

***BABEL International Performing Arts  
Festival, Târgoviște, Romania***

***”Theatre is not a place for unanimity”***



@Maria Ștefănescu, 2025

INTERVIEW<sup>1</sup> WITH MANAGER,  
DIRECTOR, AND SCENOGRAPHER  
**MIHAI CONSTANTIN RANIN**  
**(Mc Ranin)**

by **RUXANDRA VERA ENACHE**

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Cornel Huțanu.

**Mihai Constantin Ranin** is a visionary artist, both a director and a scenographer, whose work is deeply intertwined with the destiny of the “Tony Bulandra” Theatre in Târgoviște, Romania. As a trailblazer, he played a pivotal role in founding this theatre and establishing the Babel Festival, which has grown significantly over the years. In this interview, primarily focused on the festival, readers can gain insight into the importance of building something meaningful for both the artistic community and the general public. While many obstacles have arisen along the way, overcoming them has paradoxically fuelled his motivation. Though nothing can be achieved in complete solitude, as an artist and manager, Mihai Constantin Ranin has often felt isolated in the face of entrenched habits and mentalities. Nevertheless, he has never grown weary or hopeless. With a profound love for a holistic, almost Renaissance-like culture, he continues to reach for the stars. As someone who appreciates all nuances, he asserts: “Theatre is not a place for unanimity.”

His repertoire as a director and as a scenographer is an incredible vast one, officially starting with year 1984. Apart from many Romanian plays, well-known and much appreciated, from the international works he staged and/or designed: *Pygmalion* by G.B. Shaw; *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, *The School for Wives*, *Don Juan* or *The Feast of Stone* by Molière; *The Marriage of Figaro* by Pierre Beaumarchais; *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry; *Macbett* by Eugène Ionesco; *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett; *Miss Julie* by August Strindberg; *The Kreutzer Sonata* after Leo Tolstoy; *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Richard III* by William Shakespeare; *Don Quixote* after Miguel de Cervantes; *Leonce and Lena* and *Woyzeck* by Georg Büchner; *Jeanne d’Arc au bûcher* by Paul Claudel; *The Maids* by Jean Genet; *Turandot* by Carlo Gozzi; *Spring Awakening* by Frank Wedekind; *Nora* by Henrik Ibsen; *Three sisters* by A.P. Chekhov; *Žorba the Greek* by Hristo Boychev, after Nikos Kazantzakis’s novel; *Antigone* by Sophocles; *Central Park West* by Woody Allen and many others. He is a complete and versatile artist, with a penchant for the Renaissance and Baroque periods and a style of humour specific to them—refined, intelligent, flamboyant.

**Vera Enache<sup>2</sup>:** *How did the idea of the Babel Festival start initially?*

2 **Ruxandra Vera Enache** graduated from the “I.L. Caragiale” National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest, with a MA in Theatre Studies – Cultural Management & Marketing. She collaborated with various Romanian theatre festivals, published articles in *Teatrul azi*, *LiterNet*, *Yorick* and *Concept* academic journal. She was part of the Literary Management Department of the “Nottara” Theatre, “Ion Creangă” Theatre in Bucharest and is nowadays a literary manager of “Tony Bulandra” Theatre in Târgoviște. In 2022 she successfully defended her PhD Thesis at UNATC, where she also worked as an adjunct professor and research assistant.

**Mc Ranin:** The idea of *the Babel Festival* came to me when I was in Israel. I was supposed to do a performance with the “Circus Association” of Jerusalem, composed of young acrobats of Israeli, but also Palestinian origin. The atmosphere was very good between them. I tried several times to make this performance happen. It should have taken place outdoors, at the East Railway Station, where there are several theatres and art galleries, where different painters live and have their studios. I didn’t succeed, because every time I got there, the territories were closed, and the Palestinians were stuck in Gaza. At a certain point, together with the director of the circus, we decided to stop the project. I was very sad. I was in a park, on a bench, in front of the Tower of David. Looking at this small tower, which is not exceptional, I realized that, in fact, every tower in every village, in every city, in every capital of the world, is a representation of the Tower of Babel. People have been building towers since religion came along. I realized that we have a tower in Târgoviște—the Chindia Tower overused by the communists as a symbol in their ultranationalism—and I said to myself, an international festival cannot be called “The Chindia Tower”. We needed a macro-acknowledged tower and only the Tower of Babel remained, because it contains several parables. For example, the linguistic mixture, therefore the presence of very different people who end up not understanding each other. Those who want to reach God, therefore who have an aspiration. All these aspects are found in the theatre—the action, the word, the body, and the connection with the imagined, the unknown. And I said, “Babel! Babel is a word that can be understood in almost all corners of the world, both by Christians and by Islamists... and Buddhists”... Then I said, “Let there be Babel!”, but a different Babel, a Babel of understanding, of harmony, of artistic research, of knowledge.

**V.E.:** *Weren’t you afraid of the negative undertone of this word, of this symbol? How did you overcome this?*

**Mc R.:** You must have a type of culture, education, and attitude to overcome this undertone. I don’t stop at the common areas, especially the interpretation, and strong symbols don’t discourage me, I don’t take them as such. There is always something much more subtle than appearance behind a symbol. For example, my last child is a girl I named Cassandra. Very few of those who link the name to the fate of the character in the ancient tragedy of Troy, would have had the courage to name their child Cassandra. But why think only of that Cassandra?! Furthermore, that

Cassandra was perceived only in a certain way, but we should talk about her ability to look into people's hearts, about her desire to save the city. We often refer to "shooting the messenger." Such a character does not have the satisfaction of giving that news, but he gives it to warn you, to protect you. The problem is that man does not listen to what he does not want to listen to or is contrary to his beliefs. This requires a certain kind of maturity and time for this maturity to shape the individual. So no, I wasn't afraid. I think it was a good choice. In this way, we have reconciled religion, culture, and the arts, because Pieter Breugel the Elder's representations of the Tower of Babel are extremely beautiful and, sometimes, we use them in advertising. Furthermore, Babel is also a reference to the origins of civilization, to the Mesopotamian civilization. That's why I've always had guests from Iraq, Iran, from that area that was rumoured to have hosted Paradise. People need stories and already, when a festival has a good title, you can enunciate your concept, it is intrinsic, you don't have to use a lot of words.

**V.E.:** *How were the beginnings, in a festival landscape that was not as oversaturated as it is today? Every theatre, every city has at least one festival.*

***"For a classic text to speak to the audience, I learned to use it in a profoundly contemporary interpretation."***

**Mc R.:** First of all, it started from a personal experience. I think the festival is very much linked to this experience. I had participated to the Avignon Festival, and, in the meantime, I managed to go to Edinburgh, and the Sibiu Festival, which was in its infancy at the time and where I also worked for a few years. It seemed natural to me that a young theatre should have a festival, above all as a catalyst for theatre, for the audience. It is possible for a festival to bring international recognition to your work, to support the concept of repertory theatre, because we are in a period when the social is trying to replace the aesthetic—I believed, even during communism, very much in the idea of "art for art's sake", because at that time the trend, the line was "art with a tendency", and from what they understood by political theatre, I was doing a certain type of opposition politics, basically, using the communist system, and playing with censorship became a virtuosity, because, as we know, censorship was never subtle and it forced you to a theatrical-aesthetic solution that went beyond the initial imaginary. You had to walk in a maze all the time and be a forerunner for others. Therefore, taking them into your universe, not into the universe

they wanted to expose. People needed a saving parallel universe—that was the social component—because the directors were militating subtly, not directly, they talked about communism with amusement... not only of communism, of socialist countries. For example, for a classic text to speak to the viewers, I learned to use it in a profoundly contemporary interpretation. Otherwise, it would have made no sense.

