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THE FRIDAY PREVIEW

Lisa Brounsdhan's Woman leaning into tree

HEINER Muller was brought up in Nazi Germany, lives and works in the German Democratic Republic. Robert Wilson was born and grew up in Waco, Texas. Two very different worlds. But this famous East German playwright and leading postmodernist theatre director have found much common ground since they began working together in 1981.

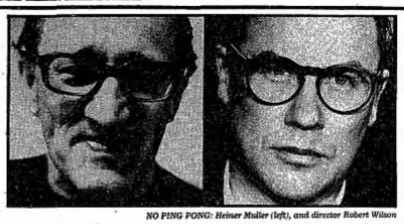
When they first met, they exchanged earliest memories in the process of getting to know each other. Muller remembers watching through the keyhole of his bedroom door while his father was beaten and arrested by the SS. He crept back to his bed. Hearing footsteps approach his room and his father calling out to him, he pretended to be asleep. He refers to this as his guilt. It remains with him and is in all his plays.

Wilson's earliest memory is, he admits, banal by comparison. "I was left outside of this supermarket and I went out into the street . . . I didn't know exactly where I lived . . . had a feeling of being lost." That's almost how some outraged critics seem to have felt after experiencing such seminal productions of his as Einstein on the Beach (1976) with minimalist music by Philip Glass, or Death Destruction & Detroit I & II (1979, 1987).

Hamletmachine, their most recent collaboration, is in London next month at the Almeida on its European tour. Wilson was drawn to the play by its construction and the complexity of the language. "Usually in the theatre you have this ping pong match: pik, pok, pik, pok. In Heiner's plays there's no ping pong." More like pinball, maybe? "Yeah pinball is a good one . . . To me it's like a labyrinth, and sometimes you get half way through it, and you try to figure out how you got there, and you go back and you can't figure it out. When we try to interpret the text, the meanings of the words are narrowed and so I try not to interpret them."

The play, set in the ruins of Europe, resists easy interpretation. The five act structure of Shakespeare's Hamlet, with a dumb show as prelude, is followed, contrasting with the explosion of characters, locations and historical references, Denmark and Budapest (1956) figure in the fragments, as do characters from Hamlet who speak through nameless performers, "Horatio Polonius. I know you're an actor, I am too, I'm playing Hamlet . . . a wall is growing between the two of us."

This death of traditional characters is taken to its postmodern limits, with the death of the author suggested by the tearing in two of a photograph of Heiner Muller.



NO PING PONG: Heiner Muller (left), and director Robert Wilson

East Germany's best playwright since Brecht is teamed with the top US postmodern director for Hamletmachine. Christopher Granlund reports

Pinball ruins

Muller was expelled from the GDR Writers Union in 1961. He is still committed to socialism and is highly critical of West German theatre. Hamletmachine written in 1978, has never been performed in the GDR. It is considered to lack a "sense of historic truth," while Muller is criticised for his "pessimistic attitude to the world and to history."

Wilson doesn't consider it a subversive play in either the eastern or western context. "I mean, sure, one could read it that way. But I think 500 years from now we won't think about it like that. It would have more interest than, say, Sam Shepard or David Mamet . . . now those are real ping pong matches!"

Wilson has had his own problems working within the system. His most ambitious project Civil Wars, a twelve-hour opera using artists from three continents, 15 different languages and a myriad of theatrical techniques and traditions collapsed for lack of sponsorship. With David Bowie booked to feature as Abraham Lincoln, it was to be performed at the 1984 Olympics but the financial backing just wasn't there.

Peter Ueberroth, managing director of the LA Olympics, is not a cultured man. He didn't understand it. Just the title scared him. And his big thing was that this was going to be the Olympics to make money."

Heiner Muller frequently speaks about living and working in "real existing socialism," and its implications for an artist. Wilson, equally conscious of the complexity of working within "real existing capitalism," says "Theatre is a questioning. That's the reason we do it. I dislike most theatre, because of the absence of the question."

