

Unwritten Truths

Performance review: *Surpriza vieții* [*The Surprises of Life*], presented within the 1st edition of the “Ziua Grănicerului” [The Border Guard’s Day] event, 11.09.2019, Năsăud, Romania.

Cast: Sofia Ceciuleac, Dorel Timiș, Andrei Carafa, Macedon Marte, Ionela Timiș, Ancuța Filipoi

At the beginning of September 2019, the Border Guard Museum from the town of Năsăud (a former, up until 1918, border town of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, home of the 10th Border Regiment), in association with the City Hall and Bistrița County Council, hosted the first edition of “The Border Guard’s Day” event, presented by Andrei Duban and Iulia Dragu, an occasion to celebrate the town’s rich cultural and military heritage. Throughout the day, audiences were rewarded with a military parade (including students in historical costumes and military uniforms, alongside the march of the 81st Mechanized Brigade), an exhibition dedicated to the history of Năsăud’s border guards, medieval and folk dance (“Dancing Wings” and “Colibița” Ensemble), music (Dan Pantiș – folk, as well as Vali Boghean Band), a folk art fair and, last but by no means least, a brief theatre performance entitled *The Surprises of Life*, presented by the renowned “Constantin Iugan” Unwritten Theatre Company® from the parish of Șanț, Bistrița-Năsăud County, Romania.

When I say “renowned”, I am by no means exaggerating. Re-established as a community theatre company in 1935 (its existence attested as of 1912) by none other than the famous sociologist and ethnologist Dimitrie Gusti, who understood the value and extraordinary potential of this unique folk theatre form, the group manages to this day to thrivingly continue a more than one hundred years old theatrical tradition from their village: a theatre of situations with improvised, not written, dialogue. In this respect, it bears some resemblance to Commedia Dell’Arte.



Fig. 1: “Constantin Iugan” Unwritten Theatre Company®, Șanț, Romania
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Currently, the company led by Sofia Ceciuleac, a folk theatre performer with 30 years of experience in the group, comprises six members, three women (Sofia Ceciuleac, Ionela Timiș, Ancuța Filipoi) and three men (Dorel Timiș, Macedon Marte, Andrei Carafa), but the structure has varied over the years, so much so that the shifting nature of its organization could easily be considered an integral part of the Unwritten Theatre’s identity, alongside the predominance of “plays” dealing with the life of the community – such titles as *Bătrânul/Bătrâna își împarte averea* [*The Old Man/Woman Dividing His/Her Wealth*]; *Măritatul fără voie* [*Unwilling Marriage*]; *Fermierii* [*The Farmers*] date back to Constantin Iugan himself – , the reliance on the local dialect for authenticity and, to a considerable extent, for comic effect and, most importantly, the fundamental role of improvisation.



Fig. 2: The Wife and the Gossipy Women in *The Surprises of Life*
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With just a general idea of a plot line and a set of pre-established, often stereotypical, characters (The Old Man; The Old Woman; The Cheating Spouse; The Lover etc.), no Unwritten Theatre performance is like the other, varying, not unlike a happening, in accordance with the intrinsically changing nature of the surrounding environment. According to Sofia Ceciuleac, the company's coordinator, at present "the members have written sixteen plays dealing with contemporary issues, events from the day-to-day life of the community". And they seem to be doing it with great success, winning several accolades at various artistic events over the years, most recently in 2019, at the "Oltenii și restul lumii" Humoristic Festival in Slatina, Romania, where they won first prize.

The performance presented in September in Năsăud, entitled *Surpriza vieții* [*The Surprises of Life*], brings forth a comic perspective on immigration and how it affects, or rather how it becomes a part of the community. The story is filtered through the eyes of the ever-present on stage, gossipy Women (Ionela Timiș, Ancuța Filipoi), two know-it-alls sitting on a village bench, spinning and humorously scrutinizing every movement on the street. The Wife (beautifully performed by Sofia Ceciuleac) enjoys a love affair with her Lover (Macedon Marte), confident that her Husband (Dorel Timiș) is working abroad, like so many husbands, is constantly sending money home for her and their child and is not smart enough to suspect that she might be having another love interest. His sudden return home to find the two lovers together represents a shock and, apparently, he suffers a heart attack, to the satisfaction of the Wife who begins to empty his pockets before reluctantly calling for the Doctor (Andrei Carafa). The husband recovers and, having heard his wife's true opinion of him, scolds her dearly. The group successfully managed to shed light on an issue affecting the lives of so many communities. Divided families all over the country, though not as dysfunctional as the one portrayed in rough overtones by *The Surprises of Life*, will resonate to such problems as immigration, alienation, financial distress and life as part of a community.



Fig. 3: The Wife and The Husband in *The Surprises of Life*
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UNWRITTEN TRUTHS

The commitment and sustained artistic efforts of the Unwritten Theatre Company from Şanţ should only be applauded and encouraged. They successfully carry on a century old community theatre tradition, a unique phenomenon in the Romanian cultural landscape.

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