***“Contemporary theatre... sometimes doesn’t respect the dramatic structures... It’s not enough to have a dialogue, if you don’t also have a theatrical situation, a conflict, conducted in a certain way.”***

I have heard, especially when I was a teacher, many young people saying that they are very interested in contemporary theatre, in contemporary text. The problem with this type of text—of course, this is a generalization and I emphasize that I have limited experience with contemporary theatre—is that sometimes it doesn’t respect the dramatic structures and it just says some things. In addition to this, dialogue is very often confused with theatrical dialogue. It’s not enough to have a dialogue, if you don’t also have a theatrical situation, a conflict, conducted in a certain way. This type of texts, of absolute platitude, are exposed, of course, with great feeling or in slang... I personally avoid explicit text on stage because we need to have decency... We are looked at by others and we must be exemplary, both by choosing the text, and the words, the expressions. We must also be exemplary through theatrical interpretation because an actor should not be on stage as on the street. Of course, it must not be outdated and ridiculous through an inflated interpretation, as perhaps theatre was done in a certain period because people put more emphasis on the grotesque, on the *bouffe*.

The world today is much different from that of my youth. In a way, the world in my youth, in terms of theatre, had a positive element, as people did not question money, but the artistic product. Aesthetics were paramount, there were no other hidden aspects. I assure you that the performances were of an absolute modernity, and theatre was related to the other arts. We, the artists, were not isolated in the world of theatre. We were perfectly in communion with other artists, painters, scenographers, musicians, choreographers. The theatre was the place where all these energies were catalysed, and I think it must continue to remain so. For

example, I have kept very close friendships with artists, with musicians. I continue to collaborate with many of them, even though I myself am a visual artist and sometimes do the choreographies or the music for the performance. This situation is funny, how I came to be the most famous director among scenographers and the most famous scenographer among directors. It happened to me in Sibiu, at my debut... On my first performance, I got a debut award, but there was also a scenography award and the scenography was 90% my work... and I got angry and said to myself, “From now on I’m going to officially do my own scenographies”. Of course, with small exceptions, because there are extraordinarily great scenographers that I met and worked with—Maria Bodor from Sibiu, who worked for the German section of the theatre there, Phoebus Viorel Ștefănescu, who worked for the puppet theatre, Valentin Codoiu, with whom I also worked at IATC and then ten years in Paris, Horațiu Mihaiu (architect, who also wrote the first book on Romanian scenographers<sup>3</sup>).

**V.E.:** *How difficult was it to reach foreign companies in 2007, when the first edition of the Babel Festival took place? Because social media and rapid communication networks did not exist.*

**Mc R.:** It was very simple, because I had plenty connections. For example, I think that’s when I brought a company from South Korea for the first time. But, before doing the first edition of Babel, I made a a miniature pre-edition of Babel where I invited Scott Johnston with his students to do a performance with students from Târgoviște, to test the reaction of the audience in Târgoviște. Basically, Babel was prepared a year before. At that time, we operated in a very restricted formula, with Liviu Cheloiu, who also knew the situation in Sibiu—he was my student and I think he was also an employee of the Sibiu Theatre for a short period. And with Mr. Adrian Mărgineanu (known as Bubu), on the image side of the festival. I started with them. I knew some of the companies, they knew the rest. We didn’t want a big festival. Everyone wants that. You make a big festival when music is your object of activity... pop, rock, country. This was not the case. Theatre was always destined for a much smaller part of the population, for people who have a certain delicacy of spirit, who have a critical view of society, they are not necessarily just consumers... they know how to participate, creatively, in an artistic act. Even now I don’t want a very big festival, although it has

<sup>3</sup> Mihaiu, Horațiu, *Scenografi români contemporani*, Fundația Culturală „Camil Petrescu”, 2022

reached a few dozen countries. Even when we had over 30 countries (in one year we had 46), that doesn't make it a very big festival. We gather the nationality of each festival participant. That is, everyone represents their country of origin. Many contemporary theatre and dance theatre companies have 12 or 14 nationalities in their composition.

But coming back, Babel—a small festival, a festival with a very clear concept, a festival that has grown each year. The team changed, but Babel continued to grow. Babel—support for the “Tony Bulandra” Theatre and for all its employees. International recognition is slowly leading to national recognition. We prefer it this way because we are not part of the networks in Romania. We got acknowledged in a more discreet way. But we never massively advertised. We said to ourselves that if people come and see what we are about, then they will appreciate and write or spread the news of what is happening in Târgoviște. Babel is a festival that has a type of modesty in a world devoid of modesty and full of egos that have no rationing, not even artistic. In a world that is said to be in full dissolution, Babel is a solid construction, on very solid foundations, and can be carried forward by anyone now.



*Chinese Traditional Opera Recital*, regia colectivă,  
Festivalul Babel 2024, @Maria Ștefănescu

Sursa: <https://www.babel2024.tonybulandra.ro/media/foto-babel-conexiuni/nggallery/conexiuni-cu-maria-stefanescu/the-blossom-friends>

**V.E.:** *Is this predominantly international participation also a support of the concept?*

***“I told myself to bring to Târgoviște and...  
in Europe productions  
that you can’t see otherwise.”***

**Mc R.:** Yes, it is a support of the concept. I started from a very simple reality. If you are a spectator and theatre goer, you can see any performance in Romania, anywhere. I know people who do this. Then, I told myself to bring to Târgoviște and... in Europe productions that you can’t see otherwise. When you bring companies from Japan, China, Iraq, especially from these areas where there is war and terrorism—we have had a lot of problems, we can exemplify them later, if you want—then the festival will have a different consistency. That was the decision. Otherwise, we enter a system of cronyism, in which I invite you, you invite me, I give you a prize, you give me one, and that’s what we see. That’s why our festival did not have awards. The presence in the festival has always been a prize because a rigorous selection was made. This does not mean that all things are 100% as I present them because there are also cases when, if you have not seen a live performance, you can be fooled, and the performance does not look like in the video or in the photos. But I could argue that 70-80% of the selection was correct.

And we have something more to Babel: my desire to tune in to the history of universal theatre, to the great theatrical theories. I even asked recently what theory is new that I don’t know about and a friend from Paris told me, “Don’t worry, nothing new on the horizon. Everything is old.” Grotowski appeared in Europe, born from Artaud who was not talked about in Romania, I didn’t learn in school, but I found out about Grotowski, because we were friendly, communist countries and information was still circulating, even if it was not written in a book. I, for example, had translated xeroxed typed texts, which I still have today, with all the theories, the writings of Jerzy Grotowski. Of course, you wonder why the great change of theatre appeared precisely in communism. It appeared because in our country it was a necessity in a false world. We were living falsely on the outside. Everything happened in the family, truths were told there, and sometimes not even there, because there was an obsession that you could be recorded and denounced. It’s very difficult to explain this atmosphere to a young person. On the other hand, I was also very young, and I wanted to be a revolutionary. Any young person is a revolutionary.

On the other hand, I did not act as young people do today, that is, I did not want someone else's place. I wanted to make my own creation, to find a place in that society. That's what happened to me in Paris, I didn't replace someone and try to take away that person's privileges. I think this is also a problem of education. It is good to respect the "elders". In African nations there is a council of elders. The elderly take care of the chickens and the children. So, they are useful. It is a deepening conception in the West that the elderly are useless. But we delve too much into politics and talk about old and young politicians and that is not the purpose of this discussion.

