

UNGA KLARA BERÄTTAR LIVET
UNGA KLARA ON LIFE 1982



HÄXORNA I TORSÅKER
THE WITCHES OF TORSÅKER 1977



ANIARA 1982



UNDERJORDENS LÉENDE
THE SMILE OF HADES 1982



EMILIA! EMILIA! 1976



MIRAD - EN POJKE FRÅN BOSNIEN
MIRAD - A BOY FROM BOSNIA 1994





GABRIELLE 1975



EN MAN GJUTEN I ETT STYCKE
A MAN CAST IN ONE PIECE
1976



MÅSEN/THE SEAGULL 1997



»R« 1990



AFFÄREN DANTON/THE DANTON AFFAIR 1986



TYP 931 OEDIPUS/OEDIPUS 1993



SPRIT/LIQUOR 1978



DET KUNGLIGA TEATERDAGISET/THE ROYAL THEATRE NURSERY 2001



What Is Unga Klara?

Unga Klara is an ongoing exploration of the possibilities of theatre, still under the leadership of Suzanne Osten, artistic director since its creation in 1975.

The company is a separate entity within the City Theatre of Stockholm, having two stages, its own budget, acting ensemble and organisation.

”Unga Klara is a little bit like Real Madrid” (the football team), says the dramatist, Mattias Andersson. ”One takes for granted that one will win everything”.

Is that really so?

A number of people, each important to Unga Klara, try to put their finger on what exactly Unga Klara is.

Lotta Fristorp, editor

Suzanne Osten, director and artistic director of Unga Klara since its foundation in 1975, is also a Professor at the Stockholm Dramatic Institute, a film-maker and an incisive social commentator. Becomes bored as quickly as she becomes involved.

'What I hate in children's culture is the diminution of feelings. Things only almost become angry, almost become sad, almost become disgusting. When children are supposed to vomit on stage, it's diminished to a little sob. It seems that the responsibility of adults imposes a kind of stopper upon feelings children have, like a kind of condom. I get so bored when I see bad children's theatre, well-meaning crap.

'Of course, it's about nostalgia. Nobody has an interest in children really, or takes them seriously. But good art turns your thinking completely upside down and children need that too.

'We adults haven't got the energy to cope with children. They're difficult to be with.

I don't say that I'm better but I do say that

I've seen through it. I feel betrayed when I sit in a theatre and see something well-meaning and dishonest.

'I felt compelled to come up with an alternative. And I've met self-deluding adults who say: "children won't understand that." Adults are not good at living in the here and now. We live either in the past or the future. Sometimes I almost become ill from pining for my childhood. I have incredibly sensuous memories of my childhood experiences, but they are short, happy, fleeting moments.

'I look back to my wounds and upsets and transform them. I have written about and made theatre of my childhood with a mother who was psychologically ill, and criticised people who saw what life was like for me then but didn't intervene. But would it have been better to be adopted? Would I have then have eternally missed my mother? Bad things bind us together enormously. Everything I say about dishonest ways of depicting childhood has to do with me wanting to satisfy the child that I once was.

'Nostalgia is fog—it's a way of forgetting and making things cosy. What I mean when I talk about children's theatre as revolution is about turning every assumption on its head.

'One of my first productions at Unga Klara, *Medea's Children* (1975), was a symbolically important play. It was about divorce and took the children's part. We who worked on the pro-



duction were divorced and it became a settling of accounts with our own inabilities. In a way, *Medea's Children* is the antecedent to *The Girl, the Mother and the Rubbish* (1998). Both are about mothers whose agony drains into the children. Now, when we're embarking upon a new interpretation of *Medea's Children*, people say: "But everybody's divorcing".

But they haven't understood how incredibly decisive a divorce is for the lives of the children, even if the divorce is "amicable". Yes, society accepts divorce nowadays. But if infidelity can break an adult, then for a child divorce can be as powerful as a murder threat. It threatens their very existence. But that's what is so good about the Classics—they took catastrophe

seriously. Nowadays we psychologise and trivialise the catastrophes in life.

'I'd like to challenge our audience with an non-ingratiating classic. Perhaps I would like to do a *Chief Thing* for five-year-olds, or something that's a matter of life or death to 10–13 year-olds.

'What is Unga Klara? As a place to be, we're not a particularly matey. But at best, we're an advanced intellectual and avant-garde laboratory. If there's anything folksy about Unga Klara it's the absolute determination to take our work to an audience.

'I work best when the wind's against me. I develop through resistance. I'm good at creating space, although nobody wants to give it to me. Nagging pays off, my mother said. I've lived up to that.

'Unga Klara is the will to meet an audience. That's enormously important and it comes from me. I have a teacher within me. I'm enormously fond of creating dialogue and often strike up a good relationship with people. I feel safe when I get people going. I must have learnt that early on, probably from my teacher, Miss Margareta. She acknowledged me. "Yes, you're ok and we'll listen." She was a passionate woman with a great fervour who wrote a book advocating that secretaries stand up for their rights. She formed my image of the teacher as an artist. Miss Margareta took her pupils—all of them—completely seriously. She treated us with respect.

