

# BOND STREET THEATRE NEWS

Spring 2002 2 Bond Street, New York, NY 10012 tel/fax 212-254-4614 www.bondst.org

## Working with refugees in *Afghanistan-Pakistan*

Our recent travels to the Afghan refugee camps in northern Pakistan were incredibly rewarding – the population there had certainly never seen anything like us or our performances. People told us their cheeks hurt from laughing because they so rarely have cause to laugh. Basic survival in the face of extreme poverty is the focus of daily life in the refugee areas and everyone – men, women and even children – work constantly to eke out a living.

The Afghan culture in the camps is very conservative: women are completely covered, men and women never mix, and all entertainment (music, television, film, dance) is frowned upon or actually forbidden. So how did they accept us coming in with music and stilt-dancing? And clown routines with acrobatics, slapstick, and outlandish behavior? We were so different from anything they had ever seen, we were almost beyond rules. Also, we were performing in the safety of the refugee schools where “cross-cultural” behavior could be viewed as educational. Outside of the schools, our presentations would have been impossible.

I am sure that we made an amazing impression on the children and on the adults too! Everyone was enthralled by the show and thrilled to learn the skills in workshops. To see something so amazing as stilts and then to try it yourself was a kind of miracle. The little girls, who are so shy and reserved, just came to life – all smiles and maybe their first feelings of self-confidence.

April 4—20  
**Afghanistan-Pakistan**

July 17—August 19  
**Tour in Western Europe**

October 21—November 27  
**Balkan Peace Project**

October-November 2003  
**U.S. National Tour**

Highlights of 2001 ⇌⇌

## *Cozmic Jazz — a Short History of the Universe*

was presented at the famous MIMOS Festival in Perigueux, France, this August, and won First Prize at the Meppel Festival in the Netherlands. A satirical and humorous history of humanity, *Cozmic Jazz* is an original play without words, full of bizarre characters, acrobatics, stilts, dance, physical comedy and live music. The company also performed at the Limburg, Overijssel op Straat and Karavan Festivals in the Netherlands and the Lauwe Festival in Belgium.

## *Balkan Peace Project* continues...

Continuing a collaboration initiated in 1999, Bond Street Theatre and Theatre Tsvete, an award-winning puppet theatre company from Bulgaria, are returning to the Balkans to continue their creative work in areas of conflict. Over the last three years, the two companies have worked together to create a theatre production which would address critical issues in a creative way — the result was a visual, non-verbal version of *Romeo and Juliet* which toured throughout Kosovo, Bosnia and Serbia. This Fall, the two groups will meet and collaborate with four other theatre companies: Dah Teatar, a well-known Serbian theatre company; Theatre Dodona, a puppet theatre in Kosovo; Theatre Boemi in Macedonia; and Teatri Petro Marko in Albania. In each location, the companies will exchange performance techniques, training processes, ideas and missions. The goal is to encourage the formation of an inter-Balkan network of artists devoted to promoting peace and cross-cultural understanding.

## *Romeo and Juliet* to tour US next Oct-Nov 2003

Bond Street Theatre is raising funds to bring Theatre Tsvete from Bulgaria to perform *Romeo and Juliet* in theatres across the US. The two groups will also present a video-lecture about working in areas of conflict for presentation to civic organizations and universities, plus a variety of programs for children. We are especially targeting communities with inter-ethnic conflicts of their own. We are also eager to bring the unique Bulgarian music and “object theatre” techniques to audiences in this country, and to introduce our vision of physical-visual theatre.



Scene from *Cozmic Jazz* (Michael McGuigan)



Scene from *Romeo and Juliet* (Katya Stoyanova)

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Rehearsing *Romeo & Juliet* in Sibiu, Romania



Stilt-walkers leading Village Halloween Parade

## 2001—Peace Project in Serbia and Bosnia

Continuing our collaboration with Theatre Tsvete of Bulgaria, we brought *Romeo and Juliet* to festivals and theatres in Romania, Serbia, Bosnia and Bulgaria. Highlights include: an artists' symposium in honor of Dah Teatar of Belgrade (pioneers throughout the Milosevic era), performances at the **International Festival of New and Alternative Theatre** in Yugoslavia and the **Sibiu International Theatre Festival** in Romania and, through UNICEF, performances in the most critical areas of southern Serbia where ethnic tensions are still dangerously high. The theatres here were packed beyond capacity and audiences were wildly enthusiastic. This type of theatre has not been seen in this region and most theatres have been closed since the war.

Our special performance for the **Hospital for Children with Mental Disorders** in Kuline, which had been horribly neglected during the war, was especially rewarding. At first, the doctors were concerned that our Stilt Band might agitate the children who had never seen stilts nor heard such music. To their amazement, the children smiled and laughed and got up to dance! The hospital staff said it was the first time they had seen these children smile, let alone dance! In fact, they asked if we could stay and play for them again... which we did.

The journey was as challenging as it was uplifting: for example, in one theatre we performed *Romeo and Juliet* with exactly one stage light and 12 flashlights since this theatre had no budget to make repairs or basic upkeep for years. Our border-crossing stories were also ones for the books. We are proud that feature stories about our work appeared on UNICEF's website and in the National Endowment's Annual Report. **We heartily thank Arts International, the Trust for Mutual Understanding, ArtsLink, the NEA, and all our generous donors!**

## 3rd Balkan Youth Reconciliation Seminar

Young adults from 8 Balkan nations were selected by the Friendship Ambassadors Foundation and given the challenge to envision a New Balkania. Bond Street Theatre, together with New York's Vanaver Caravan, created a street performance to illustrate this idea, based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and interwoven with the music and dances of each region. The 40-member cast of non-professionals worked intensively. The result was not only a beautiful production, but a harmony brought about through hard work for a common goal, and a tribute to the theatre arts to be able to cross cultural barriers and foster trust.

## Festival Internacional de Oriente de Barcelona — Venezuela

Our timely production, *Cozmic Jazz—A Short History of the Universe*, was presented this past October at one of Venezuela's most popular festivals. Flying to Venezuela via Colombia so soon after events of 9-11 gave the company an ample taste of the new airport security, but the beauty of Barcelona's architecture, people, weather and beaches, made the complicated travel experience worth it. The company performed in one of the town's most picturesque old theatres, with raked stage and ornate tiered seating. And in true Venezuelan style, we salsa'd until dawn. We thank Delbis Cordona, a well-known actor from Caracas, who joined our cast for the production.

## A Special Tribute at the Village Halloween Parade

Twenty of New York's best stilts joined Bond Street Theatre in leading the legendary Village Halloween Parade. Bond Street has led the parade, with On-the-Lam Band, for many years and has been a participant since its inception in 1973. This year's theme of the Phoenix Bird rising from its ashes inspired us to create a special tribute to New York with 20 costumed stilts sweeping the street from their lofty heights to metaphorically clean the streets of tragedy and clear the way for a renewal of spirit and hope. Costumes by Misako.

## The Bond Street Theatre Company

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**Joanna Sherman**—Artistic Director, actor; **Michael McGuigan**—Managing Director, actor; **Kim van Os**—Marketing Director;  
**Misako Takashima**—Costume and Puppet Designer; **Sean Nowell**—Musical Director, actor; **Luanne Dietrich**—Actor, mask-maker, musician;  
**Fred Collins**—Fight choreographer; **Rob Lok**—Actor; **Alexandre Fortuit**—Percussionist; **Christina Gelsone**—Actor; **Sima Wolf**—Actor, musician;  
**Bruce Williamson**—Musician, composer; **Joe Schuffe**—Musician; **Danny Evans**—Actor; **Madeleine McLaughlin**—Apprentice.