

THEATER
EUROPE COMES TO CALL



‘Who feels European?’

RIMINI PROTOKOLL

EN | The Berlin theatre company Rimini Protokoll has put together a project in which groups of fifteen participants meet up in somebody’s living room for a game that sees them compete for the largest slice of the European cake. **MICHAËL BELLON**

Rimini Protokoll is no ordinary theatre company. The last time they were in Brussels, they presented a show called *100% Brussels* - a sort of statistical theatrical investigation of our city's population, which was represented onstage by a hundred locals. They later repeated the project in a number of other cities.

Home Visit Europe shows some similarities: the form, once again, is unconventional; the nature of the people who buy a ticket is investigated; in these small-scale theatrical evenings, moreover, all ticket-buyers are participants; once more, the project takes place in different cities; and the thrust is once again a directly social one, this time looking at what makes us Europeans so European.

"But people shouldn't be scared off," says Helgard Haug, who, along with Stefan Kaegi and Daniel Wetzlar, forms the core of Rimini Protokoll and who is keen to stress the fun factor in *Home Visit Europe*. "Clearly, for some people, it's kind of difficult to swap the secure surroundings of a traditional theatre for a stranger's living room. Moreover, lots of people don't see Europe as such a sexy subject, so they're afraid it will be an experimental evening at which they'll have to show what they know about Europe. And of course it's not like that at all."

So what's the idea then? You have already made "home visits" in several European cities and you've got a website about it, www.homevisiteurope.org.

HELGARD HAUG: We believe theatre doesn't always have to happen in a theatre building. It can be in an office, a parliament, or a living room. Certainly for this project, with a subject like Europe, we wanted to get away from any official context. We really wanted to create a situation in which people could meet up in a way that isn't formally organised. So each performance is on a small scale, but it's not just about those two hours. Overall, it is also a broader investigation of the tectonics of European integration. What is Europe? And is there such a thing as a European cultural identity?

Maybe it will be a bit easier to get people in Brussels interested. So we're doing it in four languages here. If we can attract people from outside the cultural bubble, and the baker comes too and not just the gallery-owner, then we're on the right track. We're aiming for a diverse group of

individuals who will talk about their relations with the different countries they feel a connection with one way or another. In addition, we use the gathering for a game. The way the game works is very simple. It only requires a small amount of material, which is got ready an hour beforehand. We're not even present ourselves. In each city, a few people are trained as MCs and technicians, but on a perfect evening, they're forgotten about too. The participants gather, like politicians, around a big table. A big map of Europe is opened up on it and there is also a machine we call the "pacemaker". If you press the green button on it, you are given tasks, ques-

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tions, or texts and then the group itself decides how to interpret them and what to do with them.


Is it true that the game has levels that correspond to key moments in European unification?

HAUG: There are five levels that do indeed correspond a little to significant periods in the integration of the European Union, from the first steps just after the Second World War to today's refugee question. But each level mainly serves to introduce a further tool or another perspective in the game. It starts with the host - with a few questions about where and why he or she is living there, so that everyone learns something about the setting. After

that, it's about the group. Much of the event focuses on the stories participants tell about the way they are connected to particular places in Europe. So it all starts off with a tentative attempt to create some fellow feeling in the group.

But a competitive element is soon added: teams are formed that literally compete for the biggest slice of the European cake. The more you get to know about the game, the more you start to take decisions in a different way, and the more it becomes a competition you can win or lose. You learn how difficult it is to make compromises and you become aware that decisions you make in your own interest can damage the solidarity within the group. Then you notice the atmosphere changing: it all becomes a bit louder and faster, but more fun too.

Can you already, on the basis of your experiences in cities like Aalborg, Poznan, or Prague, draw conclusions about the affinity with Europe in the different member states?

HAUG: It is still difficult to form a complete picture. Moreover, it's an arts project, first and foremost, and not a scholarly one. But sometimes you do come across some striking stuff. We are doing the "home visits" in Amsterdam and in Lisbon now too, and you can see that people sometimes have totally different perspectives. Asked a question like "Who feels they are more European than an inhabitant of their own country?", nobody in Portugal gives a positive answer. People there scarcely feel they are part of European construction at all. In Germany and probably in Belgium too, things are very different. And it is fascinating to see how, faced with the question, "Who is afraid of the future?", it is the Norwegians who score highest of all. If you visit a rich, cultured country like Norway, you really wonder what they could be afraid of. Whereas in Poland, which at first sight looks much more fragile, they're not so afraid at all. Of course, our statistics are not scientific, but they do show a mood. 

 **HOME VISIT EUROPE**

8 > 20/12, location tbc, www.kaaitheater.be

NL | Het Berlijnse theatergezelschap Rimini Protokoll pakt uit met een project waarbij groepjes van vijftien deelnemers samenkomen in privéwoonkamers voor een theateraal spel over Europa.

FR | La compagnie berlinoise Rimini Protokoll débarque avec un projet où des petits groupes d'une quinzaine de participants se réunissent dans le salon d'une habitation privée pour une performance théâtrale sur l'Europe.