'That was before "the male gaze" fell upon me, before I changed from skinny tomboy and gang leader to a bimbo. For several years I was unhappy in my new attractive huge body that I tried to diet away. All that I made into theatre.

'Unga Klara will soon have had thirty years of freedom within the confines of The City Theatre of Stockholm. What will we do then? I'm scared almost to death of stagnating. So the new vision looks like this: we shall do new

things with the audience, riskier things. Repeating the Unga Klara concept would be like putting on a straitjacket. It would bore me. I must have a different sort of jacket to wear. Developing the ensemble would be good, but the ensemble must also develop itself. It's good that they slide off sometimes and don't think of Unga Klara as a home. I think that in the future we will have 24 actors some years and 4 in others.

'It's good when people in the ensemble try directing and writing. I believe in Unga Klara as "research theatre", that we assume the responsibility of showing our way of working to a younger generation of theatre workers. I would like to tie film-makers into the group, bring in dynamic teachers and guest specialists, and it would be good if we ourselves tutor and teach within our fields. I believe in Unga Klara combining a research profile with a responsibility to its audience.

'And apart from an non-ingratiating classic perhaps I'd like to do baby theatre. As a kind of visceral happening.' ●

The Child's Perspective

Politically aware, playful and constantly attempting to roll back the theatrical limits—in the eyes of critics sometimes successfully, sometimes not—these are the definitions to which reviewers most often return when describing Unga Klara. Yet within the company there is another notion that constantly recurs when we want to get to the heart of our work, and that is the child's perspective.

'What's the child's perspective on this?' we ask when discussing a project. Perhaps this sounds a bit hazy, but it's a way of questioning what is important in the work, where the conflicts are, and who has the power.

When Suzanne Osten and Per Lysander wrote Unga Klara's first production, *Medea's Children* in 1975, they had a clear idea in mind. It was the concept that gave Suzanne Osten the opportunity to launch Unga Klara as an independent company within the City Theatre of Stockholm. In the Greek classical drama of Medea on which the play was based, two parents fight a furiously bloody battle following their separation during which their children, despite being frequently referred to, have only a few lines to speak. In *Medea's children*, the children were to be the main focus; now they would say what their parents' wrangling meant to them.

In the same way, Unga Klara has in one production after another over the years looked at the condition of children. Sometimes we have taken on concrete issues, such as the alcoholism of parents, anorexia, the madness of

parents, suicide, or the trials of having to live under cover in a foreign country. And in this way Unga Klara's lightheartedness in creating theatre encounters serious themes.

Sometimes the perspective has extended even further: in *The Piggie* (1991), the psychoanalysis of a two-year-old girl was portrayed; in *Irina's New Life* (1996), a woman with Down's Syndrome told the story of Ronja Rövardotter [a novel by Astrid Lindgren] in her own way. The child was allowed to tear apart the adult world.

The child's perspective is just that: attacking entrenched power from the viewpoint of the powerless, since children are always powerless in relation to adults.

And yet one might ask what is the child's perspective in a production such as *The Main Thing?* (2002.) Well, we would probably say that it lies in the affirmation of the right of the young to form their own identities, and perhaps also in the interest in psychoanalysis. It has not only been a way of interpreting the world, and I think in that sense our way of using psychoanalysis has changed over the years; but it is also an expression of something very simple: the will, without prejudice, to investigate the power and clarity of childhood experience in order to create artistic expression.

Good theatre is often exaggerated yet truthful, and at the same time rather like those childhood memories that are so profound they leave an indelible mark upon the mind.

Erik Uddenberg, dramaturg

Unga Klara 1975–2003

GABRIELLE 1975
MEDEA'S CHILDREN 1975
THE VAMPIRE 1975
A MAN CAST IN ONE PIECE 1976
THE BITTER TEARS OF PETRA VON KANT 1976
THE PRINCESSES AT HAGA 1976
THE HUNTING OF THE SNAKES 1976
EMILIA! EMILIA! 1976
THE WITCHES OF TORSÅKER 1977
LAZARILLO 1977
CHILDCABARET 1977
PRINCE FREE OF SORROW 1977
CLASS 6D, SWEDEN, THE WORLD 1978
THE SWEATY TIGER 1978
LIQUOR 1978
THE CHILDREN OF THE FROSTMOOR 1978
VIOLENT LOVE 1979
ROMEO & SIGNE 1979
A TASTE OF HONEY 1981
THE PORK HORSES 1981
UNGA KLARA ON LIFE 1982
ANIARA 1982
THE SMILE OF HADES 1982
A CLEAN GIRL 1983
A WINTER'S TALE 1983
HITLER'S CHILDHOOD, PART 1 1984
HITLER'S CHILDHOOD, PART 2 1984
THE PERFORMANCE ABOUT GOD 1985
CHILDHATRED 1985
THE DANTON AFFAIR 1986
METAMORPHOS 1986
EVERYONE – EXCEPT ME 1987
CHANG ENG – THE SIAMESE TWINS 1987
THE TOAD AQUARIUM 1988
MR LEONARDS CHILDREN 1989
IN THE SUMMERHOUSE 1988
THE TEMPEST 1990
»R« 1990
THE PIGGLE 1991
VADORAN 1991
»6« 1992
THE DOLPHIN 1992
OEDIPUS 1993
DANCE WITH YOUR NEIGHBOUR 1993
THE SEA OF FAIRY TALES 1993
MIRAD – A BOY FROM BOSNIA 1994
PREPARATIONS FOR A SUICIDE 1994
MONEY 1994
HAMLET 1995
THE LILACS 1996
IRINA'S NEW LIFE 1996
THE SEAGULL 1997
THE GIRL, THE MOTHER AND THE RUBBISH 1998
DIFFICULT PEOPLE 1999
THE RUNNER 2000
THE BORDERLINE 2000
JB 2001
THE ROYAL THEATRE NURSERY 2001
DARK DAYS 2002
THE MAIN THING 2002
LIFE IS A DREAM 2003
MEDEA'S CHILDREN 2003

