



Photo: Mely Ribrow

molly pilbrow's PQ DIARY

An eyewitness account of PQ 2007

Arguably the premier event for serious students of theatre design, the Prague Quadrennial attracts a worldwide slate of participants and offers unprecedented opportunities for cultural exchange. Molly Pilbrow attended the events with her husband, the lighting designer and theatre consultant, Richard Pilbrow. What follows is a diary of her observations.

Wednesday, June 13

We're on our way to Prague for PQ2007, our first visit ever. We've been planning the trip for two years, since Richard was asked by USITT to act as curator for the American architecture and technology exhibit.

We land at midnight and take a taxi to a beautifully renovated old hotel in the center of old town Prague. It has modern furnishings and decoration, and there are some lovely Art-Nouveau touches held over from the older hotel—but the high point for us at this late hour is finding the room fridge stocked with cold Pilsner Urquell! The next several days in Prague are very hot, and we quickly gain a real appreciation of the excellent Czech beers.

Thursday, June 14

We taxi to the Industrial Palace, home of the Prague Quadrennial. This exhibition is the only one of its kind and

size in the world. It is held in Prague every four years and exhibits contemporary theatre scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound designs from all over the world, as well as current theatre architecture. The first PQ was held in 1967, so this is the 40th anniversary. A record 60 countries are participating this year.

The Industrial Palace, located about 10 minutes from the city center, is a huge building in the Art Nouveau style. Dominated by a central tower 167' high, there are two exhibition wings totaling 110,000 sq. ft.

Thankfully, we are spared queuing in the heat for our entry passes. Michael Ramsaur (a lighting designer, Stanford University professor, and president of OISTAT) rescues us with some orphaned name tags (not our names) that get us in the door. Immediately, we check out the U.S. architectural exhibit, which has been built and put up by a stalwart group of students from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. John Coyne, of Theatre Projects Consultants, who designed the exhibit, and Bob Scales, past head of theatre at the University of Southern California, make last-minute adjustments. Bob, on behalf of USITT, will be arranging tours of the U.S. exhibits after PQ.

PQ is organized into three distinct sections: National exhibits, school

exhibits, and theatre architecture and technology exhibits. The national exhibitions area is the largest and most elaborate. All 60 participants mount an exhibit showing the latest in professional scenography and theatre technology from their countries. Each installation is built around a theme that the country has chosen. Of the countries exhibiting, those here for the first time include: Belorussia, Ireland, Cameroon, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mongolia, Singapore, and Georgia. Later this week, an international jury will award one country the Golden Triga for its exhibition. Also found in this area are three custom-built theatres for the many lectures and presentations to be given by theatre practitioners from all over the world. Another popular meeting area is the PQ Bar/Second Hand Plaza, where discussions and book presentations are scheduled to take place.

The U.S. exhibit is getting a final checkover. All U.S. participation in PQ is under the auspices of USITT. Alexandra (Sandy) Bonds, professor of costume design at the University of Oregon, is the USITT commissioner for the U.S. at PQ2007. The vice commissioner and exhibits project manager is Tom Korder, from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The U.S. exhibit is looking good—the theme is “New Voices,

New Visions—Out of the Box.” On display is a wonderful collection of set models by U.S. designers; a fascinating range of costumes, photographs, and projected theatre lighting images; and a comfy nook where you can don earphones and hear some striking examples of sound design. There are also computer terminals where you can view more design work, in greater depth. Over 100 U.S. designers are represented. Their work is shown in a two-level purpose-built structure with many entry and exit points allowing for easy traffic flow. The exhibit

Republic. This is the government department that announces and organizes PQ every four years. PQ is supervised by the Theatre Institute in Prague and a council appointed by the Ministry. There is also a welcome from the general commissioner for PQ, Arnold Aronson, professor at Columbia University School of the Arts, division of theatre, and author of many books and articles on theatre and stage design. The speeches are short and everyone gathers in the exhibit halls for food, drink, greeting friends, and a first look at the exhibits. There is a rich collection to

behind the Industrial Palace. As you enter the pavilion, you first encounter Estonia’s exhibit, which consists of an operating table where there is a “body organ” hooked to clear tubes with liquid pulsating through them, leading to a TV screen showing abstract images. Onward, there are interactive exhibits asking you to go down a slide, rotate large wooden wheels, make and decorate paper boats, pull levers, push buttons, peer through peepholes, and sit on puffy cushions in a tent. With some patience and perseverance, you think you know what point is being made—in some instances. There are also the more easily digested exhibits of skillful scenic renderings, models, costumes, clever lighting, and sound effects. Some outstanding models can be seen by students from Belarus, Greece, Taiwan, Italy, Romania, Israel, and Russia.