**V.E.:** *How has your mission evolved at the Babel Festival? Currently, you are the president of the festival, you have always been a selector. Over the years, what other duties have you had within the festival team?*

**Mc R.:** Basically, the director or president of the festival does almost everything, because he must be an example. Instead, I tried to delegate people on certain issues. Of course, the atmosphere is always friendly and based on modesty. I have chosen, also as a theatre director, a way of leading people, of doing things, which is highly contested by many, because it is based on requests. I need the goodwill and understanding of the person in front of me to get a certain thing for the festival and this is not necessarily out of weakness, it is perhaps because I lived in France where things are said more subtly, not so directly. It seems to me a much more human, but also more difficult way of working because you must overcome, without sanctioning, moments of maximum impudence, over nervous breakdowns, over despair, because a festival doesn't get done *with a bang*. It is achieved with a lot of effort. Some things get mixed up. People don't communicate well with each other. This still happens. Although the team is constantly growing, communication is difficult, because each one thinks that the other knows the same thing, that something is self-evident. I also have this fault in communication. Sometimes I don't say certain things that are so obvious to me that I don't think they need to be said. Not saying them sometimes leads to a crisis. But crises are overcome and the proof stands in the fact that this festival has reached its twelfth edition, the theatre has over 20 years of activity, these things happened, dare I say, in a cultural desert, because there was nothing here. There was a lot of tradition, of course, there was the literary school of Târgoviște, the first prints in Romanian, the first poets, the creator of the Romanian Conservatory and Academy, Ion Heliade Rădulescu, Vasile Cârlova, Alfred Alessandrescu, Ion Ghica,

Deacon Coresi, but all these names were linked to the past. Only the Târgoviște School, with Mircea Horia Simionescu as leader, was the last important thing that had been done, although the Târgoviște School is just a title because they were not from Târgoviște, this was a place they wanted to connect with. I also want to tell you that Mircea Horia Simionescu called the city “Wallachian Florence”. This mattered to me when I chose the name “Babel” because I realized that even if it’s just a cell in the Italian area, that cell is important to begin with, and that it can divide and develop into something more important.

**V.E.:** *At a certain time, Târgoviște also had an Italian minority..*

**Mc R.:** Yes, but they were not the Romans we learned about, they were Italians who came during the crises in the West, the great crisis in Italy. Very ordinary people came. There is an Italian cemetery in Târgoviște, there was an Italian consulate until the ‘60s, it is called Casa d’Italia, you can still see the building, it did not permanently collapse. I had schoolmates, classmates, I remember three classmates, Enache Armando, Sacchetti Antonio, and Helena Pasquale. It’s interesting when you have the Italian community so close to you. But we weren’t very different. I have very beautiful memories with them... My childhood friend, Armando, an engineer, unfortunately died very young.

**V.E.:** *How did the audience receive this festival, how did it follow it, considering that the festival also had certain years in which it could not take place, because, at one point, you were in Deva, followed by another syncope during the pandemic?*

**“Artists cannot fight against politicians, they can only mock them.”**

**Mc R.:** The festival disappeared because of politics because I was dismissed and, before I got to Deva, I travelled the world for about half a year. And there we laid the cornerstone. It had been a musical theatre and we turned in to a repertory theatre, even if in the official papers it appeared as a project theatre. In fact, I was away for three years, and the festival was not held in that period, because things were unfortunately related to me, as it very often happens in Romania. I was in full creative force, I wasn’t ready to leave. The whole theatre took to the streets then. All the theatre people showed solidarity, but **artists cannot fight against politicians,**

**they can only mock them.** This superiority of the artists is manifested only on stage. Others have the power. I had been offered to be director of all cultural institutions and I refused, because, in fact, I knew that the money would go to the general director, not to me, I was a kind of artistic general director. I mean, I was the man with the ideas and the facts and others got the money. If you don't have control of the money on a certain theatrical production, you can't make it. There is no such thing as artistic understanding. For example, a politician said to me, "Why do you still have to make costumes for the new *Hamlet*, don't you have them from the other *Hamlet*?!" I had to explain to him that there is a different director, a different concept and yet almost 15 years have passed since then. So, there are also naïve discussions about theatre. Just like I would discuss football. I'm not good at it and I don't watch matches. But I know that those who watch football on TV are better footballers than those on the field... But let's not trivialize the discussion.

**V.E.:** *Did you manage to attract other institutions from Târgoviște and the county in organizing the festival? To involve schools, universities...*

**Mc R.:** At the first edition, I had this idea of volunteers and I turned to high school students, who were looking for a way and, in fact, a meeting place. That's why I congratulated myself for the gesture at that time. Now young people meet at the theatre. It has become a landmark. Before that, the old name of the institution remained "The Petrol Club". It was a club. Now no one says the Petrol Club, but the "Tony Bulandra" Theatre, which is very good. Those young people who had, first of all, the opportunity to socialize with people from other countries, with such different cultures and to practice a foreign language, remained friends of the theatre. Some became directors, some actors, but that wasn't my goal. My goal was to provide them with a minimum artistic education, which is what happened. They became the first spectators of the festival, but, above all, the engine of the festival, because, in their turn, they trained their friends, the other young people in the city, their families. At one point, we managed to distribute 10,000 flyers, including in mailboxes, because we involved them in the festival's advertising campaign. I also learned a lot from politics, because I did politics for a while for the sake of theatre, to save the idea of theatre in Târgoviște. We learned how to steal from the image of an event, if you are also present at that event, even if, in fact, you have nothing to do with it. Example, I go to a folk music concert and give out 5,000 flyers for Babel.

This year I think we had the most significant success in terms of audience, because the halls were full, given that we had competition. I mean, it was Boney M concert and we had 1000 spectators on the street, at a vertical dance performance, on the building of the House of Trade Unions.

**V.E.:** *Why, in addition to this powerful concept—Babel, do you choose every year a theme to the edition?*

**Mc R.:** If you look at all the themes we chose, they are related to research. For example, when I chose “The Body” as theme, I was interested in the actor’s body. Many art theorists have written about the actor’s body, and it seemed to me an important theme because this way you can also bring choreographers into the discussion, as well as dance theatre. There is a whole debate about the body, what is the body, how much independence does the body have from the spirit on stage, how do they communicate with each other.

When I chose “Image/Imago”, I thought of the image of the ancestor that is in the atrium of the traditional Roman family. Starting from this imago, we also got to icons, and to the television screen or to today’s iPhone. So, the image is very important and we have seen how manipulative it can be, just remember the images from the 1989 Revolution. There must be research in terms of image, which is done, first of all, through theatre. It is useless to have a very good text if it is not supported by a strong image. When you have this theme, you can talk about painting, about perspective, about colour, about technology. In addition, the theme I have chosen so far illustrates my concerns.

The last edition was “Connections”, because when I was a child, I saw a BBC program called that and I was amazed by the connections that can be made between science and art, for example, or between medicine and religion. I didn’t immediately think about the connections we make nowadays through *devices* or to the connection between theatre companies.

**V.E.:** *Basically, these themes create a chronological, aesthetic arch, the connection between different fields...*

**Mc R.:** I was presented at an exhibition of director Alexander Hausvater as a Renaissance man. I was amused by this. Afterward, I thought about it. In fact, my background is Renaissance, I am interested in many aspects, and I try to gather several perspectives. Maybe I don’t always succeed. For

example, the thing that didn't work out for me at all in Romania was my artistic recognition. I was practically not acknowledged as an artist. But the audience and the subtle people who were around me acknowledged me. I am a provincial artist, in the sense that I work in a province. And this is funny because I went from Sibiu to Paris, from Paris to Sibiu and from Sibiu to Târgoviște... then to Deva and back to Târgoviște. I've always gone to smaller towns. And now I live in a small village... on the outskirts of a village. So, I walked away. Instead of being in the center of things, I ended up in a peripheral area. And in this case, I also took my inspiration from theatre, from Jerzy Grotowski, because he could have chosen Warsaw as his headquarters, but he knew that he would do things much better in Opole. So, you need a small space, where your ideas are highly visible, not diluted, and don't have as much competition. You can give them the importance that they deserve.