Mattias Andersson, dramatist. In 2000, he directed his own play, *The Runner*, at Unga Klara. Although proud of the result, next time, he says, he will do things entirely differently.

'I sent my first play, *And on the Outside lies the Sea*, to Suzanne Osten. She sent a cryptic response in curious handwriting: "As I wrote in my earlier letter..." But I had not had an "earlier letter". And neither did I get an answer as to what she thought of my play.

'I had written to Suzanne earlier, when I was training as an actor, and apparently something interested her as she suggested we meet. It was not a success. We went to McDonald's. I was awkward, and I think she thought I was as well. But at least she knew





who I was. I sent my next play, *Floor 12*, to Unga Klara, and this time they contacted me and asked whether I had any other ideas. That led to their commissioning an idea for a play that eventually became *The Runner*, about a young man who trains as a runner but feels as though he's stuck in a rut and going round and round in circles.

'And then we met at a seminar in Amsterdam. Suzanne and Erik [Uddenberg, dramatist and dramaturg] and me. That was great fun. And it was there that I saw Suzanne's greatness as a director. She immediately created a good atmosphere with the actors.

'During the 1998 Year of Culture in Stockholm, a theatre group in which I was involved produced *K+M+R+L*. I directed the play myself and it was a kind of breakthrough for me. It was after that production that Suzanne asked whether I would like to direct *The Runner*.

'We started rehearsals just before Christmas. My play was stylised and full of repetition. The rhythm was very important and an ensemble style of acting was required in order to make it work. I thought we had an incredibly long rehearsal schedule. Then it was announced we were going to do research. "What research?" I thought. I suppose it's good to go out and investigate a subject and then make a play, but in this case, there already was a play.

'The point was that the ensemble just had finished a playing long periods of *Difficult People*, and had worked themselves into their own roles. "Shit, what do we do now?" I thought. I wasn't hugely worried but I certainly felt a pressure to inspire the actors. At an early stage in the rehearsal process, it was agreed to try out the text of the play at a high school. I was rather hesitant, but went along with it. It started well enough. The actors did a bit of theatre sports with the students, which they thought good fun. Then we read the first fifteen pages of my manuscript.

'It went appallingly badly. And this was precisely the audience I wanted the play to reach. It doesn't really get to me much if theatre people think that what I do is bad, but this felt terrible. I went home that night and re-wrote the entire first section. It changed for the better, but it was painful getting that insight.

'But I think the agony started before that, when Unga Klara asked me if I could write for high school audiences. In order to write about my own high school experiences I had recreated what I'd felt then and as a result, I felt dreadful. I regressed. I think the atmosphere in the play prompted that for me and perhaps also for the cast. When conflicts arose the cast tended to escalate into a kind of adolescent squabble, scoring points off each other. Possibly it was the cast taking on the characters in the play.

'Every Saturday, after each week's rehearsal, we'd have a meeting at which the actors related their experiences of the week. That also completely threw me. I had never experienced that before. But it was probably a good way of solving whatever conflicts had arisen.

'*The Runner* is about bullying. My intention was that the audience would be so provoked by the weakness of the main character, that they would think that he deserved to be bullied. "The little idiot deserves a thumping." The idea was that after a while their compassion would be awoken and they'd turn in his favour, and although during most performances this happened as I hoped, sometimes the audience remained against him for the entire show and that was very alarming. *The Runner* was not at all ingratiating. It was provocatively done with a lot of repetitions and it all drove the audience crazy.

'I like playing in front of high school audiences. They react more directly and spontaneously to different provocations. But it's easy to be cocky when you sit down and write. We creat-

ed our own homepage for *The Runner* and got some malicious responses. I began longing to do an ingratiating work.

