

Request Concert

Łaźnia Nowa Theater
and TR Warszawa

By Franz Xaver Kroetz
Directed by Yana Ross

Presented in association with the
Polish Cultural Institute New York

DATES: OCT 26—29 at 7:30pm
LOCATION: BAM Fisher (Fishman Space)
RUN TIME: 1hr 15mins, no intermission

#RequestConcert
#BAMNextWave

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Request Concert

TEXT

Franz Xaver Kroetz

DIRECTION

Yana Ross

DRAMATURG

Aśka Grochulska

TRANSLATION

Danuta Żmij-Zielińska

SOUNDSCAPE

Aśka Grochulska
Tomasz Wyszomirski

LIGHTING DESIGN

Mats Öhlin

SCENOGRAPHY/MULTIMEDIA DESIGN

Simona Biekšaitė

SCENIC CO-DESIGNER

Zane Pihlstrom

CO-DRAMATURG

Marcin Zawada

CAST

FRAU RASCH

Danuta Stenka
Actress of the National Theater

RADIO HOST

Ari Shapiro

Produced by Łaźnia Nowa Theater in association with TR Warszawa and Divine Comedy International Theatre Festival.

Co-presented by the Polish Cultural Institute New York.



ABOUT *Request Concert*

Request Concert is based on a text by the German playwright Franz Xaver Kroetz. Unlike classically constructed dramas, this play comprises only a side text that serves as a score and a commentary on the stage action. The protagonist, a 50-year-old woman who works as a stenographer, lives in an apartment with modern middle class décor. Surrounded by colorful advertisements and packages, overly-organized and pedantic, she cannot overcome her loneliness. The society that she lives in also doesn't help, condemning her to exclusion and isolation. Kroetz creates a world where the individual feels very much alone, lost in the manic tempo of the big city. The playwright closely observes the behavior patterns and morality of the bourgeoisie as it faces cultural and social transformations that force it to re-establish its identity.

“Karl Marx defines a time as ripe for revolution when the masses are fed up with oppression, and the elite is no longer able to control them. But what if the financial elite has adapted with the times and worked out a way to keep the masses more or less occupied with consumerism, keeping them busy with daily small rewards and pleasures enough to forget the pain of a senseless cycle of life?”

—Yana Ross



photo: Danuta Stenka by Klaudyna Schubert

Director's Note

I don't like monodramas. I think it is pretentious for one actor to draw all attention and drag out monologues. I don't see *Request Concert* as a mono-performance. There is a clear partner present. A radio host. He's very real. They are in conversation together, even though she doesn't say a word. This play is a great challenge for a mega-actress and a stubborn director. Everything has to be subtle, almost hidden. Hints, cues, clues, and references are planted in every corner, but it is up to the audience to read their own story through them.

I remember reading a strange Serbian name, Dragan Klaic, next to Franz Xaver Kroetz while a student at Yale School of Drama. I thought what a cool name, Dragan... and a year later, a coincidence, meeting Dragan Klaic in Vilnius, introducing myself: "You were a dramaturg and translator of Kroetz plays at Yale Cabaret in 1978..." A great beginning to a long friendship. But yes, Kroetz captured my attention immediately with a text so tightly woven, so rigid and precise in dramaturgy, it stuck with me and entered the liminal space of a director's "suitcase." I marked this play. I wanted to go back to it at some point in my life but I didn't know what kind of actress would be capable of such precision.

I remember talking with Anne Tismer after seeing the Schaubühne production. I remember her dedication to each and every detail in the script. I went back to that memory when Danuta Stenka and

I sat down in the rented apartment and started our first conversation about the play.

Language is a strong partner in theater, so is an actor ensemble. Working on *Wünschkonzert (Request Concert)* I wanted to challenge these tools I often use and discard them in search for a different type of communication. How to work with human energy? Space between vocal communication? I wanted to heighten our sense of intuitive presence. I wanted to give the audience freedom to choose how to process and watch the performance. For a major star, an actress of world fame, a big challenge, to give up the most powerful tool—her voice, was also a thrill and experiment. Can her power still reach the audience, can she communicate the rich and complex inner world of her character without whispering one sound? How honest can we be facing each other in rehearsal without any other partner to lean on.

Intimacy was vital. We worked in this private apartment, rented for us to mimic the setting, and we spent hours in each corner of it exploring her presence. Kitchen with radio, laptop, and cup of tea. Bathroom ritual... To respect the dramaturgy one must scrutinize and examine every single line and question its relevance to our generation, to the audience which comes to see the performance. For example, Kroetz gives Frau Rasch a hobby—she is knitting a rug. She is actually about to finish her creation but the audience is not supposed to notice that the rug is done. We've spent a long time looking for her equivalent hobby. Not many modern women knit.