Babel Festival Parade 2024, @Cosmin Virvan  
Source: <https://s.go.ro/924iwpvc>

**V.E.:** *You are much better known and recognized abroad, after all, in all the countries that have been present to Babel so far.*

**Mc R.:** Yes, it is a kind of extension of the village where I live. I discovered this type of village on the outskirts of Seoul, I also discovered it in China,

in the Sahara Desert. It's funny and it honours me when I'm welcomed in these countries. In general, I am received by important people and most of the awards throughout my life were from foreigners. Even in the academic field. Although I taught in a large university, at "Babeş-Bolyai" in Cluj-Napoca, the recognition did not come from this university. I was also a marginal there, a foreigner, a man from the south, recognition came from other universities such as Kyonggi in Seoul, from the one in Florianópolis, Brazil, in Pune, India. I am also the depository of things that are too little discussed about in Romania, for example monumental theatre and street theatre, in water and on water, types of performances that I did at the opening of the festival in Sibiu and Craiova, in very large cities, with great financial possibilities and with appropriate human resources.

**V.E.:** *Have you always cared about the idea of a parade? Why exactly? Do you give these parades a theme...*

**Mc R.:** To gather people around them and get them in the festival atmosphere. I will give an example of a parade that had as its theme "The Wedding", which requested the participants come in the traditional costumes of their respective countries. It is important not to talk only about the Romanian blouse, about our brandy, about our cheese. We must look at the others as well because everyone has a kind of blouse, everyone has a kind of brandy, a kind of cheese. These elements are profoundly human. Indeed, the parade is, first, a celebration of the volunteers who participate in it, because they are exuberant and, for them, the festival is new every time. Some come for the first time, obviously. People, who are very comfortable today, are taken out of the house and the theatre asserts itself as such. Theatre must get out of its space from time to time, because otherwise this confusion between the building and the theatrical art is made. Therefore, the next theme will be "Space"—theatrical space.

**V.E.:** *Is there therefore a deep connection between the festival context and education?*

**Mc R.:** In addition to the involvement of students as volunteers, the festival has workshops that are generally dedicated to students. We didn't manage to bring students from Romania, because it's exam time or because the teachers didn't consider it useful. We should say the names of those who taught... Scott Johnston from the University of Edinburgh; Dumitru Acris, graduate of the Moscow Theater Academy, GHITIS; Katsumi Sakakura,

master of martial arts. Students from South Korea and Scotland and local pupils came. The halls were also full at these workshops. I would have liked, as was the case in the past in Târgoviște, a festival of art schools, which lasted very little, before professional theatre existed. I would have liked each school to present... this year there were a few students from Hyperion University. I wanted every university with an artistic profile in Romania to send a group of students, especially theorists, researchers, to write about the Târgoviște phenomenon. "The Târgoviște Phenomenon" is the title of an article in *România Literară*, written by Mr. Ion Parhon, where he analysed our repertoire and what was happening in Târgoviște. This article dates back 18 years ago. Slowly, we become old, we lose the battle with time.

**V.E.:** *Is it what you dream of, for what you have built to grow old?*

**Mc R.:** Yes, I would like it to continue. For example, I said that I don't want them to give my name to a hall, a street, an institution... This is part of my false modesty. I would like people to remember me through the good things that will continue and for the good things I have done. I didn't have recognition during my lifetime, I don't want to have recognition after death. It's a struggle with yourself to become modest, because injustice happens to you almost every day, people misinterpret your gestures, people are generally rough, they have a brutal zone. A sensitive artist always tends to withdraw into his shell in contact with such people. In fact, the people from Săteni, the people from the "Tony Bulandra" Theatre or the world from Sibiu... I built some shells in which I was able to survive, regardless of the political and social context. I was not satisfied with a single shell. I've changed shells over time. I'm an artist who has travelled a lot. I have worked in many countries, some of the... strangest ones.

**V.E.:** *Has the festival developed collaboration mechanisms, festival networks and ways to become more efficient?*

***"It is also often said that anyone can be a theatre manager. It can't be just anyone, because we don't sell products here, we sell Dreams."***

**Mc R.:** Efficiency is a barbaric word. You can't talk about art and use the word efficiency. At one point, the dissolution of the "Tony Bulandra" Theatre and several institutions was sought for reasons of efficiency,

forgetting that each institution has its own specificity. For example, the puppet theatre has another production system, which does not resemble the theatre that performs for mature audiences. The sets in an animation performance are totally different.

It is also often said that anyone can be a theatre manager. It can't be just anyone, because we don't sell products here, we sell Dreams. Cultural management has a large area of imagination and creativity, which cannot come from a hospital manager, who is busy with the inventory of medical instruments or the menus that are served to employees or robes and means of transport. Even the means of transport we must take care of as artists, because it's important when you send a car without air conditioning to a person who comes from a country where he is used to air conditioning. Or offer him a vegetarian menu that does not only contain pickled peppers and chopped cabbage. I mean, vegetarian or vegan means something completely different. You see, these things have entered our culture very slowly, or they haven't entered yet. When I came back from France, after 10 years of exile, I asked for still water at a restaurant and they said they didn't have it, that they could give me tap water, what's the big deal?! Now they sell you still water because you can pay it. Back then it was a fad. What was once a fad has become commonplace. It is part of the comfort of our daily lives.

***“We must have the responsibility  
of a researcher in a laboratory.”***

But theatre is not about whims. Theatre is something that belongs to life. There are many definitions. Theatre is life. Life is theatre. In fact, theatre tells stories for people and not always happy stories, because life is not always joyful. We are responsible for the way these stories are told, because they can be told simply, or they can be told in jest. We must have the responsibility of the researcher in a laboratory. So, we have to do research, and the performance is a conclusion, it is the research report that we present publicly. That is the performance. That's how I see things, very thoroughly. Very often I resemble a physicist. I don't believe in improvisation, except in the creative process. I don't believe in chance; I don't believe in laziness on stage. I believe in solid things, which have been exposed in many theatrical theories, in many poetics. We don't really talk about theatrical poetics, unfortunately. What use do we have for Nicolas Boileau's poetics? But we need it. For example, I was very fond of Beaumarchais, until I found out that he was a lawyer by profession and that he had invented the Society of

Playwrights. That's why we pay copyright today. And there are many who fight for copyright. One is Peter Brook's scenographer, Jean-Guy Lecat, who is fighting for the rights of the scenographer. The scenographer is not considered an author, but a co-author of an artistic production. Here are other things to discuss, other aspects.

***“I believe that a text must remain in motion and alive. Translations should be redone every 10 years...”***

I have my own ideas, because I believe that a text must remain in motion and alive. Translations should be redone every 10 years, because the language changes and some words go out of use, lose their meaning, or are misused. That's why the director is not only a physicist, but he must also be a linguist, he must also be a researcher in the field of philology. He must be many things. It's a tiring, but you don't get anything through political pressure, when it comes to art, of course, or through personal relationships, that sort of connections. Everyone must assert their own style and I think there is room for everyone on this planet. We still don't bump into each other. That is, we must be generous, we must be lenient, but not lenient with the Pharisees, with cultural by-products, with extra-commercial things, because another threat is commercial. But it's not such a big threat, because people who go to super-commercial performances will never come to the important theatrical performances. It's a different audience, and I discovered that the audience for the Studio Hall is different from the one for the Great Hall, because the Studio Hall audience is looking for privacy, they want to be very close to the actor. While the other is looking for the performance with all its elements.