'I travel around. I go round as a kind of travelling salesman in theatre. There's an incredible freedom in this that appeals to me, although the disadvantage is that you haven't got time to follow through anything. If I came back to Unga Klara, I would know what I would do. I would use time. One has to take into account what is special with Unga Klara. The ensemble. The openness. The terminology. And use it. A show like *The Main Thing* would not be possible to do anywhere else in Sweden. Perhaps not anywhere else at all. That's what I thought when I saw it.

'I'm pleased with how *The Runner* turned out. By the premiere we had really got it together, but with Unga Klara it's a little bit like Real Madrid, one takes for granted that they're going to win everything. We were invited to take the play to that year's Theatre Biennale in Växjö, which I thought was wonderful. But the opinion at Unga Klara was that there was no time to go and the show was too complicated technically. And there I was, so proud...' ●

Maria Geber, costume designer, whose work for Unga Klara includes Hamlet, Difficult People and The Main Thing. She believes herself to be too austere in her work and is therefore searching for more fluidity.

'I think I'm probably at my most generous at Unga Klara, when I'm part of a more democratic working process. Sometimes I can be too austere in my approach, but that doesn't work here. So I go with the flow. There are good things, advantages about this way of working that make you put up with it.

'One often says that the theatre is a closed world, but at Unga Klara, it's one's own world that becomes bigger. Here, I've met a paediatrician who has worked in Rwanda and a female priest who's been married to a transvestite. I often walk away reinvigorated even when the work is about distressing issues. I especially like the mix of highs and lows. Sometimes one has to tap one's creativity to the utmost and at other times it's just for fun. One talks about designer clothes and children's analysts seemingly in the same breath.

'At other theatres I have far greater control.

At the Stockholm Opera, the costume sketches must be submitted six months in advance, just as in films, where everything runs to a tight schedule. But Unga Klara has made a virtue of keeping everything in flux for as long as possible. Suzanne Osten feels that the designer providing sketches too early can hinder the actors, that somebody else's expression impedes their working process. So when everything is unresolved for so long, why should I deliver sketches? It's good training for me. I have to let go of the control I have elsewhere. When we did *Difficult People* Johan Petri [musician, composer] asked: "will it really look like this?" "Yes", I said. That was such a liberating feeling.

'Although I grew up surrounded by convention, I always fought against it and the accusation I most hated was this: "What would things be like if everybody did things this way?" But I still think that I'm too inhibited and controlled. Now I want my approach to become more free-flowing.

'Suzanne Osten is like a wonderful well that never runs dry; she leaves you to get on with it, which is good. I think she is best in the really big format as a commander—when she's organising her troops. Then she's in her element. She can put in everything she thinks of and dodge backwards and forwards.

'I remember *Difficult People* with joy. But when I was faced with the prospect of *The Main Thing* I felt the need of a few "light-houses in the storm", if you like, to navigate by, just so that I could ride the waves a bit. The wedding dresses became the fixed points—besides, the costume department needed time to make them. I've also tried to have costume showings on mannequins in order to push a director into a decision.

'At Unga Klara, one talks very much with the actors, which is something I've introduced in other theatres. If the only thing you've done



is show a sketch for a costume at the first reading, there can problems later at the fitting.

'I was a costume assistant on *The Mozart Brothers* (film, dir. Suzanne Osten 1986) when I had my first contact with Suzanne. I had just agreed to make costumes for the Park Theatre and when I later withdrew from that I heard I would be blacklisted in the business.

'I was on Beckman's Costume Course in Stockholm during the 1970s. Note that it was not called the Fashion Course; that would have been politically incorrect in Sweden at the time. Even then I was different. I had already gone to art school and trained as a photographer in San Francisco. I wanted to do and see as much as I could. None of my classmates had ever been to the Museum of Modern Art. I more or less grew up there.

'When I was little, I longed to disappear into a dream world. I could stand in front of

a mirror draping myself with shawls for hours. When I was fourteen, I knew the name of every French photo model. I escaped into *Bildjournalen* [a Swedish fashion and general interest magazine] and fantasised about people my own age who seemed to lead such exciting lives, Ann Zacharias and the Princess of Monaco, for example. I had the kind of eye that registered everything. Fashion was an enormous interest of mine.

'And yet I still had that severity. I wanted to get to the central artistic image, and when I came to the theatre I thought I had found a place that radiated just that. Here was the collective. Here was a profession to do with clothes that also meant artistic freedom.

'At times in my life I have been melancholy. At Unga Klara you could sit in a corner and cry. In some way I knew I would end up here.'



Malin Ek, actress. An “arbour person” who likes stopping for a while, sitting still, having a cup of coffee and enjoying the peace. Needs continuity, context, and seeks a greater depth in acting. And a blowtorch to enthuse her.



‘When I was little, I went to *Vår teater* [Our Theatre—a local community theatre] but it was absolutely not for me. My Dad, who was an actor, always emphasised to us children what a terrible strain acting was. “Whatever you do,” he said, “don’t ever become actors”.

‘At school I had difficulty in concentrating. I didn’t even take Realen [a national examination taken at 16] but started work as an errand girl. However, when I was 17 I started studying at a *Folkhögskola* [adult education college]. A man there was producing a play and in the end I agreed to be a part of it. I was very taken by the experience of getting to show what I felt inside. By the same token, my brother Niklas did not begin dancing until he was 19—and then he shared this compelling need for expression.

