

BOND STREET THEATRE NEWS

Winter 2003

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www.bondst.org

Afghanistan



Scene from *In the Mirror* with Exile Theatre in Afghanistan.



Making rugs in Andkhoi, Afghanistan, at headmaster's home.



Rob Lok as Romeo and Jordanka Andonova as Juliet.

In June-July, four members of Bond Street Theatre traveled to Afghanistan to bring joy and laughter to a country plagued by decades of war and years of oppression under Taliban rule—a country of warm people where laughter is almost forgotten.

Afghanistan is like traveling back to ancient times: great expanses of deserts and dirt roads with trains of camels carrying goods into exotic marketplaces, and villages of beautiful mud houses with no electricity or running water for miles.

In the bigger cities, the destruction of war is still devastating. Thousands of refugees try to make a life in little shops built into the ruins. Children are going to schools with no facades (you can just walk off the edge of the third floor), broken walls, no electricity and no water! But they are so eager to go to school. Under the Taliban, girls could not attend school and boys only received religious training, so everyone was deprived of education.

Theatre—and all of the arts—have been decimated by the eight years of strict Taliban law. They almost succeeded in breaking the creative soul of this country! Most children under the age of 10 have never seen a performance of any kind, nor a painting, nor seen a dance! The traditional music managed to survive although this too was banned, musical instruments destroyed, and even the National Dance was forbidden. It is heart-breaking!

Our project in Afghanistan had two parts: one was to collaborate with a theatre company there, Exile Theatre, a daring group that had taken great risks to perform during the Taliban and finally fled to Pakistan. And the other was to work with children in the huge orphanages of Kabul and in schools in the most remote villages in northern Afghanistan. We taught students in the Theatre Program at Kabul University—all 60+ of them male!

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Romeo and Juliet

Theatre Tsvete, puppet theatre of Bulgaria
& Bond Street Theatre of New York present the premiere US tour

After four years of performing throughout the Balkans, Theatre Tsvete, renowned puppet theatre from Bulgaria, and Bond Street Theatre bring their beautifully **visual, non-verbal** version of *Romeo & Juliet* to the USA for the first time. Striking images, blacklight effects, live music and the dynamic physicality of dance, stunts, acrobatics and swordplay bring the story to life. Created at the height of the war in Kosovo, this famous tragedy is eased with beautiful images and more than a dash of comedy.

Using the power of symbols rather than verbal language, the play vividly expresses the tragedy of neighbor against neighbor, and the situation of people in many areas of the world today who are confronting the choice between love and violence. The two theatre groups have a mutual mission to create theatre designed to stimulate peace.

We invite you to come enjoy the production at:

| | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Double Edge Theatre | — Ashfield, MA | October 11-12 |
| Baltimore Theatre Project | — Baltimore, MD | October 17-19 and 23-26 |
| Takoma Theatre | — Washington, DC | October 30-31, November 1-2 |
| The Family Arts Center | — Monticello, NY | November 6-7 |
| University of Rio Grande | — Rio Grande, OH | November 9 |
| Theatre for the New City | — New York City, NY | November 12-16 |

For full schedule with performance times and locations, go to www.bondst.org.

“Attractive, spiritual and contemporary.” — Darinka Nikolich, DNEVIK, Serbia
“An instant hit... Laughter and applause punctuated the performance.”

— Daniel Simpson, THE NEW YORK TIMES

Arts for Healing — a retreat for children and families affected by 9/11

Sponsored by Lions Club International and facilitated by Friendship Ambassadors Foundation, Bond Street has been offering its healing theatre work to families who lost loved ones on September 11th through a very effective series of arts retreats. The program provided families a wide range of artistic expression, such as puppetry, mask-making, circus arts, music and dance, as a means to address grief and anxiety. Bond Street is proud to be a part of this excellent program. Theatre Tsvete will also participate in the program while in the USA.

Upcoming Plans — Afghanistan / Mexico / Balkan Peace Project

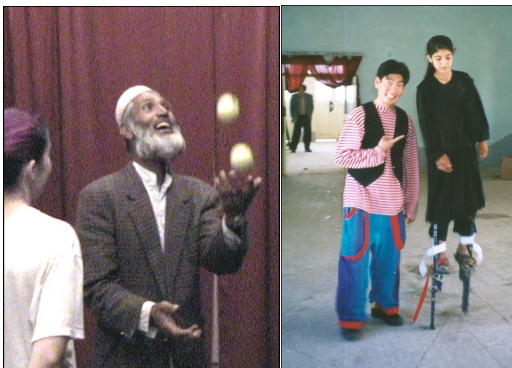
In January, Bond Street will visit **Mexico** to begin research on workers in plants and *maquiladoras* for upcoming production on this topic. Invitations to Festivals in **South America** in August will provide the opportunity for additional research on globalization issues.