***“If you don't have theatre, you have to invent it.”***

I think I should end by saying that if you don't have theatre, you have to invent it. Everyone complains that there are no more openings in Romanian theatres. I am living proof that a theatre can be made and can have a long life. Chris Simion does a theatre or has done it. These small companies are forms of theatre. For example, the Art Theatre in Bucharest, *Unteatru*. There are theatres that have discovered a certain identity. Only when a private theatre tries to compete with a state theatre, which has other operating principles, is it a problem, because it will never have the means of a state theatre, just as the state theatre should not be used as a

private theatre. What you can do independently you don't have to do in a state theatre. Things are mixed up now, unfortunately.

**V.E.:** *Did the Babel Festival help the development of Târgoviște?*

***“A festival must encourage research. It's essential. It is not only aimed at the public inside the city, but also, at the public inside the guild.”***

**Mc R.:** I think so, I think it helped and I can give figures here. The fact that all the hotels are full not only with festival guests, but the fact also that the terraces and restaurants are full, the streets are full, clearly with people coming from elsewhere, this means a plus for the city of Târgoviște. Another proof is the partnership we have with the mall in Târgoviște. We met and they proposed to advertise us for free, because they felt it was a plus for them as well. More and more local entrepreneurs, on their own initiative, have become sponsors of the Babel Festival. Of course, I am also satisfied with the fact that we have the recognition of the Ministry of Culture. Even if we are poorly funded, we are still funded. We have been funded several times by the Romanian Cultural Institute. All the companies are supported by the cultural institutes of their respective countries or by other bodies, government associations and I am thinking now of South Korea which comes with the largest delegation, of the Poles.

We have always had distinguished guests from Poland, this year the Grotowski Institute, but the connection with Poland is very old. I recall Biuro Podróż, with impressive street performances. They won the prize at the Edinburgh Festival with *Macbeth*. A theatrical movement that emerged in the 80s, within the Faculty of Architecture in Warsaw, making a non-verbal theatre, a theatre of movement. Practically there was no such thing for Romanians, we did not know that such a thing existed. I found out late. I invite such forms of artistic expression precisely to extend a bridge in time with all theatrical movements. Many said, “Yes, but why remake, for example, a Peter Brook performance.” You must do it, because many of today's young people have not heard of Peter Brook and do not know how much he has done for the world theatre. And then you must do it, so that they can see it... as long as there are still survivors from Peter Brook's company. For example, I don't know if those who are at the Grotowski Institute today have met Grotowski in person, but they do know his method and are still experimenting with it. A festival must encourage research, I

repeat. It's essential. It is not only aimed to the public inside the city, but also at the public inside the guild.

**V.E.:** *Of course. In this way, the festival is given an over-theme, over-value and maybe an extra motivation to exist.*

**Mc R.:** I don't want to compare myself in numbers with other festivals, I don't compete with any festival. My competition is with myself... to what extent can I grow, keeping these concepts, these principles clean and not compromise a certain quality.

**V.E.:** *Does the Babel Festival have a role in promoting and capitalizing on the heritage and tourism potential? Does it have the potential of a country brand?*

***“We also contribute a grain to this prestige.”***

**Mc R.:** Yes. For example, we started going to many festivals with a performance... for example, now the theatre company is in Cyprus with *Orestes*, at the The International Festival of Ancient Greek Drama. Another part of the company will travel again to Daejeon, South Korea, with two performances: *The Little Prince* and *Richard III. The Man*. Therefore, it becomes a country brand, because Romania is present, they don't know where Târgoviște is exactly. I was amused once that some Asians came with some T-shirts with the map of Romania and the name of the city of Târgoviște printed in the centre. This is a form of recognition and a form of respect for the one who invited you. Yes, the fact that, for example, the director of the cultural department of the Seoul City Hall received us for future collaborations. This is a recognition of our work, of our country. We also contribute a grain to this prestige. The fact that we don't have too many negative reviews, that everyone understood our gesture is important. I hope it will continue to be understood. The Prime Minister of Romania has given his consent to use his High Patronage. It's a good start. I hope, in the future, to have the patronage of the Romanian Government, whatever its composition, or of the President of Romania, whoever he may be, because in this way you are protected. In fact, the presence of the ambassadors of several countries at the editions of the Babel Festival, along with their companies, plus the presence of all the festival directors who attended in large number this year, the idea of designing another festival, such as *AMASIA*, which would be a kind of theatrical Olympic

games, this proves that this is an evolving place, not a static, or boring place. It is a place worth going to because there is always something new, it is alive, it is thorough.

**V.E.:** *Does the Babel Festival play a role in the programs of social inclusion and regeneration of marginalized communities?*

**Mc R.:** From the beginning the festival had a collaboration protocol with the National Association of Hearing-Impaired Persons in Romania (ANSR), Târgoviște branch. We even had performances that were dedicated to them. Because, while in communist Romania the appellation “handicapped” was used, I learned in France that I should never use this word, but “person with disabilities”, as such a person is no less human than you. You must support this person. You shouldn’t say “dwarf” at the circus, but rather “small man”. You find it strange at first when you arrive from a country with a poor education from this point of view. That’s when I applied this approach in theatre. For example, we implemented facilities for people with physical disabilities before it was a national legislation. At “Tony Bulandra” we built a ramp for wheelchairs, we created easier access to the auditorium, even if I don’t think more than one person benefited from these utilities.

In addition, we had collaborations with the Roma minority on various events, because they have always had representatives in the Local Council, with Bulgarians, who gave us a rehearsal room, at their cultural centre—they are called Serbs, but, in fact, they are Bulgarians. If you noticed, the Ambassador of Bulgaria comes to almost every edition of the festival. We had the National Theatre in Sofia as guest at the last two editions, we had the theatre in Ruse, which is very close to Romania, where I also worked as a scenographer. The community of Italians in Târgoviște practically no longer exists. It got absorbed in the Romanian population. They say they are Romanians now, after so many generations... I don’t know what other communities there are. I know that there is also the German Forum, but it consists of only a few members. The festival contributes to inclusion, because it is natural that when you make a selection you also bring performances for those who speak a language other than the official language of that country.

**V.E.:** *Who defines the current trends in theatre, film, and new media? Is the festival expected to set new trends? Most likely, Babel has already done this.*

***“Let us not delude ourselves that we will radically  
transform mentalities...  
We want this, we must keep our standards,  
but a part of the population still cannot be tamed with  
something like this.”***

**Mc R.:** First of all, it forced the other festivals to be more rigorous. It was an example, even if it is not extremely visible, because what is visible is the thing that is the loudest. We have now witnessed the hyperonization of the *Shakespeare Festival* in Craiova, which is beginning to resemble another type of festival and I think it loses exactly what it was supposed to keep, that is, a very rigorous concept focused on the great creations, the great directors of the world who challenge Shakespearean themes or texts. If you can't make Shakespeare very popular in Craiova, naturally, you must do it in Stratford. However, that festival remains for an elitist area. On the street, many people don't even know who Shakespeare is and I recall a very funny moment related to it. At one point, in our festival, we played *Hamlet*, but my story didn't take place then, but at the Days of the City of Târgoviște, in which we decided to do the play at the Chindia Tower, right in the fortress, with spectators all around, perched on the walls. There were a lot of people and I saw a person dressed in fluorescent fabric, with plastic slippers and a bag of popcorn, who also had a pink mobile phone, who was rushing to get to *Hamlet*. I was standing at the entrance, at one point, I see her struggling to get through the spectators and I heard the following conversation, “Girl, I'm so stupid! I came to this *Hamlet* thing, and they didn't hand out anything!” So, there are also people who have nothing to do with theatre and we don't have the illusion that we will radically transform mentalities, as we like to say. We want to, we must keep our standards, but there remains an area of the population that cannot be tamed with something like this.