The U.S. student exhibit echoes its national counterpart with the theme, “New Voices, New Visions, New Vocabulary.” Here, too, is a great variety of work. It is also an interactive experience, since you enter a room that, at first look, is all mirrors. Looking closer, the mirrors are really doors, or drawers, that open to reveal design treasures—tiny set models, video images, costume designs, lighting effects, puppets, and drawing collections. The schools represented here include Ohio University, Carnegie Mellon, University of Connecticut, CalArts, University of South Carolina, University of Oregon, North Carolina School of the Arts, University of Texas at Austin, Yale School of Drama, University of California San Diego, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Tisch School at NYU, Boston University, and University of Missouri-Kansas City. The mirrored exhibit area also serves as a space, where, each day, students from participating schools will give short performances that are design-driven,



Left: U.S. students putting up the U.S. exhibit. Right: The finished work.

was designed by Nic Ularu and Madeleine Sobota. R. Eric Stone was associate designer.

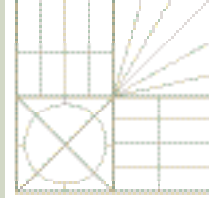
Next door is a large, oddly shaped, and very pink plastic structure. It is Poland’s exhibit; you can’t see what’s inside, and there is feverish activity all around it. Russia’s exhibit is located behind the U.S. It’s not clear what’s happening here—but there seems to be water involved and a row of very large galoshes have appeared across the front of the exhibit opening.

At 7pm, PQ 2007 is officially opened by representatives of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech

Republic. This is the government department that announces and organizes PQ every four years. PQ is supervised by the Theatre Institute in Prague and a council appointed by the Ministry. There is also a welcome from the general commissioner for PQ, Arnold Aronson, professor at Columbia University School of the Arts, division of theatre, and author of many books and articles on theatre and stage design. The speeches are short and everyone gathers in the exhibit halls for food, drink, greeting friends, and a first look at the exhibits. There is a rich collection to

Friday, June 15

Today we take an extensive look at the school exhibits. Forty-three countries have exhibits representing the work of students from art and design schools, drama institutes, and theatre academies, as well as university theatre departments. It is so large that it is housed in a separate pavilion



rather than actor- or director-driven.

This installation, under the guidance of USITT and Sandy Bond, is sponsored by the Tobin Theatre Arts Fund. Like the national U.S. exhibit, it was constructed and installed by students from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) with support from the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts. Tom Korder and R. Eric Stone were project manager and associate project manager respectively. The student exhibit was designed by Ursula Belden. The curators were Susan Tsu, Don Tindall, Jon Savage, Laura Crow, and Ursula Belden.

This evening, we join the USITT PQ team, exhibit designers, and UIUC students and teachers who can now relax a little and enjoy the successes of their many months of hard work. We are treated to an excellent outing at a Czech beer garden where, between glasses of becherovka and slivovice, we enjoy tales of visits to the Czech Home Depot, last-minute electrical emergencies, and other getting-the-show-on stories. This is a very impressive group of folks, many of whom have been working years to get the U.S. contribution to PQ 2007 planned, organized, and realized.

Saturday, June 16

I'm taking a day off from PQ. Instead, I'm looking around Prague.

The architecture of the Old Town is a very pleasing scale—no tall skyscrapers here. Each building seems to have a character of its own. The facades are decorated with beautiful details, often highlighted with bright colors. It's an easy place to walk and look.

First stop is the Mucha Museum, dedicated to the work of Alphonse Mucha, one of the most popular artists of the Art Nouveau period. He's best-known for his panels and posters of beautiful women, flowing hair, flowers, and halo effects. His career took off after he designed a poster for Sarah Bernhardt's produc-



The U.S. student exhibit.

tion of *Gismonda* in 1894. He followed with a series of theatre posters for Bernhardt that established him as the pre-eminent exponent of Parisian Art Nouveau.