Hamletmachine, without traditional development of the plot, themes or characters, is the first chance for the British public to see a major Wilson production; it addresses a limited audience. There seems to be no link with popular culture and Wilson is at first nonplussed by the mention of Dallas and Dynasty in the context of a discussion of his work.

He claims to be one of the Texans who has never even seen Dallas. "I thought of Dallas — although I have honestly never seen it before — when I was doing Heiner's Quartet. I wanted to do it like an American soap opera. These people are going to the guillotine and I thought that for it to be terrifying, really terrifying, it had to be done just like an American soap opera."

Is this what Heiner Muller means when he defiantly describes his plays as comedies? "Oh, they are!" says Wilson. "That's the mistake. No one knows what Heiner's plays are about. They do them all the wrong way. Hamletmachine can be really terrifying (hough in Germany it's never terrifying. It's all done in the wrong way. It's right they are comedies. It's in the middle of the laughing that it becomes terrifying and you think, 'What am I laughing at?'"

Does Wilson still feel that Texas is his home? "No, but I have that landscape in my head and I can't get it out. I went back to Waco when my father died. And I was driving down the street, when suddenly there was this enormous, red, marble, Egyptian temple . . . I thought, what on earth . . . ? I pulled over to the side of the road to have a look. This policeman drives up and says (macho Texan drawl) 'I gotta see your licence.' So I say, 'OK.' Then he asks, 'What are you doin'?' 'I'm looking at this building.' 'Oh, you just looking at this building, ha? Do you do that sort of thing often?' And I say, 'Well, you know I used to study architecture.' 'Hm-hmmm!'

"So it just got more and more ridiculous and he took me down to the city hall. 'We're gonna have to talk about this . . . Hey, this guy just looks at buildings.' It was just too much!" Wilson shrieks with laughter silencing members of the cast on the next table. "Bananas. Oh, God it is terrifying! I mean it really is."

Hamletmachine is at St Etienne and Lille, before coming to the Almeida from November 2 to 15.

THEATRE

The Winter's Tale (Barbican): deeply moving Terry Hands production of one of Shakespeare's best plays: good performances from Paul Shelley, Penny Downie, Joe Melia.
Antony and Cleopatra (Olivier: tonight, tomorrow): Peter Hall's production is both intimate and epic: Judi Dench and Anthony Hopkins play the lovers like two people living in a dream of passion.
The Hypochondriac (Lyric Hammersmith): Moliere's comedy survives Nancy Meckler's updating and Tom Courtenay is seriously funny as the gullible patient who makes his bed his kingdom.
Follies (Shaftesbury): The best musical in London.

Next week

Moscow's Mayakovsky Theatre Company visit the Lyttelton with Andrei Goncharov's production of **Tomorrow Was War** which deals with young people going straight to the battlefront from school. Peter Shaffer's **Lettice and Lovage** opens at the Globe with Maggie Smith and Margaret Tyzack. D H Lawrence's **A Collier's Friday Night** is revived at Greenwich Theatre. John Session's **The Life of Napoleon** comes to the Albery for a season with Kenneth Branagh directing. **Romeo and Juliet** and **David Holman's The Small Poppies** open at the Young Vic. The Joint stock production of Ralph Brown's rap musical **Sanctuary**, comes to the Drill Hall. **Tewodros** by a contemporary African playwright, Tsegaye Gabre Medhin, opens at the Arts Theatre.

Outside London

Susan Penhaligon, Charlotte Cornwell and David Gwillim appear in Ibsen's **A Doll's House** at the Palace, Watford. Stephanie Turner plays the lead in **A Streetcar Named Desire** at the Everyman, Cheltenham. Alan Sillitoe's **Saturday Night and Sunday Morning**, adapted by David Brett, hows at Nottingham Playhouse.