*Mahamaya Electronic Devices*, directed by Mikola Mishyn,  
Babel Festival 2024, @Augustina Iohan

Source: <https://www.babel2024.tonybulandra.ro/media/foto-babel-conexiuni/nggallery/conexiuni-cu-augustina-iohan/mahamaya-electronic-devices>

**V.E.:** *How can we measure the impact of a theatre, film, and new media festival other than by numbers?*

**Mc R.:** Through my personal impressions. I think they are the best barometer. If I, who am a perfectionist and demanding person, am satisfied after a festival edition, as it happened this time, it means that things were more than good, and they were not static, because this attitude of mine has a psychological explanation. First, I'm glad it's over. Secondly, I am glad that it ended well, and thirdly, it means that the next edition I will be able to do even more than we set out to do.

**V.E.:** *Virtual, non-virtual—a dilemma for the cultural event?*

**Mc R.:** Non-virtual for theatre.

**V.E.:** *The hybrid post-pandemic format, a temporary solution, an option for the future?*

**Mc R.:** I refused to use filmed performances. Filmed theatre is something completely different and must be done in the television studio, as you do a film. But it's not theatre anymore. It is a hybrid form. I don't believe in

hybrid forms. It's like what happens with cars today, these hybrids. At some point the hybrid disappears, something else must appear instead. I must wait for something else to appear in its place. I doubt that I will happen in my lifetime. I prefer to keep the feel of the theatre as I inherited it and as I try to pass it on.

**V.E.:** *Therefore, Babel doesn't have a section dedicated to the interactive-participatory virtual experience?*

**Mc R.:** I personally have experienced all these forms. I experimented with dance theatre dance, theatre-image. I'm using holograms in the upcoming *Hamlet*. I used Morgan Freeman's voice in advertising. I also play with the weaknesses of media communication.

**V.E.:** *You use them to your advantage...*

**Mc R.:** No... I'm amused. There is no advantage, because, after all, they do catch you at some point, which did happen, but you prove how precarious everything is. I want to say something else... the fact that theatre is for *today and now*, for emotion and for direct emotion. That's why it can't go through social networks and video. I think it's very simple. Theatre is a living art. This has been said, everyone has said it, because it has remained so. Revolutions in technology have been and will continue to be. We will end up in a society where we will have robot co-workers. But the robot will not go to theatre and have an aesthetic satisfaction, because it has all the information and can give you that information, but it cannot imagine anything else and have another thought outside of what we have put in its memory. Maybe we will end up with humanoid-robots, semi-robots, which also have a biological area, I don't know. Probably, yes. This is for sci-fi lovers. Theatre is harder to make sci-fi. Let's leave this territory to film. You should know that when film appeared, everyone said that theatre was going to disappear. Or when television appeared... This did not happen. Theatre has come back in force every time.

**V.E.:** *Challenges in the recent festival industry. What are the most innovative festival formats now in the country, in the world?*

**Mc R.:** I don't know how to answer something like that. I mean, I can answer, but I don't want to answer that question.

**V.E.:** *You just said that you don't compare yourself..*

***"Each artist has his own audience.  
That's clear. You can't have the entire audience.  
Theatre is not a place for unanimity, and it never will be."***

**Mc R.:** No. But let's use the words "industry" and "innovative"... Well, theatre is innovative. That's why it's theatre, otherwise it's not theatre, it's something else. When you performance, you must surprise the audience with something new. You can use screams, a scenographic element, I don't know. That new element is not necessarily one of quality. Let's be serious, the most beautiful tomatoes in the supermarket are not necessarily tasty. I know this type of question because I practiced it 30 years ago in France. The issues brought up now come very late to us, in Romania, and we forget that we already have certain places that they, the French, don't have, because they don't have a state theatre. The only good things that the Russians brought to Romania after World War II were Russian literature, Russian music, and the concept of state theatre, which was almost non-existent. We only had national theatres. They understood that no matter how much politics you do and whatever society you shape, society cannot exist without living models, and living models are brought only by theatre. They tried to make friends with the great actors at first.

It's a big problem for new playwrights, because they don't manage to be as big as the classics and it's frustrating. The problem with them, I think, is that they aim to be as big and that's why they don't succeed. If they would focus on who they are with maximum sincerity or write things that are close to their hearts—although there are a few playwrights who do this—they would more successful. Because every artist has his own audience. That's clear. You can't have the entire audience. Theatre is not a place for unanimity and never will be. We don't even have to want it to be. Think about how boring it would be. I noticed a contemporary phenomenon, the hall stands up and applauds a performance, even if that performance is execrable, applauds the artists and the artists are ashamed. Before, we whistled, people reacted, threw tomatoes. For example, Maria Callas received a bouquet of cabbage and some cauliflower, because her voice quit during the performance. We must also make irreverent gestures. The artist is obliged to be irreverent. He cannot be polite, neither with the spectators, nor with the politicians, nor with his colleagues. Things must be said. Of course, the form in which you say it always matters. Form is

essential. One edition of the festival had the theme “Forms”. I believe in form. There is no form without content or content without form. You can’t separate them. It was tried many times and it failed.

**V.E.:** *How can we overcome the ephemerality of artistic projects? Do we have models for archiving the festival experience to train new generations of festival creators?*

**Mc R.:** I don’t believe in festival creators. This role arises spontaneously, after a life experience. A temple appears in the same way, that is, it appears out of necessity. For example, the festival in Piatra-Neamt in recent years is in the image and likeness of the director of the festival in Piatra-Neamt. Ion Sava said that directors are like tailors, some make tailcoats, others make jumpsuits. It is not good or bad. Each festival builds a certain type of image with which it moves forward. A festival cannot appear programmatically because the artist does not appear programmatically. He can be born in Hobița or he can be born in the village of Ipotești and I gave the example of two genius artists. We don’t know where the next great artist will be born, and we can’t program it. A festival is linked to the name of an artist, that’s clear. I’m talking about the theatre festival, which develops, and each time presents something different. It’s not the same when it comes to music. On the other hand, a festival director does not only have to express his taste in a festival, but he has to understand the phenomena, the movements. For example, I brought the Peking Opera, a theatrical genre from China, simply to exemplify those who don’t know about this kind of theatre, not to show what a great theatre Peking Opera is. Because it is a traditional theatre, a codified theatre. I brought the Grotowski Institute not because I really appreciate the experimental performances they do, but to show a certain type of research and what Jerzy Grotowski continues to produce, even after his physical disappearance.

**V.E.:** *I know that you always receive and accept proposals from other personalities, for example those on the festival board or the contribution of Liviu Cheloiu who, at several editions, was one of the selectors.*

**Mc R.:** My relationship with Liviu Cheloiu is very interesting, because after the first edition I ended the collaboration with him. The most important edition, before I was dismissed, the one in 2008, was made without Liviu Cheloiu. Then came Changpa, a theatre in South Korea. Then came the Kaze Theatre from Japan. I realized that I had to let him

make mistakes... For example, he made a mistake at one of the editions. The theme was “Sound” and he believed that sound included the idea of music and selected many concerts, causing a stir in the city. So, if you don’t face mistakes that you overcome assumedly, you will never understand what the concept of a festival means. If you choose performances just because you liked them or because you found them interesting on your phone, you will have a problem with introducing them into a concept, because they don’t always fit together and not everything you see on your phone is in line with reality. Later he understood that he had to see them, he had to get more information. The proof that he understood is that at the last edition we brought together the scenographers from the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, the scenographer of Giorgio Strehler, the scenographer of Peter Brook, the scenographer of the James Bond series. We will develop this area of scenography in next year’s edition. He also understood the area of research because it is insufficient to produce performances just for the pleasure of presenting them to the public. A festival is not a bunch of performances, even if they are exceptional. We must bring the image of the world theatre, from the past and the present. For example, I brought Romeo Castellucci three years ago. His performance was a shock for Târgoviște, but in the words of my friend Irina Niculescu, who lives in the United States, an animation theatre director, “Castellucci is classic”. For us, theatre people, he is classic. But for the spectator from Târgoviște or for the young man who turns 18 and is already thinking about what his professional and intimate life will look like, surely the encounter with Romeo Castellucci’s aesthetics was an encounter that only the Babel Festival could provoke. I don’t choose things that are necessarily fashionable, but I choose durable things. Classic English shoes are always more durable, even if they are less beautiful than Italian shoes. I like, for example, in summer to dress in natural materials, cotton... And the brand doesn’t matter. It’s the same with Babel. At some point, all these things that are true and natural will leave a mark.