Also, the internet did not exist in 1970s when the play was written but now, the online presence is overwhelming.

We burn the midnight oil on Facebook and online shopping. Danuta and I started to explore the possibilities of her internet presence. Would she be on the dating site? Is she interested in finding someone? Does she shop online? Does she have a porn addiction? We played for hours in such scenarios and discovered all possible clichés and had to kill these ideas one by one until we discovered The Sims, an online game which allows someone to create an identity and a family, and we thought this is something Frau Rasch could get into. She started slowly by playing a few hours a day, creating a perfect husband and a daughter, a job, and a hobby as well. It gave a routine pleasure for the character to come home to this virtual family and to complete some tasks. Just like Kroetz writes that the rug is finished but the audience doesn't notice, so does our heroine finish playing The Sims. She pops the disk out and puts it away for good. Relationship with this game returns at the end of the performance when the audience might feel they were part of someone else's Sims game...

—Yana Ross

Note from the Playwright

Franz Xaver Kroetz, who came specially from Munich to see this production in its European premiere, didn't hide his excitement. Acknowledging that adapting the show to our times was necessary to ensuring that his play may best function today, he admired the idea of using The Sims. Kroetz said that playing The Sims today has the same meaning as knitting a rug 40 years ago. He also added: "The anonymity of Danuta Stenka broke down barriers and showed a phenomenal, outstanding actress. The pain expressed in every detail and her exquisite minimalist gestures conveyed the truth of my play in the best possible way."

Who's Who

YANA ROSS
Director

Yana Ross grew up in Latvia and spent her childhood between Europe, Russia, and the US. After graduating with an MFA from Yale School of Drama in 2006, Ross collaborated with the Nobel laureate Elfriede Jelinek, directing her plays *Sleeping Beauty* and *Bambiland*. She continues to work internationally from Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz to Seoul Performing Arts Festival in South Korea. Ross is a recipient of a prestigious Fulbright Fellowship. She served as a managing editor at *Yale Theater* magazine on a special volume: Russian Theater of the 21st Century, for which she received John Gassner Memorial prize. Since 2006, she has been a resident director at the National Theater, Lithuania. These performances are dedicated to Lana Johnson.

DANUTA STENKA
Actor/Frau Rasch

Danuta Stenka is one of Poland's leading film and theater actresses. Since 1991, she spent a decade working at Teatr Dramatyczny in Warsaw, then at TR Warszawa. She earned critical acclaim for her distinguished roles in Krzysztof Warlikowski's productions (*Electra*, *The Taming of*

the Shrew, *Krum*, *Angels in America*, and *Apollonia*). In 2003, she joined the ensemble of the National Theater in Warsaw, taking on roles with many renowned directors, including Robert Wilson (*Lady from the Sea*), Grzegorz Jarzyna (*Giovanni*), and Maja Kleczewska (*Phaedra*, *Marat/Sade*, *Oresteia*). She has played in many films and TV series winning over 30 awards for her theater and film work. She received the Silver Medal for Merit to Culture 'Gloria Artis', awarded by the Polish ministry of culture.

SIMONA BIEKŠAITĖ
Scenography/Multimedia Design

Simona Biekšaitė is a Lithuanian theater artist and experimental stage designer with diplomas in design from Lithuanian and Norwegian universities. She has worked with many renowned international artists including Rob M. Johansson (US), Sara Turunen (FI), Lisa Charlotte Boduin Lie (NO), and Kristian Smeds (FIN). In 2013, she co-founded Guts United collective which she now heads together with Marit Sirgmets (EST).

ARI SHAPIRO
Radio Host

As host of NPR's afternoon news program, *All Things Considered*, Ari Shapiro has interviewed presidential candidates, refugees, artists, and celebrities. He has reported from above the Arctic Circle and aboard Air Force One. He has covered wars in Iraq, Ukraine, and Israel, and he has filed stories from five continents (sorry, Australia). Before joining the program in 2015, Shapiro was NPR's international

correspondent based in London. He also served for four years as NPR's White House correspondent and, before that, as Justice correspondent. During his free time, Shapiro is a regular guest singer with the "little orchestra" Pink Martini, whose recent albums feature several of his contributions. Since his debut at the Hollywood Bowl in 2009, Shapiro has performed with the band live at many of the world's most storied venues, including Carnegie Hall in New York, L'Olympia in Paris, and Mount Lycabettus in Athens.