‘Perhaps I would have always ended up in the theatre—both my parents were theatre people—but without the experience from the *Folkhögskola* I might have become a cleaner or a dresser rather than an actor. But after *Folkhögskola*, I got into acting school and after that I started at the Royal Dramatic

Theatre when I was 23 years old.

‘My first contact with Suzanne Osten was when she was looking for a main character for her film, *Mum* (1982). She had been told to see me in a play, *A Cool Million*, at the Royal Dramatic Theatre. I did a screen test and that was a very positive experience. Suzanne was very humane and guided me wonderfully. I got the role. I like the film, but when it comes to my own contribution, my self-criticism just blinds me. I worry at myself like a terrier.

‘Acting can be wonderful but also bloody awful. Since you’re your own instrument, you must have access to your inner as well as outer resources. And when you open up like that, you might encounter feelings you’d rather not know about. It’s not every day that you want to confront yourself when you go on stage at 6pm.

‘The first production I was in at Unga Klara was Lars Norén’s *The Smile of Hades*. I had rather a silent role, a listener’s role. I have never regretted leaving the Royal Dramatic Theatre for Unga Klara. The meeting with Suzanne and her way of working was very significant. I needed her insight and her joy of discovery. Unga Klara has been my education and my university. There’s the child’s perspective and the psychoanalytical orientation of the productions—“Just theatre” is not enough as far as Suzanne’s concerned. There also has to be a collective stand in the artistic work. When I was 43, I started psychoanalysis myself. The impetus was that encounter with Unga Klara and it’s been of great importance to me. But in order to depict people you don’t have to have a great self-knowledge.

‘I think all the productions have been important but the research work before *A Clean Girl* (about anorexia) and *Hitler’s Childhood* were hugely affecting. Of the roles I have played, I think most of all of Aerial in *The Tempest*, the female role in *Dance with your Neighbour*, and

Mr Solares in *The Summerhouse*. Mr Solares was a male role with few lines. Therefore I could work with a hoarse Latino voice—he thrust his words forward. Not many people recognised me and several asked: “who is that little actor?” To begin with, it was terrifying to assume the role of a man, but it was a good challenge to get the longing and insecurity of that stereotypical male, and simply bring him to life.

‘Has Unga Klara changed? It’s a big part of my life—it’s changed. There’s continuity; Suzanne has managed to renew and preserve at the same time. A lot of it is about how you manage to make use of people’s abilities and the possibilities of development. It doesn’t always succeed, but for my own part, I’m satisfied.

‘At the same time, I’m critical of the fact that there’s not time to do more in-depth acting work with character. I often find my way there too late—when we’ve already premiered. In the few productions I see on other stages, I often miss depth in the acting. As part of an audience I don’t feel

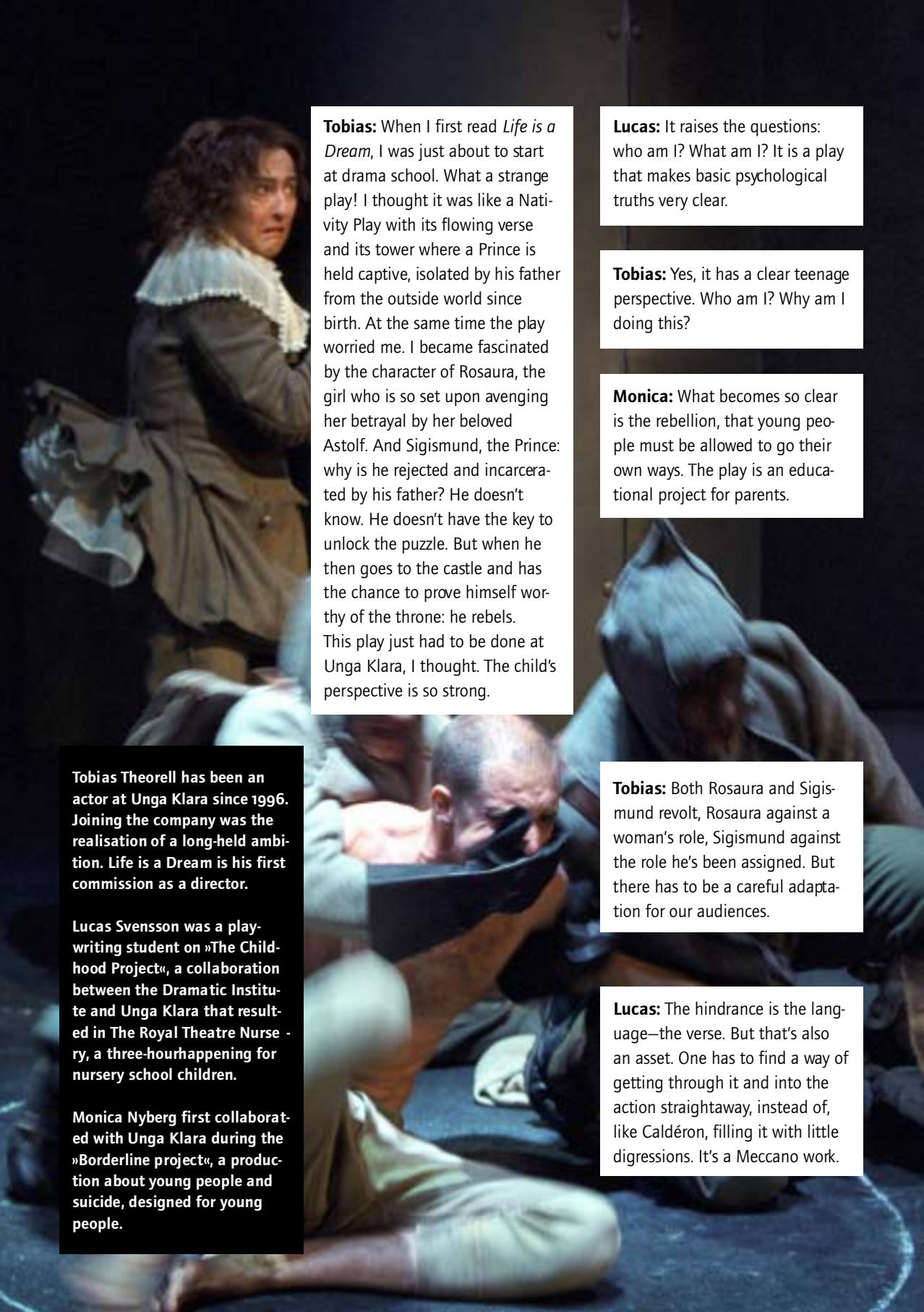
what the characters in the play experience. Intellectually I can understand, but that’s not enough. It’s a director’s job to demand this work and make space for it.