Michael Billington

OPERA

Nozze di Figaro (Covent Garden Tuesday, Thursday). Interesting cool new staging by Johannes Schaaf. Thomas Allen's Count and Marie McLaughlin's Susanna impress. But Claudio Desider's Figaro is overparted. Haitink as usual reserved but elegant.
Pacific Overtures (Coliseum Thursday, tomorrow week). Unusual Sondheim musical about yankee imperialism, given ENO's operetta treatment of foggy diction and limp music-making. Worth a look though.
The Pearl Fishers (Coliseum tomorrow, Tuesday, next Friday). Bizet rarity with famous tune and Anthony Michaels-Moore as Zurga. The Prowse staging is pretty tatty.
Werther (Coliseum tonight, Wednesday). Severe new staging (without glitz) of Massenet's Goethe. Arthur Davies as the glum young hero. Last chance for Ann Murray as the bourgeois loved-one.

Outside London

Die Fledermaus (Liverpool tomorrow, Bristol Tuesday, next Friday). Witty and lively staging with Susanne Murphy as Rosalinde, Peter Brunder a multifluous Alfred, and Laurence Dale charming petulant as Eisenstein. Bright new English text. Also in the WNO rep: Cunning Little Vixen (Liverpool tonight, Bristol tomorrow week) with Anne Dawson and Rita Cullis, Macbeth (Cardiff tomorrow week), and Figaro (Bristol Wednesday).
The Trojans at Carthage (Hull tonight, Nottingham Tuesday, next Friday). Not to be missed staging by Tim Albery with superb designs and choreography by Ian Spink. Sally Burgess memorable as Dido. Also in the Opera North rep: Figaro (Nottingham Wednesday, tomorrow week). Promising Peter Gill staging, with Helen Field's delightful Susanna, Peter Savidge's impressive Count. And Macbeth (Hull tonight, Nottingham Thursday). Barstow as Lady M and Brent Ellis are her man in camp Ian Judge staging.
The Electrification of the Soviet Union (Glyndebourne tomorrow, Oxford tomorrow week). Fascinating new opera by Nigel Osborne with Craig Raine libretto, stunningly theatrical staging by Peter Sellars. Music to hear, plus intriguing ideas. Don't miss. Also on GTO tour: Cosi (Glyndebourne tonight, Oxford, next Friday). Last viewing of Hall's production, with strong new line-up and Graeme Jenkins's lithe conducting. Plus Ravel double bill (Oxford Wednesday, Thursday).

Tom Sutcliffe

DANCE

Tonight's Royal Ballet performance of Swan Lake at Covent Garden will be led by gifted young Maria Almeida and Jay Jolley. Tomorrow night brings first performance of a Stravinsky triple bill conducted by Haitink (Fonteins, Scenes de Ballet and Rite of Spring).

Interesting debuts will be Cynthia Harvey as Firebird and Fiona Chadwick as Chosen One in this Fragonard repeats Monday and Wednesday with cast changes. Simon Rice is Chosen One (Wednesday), first man for this part in Kenneth MacMillan's version. Check casting on 01-240 1815.

Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet at S. Wells (Tuesday to Saturday) give first London performances of Graham Lustig's Paramour, Susan Crow's Private City and Derek Deane's Picture of Dorian Gray. There's a special programme for newcomers to Ballet on Wednesday afternoon, and from Tuesday to Thursday programmes include Ashton's ravishing Valses Nobles et Sentimentales.

Television

Tomorrow evening's Dance From America (BBC-2) features New York City Ballet in Jerome Robbins's In Memory Of, to the Alban Berg violin concerto and starring Suzanne Farrell. Do not miss.

Outside London

Rambert Dance Company and their engagement at the Apollo, Oxford, with (tonight and tomorrow) their commedia dell'arte programme, Pulcinella and Pierrot Lunaire. Next week finds them at the Grand Theatre, Swansea, in two triple bills featuring works by Alston, Clark, Seymour, Bruce and Tetley.

Scottish Ballet gives Peter Darrell's Carmen at their new studio theatre in Glasgow tonight and tomorrow and then next Thursday to Saturday. Northern Ballet Theatre next week will be at the King's Theatre, Southsea, in Robert de Warren's Swan Lake. London Contemporary Dance Theatre will dance The Phantasmagoria at the Grand Theatre, Leeds.

