

## **Feather Picking**

### ***Theater, Movie and Education for Inclusion***

#### **Background, aims:**

**Cultural:** There is no contemporary Roma drama literature in Hungary till 2009, and the Roma art is predominated only by 'authentic', historic art, known mostly on the fields of music and fine arts. There are only very few theater professionals of Roma origin: on the Hungarian Theater Academy only 13 Roma professionals graduated between 1960 and 2013. None of the theaters deal with the actual social challenges and facts concerning the Roma people (e.g. murderers of Roma, discrimination). In the most of the artistic products Roma people are presented in a stereotypical way as very different ones from the members of the majority. – **Aim:** Creating social drama, performance and movie presenting actual social issues and stories in a contemporary – not authentic – way showing a genuine image about Roma communities and their problems, which are common with the ones of the majority, with the active involvement of Roma and non-Roma professionals, youngsters, showing a new perspective for the domestic theater profession.

**Educational:** The disadvantaged and Roma youngsters hardly have a chance to become theater professionals or trainers because of financial reasons and the discriminative functioning of the system. Most of the educational programs ensure for their students weak connections to the work market. In the public education the art products of the biggest minority of the country don't appear and in the social studies there are only few and superficial information about the Roma communities. The democratic discussions, the cooperative art are also missing in the formal education. The students hardly meet young, successful, likable Roma people, who can be positive examples and open discussions partners for them. The support of radical parties (e.g. Jobbik) is increasing among the young people. – **Aim:** theater/trainer education with scholarship for disadvantaged/Roma youngsters, who can also work as actors or trainers beside their studies and who can continue their studies and professional career on the given field. Bringing Roma artistic products (drama, performance, movie) and social studies concerning Roma and non-Roma people in the frames of schools lessons. Ensuring for the students democratic discussion and cooperative art work with the the facilitation of Roma and non-Roma peer trainers. Fostering the participants in the recognition of the dead ends of the radical ideologies.

**Social:** The members of the disadvantaged groups are handled in a very different way than the majority, many times with a deploring, 'supporting' attitude, the common problems and interests of the Roma and non-Roma communities are not in focus, professionally genuine, independent and still successful young Roma people are almost invisible. – **Aim:** Instead of deploring strengthening the partnership attitude either in Roma or in non-Roma youngsters, fixing higher expectation for disadvantaged youngsters, meanwhile showing them professional and financial perspective, which helps them to become genuine, independent and successful professionals. Showing the real backgrounds of social phenomena, the common problems and aims of Roma and non-Roma people, proving that the educational, cultural, social and financial inclusion strengthening each other in a complex way can become sustainable.

#### **Activities, methods:**

**2009 – Collecting** of legal cases, personal stories and actualities (1980-2009) with the professional support of legal defense organizations (Otherness Foundation, Movement for the Desegregation Foundation). Writing a **Roma drama** based on the given stories, which ends up by the mortal hate crimes targeting Roma and non-Roma children, which shows today's reality through the eyes of the children. **Selecting young scholars** with the involvement of a psychologist.

**2010-2011** – 3 months long complex **theater education and rehearsal** with the participation of 5 actor and one assistant director scholars in 20 hours weekly. **Premiere** on the Budapest Spring Festival. Realizing **20 performances** in Budapest and in the countryside for the orders of NGOs and in

own organizations. The performances – which were usually together with **audience meetings** – were successful also by very different target groups (e.g. Hungarian Sociological Association, students, Roma and non-Roma inhabitants of Borsod county). As the play brings attention to the responsibility of all stakeholders (e.g. teacher, Roma mother, doctor, Roma leader, journalist, sociologist) the audience meetings focuses on many new points of view and questions in the discussions of the stakeholders. Many Hungarian theater groups (e.g. Katona József Theater, Pannodráma, Koma Group) and movie makers (e.g. Benedek Fligeauf) start to deal with the topic after the premiere of the 'Feather Picking'. The play is also successful as the opening performance of the « **Memoirées Blessées** » **festival** and also for the local students in the Théâtre Saint-Gervais, Genève in 2011. Here the play was performed with French subtitles. Till then 3 out of the 6 scholars have started their studies on theater academy. Some of the parents of the scholars also participate in our work, which has a positive influence on their lives and their opportunities on the work market.

More social scientific, communicational and artistic groups start to work with the play.

**2012-2013** – The play is performed in **London** for secondary school students with English subtitles. The actors have become 3 years older since the premiere, so they start to be too old for their roles. For this reason, and because there is a growing need for the performance, we figure out to make a movie based on the play and methodology, which helps students to work with the movie and the social questions showed up in it.

