

Barefoot on the Stage

by Váry O. Péter, translated from the Hungarian by Szabó Réka

American director Tom Dugdale chose a unique way to put the *Alcestis* myth on stage. It's not that he made a transcription of an ancient Greek tragedy. He is certainly not the first director to rewrite the cruel story, nor will he be the last... But the beginning of the performance misleads the spectator intriguingly. While the spectators take their seats, the actors are warming up on a fully lit stage. The actors observe who is coming, who is not...And why are they doing all this barefooted? Maybe it is a sign of modesty and respect for the arts.

Gradually, each actor approaches a microphone, offering anecdotes that seem personal and whose content is unremarkable, except for four words uttered at the end of each anecdote: "we only live once." From there, down this direct path, the show unfolds...The director's decision to replace the characters' names with the actors' own names is a deliberate and effective gesture.

Some of the spectators panic, not understanding everything. A few even stand up and leave...But Tom Dugdale is not attempting a provocation, even though the spirit of the show is cooking hot. He is asking a question. It is not the question suggested by the title, which is a facade, but a deeper question: "Is it right to take life from one in order to give life to another?" The answer of course is obvious.