Łaźnia Nowa Theater

Łaźnia Nowa Theater is a place where ideas bloom, a place where both renowned and emerging artists, or even amateurs, find space for development and creative work. Here, in a post-industrial space which formerly served as a workshop for a nearby vocational school, the borders between audience and artists have been knocked down, and projects that would have had no chance in other theaters have been created. Here, unique relationships are formed, resulting in an engagement in the art and life of the local society. Łaźnia Nowa is a place where art is inseparably connected with education, self-improvement, development, care, and responsibility for the residents of Krakow.

In the ten years of its existence, the theater has become a recognized trademark in Polish theater. It has initiated a number of popular festivals, such as Genius Loci Theatre Festival, the Divine Comedy International Theatre Festival, and Mroźek Festival. Łaźnia Nowa does not have a fixed

cast, and its productions follow the practice of inviting various actors and directors to cooperate.

Between 2005 and 2016, Łaźnia Nowa Theater produced more than 40 shows, both independently and in co-production with other institutions such as Jerzy Szaniawski Theatre in Wałbrzych, Contemporary Theatre in Szczecin, Dramatic Theatre of the Capital City of Warsaw, Montownia Theatre, and Imka Theatre. Łaźnia Nowa's productions have been successfully presented in numerous theater festivals, including the Interpretations National Directing Art Festival in Katowice, R@port Festival of Polish Contemporary Arts, Premiere Festival in Bydgoszcz, Theatrical Whims in Wałbrzych, and Gliwice Theatre Meetings Festival. They have also regularly appeared abroad in Berlin, Madrid, Mexico City, and Singapore.

The unusual space of Łaźnia Nowa theater (two stages with auditoriums of up to several hundred spectators, as well as a spacious foyer) attracts the best productions from Europe. Rock concerts by leading artists from Poland and abroad regularly take place here. Determination and firm faith in the power of human creativity allowed the theater to become rooted in the local landscape, to gain a regular audience, and be hopeful about the future.
laznianowa.pl

General and Artistic Director
Bartosz Szydłowski

Deputy Directors
Jarosław Tochowicz
Małgorzata Szydłowska

TR Warszawa

In 1998, a year after his critically acclaimed debut with *The Tropical Craze*, Grzegorz Jarzyna was offered the direction of a small Warsaw stage called Teatr Rozmaitości. Since that time, he has transformed it into TR Warszawa, one of the most important theaters in Poland—and one of the best known Polish theaters around the world.

TR Warszawa is home to artistic experiments of all kinds. Jarzyna has created a place that not only provides space for his own work but also attracts other brilliant directors including Krystian Lupa, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Jan Klata, René Pollesch, Kornél Mundruczó, and Yana Ross. He has built an acclaimed team of actors, composers and designers. Always on the lookout for new talents and a new language for contemporary theater, TR Warszawa has commissioned several new dramas, made some bold reinterpretations of classics texts, opened its stage to young actors and directors, and explored the potential of non-traditional performance spaces in the city.

TR Warszawa has received invitations to various festivals and stages in Europe and beyond, performing in Avignon, Paris, Lille, London, Edinburgh, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Jerusalem, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Stockholm, Dublin, Brussels, Madrid, Minsk, Bucharest, Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, Wellington, and Hong Kong. trwarszawa.pl

Grzegorz Jarzyna, Artistic Director
Wojciech Gorczyca, Executive Director

THE POLISH CULTURAL INSTITUTE NEW YORK

The Polish Cultural Institute New York (PCINY) was founded in 2000. It is a diplomatic mission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, operating in the area of public diplomacy. The PCINY is one of 24 such institutes around the world. It is also an active member of the network of the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) in its New York cluster.

The Institute's mission is to disseminate around the world comprehensive knowledge of Poland, Polish history, and national heritage, as well as to promote Poland's contemporary contributions to the success of world culture. The Institute does so through initiating, supporting, and promoting collaboration between Poland and the United States in the areas of art, education, research, and in many other aspects of intellectual and social life. The Institute's main task is to ensure Polish participation in the programming of America's most important cultural institutions as well as in large international initiatives.

The Institute works with renowned cultural and academic centers and opinion leaders operating on the American market. For more than fifteen years, it has presented Americans the achievements of outstanding Polish artists. The Institute initiates and actively participates in debates around the humanities in the broad sense, including those concerning history and the today's most important social and political occurrences. polishculture-nyc.org







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