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From left, Vincent Lecuyer, Antoine Oppenheim and Céline Bolomey in a scene in front of a mirror in "Genèse 2," directed by Galin Stoev, below left. (Boris Horvat/Agence France-Presse)

## Bulgarian director opens a curtain on the former East bloc

By Joan Dupont

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(Page 2 of 2)

Like in Antonina Velikanova's analysis? "Exactly. My work is to make them all exist naturally on stage even though everything is calculated. A good director is a director who disappears from the scene."

This play on words and beliefs flashes with humor, far from the documentary line that Viripaeve appeared to adopt earlier in his career.

"Although Ivan is very provocative, he hasn't had problems with the government. In Moscow, he himself acted in it on stage and they can't imagine the play without him.

"These days, the church has become quite powerful, and all the politicians are on TV appearing in church - the cult of the good citizen. So Ivan comes up with a text that is controversial, but it doesn't seem to endanger him.

"In Russia for 70 years, and for 45 years in Bulgaria, religion was banned, and now there is a feeling that we have to develop our spirituality. After the changes, people went back there to find a place that was not dirtied by politics. I find this important."

Stoev was happy about the reaction of the Avignon public to the play. "It touches people: after the show they were overcome and couldn't analyze what they had seen, which is what we wanted."

He was especially pleased because, he said, in France, critics and theatergoers tend to take political positions. "It's funny, because a lot of people in the realm of culture are ex-Trotskyite or

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ex-Maoist, so they can't get why God should be the subject of a play. We are supposed to be free."

But cultural differences can create cultural boundaries. He sees theater as a humanistic force, opening up space within us.

"How free are we in our minds? Often not as free as we think. And performance touches a sensuous spot in us, because we are so divided in our contemporary selves, in this modern society. One of the aims of theater is to help us to find strength in ourselves," he said.

"I grew up in a world where you projected your dreams from behind the Wall to this place across the world. We tried to search for information which was banned. Then, after, we realized that the problems are everywhere - but you learn to take responsibility."

[Previous Page](#) | [2](#)

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