Mary Clarke

LADY Macbeth's parrot, writes John Gittings, is the unexpected product of a marriage between Shakespeare and the Shanghai Opera (at the Palladium from next Monday). There are also familiar favourites like the Magic Monkey — seen above doing battle with the Iron Fan Maiden. For Chinese operatic convention the parrot represents some talk about the Thane of Cawdor's deadly secret. In the sleep-walking scene, Lady M meets Banquo's and the parrot's ghosts before dying on stage. The essence of the play, enhanced by traditional "Kungu" gongs, drums, masks and gestures is unchanged.

Zheng Shifang, adapter of Macbeth (known as "The Story of Bloody Hands"), says there were many Macbeths in the history of the Chinese warring states. Macbeth becomes General Ma Pei, and the players observe the etiquette of the Imperial Court.

CONCERTS

Tilson Thomas/LSO/ Rostropovich (Festival Hall, tonight and Sunday, 7 30). The LSO's Rostropovich Festival, with two rare concertos: Penderecki's Cello Concerto No. 2 (tonight) and Dutilleux's Tout un monde lointain (Sunday). Vivaldi in C major and Strauss's Don Quixote (tonight); Schumann and Brahms's Double Concerto with Anne-Sophie Mutter (Sunday).
Carmina Quartet (Wigmore, tomorrow, 7 30). This British debut of a quartet that has been winning rave notices has Mozart, Ravel and Schumann.
Pollini (Festival Hall, Monday, 7 30). Chopin in the first half. 12 Debussy Etudes.
Tuab (Wigmore, Tuesday, 7 30). Robert Taub, celebrated for his playing of Milton Babbitt tackles Beethoven, Brahms, Scriabin, Chopin.
Salonen/Philharmonia/ Harrell (Festival Hall, Wednesday, 7 30). Ligeti's Lontano, Nielsen's Fifth, and Lynn Harrell plays Elgar. His Wigmore recital on Thursday (7 30) has unaccompanied Bach and Hindemith.
Friend/Nash Ensemble/ Walker (Wigmore, Wednesday, 7 30. French series, rare works by Guy Roparts, Boulez, Debussy, Ravel and Faure.

Edward Greenfield

Outside London

Jarvi/SNO (Usher Hall, Edinburgh today; City Hall, Glasgow tomorrow). Dvorak's Requiem, a masterpiece sadly neglected in this country, is neatly linked with his Biblical Songs. Scottish National Orchestra, SNO Chorus, and soloists Hillevi Martinpelto, Linda Finnie, Martyn Hill, and Brian Rayner Cook.
Tear/OM (Turnpike Gallery, Leigh Street). Robert Tear joins the Orchestra of the Mill as conductor, with Ravel's Le Tombeaude Couperin, Mozart's 40th, and Mendelssohn's Italian.
MRE (Royal Exchange, Manchester Sunday). Musicians of the Royal Exchange present a thoughtful afternoon programme. Two dances from El Amor Brujo arranged by Falla for piano and string quintet, Mozart's Piano Concerto in C, K415, in the chamber version, two Dvorak Waltzes and Lyapunov's Sextet.

Gerald Larner

CABARET

Audience participation is a central part of the cabaret scene — often at the victim's expense. But **J. J. Waller's** total charm and generosity to his random "co-stars" makes for a warm, friendly show. It involves much mess with eggs, but is as clever as it's funny. Tomorrow Waller is at Tramshed (54 Woolwich New Rd), along with **Phil Cornwell, Sea Monster, Gary Howard and Arthur Smith.**
Ronnie Golden does his DJ disco at the end. J.J. is also at the bearpit Tunnel on Sunday (the Mitre, Tunnel Avenue, SE10), with **Harry Enfield** (aka Stavros).
Claire Dowie's one woman play, Adult Child/Dead Child (King's Head Theatre, Upper Street, N1) is moving, gripping and in parts harrowing — with all the genuine intimacy learned from cabaret rather than RADA.
At the George IV, 144 Brixton Hill, the Rodney Bewes Conspiracy Cabaret solid A-team players, Robert Sprackling (Tuesday) tries his hand at comparing Jeremy Hardy, Kit Hollerbach and Kevin Day.