Next, a visit to The Municipal House, a public building that opened in 1911. It has been referred to as "the pearl of Prague Art Nouveau." It housed a major concert hall, which enjoyed an international reputation, with many famous musicians performing there before World War II. After the war, the building was badly neglected and only used for propaganda events. Only after The Velvet Revolution in 1989, when the Communist government was replaced by Vaclav Havel's Civic Forum, did it undergo a renovation that returned it to its former beauty and elegance. Today, you can enjoy the concert hall, two recital halls, two elegant restaurants, bars, meeting and club rooms, and exhibition spaces all decorated with outstanding examples of Prague Art Nouveau, Cubism, and Art Deco. Highlights include beautiful colored windows, wall panels, light fittings, murals, tiles, fabrics, and furnishings.

In the evening we see a performance of the renowned *Laterna Magika*. This is the original show of

projection mixed with live performers created for the 1958 Brussels World Fair by the legendary Czech designer Josef Svoboda. Frankly, it is rather dated now. Nearly half a century ago, I'm told, it was a sensation. Now, it is an interesting piece of theatre design history.

Sunday, June 17

The third exhibition section at PQ is for theatre architecture and technology.

This subject is given the least amount of space; therefore, the entries are more modest. Twenty four countries have presented examples of recent theatre architecture. The primary display methods are video, large photographs and boards, and architectural models. Each country has chosen a theme for its exhibit.

The U.S. theme is "Performance Spaces for a New Generation"—new training facilities for the performing arts. The projects presented were chosen through a USITT competition. The advisory committee included Dawn Chiang, lighting designer; Peter Sargent, dean, College of Fine Arts, Webster University; Robert Shock, theatre consultant; Michael Tingley, architect, BOORA; Richard Weinstein, architect. Richard served as curator. Additional support came from ETC.



The U.S. national exhibit, seen from the second level.

The two featured buildings are the Class of '62 Center for Theatre and Dance at Williams College, Massachusetts, architect William Rawn Associates, and the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Bard College, New York, architect Gehry Partners LLP. Fifteen other projects are shown in mounted photographs and a video presentation.

There is a small lecture theatre in the area, for presentations and lectures by architects and consultants. Some lectures cover theatre architecture in India, Germany, Rumania, Uganda, Holland, Uzbekistan, and the Czech Republic.

Possibly the most action-packed and vibrant aspect of PQ is SCENOFEST, located in the Central Hall. It is the result of collaboration between PQ and OISTAT. Here, young designers and students mix with seasoned professionals for workshops on scene design, costumes, puppetry, lighting, sound, rigging, and

technology. There are daily lectures and discussions, demonstrations, and performances. The performances often take place in the grounds surrounding the palace and at various sites in the city. Scenofest embodies the true worldwide nature of PQ—with collaborative experiences and projects involving students from many of the 60 countries taking part.

An example of an interesting project is the lighting of several landmarks around the city of Prague. Led by Cindy Limauro, professor of lighting design at Carnegie Mellon University, a group of students are supervised in the lighting of a different attraction each night. Each object is lit for one evening only. (See sidebar.)

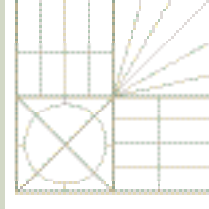
A project that design students from many countries undertook was costume and scenery designs for Aristophanes' *The Birds*. Displayed as a group, they form an exciting range of creativity and skills. Critique sessions are scheduled with several noted visiting designers. Another

project in the Central Hall is the Tower of Babel. This tall, open, metal structure houses various demonstrations and performances that require rigging and flying of scenic pieces or individuals. Also in this hall is the Scenofest Theatre, a presentation space complete with full lighting, sound, and rigging capabilities made of scaffolding and encased by walls of cardboard boxes filled with Rockwool. It is a very efficient space with remarkable acoustic properties.

On display in the Central Hall are the entries for the OISTAT architecture competition. Architects were asked to design a new theatre space, seating 500. Examples vary from very experimental and flexible spaces, to more traditional forms.