**V.E.:** *So, basically, the Babel Festival represents an exceptional period for Târgoviște. Just as the hero is an exceptional man put in exceptional situations, so is Babel for Târgoviște?*

**Mc R.:** We need the exceptional to emphasize exemplarity. If there were more genuinely exceptional things, not just declared exceptional, but authentic, the country would look better. Every person, owner of a place, must make things visible in the exceptional, in order to be exemplary. We

need examples. I've always needed examples. The interwar period for Romania was a period full of positive examples, in all areas. And it stayed that way. Many relate to it. We try to rebuild that period and we are not allowed. But they weren't allowed either, they did not finish their mission. For example, from that period, I will give a strange name, the name of Dimitrie Gusti, who was a sociologist. He did an essential thing, he went with ethnographers, with sociologists to the countryside. He taught the peasants to make toilets and put lime in their toilets, to disinfect their houses. It seems like a gesture, I don't know, which is close to scatology, but it is essential in the civilizing act. That's why it's important for me, when I enter the theatre, to enter a clean theatre, because I know that the person, the spectator who enters, will always respect that place, which is what happens. I like that Romania is evolving. For example, bottles are now being recycled. Romania looks cleaner. What a simple solution. Practically everyone invests in their own packaging and then tries to recover part of the investments. In this way, we became responsible. I wonder why this was not done earlier. The communists did it. No bottle was thrown away. The plastic bags were kept with holiness, it was called the "one leu bag". Back then you had bags, you didn't have anything to put in them, so you collected them.

**V.E.:** *Can you give examples of obstacles you have encountered in organizing the editions so far?*

***"It became a habit to work with this inertia."***

**McR.:** I think the main obstacle is the lack of local and national recognition of this festival, although it is obvious. If we overcame this obstacle, the financing of the festival would also be important. It doesn't have to be much more important than it is today. But we would be more carefree. We could focus more on artistic things. And this is due to a lack of theatrical culture, a lack of openness and due to envy. People are envious. You always go for the apple tree full of fruits, not after a barren apple tree. It became a habit to work with this inertia. It would be much easier and much less tiring for me. The fact that I succeed leads me to the conclusion that maybe this force, which is against me and the festival, is essential in the dynamics of the festival, because it mobilizes me. There is nothing comfortable.

**V.E.:** *And obstacles in bringing certain countries, given the wars, the mentalities?*

***”You bring Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Romeo Castellucci, and Peter Brook together, to see the movement of ideas, otherwise it’s useless...”***

**Mc R.:** I’ll give you an example of what happened this year. I invited a company of clowns from Israel and, when the Arab countries found out, with one exception, that artists from Israel would be there, they withdrew their companies. There are also religious obstacles, but we overcame them through discussions, because I have a broader vision of things, I am not a zealot. The fact that I studied the history of religions helps me and I don’t have a problem talking to a fierce Islamist, because I have read the *Qur’an* and the life of Muhammad. I’m not afraid to talk to a Buddhist, because I’ve studied his philosophy and visited more temples than he did. I am not afraid to talk to a Catholic about the Great Schism, because I taught in a Catholic school, as an Orthodox. All obstacles can be overcome. I have encountered war several times. I have noticed that small nations, like Kosovo, Serbia, to give examples around Romania, have an exacerbated pride. When they come to the festival, they have the highest demands. Great theatres and great nations have fewer pretensions. They enjoy the meeting that the *Babel* Festival occasions them. For example, the most modest people are the greatest personalities. I’m thinking of Jean-Guy Lecat or Odin Teatret.

You bring Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Romeo Castellucci, and Peter Brook together, to see the movement of ideas, otherwise it’s useless, you bring them as museum pieces, and I’m not interested. You must start debates. That’s why we discuss after each performance with the press, with the audience, with whoever is interested. There are not many interested, but we talk anyway. It is like a service in a Buddhist temple, where there is only the monk who prays for others. It doesn’t matter how many of us there are. The important thing is to say that prayer.

**V.E.:** *As a result of the discussion, it becomes increasingly clear that the Babel Festival is designed in layers.*

**Mc R.:** That’s why it’s not just a theatre festival. It’s the Festival of Performing Arts, there are more arts, more theatre schools, more schools of thought, many religions, many types of political thought. There are many types of politicians. That’s why politics is not done at Babel. We did a kind of politics when we invite the Mariupol Theatre, which is the

only theatre destroyed during a war, at least since the Second World War. The story of this theatre has haunted me since last year when I brought them for the first time. We will further collaborate with them. Because of a defection, we couldn't do *Romeo and Juliet*, because we brought the team from Ukraine to start rehearsals, and an actor fled to the United States and the whole team had to go back home. We missed the opportunity. There are also such obstacles. But I have the feeling that I am part of the events of the Babel Festival, which only the Babel Festival and no other festivals should have.

**V.E.:** *What feelings do you have after the festival and who would miss it... you, the community, the team?*

***“You can't take something that already exists and put something less valuable in its place, without the public immediately noticing.”***

**Mc R.:** I think I would miss it first of all. After the 2008 edition, which was very successful, because we saw the magnitude that the festival can take, I was not given any more money for the 2009 edition, because the political power changed. I said to myself, “This is a concept” and the theme of the edition was “Zero budget”. That year, a country like Japan came along with its ambassador and said, “We're funding the company from Tokyo.” This is just one example. Therefore, a major obstacle— well, it was the beginning of the disaster for me, personally, and for the theatre, as we saw later—can become a virtuosity. We turned a big problem into a concept around which we embroidered the Babel Festival. If you don't have money to feed the participants, you call on the theatre employees. Everyone brought what they had at home, potatoes, cabbage, etc. and cooked in the theatre yard. I have a very pleasant memory about that edition, because we were able to laugh in the face of those who wanted to destroy us. We showed them that we can resist. I remember that, in 2010, I was left alone on the barricades, with a flag, and that's why I left. The people, not from the “Tony Bulandra” Theatre, from the Romanian theatre “helped” me to leave, because they united to destroy this festival and me personally. They didn't succeed or they succeeded just for the moment. After a few days, a few weeks, things came back, and do you know why they came back?... Because they were things made with faith, cleanly, and conceptually very

solid, they couldn't be destroyed so easily. You can't take something that already exists and put something less valuable in its place, without the public immediately noticing. You must put something more valuable. And they didn't find what, although they tried for three years. They called me again and I resumed Babel. I didn't want to do Babel in any conditions, that's why I didn't want to do it during the pandemic, like other festivals did. It was a different kind of choice. It was a theatre man's choice. I believe in theatre as a living form. I believe in the empathy I can have with the person in front of me. I must feel his gaze, see his reaction to act, right?! Otherwise, we make dead theatre. Dead theatre is everywhere. In fact, it is the greatest enemy of theatre—the dead theatre. If you analyse a very noisy theatre, you realize that it is just a shaken sheet of metal that imitates the wind. It has no substance; it has no weight. They are now reinventing the Living Theatre, which was done in the flower *power period* in the United States. It came to us a little late, after half a century. We are already in the 21st century and those movements were born for other reasons. It was a different socio-political context, another culture. I prefer to talk about art forms, not about political movements.