The whole point, the whole meaning of the actor’s work is for the audience to be both emotionally and intellectually affected by what they see on stage. And the older I become, the more meaningless my work seems without this depth.

‘Now, I wouldn’t mind going back to studying again. The motivation’s there. And the serenity. So the “compelling need for expression” has subsided a bit, I suppose! ●

Skip the happy ending—let rip with the violence.

In three conversations at different stages during the preparation for the production of Caldéron's *Life is A Dream*, the dramatist Lucas Svensson, the director Tobias Theorell and the teacher Monica Nyberg discuss how much seventeenth century text 13–16 year olds can tolerate, the adaptation of ideas and their experiences of encounters between actors and young people at school.



Tobias: When I first read *Life is a Dream*, I was just about to start at drama school. What a strange play! I thought it was like a Nativity Play with its flowing verse and its tower where a Prince is held captive, isolated by his father from the outside world since birth. At the same time the play worried me. I became fascinated by the character of Rosaura, the girl who is so set upon avenging her betrayal by her beloved Astolf. And Sigismund, the Prince: why is he rejected and incarcerated by his father? He doesn't know. He doesn't have the key to unlock the puzzle. But when he then goes to the castle and has the chance to prove himself worthy of the throne: he rebels. This play just had to be done at Unga Klara, I thought. The child's perspective is so strong.

Lucas: It raises the questions: who am I? What am I? It is a play that makes basic psychological truths very clear.

Tobias: Yes, it has a clear teenage perspective. Who am I? Why am I doing this?

Monica: What becomes so clear is the rebellion, that young people must be allowed to go their own ways. The play is an educational project for parents.


Tobias Theorell has been an actor at Unga Klara since 1996. Joining the company was the realisation of a long-held ambition. *Life is a Dream* is his first commission as a director.

Lucas Svensson was a play-writing student on «The Childhood Project», a collaboration between the Dramatic Institute and Unga Klara that resulted in *The Royal Theatre Nursery*, a three-hour happening for nursery school children.

Monica Nyberg first collaborated with Unga Klara during the «Borderline project», a production about young people and suicide, designed for young people.

Tobias: Both Rosaura and Sigismund revolt, Rosaura against a woman's role, Sigismund against the role he's been assigned. But there has to be a careful adaptation for our audiences.

Lucas: The hindrance is the language—the verse. But that's also an asset. One has to find a way of getting through it and into the action straightaway, instead of, like Caldéron, filling it with little digressions. It's a Meccano work.



Monica: That's a difficulty—absolutely. But at the same time I can also see an asset in the language. Teenagers use language games: hip-hop is a language game. And the whole play is about so much: war and peace, love and hate, black or white. It really suits this age group, and it engages with the 'I'.

Lucas: I remember when I was fifteen, I constructed an alternative 'Lucas'. For the whole of my schooling between seven and sixteen I was badly bullied—by the time I was thirteen a pattern of humiliation had been established. Not until after I was 16 did I change environment, but by then I had been to school with the same people since nursery school, and had the same nicknames all the way through.

The 'Lucas' that I constructed worked better, but a division emerged between the real Lucas and the constructed one.

