

A grey November day in the early 1980's. The train from Nuremberg is passing distant forests of fir and villages dusted with snow, the houses fresh with paint, there is quiet order everywhere. And then the border. As the train pulls into the station I see soldiers evenly spaced down the platform. As soon as we stop they are on board checking the ceiling panels in the corridors. Other officials check passports, visas and luggage. They are polite, efficient and alert. After an hour all is done and we are leaving Cheb. I have once more crossed the Iron Curtain. This is the land of Dvorak and Janáček's music, the films of Milos Forman, the photography of Josef Sudek, this is Czechoslovakia. This is my annual holiday from the large, ever growing Edinburgh lawyer's office where I am responsible for the building, contents and equipment. I am escaping again from the meticulous order I need to create in my office into a tightly controlled but somehow very dishevelled land.

The train is taking me to Prague through Bohemia's gentle wooded hills. But the urban landscapes I am seeing are very different. There is an atmosphere of decay and neglect. The colours are faded dirty pinks and damaged reds. This is what I am going to photograph. I have taken Prague's cityscapes before but now I want to look more closely - to look at the surfaces. From these pictures came my first major exhibition '*Prague Walls*' in the Edinburgh College of Art in 1984

Finding similar material at home seemed just about impossible until I discovered, one Sunday, the declining docks of Leith in northern Edinburgh. There, over repeated visits with a medium format camera using colour transparencies, I found rusting sides of ships and metal plates strewn on waste ground, with colours and accidental markings that with careful selection could reveal new decaying landscapes - and eventually a new exhibition '*Secret Landscapes*'. This exhibition showed in Scotland in 1991 and then toured six cities in Czechoslovakia, the land that originally inspired it, and then in succeeding years on to Poland (five cities) and finally Germany (Dresden, Halle, Cottbus and Nuremberg) under the auspices of the British Council.

During these years my imagination had been richly fed not only by the travels but also by the riches of the Edinburgh Festival and Film Festival, which brought theatre from Georgia, film from Eastern Europe and Russia, music from just about everywhere. Tarkovsky's films made a profound impression, being backed at the same time by the poetry of the great Russian poets, especially Mandelstam and Pasternak. I was immersed in music exploring in greater depth Janáček and Bartok but also the avant-garde of the West. Equally important was the great light and space of Turner, Rothko and the Abstract Expressionists, and Serra's monumental metal; but also the figures of Giacometti. All these I understood to influence and inspire the way I saw and created pictures. The music led me to begin exploring the possibilities of photographing musicians in black and white.

Then quite unexpectedly it happened. 1992 - Glasgow. The Tramway - a tram-shed converted to show art and the performing arts. Russian theatre. Black and White. The set is just plain matt black walls. The raked stage is white snow.

This is the set for *Gaudeamus*. I have come at the last moment, invited by the English interpreter, and have no idea what to expect. This is a production by the Maly Drama Theatre of St. Petersburg and their director Lev Dodin. It tells of the first days of training in an army squad. It is brilliantly conceived, and acted by a large young company with great skill. I sit there astounded, seeing, moment by moment, individual pictures in my mind. By the end of the performance I am saying to myself "whatever I do I must photograph this work." But I had never photographed a play in my life let alone one of the stature of Dodin's *Gaudeamus*. The next day the Maly had moved on and year passed but the desire remained. Then in August 1993 Mikhail Tumanishvili brought The Georgian Film Actors Studio to Edinburgh with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This was a company I knew from their first visit in 1989. They very kindly agreed to let me photograph one of their performances. This was the first time I had ever photographed a play. To my joy the pictures worked, they were pleased, I was pleased and so was Lev Dodin when I showed them to him at the beginning of their 1994 tour of the UK. He agreed immediately that I could photograph his work whenever I could find a way to be present and has been true to his word ever since.

From the beginning I worked on complete rehearsals and actual performances, never on photo calls. Invariably from just one position, the best that I could negotiate, using very fast black and white film, and of course without flash. Never commissioned, never paid. So artistically I was my own master, trying to capture the essence, tension and movement of the masterwork of the director and his actors. Once started on this project it would not let me go. I searched out performances coming out of Russia and the Ukraine in the West which I could catch without taking more than a day or two's holiday. In November 1995 I went to Moscow for the first time and with the great help of the American theatre critic of the Moscow Times, John Freedman, I was able to see and photograph, in performance, 18 productions in 14 days. Gradually this work expanded, reigned in only by the time limitations of the day job but also of course funded by it.

Ken Reynolds - Photographic Work

The artistic goal has always remained the same - to create images that have the possibility to intrigue, question, and stimulate the imagination without the viewer necessarily knowing anything about the production. They are caught in a fraction of a second - one moment will work, the next one may not. The timing is critical in relation to the body and facial movement of the actors in their interaction with each other and their surroundings and the light, and one's own inner, intuitive response to what is the essential essence and atmosphere. All my life I have been aware of seemingly accidental symmetries, and also how so many things change in relation to each other just by moving one or two steps. In the theatre I am still, and it is the the actors who are ever moving in relation to each other and the set, and my eye seems to instantaneously pick up and frame unintended parallel lines from set, props and moving arms and legs. This happens almost subconsciously for the concentration has to be on the eyes and ever changing expressions.

I have been privileged to work with some of the finest and most innovative directors, their companies, and actors, both in very early and final rehearsals, sometimes with many months intervening, and frequently during actual performance without any previous opportunity to see the production. The performance tradition and ethos is very different to my homeland. Traditions that have evolved over more than 100 years that demand extensive preparation and long rehearsal periods with good works remaining in repertory for many years. *Gaudeamus* can still be seen perhaps once or twice in a full month's programme. Kama Ginkas whom I first met during that 1995 visit to Moscow invited me photograph his new chamber piece '*K.I from Crime*' based on Katerina Ismailova and her three children, aged 6, 8 and 10 in *Crime and Punishment*. Still showing in Moscow it has travelled world-wide. On the last occasion I photographed this in New York the actress was of course the same. However this was the fourth generation of children, this time with young Russian New Yorker's replacing the one's who had appeared at the Bard Summerscape a few years before.

The natural by-product of seeking the pictures that can stand on their own without the viewer having knowledge of the production is that a play has been photographed in its entirety, providing a record of a complete 2-4 hour performance, moment by moment. This record has come from a desire to capture the work in performance and overall has gradually formed an archive of significant Russian and Eastern European theatre at a critical time in its history - the immediate post-communist years from 1993 - to the present day.

Ken Reynolds - January 2017