Monday, June 18

10:30am: Richard delivers his lecture, "Theatre vs. Architecture." I am very nervous, because I know how impassioned and outspoken he can be on this subject. Fortunately, a certain



degree of restraint is exercised and not too many slanderous comments are made.

3:30pm: Richard's second lecture of the day, "50 Years of Stage Lighting Design...and What Next?" is given to a large crowd in the Scenofest Theatre. There are lots of slides, funny stories, and good discussion with the audience.

The PQ awards ceremony takes place in the evening. Arnold Aronson introduces the award presenters. PQ's highest award, the Golden Triga, for the best presentation of a theme, is won by Russia. Their national exhibition—remember the water and galoshes—was a box lined with rubber with about an inch of water on the floor and low hanging light bulbs overhead. A row of oversized galoshes were lined up across the front for visitors to slip on before entering the box. Inside, there were models of sets, props, set pieces, and costumes created for productions of plays by Chekhov. The theme was "Our Chekhov—Twenty Years Later."

Gold medals were given for: Best Use of Technology (Taiwan and Slovakia), Best Theatre Costumes (Mexico), Best Stage Design (Portugal). Best Realization of a Production: (Germany for *Macbeth* and the Republic of South Africa for *medEia*), Best Student Exhibit (Latvia) and Most Promising Student Talent (Reinis Suhanovs of Latvia).

We are disappointed that there is no gold medal awarded this year for theatre architecture; however, an honorary diploma is given to Spain for the spirit of its exhibit, calling attention to theatre buildings that are at risk and the need for information exchange.

Tuesday, June 19

Richard and I take a trip to the medieval town of Cesky Krumlov, three hours outside of Prague in southern Bohemia. We are visiting the famous castle there and are especial-

ly keen to see the Castle Theatre. This is a Baroque theatre built around 1680 that has been extensively restored. Many parts of the original theatre have been preserved, including the auditorium, orchestra pit, stage, stage technology, machinery, decorations, costumes, props, lighting technology, and fire extinguishers, as well as archival documentation such as librettos, scripts, sheet music, inventories, accounts, and other information on theatre life in the 17th to 19th centuries. You can get a very good look at this theatre and the theatre machinery by going to: http://www.ckrumlov.cz/uk/zamek/5nadvori/i_bd.htm, click "castle," then "castle theatre." This is one of the finest preserved theatres of this period in Europe.

Wednesday, June 20

A last visit to PQ 2007. We attend a presentation by Uwe Kohler, founder, actor, and artistic director of the Theatre Titanick. This German theatre group is known world-wide for staging of large, bold, fantastical events and outdoor spectacles using giant objects and props, music, lighting, fire, and amazing special effects. It's a scale of theatrical spectacle that few of us have had the good fortune to see. Kohler is a charming presenter and takes great joy in sharing some extraordinary images with his audience.

The next event is a forum led by Arnold Aronson. His panel discusses the future of PQ. Issues include the overwhelming success of Scenofest and the workshops, which are greatly oversubscribed; the effect of new communication and presentation technologies; the growth of design-driven performances by students; and the great diversity of scenography.

A last look at the national exhibits: Some of my favorites include the models of Borus Kudlicka for the Slovak Republic, the clean and simple presentation of the British design-

ers, the Japanese work exhibited at a sushi bar, the stark presentation of beautiful models by Israel, the colorful and well-lit scenic models in the Turkish exhibit, and the skill and humor shown by Belarus designers.

Maybe one of the most unique stands is the Dutch National Pavilion. Each day a prominent Dutch designer is introduced and interviewed about his work and design process. Later, there is a round-table discussion between the featured designer and several invited designers and theatre practitioners from other countries. There is seating for the public and they are encouraged to ask questions and participate in the discussions. This is the essence of what PQ is all about: Dialogue, exchange of ideas, young people learning from more experienced designers, theatre people from all over the world sharing stories and learning from each other. This all takes place in an extraordinary atmosphere of camaraderie and love of theatre, infused with the great energy of young, creative, enthusiastic people and the wisdom and skills of experienced designers and teachers.