Tobias: I recognise that. Trying to be somebody else.

The conversation continued after two weeks of meetings at schools with pupils aged 13 to 16.

Tobias: You definitely notice things that you hadn't expected. The idea of taking power. To want power. One guy said that it was unthinkable that Rosaura avenges the betrayal herself, that her brothers or father should do so. He meant that that is why Rosaura disguises herself as a man.

Lucas: (laughing): I think Rosaura has become more of a warrior now. The sword will plunge into Astolf. [The traitor.]

Monica: It's about power and powerlessness. The language is no problem. You can tell the story grips people. But the revenge and war theme is for the boys. I think you should meet groups of girls on their own.

Lucas: Somebody thought that the play took place in the 1980s! I think one has to refine the theme of power in the play.

Tobias: Yes, the 'stage world' in the play falls by the wayside in the meetings with the pupils. What they are interested in is war and revenge. They want more of that. Somebody said: "skip the happy ending and let rip with the violence".

Lucas: What struck me is that the play brings out the parents' treachery. Many young people are so fragile in their reactions—and yet they react so strongly to the themes of treachery and fatherlessness. But they don't have the words to express it yet, I think.

The third conversation took place three weeks after the first reading.

Tobias: I think that we're on the right lines. It's a good adaptation. Full steam ahead!

Lucas: What becomes apparent now is what's missing—but I'm quite pleased. It was good that we chewed over the text for so long. At the beginning I was afraid that it would lack a sense of the here and now. But now the text feels like an asset. It generates a lot of feelings.

Tobias: Lucas has developed what's already there in the play. It hits the right note.

Monica: The male way into the play is very clear, we know that now. But when we met the pupils, it was difficult for the girls to be heard. We have to think about that when we meet the group that's going to follow the rehearsals. It's good that it's a more mixed group both in terms of ages and where they're from. Both inner-city schools and the suburbs.

Tobias: In Calderon's version it's as though Rosaura is a mixture of Kajsa Kavat [a character in a children's book by Astrid Lindgren] and an Amazon. Wholesome. She's not like that any more. I think both the girls in the play, Rosaura and Stella [whom Astolf prefers] have become more clearly defined. Just watching teenagers, watching what they're like with each other, gives you a feeling of: "Aha, now I see..."

Lucas: ...How you relate to each other in a room, of not meeting someone else's eyes. How one tries to flood one's body with personality. That's our audience, and it gives you an insight for the time when you sit down and write.

Tobias: For me, the teenage years are a period I'd rather forget. I had a kind of sentimental feeling when I walked past my old school some time ago, but that's my feeling now. Then there was a lot of unhappiness. To me the teens were a sad period. You deal with such terribly heavy stuff, becoming independent from one's parents, the "who am I?"

Monica: There was a sense of freedom when one finished school, of not being forcibly institutionalised any longer.

Lucas: There was nothing to be proud of. I was bullied too. But in the end I found enough to sustain myself with.

Tobias: In the beginning I was hesitant when it came to the target group. I thought that perhaps 13-16-year-olds were too young. But now I think rather the opposite. Now it feels natural we're going to produce this play for them. ●

Simon Norrthon, actor, played the unforgettable Birk in *Irina's New Life* and a rejected ex-wife in *The Main Thing*. Professes to dislike changes but concedes they might be beneficial.

'My first impression of Unga Klara was from a television interview with Suzanne Osten. She said a word that I had to look up in a dictionary: "omnipotent." There's a lot I've had to look up during past few years at Unga Klara. I agree with Peter Scott [stage manager] when he says that Unga Klara is his university. It's true: Unga Klara is like an information bank.

'Suzanne Osten taught at the Stockholm Drama College while I was a student there. She saw my anger during an improvisation and offered me a role as a skinhead in a film: *Speak: It's so Dark*. We filmed during the summer holidays, and in the autumn of 1993 I began working at Unga Klara, on *Dance with Your Neighbour*.

'I'd started doing theatre in upper high school but Stefan, my younger brother, already

had a theatre group. Thanks to the age difference, I was one step ahead of him all the way to stage school. When I applied and was accepted, I was worried that Stefan might not manage to do the same. Sometimes I was worried that I'd acted the dominant big brother and been rather rotten to him, so when I began at stage school I took him out to dinner and apologised. But Stefan didn't remember being slighted in any way. A weight lifted from my heart when he also got into drama school. And now we're both working at Unga Klara. Yes, I suppose you could say we're close.

'My first encounter with Unga Klara was probably the best. I thought: "this isn't happening". Imagine: getting to dance with Ana Laguna and acting opposite Malin Ek. I had seen all the productions at Unga Klara since *The Danton Affair*, and thought there was no other place that I'd rather work; that this was a place that you could never get enough of. Seen from the outside, it was such a vital and sparky group. I had come straight from stage school and saw Unga Klara as my home. Now I can see it more professionally.