Spring 2004, Bond Street will travel to eight rural districts in **Afghanistan** to create educational projects for children, teachers and especially women's groups in each area. Using theatre as a means to illuminate issues such as hygiene, landmines and other topics, participants will present their stories in their community in an imaginative format as a way to generate a creative approach to problem-solving.

Next year, the group will return to the Balkans to continue collaborating with theatre groups in Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia and further develop the **Performing Artists for Balkan Peace**, a networking project to encourage artistic cooperation in the region.



People live in these windowless ruins in Kabul, Afghanistan.



Christina teaches the security guard to juggle (L). Girl in Andkhoi learns to walk on stilts with guidance from Rob (R).

Afghanistan continued...

Working with the actors of Exile Theatre was a joy! The physical theatre techniques we brought were very new in Afghanistan, and they gave us a wealth of Afghan music, poetry and dance. Together, we created a performance about the last 20 years in Afghanistan, *In the Mirror*, a play (with no words) depicting the repression of the Soviet reign, the torture of the *mujahedeen* era, the violence of the Taliban regime, and ending with images of the unstable "interim government" of today... a sad tale, but obviously the story they needed to tell. Audiences were deeply moved! This style of image-based theatre is a new vision for theatre in Afghanistan and we were honored to receive an award from both Kabul University and the Minister of Culture.

Our work in the orphanages of Kabul, full of children left homeless from the wars, and out in the most remote villages in the north where truly the people had never seen a performance of any type—these experiences were the most rewarding! In the schoolyards, we had audiences of 2000-3000 children and adults... perhaps the entire village (the women in their burqas way in the back). And we were happy to see that the same things make children laugh everywhere in the world: falling down, squirting water, chase scenes, etc. We followed our performances with workshops in mime and stilt-walking. Especially for girls who never get to try anything so daring, learning the stilts was an empowering achievement. The joy and excitement we brought to these children makes us eager to return!

People ask if we felt in danger. We were always aware of the potential risks in our daily travels and the insecure nature of public performance, but clearly we won the hearts of even the most disapproving spectator. Certainly what we presented was controversial from the most religious standpoint: men and women together, dancing, music, women using their bodies in extraordinary ways. But people accepted our presentations with great enthusiasm and thanked us wholeheartedly. More than anything, the Afghan people are incredibly hospitable and treated us, as they do all guests, with the utmost generosity and love.

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Bond Street Theatre is proud to announce the Awards and Grants received this year:

ArtsLink—Bond Street was selected to receive an ArtsLink Residencies grant to host puppeteer Konstantin Kostov of Bulgaria in the US.

Arts International awarded Artistic Director, Joanna Sherman, an **Artists Exploration Fund** grant to support artistic activities in Afghanistan, one of fifteen artists selected from applicants nationwide.

Princess Grace Foundation awarded Stephanie Skaff a Theatre Apprenticeship grant to work and study with Bond Street for a full year.

US Department of State, Educational and Cultural Affairs, awarded a Travel Grant to assist artistic-humanitarian work in Afghanistan.

The **Barondess Foundation** has awarded Bond Street Theatre a grant to assist in the development and US tour of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Bond Street Theatre is now officially instated as an organization in association with the **United Nations** Department of Public Information.

Bond Street Theatre — 2 Bond Street, New York, NY 10012 • (212) 254-4614 info@bondst.org • www.bondst.org

Joanna Sherman—Artistic Director, actor; **Michael McGuigan**—Managing Director actor; **Stephanie Skaff**—Development Associate, actor; **Sean Nowell**—Musical Director; **Meghan Frank**—Marketing Intern; **Luanne Dietrich**—Actor, mask-maker; **Fred Collins**—Fight choreographer; **Robert Lok**—Actor; **Christina Gelsone**—Actor; **Sima Wolf**—Actor, musician; **Alexandre Fortuit**—Percussionist; **Joe Schufle**—Musician; **Bruce Williamson**—Musician, composer.