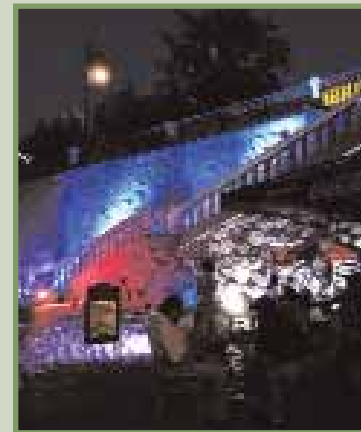
This was the largest PQ ever; there were 5,000 registered participants and a total 23,000 visitors. There will be another PQ in four years, and I'm sure it will be just as exciting and inspiring as PQ 2007. It would be only beneficial if more American colleges and universities and more professional theatre designers and architects take notice and plan to participate. The USITT will be the link for us all to plan on taking part in PQ 2011. 🌱

lighting the city: PRAGUE SHINES

By: Cindy Limauro

The Prague Quadrennial was started during the Cold War as a way for artists in countries around the world to transcend politics and to share their work. During PQ 2007, international teams of students from Belgium, Bosnia, Canada, France, Germany, Mexico, Montenegro, New Zealand, Norway, Serbia, Spain, Taiwan, and the United States were led by a pair of professional designers from the U.S., Cindy Limauro and Christopher Popowich of C & C Lighting, in lighting some of Prague's famous landmarks. Each group of students had four hours to analyze their space, experiment with light onsite, and then reveal their design to the public for one night only. Thorn Lighting in Prague generously provided a lighting package of wash

was installed after the Velvet Revolution on the pedestal formerly occupied by a large stone statue of Stalin, which was blown up in 1962. The site can be viewed from many vantage points in Prague during the day, but at night it disappears. The students approached the design of the Metronome as a symbol of the end of Communism. They attached a white light on the bottom of the needle to create a moving beacon of light. The stone façade below was lit with a color-changing wash unit to create visual contrast and a festive atmosphere. The graffiti on the side walls was embraced by grazing the surface with white light. Uplights along the steps created a huge shadow play as people moved through the light.



Left: The Metronome. Center: The Industrial Palace. Right: The riverfront. Opposite page: The Cechuv Bridge.

and spot fixtures with color filters, white and color-changing LEDs, and technical support. Students learned about the different types of architectural fixtures and the historical significance of each site. The groups were not only intercultural, but also interdisciplinary, including theatrical lighting designers, architectural lighting designers, scene designers, and architects.

The Metronome

Across the river from the Jewish Quarter, on top of the hill in Letna Park, stands a giant metronome built in 1991. It

The Industrial Palace

Built in 1891, The Industrial Palace is the site of the Prague Quadrennial. The students were asked to create special lighting on the front façade of the building in honor of the design awards being presented. To emphasize the PQ's theatricality, the students wanted to create splashes of color to create a harmonious composition and also emphasize the beautiful architectural detail. The center tower arch below the clock was lit with a color-changing wash unit, as if to provide a dynamic changing of time.

The side columns were lit with a mixture of white, blue, and green wash units. The glass was backlit from the inside with moving lights.

Cechuv Bridge

The Cechuv Bridge is located at the bottom of the hill the Metronome sits on. Crossing the river, one can look up to see the Metronome, while those at the top can look down on the bridge and the riverfront. Limited, by access, to useful lighting positions, the students chose to place a simple green wash on the underside of the bridge. This created a contrast to the blue sky and water, and was viewed by the many boats on the river and people walking along the banks. The design was also meant to complement the work of the students designing the adjacent riverfront to the bridge.

Riverfront adjacent to the Cechuv Bridge

There is a café at the foot of the Cechuv Bridge, along with a docking area for the many tourist river boats. The students' approach to this site was to create something striking that could be seen on top of the hill at the Metronome. Using the natural texture of the stone walls and cobblestone pavement, the students used color to create an abstract painting when viewed from a distance.

All in all, it was a stimulating project. Speaking of the entire experience, Heather Starr, one of the American students, said, "I was forced to reconsider how color and

direction of a beam moved the eye to highlight different aspects of the building. None of us had ever used the instruments we were given, so the different beams and colors took some getting used to. Overall, I think the lighting workshop is the best experience a lighting student could ask for." 🌱