Outside London

Tonight Comic Abuse with Ivor Dembina, Phil Cornwell, Dave Cohen and Felix are at the Exeter and Devon Arts Centre, Exeter.
Also tonight, the outrageous Gerry Sadowitz — rapidly becoming something of a cult — takes his full-length show of fearsome anger and skilful magic to the Zap Club in Brighton (101 Kings Road Arches).
The Square, Fourth Avenue, Harlow, on Monday has compere Logan Murray with Steve Hurst and the very talented Johnny Immaterial.

Carol Sarler

JAZZ

Anita O'Day and the James Moody Quartet provide some high quality at the Lewisham Festival on Monday (Lewisham Theatre). Other names include Cleo Laine (Tuesday), John Williams with Jojo (Wednesday) and Courtney Pine (Thursday).
Paul Rutherford premieres his ambitious piece "Compro(v)isations — Autumn Initiative" at Islington Town Hall (tomorrow night). The 19-piece band includes Howard Riley and Keith Tippett on grand pianos and the inspirational percussion of Louis Moholo.

Outside London

The Chichester Festival offers "Swinging on Tenth Avenue" and a tribute to Gershwin (Sunday), the bands of Peanuts Hucko and York Lawson (Monday), Loose Tubes (Tuesday), Cleo Laine and John Dankworth (Wednesday) and Steve Williamson with I.D.J. (Thursday).
Chameleon plan to make outside sounds on short tour: Carlisle (tonight), Bradford Theatre in the Mill (Tuesday), Newcastle University (Thursday lunchtime) and Stockton Dovecot (Thursday night).
Tommy-Chase Quartet is at Birmingham Showerhouse (tonight), supported by the 8-piece Big Momma. On Sunday night the Andy Sheppard Band is at the Ladbroke Hotel.

Pete Martin

ROCK

Five Star — Romford's Pearson Family with soul-pop's Midastouch play Wembley Arena (tomorrow, Tuesday).
Townes Van Zandt — legendary C&W sing-a-song writer plays the Man Fiddler (tomorrow), the Tram Shed (Sunday).
Basia — Polish-born Latin, jazz and pop chanteuse trills at the Victoria Palace (Sunday).
The Bible — thoughtful, idiosyncratic pop craftsmen at the ICA (tomorrow).
Troubleflunk — Washington DC's go-go crew rock the Academy (tomorrow).
The Ramones — New York's champions of juke box punk return to the Academy (Monday).

Outside London

Townes Van Zandt — Brighton Richmond (tonight), Tryonll Village Hall (Tuesday).
The Christians — suave socialist soul craftsmen at Glasgow QMU (tomorrow), Edinburgh Queens Hall (Sunday).
The Ramones — Cardiff University (tomorrow), Birmingham Hummingbird (Sunday).
The Triffids — panoramic Australian rockers play Nottingham Mardi Gras (tonight), Leeds Polytechnic (Monday), Bristol Bierkeller (Tuesday).
Troubleflunk — play Manchester International (tonight).

Mat Snow

GALLERIES

Sean Scully (Mayor Rowan, 31A Bruton Floor, W1 until November 12). Large striped abstracts distinguished by their brave colour combinations. If Scully's paintings were songs they would definitely fall into the big romantic ballad variety.
Graham Crowley (Edward Totah, 13 Old Burlington Street, W1 until October 31). The weirdness of Crowley's Robert Crumb-like interiors has been transferred outdoors. Macabre, gothic, spooky skylines.
Peter Howson (Angela Flowers, 11 Tottenham Mews, W1 until October 31). Howson's most accomplished show to date in which exuberant Scottish figuration goes in search of Munch-like anxiety.

Outside London

The Vigorous Imagination (National Gallery of Modern Art until October 25). Not the show it could have been but nevertheless an informative survey of the much-lauded new Scottish painting.
Balla (Oxford Museum of Modern Art from Sunday until December 6). A delightful and surprising selection which focuses on the quieter side of the great Futurist's vision. Paintings, drawings, furniture design.

Waldemar Januszczak

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