Some company members are professional theatre artists whose careers have been interrupted by mental illness; others are amateurs drawn to the company's training program. Importantly, however, all WTP members participate voluntarily and the company does not offer any form of therapy. Instead, the company's primary aim is the artistic development of its members, some of whom may have difficulty accessing more traditional forms of arts training. Another important aim of the WTP is to educate and engage the public about mental health issues and concerns.

To accomplish these ends, the company's productions have explored such themes as cross-cultural understandings of mental illness, social responses to schizophrenia and changing connections between the city and the asylum. In each case, the company has tried both to challenge stereotypes or common misconceptions of mental illness and to raise public awareness of the difficulties facing people who live with mental illness. The Madness and Arts 2003 World Festival offered Brown and the WTP an opportunity to bring their work to a broader audience, to showcase a variety of international arts groups and to build an international network.

Building an International Festival

Brown shared her ideas with the president and CEO of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Paul Garfinkel, and the chief operations officer, Jean Simpson, in 2000. Both greeted the idea with enthusiasm. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is the largest mental health and addictions facility in Canada and is one of four Centres for Excellence in Mental Health named by the World Health Organization. CAMH describes its principal tasks as advancing our understanding of mental health and addiction and translating this knowledge into practical resources and tools that can be used both in its own programs and in the broader com-

oftmals bleibt im Dunkeln, warum wir an einer Sache solange proben und wir Schauspieler verlieren schnell den Überblick für das ganze Stück. Und am Ende, wenn die einzelnen Details geordnet und aufeinander abgestimmt sind, wirkt alles so, als hätte es von vornherein so gemußt - das Stück folgt der 'inneren' Logik, die wir entwickelt und ~~der~~ Paula und Manfred ihren nachhaltigen Stempel aufgedrückt haben. - Amen (: so war's immer so und so soll es auch bleiben)!