'I think I've found my place in the organisation and come to terms with the disadvantages. There have been conflicts; for example, when some people in the ensemble have to be let go after a production is finished. When you're at Unga Klara you are expected to be at one with the group, but then suddenly you're cast out into the cold again. Perhaps it has to be that way, but it's exhausting. How much should you invest? What is an ensemble?

'Now I'm back here after a period at other theatres and I think, yes, it is more fun to work in a process than not, and to be an active participant. Everybody is so incredibly commit-

ted at Unga Klara, not uncritical but loyal. Lillis [stage technician] gave me direction the other day. Anja [props manager] often points out that my "s" is too sharp.

'Once or twice I've thought that Unga Klara should be wound up, because I felt that the audience just gets what it expects and we get what we expect of the audience. But then really absorbing productions such as *Irina's New Life* and *The Main Thing* come along.

'Suzanne Osten is a strong leader and an authority in the theatre. She knows where theatre is going and she takes responsibility. I learned an enormous sympathy for "the director" when I got the opportunity to direct *JB* (2000). It's great fun to work with the actors and as a director you learn to formulate certain things, whereas as an actor you're allowed to be more irrational. But I'm not interested in putting my name on the map or going down in theatre history as a director. It's too lonely. You have to take several hundred decisions a day. But when it all sings on the stage, then it's fun. It's about creating a working environment in which the actors' suggestions are taken into account, and getting the entire creative team to come up with their own answers.

'However, as an actor I learned to wait a



little with my ideas. The risk was that Suzanne would say: "Great, we'll use that." You mustn't be too quick. One wants to please, but it's easy to run away from yourself. At Unga Klara there's always an ambitious approach and Suzanne really wants to have a conversation with the audience. The process up to the premiere is always interesting and important, but perhaps it's not always good for the actors. There are scenes in *The Main Thing*, for instance, that we rehearsed only twice. But Suzanne would never agree about that. It's the director who makes the choices, and one must remember that even at Unga Klara.' ●



In Spring 2003, Ann Petré was awarded the Swedish Theatre Critics' Prize for her performance as Doctor Fregoli in *The Main Thing*. She had then worked at Unga Klara for thirteen years. She looks upon herself as the antidote to 'a find', and is happy that hard, unglamorous acting actually pays off.

'I thought you had to be dazzlingly brilliant to be at Unga Klara. Know a lot of "tricks", juggle and do the splits. That scared me when I came here. But it wasn't like that. Being me was enough.'

'After I left drama school, I wrote a letter each year to Unga Klara about my wanting to work here. I thought I would fit in. In the end, I wrote: "This is the last time I ask..."'

'This was a time of political awareness. At drama school you dreamt of going to Unga Klara, Folkteatern or Skånska Teatern. Not the Royal Dramatic Theatre.'

'I got a job at Västmanland's Regional Theatre. That was an ideal start, but after five years I took a sabbatical. I wanted to do something else.'

'Working on Leif Sundberg's production of *Blood Wedding* in Västerås was a big turning-point. He introduced me to a more visual and physical way of working. Earlier I had thought that the face was the principal

means of expression, but now I was encouraged to use my whole body.'

'I played the bride in *Blood Wedding*. She is about to marry a man whom she doesn't love. Outside, the man she really loves is galloping on his horse. That gallop becomes part of her so that she begins stamping herself.'

'After the years in Västerås, I co-founded the Boulevard Theatre here in Stockholm with Mikael Segerström, among others. We wanted to try a new kind of farce. We borrowed money, bought the premises and painted the walls. I had a child.'

'Then, at short notice, I was offered a big part in Staffan Göthe's *A Stuffed Dog* at the Stockholm City Theatre. It was a success, and I got a year's contract. Suzanne Osten said: »Why don't you come and work with us, now that you are in the house anyway?«

'I can't say that I have a favourite role, but »The Piggie« took up a large part of my life. I got the opportunity to deal with the child within myself with the knowledge of an adult.'

'I was supposed to be a three-year-old. The same age that Ebba, my own daughter, was then. How can a grown-up woman of 172 cm create such a small girl?'

'How do you make it credible? The child's perspective, that we so often talk about at Unga Klara, became physically palpable.'

'In »The Piggie« I really had to believe that I was three years old. And that's what I did.'

'The preparation was painful. To meet people who work with children with problems. To read about child therapies, about parents who can't bond with their children.'

'It was there, inside of me. I had been such a child. Was I that kind of parent?'

'I've spent a large part of my life observing others. As a child I was forced to develop that ability in order to survive. I grew up in a bourgeois environment where orderliness was all important'.

'I could be the best waitress in the world. I'm good at reading other people's needs.'

'This is a "truth" I've found out about myself. I'm not a witty ideas-person, but I do notice things.'

'"You're not a Celebrity", a journalist said to me. Then I thought that perhaps I've made a choice to be part of a context, where the platform is more important than the play and my own performance.'

'Unga Klara is that platform to me. We are working with a process and look beyond the play, to find out as much as possible about its real content.'

'I think it's better that way. Instead of sitting about waiting for the next director to "see" you.'

'Like a horse standing in a stable waiting to be chosen.' ●

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