**V.E.:** *On an artistic level, you and the festival seem to have lived between agony and ecstasy. Is it related to what you were saying that the artist sometimes has to say uncomfortable things, or to be on the receiving end, if someone is willing to transmit them to him?*

**Mc R.:** It's very hard when you receive uncomfortable feedback. I learned to receive it. It doesn't mean that it doesn't affect me. I recover very quickly. It's just like on the balance beam. You fall, you get points deducted, but you finish your exercise. As you get older, people start to respect you more and then you are no longer attacked so primitively. Romanians still make the confusion between age and wisdom. They have nothing to do with each other. I know a lot of elderly people who are absolute idiots. They have no culture and have not wanted to learn anything all their lives. I think that the ways in which I operate with my interlocutors, with those who act against me, have also diversified and I have learned an essential thing—nothing is definitive. Today's justice can become tomorrow's great lie. You just have to be patient. I have patience. The problem is that I don't have time anymore. In fact, this is my great suffering, that I don't have time anymore. I have no regrets that things happened the way they did. You should know that I am a very happy person, and you can see this from how

the theatre looks and how I do the Babel Festival. It is a festival made from joy. It is not a festival of numbers, it is not a festival of displaying opulence, but a festival of ideas. That's what we need. Surely, I could have done the same in another festival. I have done it in my past.

**V.E.:** *In another festival or in another city?*

**Mc R.:** In another city. In another festival. But I chose this city because it was small and because it was my city. I thought I was going to stay for three years, and I stayed a lifetime. The most important things I did here because it is the place where I stayed the most. I could have stayed at Disneyland, as a very well-paid director. Funny, a cheerful world. This is how it seems for those who pay for the ticket. In fact, it's a sad world. I didn't adapt to the West, although everyone there said that I was the best adapted emigrant. But I dreamed of the smells of Romania. I don't think that an artist born in a place forgets it, but we do need to travel. We need others to confirm to us that we are what we think we are, that what we want to do is, indeed, the thing we must do. If you set your mind to it, you end up succeeding. I mean, think that I imagined that I was going to be a director and I became a director. Think that I imagined that I would live in a different system than the communist one and I succeeded. I realized that I had more things to do here than there, where there were so many other artists, because I also believed in my purpose. I've been a social worker, you know, all these years. This purpose stayed with me from communism because we had to work for the public, for others... not in favour of propaganda, but against it. That's why, after the Revolution, you saw the artists in the foreground... They were already doing this in theatres. Everywhere. Some turned out to be playing double agents. It's funny. But you should know that, even in artists, imperfection plays an important role. There are no perfect people, no perfect things, and no perfect art objects, but we must aspire to, we have to do everything to make these things positive.

**V.E.:** *Perhaps it is precisely that breach of imperfection that is the one from which creations are born. Is it somehow a no-man's area that can be claimed in an artistic way?*

**Mc R.:** Yes, yes. For example, I learned from school to leave an area of ambiguity in my performances, which is not understood, or to introduce a symbol with a private meaning, to code certain aspects of a performance. That's up to my personal acting. Otherwise, I would get bored. That's why I

didn't become an actor, because I never wanted to rehearse. Therefore, I am looking for forms of animation, musical theatre, image-theatre. I couldn't decide on a type of theatre, although many say that my performances are similar. Maybe through an area of minimalism and in terms of music, in terms of objects.

**V.E.:** *They are similar for all creators. They say the same about the actors' acting because, in the end, you can't be schizophrenic, you can't get out of yourself, do something completely different. It would mean being, suddenly, another person, with other guiding principles, with another education.*

**Mc R.:** Yes, but the emotions of creation must always be fresh and, every time, you must propose something new, not for the sake of novelty, but to satisfy your own curiosity.

**V.E.:** *Yes, but it's clear that each creator takes certain cultural quotes from other creations he values.*

***“If the cultural environment in question  
is filled with everything it needs,  
something may appear that surprises even yourself.  
There is no need to copy another.  
You don't need to copy yourself either.”***

**Mc R.:** He doesn't take them, he accepts them as part of his being, and then he develops them further. Otherwise, it would be an area of plagiarism and he could not be called creator, because he would stay with the initial statements. Theatre is life. But what if theatre is also beyond life or beyond death? Right? Or the unborn theatre? And then, of course, the imagination begins to develop. I also see performances copied from other performances. A man who sees a lot of theatre and goes to festivals immediately notices. Very often, in Romania, there was praise about a performance that was a copy of another performance in the West, because people had no information. Now it's much simpler. I wonder why he copied it because he's an important artist and he didn't need it. Imagination is infinite in an artist. It does not appear spontaneously. Spontaneity appears only at a certain time, after you have developed a favourable environment. If the cultural environment in question is filled with everything it needs, something may appear that surprises even yourself. There is no need to

copy another. You don't need to copy yourself either. I did *Don Quixote* three times, but each time I did it totally differently. Once I did it with actors and puppets. I did it because I was a kind of Don Quixote, I travelled like him, I fought windmills, I always had a Sancho Panza by my side, who also became Don Quixote in the end. I did it when I came back to Sibiu from Paris and I did it in Târgoviște, before the "Tony Bulandra" Theatre appeared. In fact, that performance triggered the old idea of the authorities to establish a theatre in Târgoviște. So, I was a pioneer.

**V.E.:** *To conclude with the festival, would you like it to continue at all costs? If it could no longer continued in this city, could it be relocated somewhere else?*

**Mc R.:** When I left Târgoviște, I thought about whether to rebuild Babel. I know a case, it's about the festival in Baia Mare, by Radu Macrinici, which was in Sfântu Gheorghe and is now in Baia Mare. In that festival formula it was possible. In the Babel formula it is not possible, because it is strictly linked to my presence here, in Târgoviște, and to this city. But I think it will continue, because I have infected too many people with this festival and with this theatre. It will continue. I am not part of that category of people, I am not Louis XIV, who said, "Après moi, le deluge!" or "L'état c'est moi!" Theatre is not me, even if sometimes things seem like that, even if sometimes I behave as if it were my theatre, I do things the way I do them at home, for myself. That's about dedication. But theatre goes on without me. It went on... badly or it was led down the wrong path. You should know that if the theatre in Târgoviște was doing well, I would not have returned. I came back precisely because it went badly and because the festival no longer existed. I felt the need to invigorate it. In fact, the Babel Festival has been revived more than the theatre was been revived.

**V.E.:** *Therefore, it's clear that, in the end, the festival would not only be missed by you, but by many others. By the team, by part of the audience.*

**Mc R.:** If I leave, the team will remain and, anyway, if I leave, I intend to remain the president of the festival for a while, until I am sure that things will go the right path. For me, things are rushing, because I'm at the end of my career and, just as I got a debut award when I started my career as a director, I think I could give myself an end-of-career award. Anyway, it's the most valuable if I give it to myself.

**V.E.:** *The career can continue even after its official end, so to speak, it can continue long and well.*

**Mc R.:** I was obsessed with this end of my career more than I was for my debut, because then, in the naivety of age, everything was fresh, and everything was possible. And it really was. My father, during the Revolution, was kicked out of office and practically refused to leave the house for 10 years. When I came back from France, he had a shock, because he was discovering a Romania that was no longer as he knew it. I didn't want the same thing to happen to me. In a way, it was very good that I was kicked out of the theatre 14-15 years ago and Babel was interrupted, because the shock happened then. Think if it had happened now, at the age of 60, how big it would have been. I couldn't have fixed anything. That's why I'm obsessed with the ending, and I'd like it to happen... It will not happen in harmony, because there is no way. But it will be smoother for me and my family. More respectful, and more in the admiration of those around me, as I admired, respected and supported them.



*Sheol*, directed by: Jarosław Fret, Babel Festival 2024, @Cosmin Virlan  
Source: <https://s.go.ro/924iwpvc>