We ensured **movie acting workshop** for the actors. Afterwards we made a **video** about the theater performance itself and also a **60 minutes long feature movie**. The second one – proving the professional humility and preparedness of the young actors – was filmed only in 3 days, and it's still become successful. As it gains on the 4<sup>th</sup> International Romani Film Fest 3<sup>rd</sup> prize and the special **prize** given by István Szentandrassy the best Roma painter alive, too.

We start the **education of 4 peer trainers** in the fall of 2013, who – after receiving social studies, training and communicational education – hold 2 x 180 minutes **workshops in two schools** (Gyula Illyés Secondary School, Budaörs, and Free Waldorf School, Fót). During the workshops beside the **discussions** about the students' experiences and opinions regarding Roma people and discrimination they can get closer to the topic through the 'Feather Picking' movie and the social facts and phenomena. They can also react on the challenges and problems most exciting for them by **cooperative creative work**, when making collages and dramatic scenes. The anonymous questionnaires filled by the students showed that all the students with only some exceptions find the workshop interesting and informative. Many of them wrote **their attitudes have changed** during the workshop.

**2014** - In the first half of this year the peer trainers will hold **20 workshops** in domestic secondary schools and universities. The leaders of more schools would also like to host the workshop in the next part of the year. The development of the professional work is supported by constant professional **mentoring, evaluation and quality assurance** in order every group could participate in a workshop, which is designed to their specific needs and characteristics. We will start an **informal group** with the involvement of the participating schools and students, who can strengthen each other in the discussion about actual social questions and in starting grass root initiatives.

#### **Relationship with the wider society:**

**Press:** The domestic printed and electronic, public, private and professional media channels all have ensured media presence for the 'Feather Picking' theater play, movie and educational program, when informing more millions of media consumers about the cultural, social and educational results of the project and its main messages. Related to the performances in Genève the critique of the local 'Tribune de Genève' said the play has similarities to Hrabal's work and it has a lot of strengths.

**Civil society:** During the writing and the creation of the play and the further performances of it in Hungary and abroad, and also during the creation of the movie and its presentation, the creation and dissemination of the educational material we cooperated with many domestic and foreigner NGOs.

**Cultural Scene:** We played the performance e.g. in the Thalia Theater, Balint House, Studio K, Synagogue, Szeged, Théâtre Saint Gervais, Genève. The thematic of the 'Feather Picking' inspired the

work of many theater groups and movie makers mentioned above. One of our earlier scholars Tamás András Szegedi has already directed an own theater play as well.

**Education:** We have had many opportunities to present the play, the movie and our methodology on many domestic and international conferences, workshops, university and non-formal seminars. more scientific papers worked with the social and artistic importance of the initiative. There are around 40 secondary schools and universities, who are waiting for the 'Feather Picking' movie and workshop. We have sources to ensure this opportunity only for 20 of them now.

### **Results:**

(till the beginning of January 2014)

- **1 drama** ( the first one since the democratic change in Hungary, which deals with the actual challenges of the Roma communities, and the first one in which children acts for adult audience)
- **23 performances** in Hungary and abroad
- **2500 viewers**
- **3 million media consumers**
- **6 young people received theater education as scholars**, three of them continued their studies on theater academy
- inspiration for **6 theater plays/movies**
- **5 young people received movie acting education as scholars**
- **1 video about the theater play**
- **1 feature movie**
- **1 educational methodology**
- **4 young people received peer trainer education as scholars**
- **2 school workshops** 2x180 minutes
- **7 collages and 5 dramatic scenes**, which are made by secondary schools students in the frames of the 'Feather Picking' workshops
- **appearance** on many conferences, events, university and non-formal education initiatives in Hungary and abroad
- **ensuring awareness** for many legal cases of discrimination, which could have been forgotten without the Feather Picking

### **Management, Financing:**

The Feather Picking program is the initiative of the Independent Theater, the legal and financial representation of which is ensured by the Women for the Future Association since 2013. The project has been functioning from HUF 20,774,275 since 2009. The grant supports (HUF 16,315,340) have come exclusively from private foundations The incomes from the market (HUF 4,458,905) have accruing from the orders of the civil society and the cultural scene. The program has been functioning for more than 4 years without any support of the Hungarian state of the EU.

In order to reach our plans for this year (holding 50 workshops in schools) we should receive HUF 6,500,000 beside the amount of HUF 6,480,000, which we already have.

In our functioning there is an important role of the disadvantaged Roma and non-Roma scholar actors and trainers, for whom we ensure education, professional practice and income together. Most of our colleagues are art trainers, advisors, psychologist and other developing professionals, who we usually work with as suppliers. During our cooperation with all of our colleagues, scholars and partners the partnership attitude, the proactive, critical attitude, the mutual responsibility, professional intensity and preciousness, predictability are the foundation of our work.