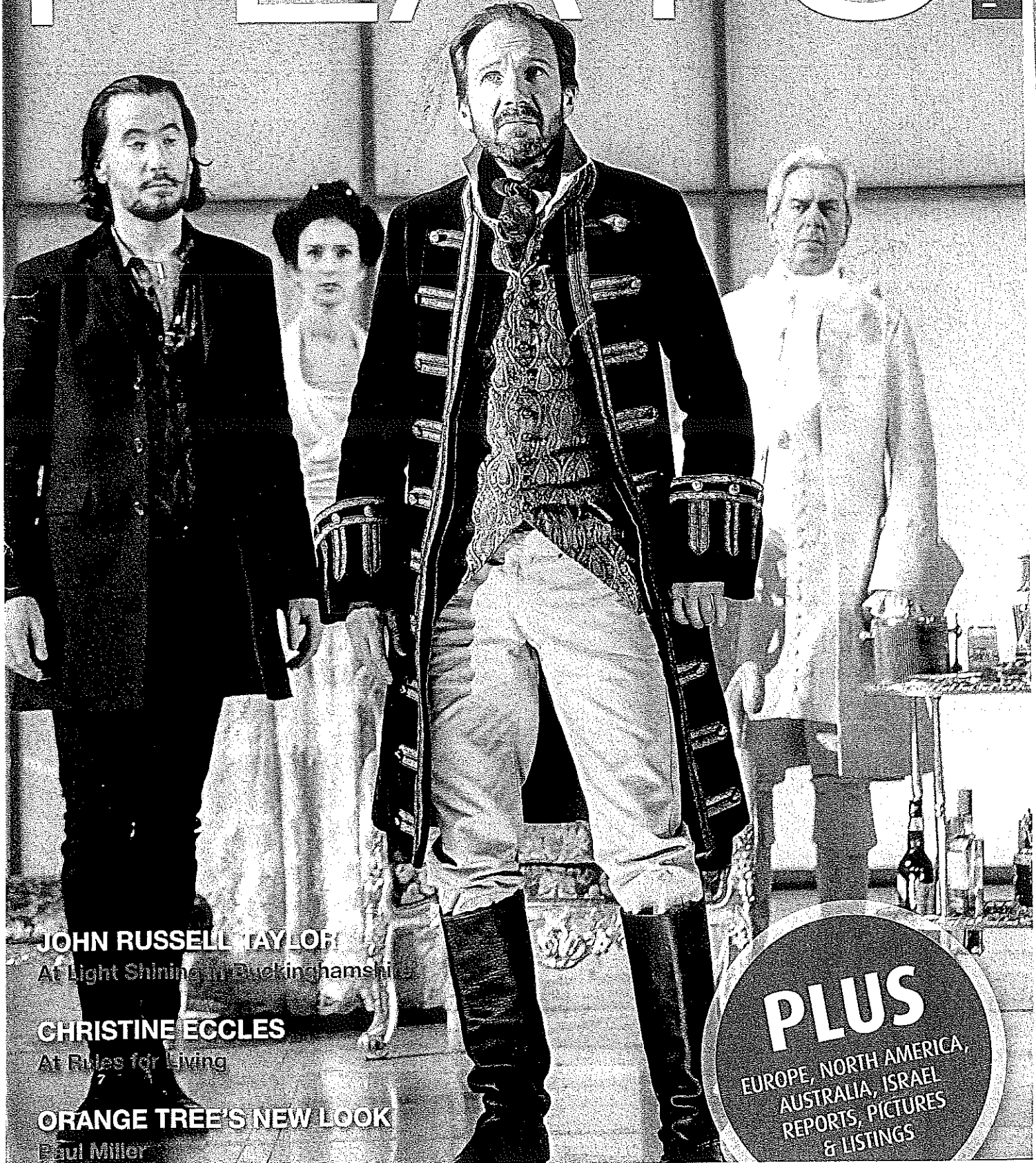


PLAYS

INTERNATIONAL



JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR
At Light Shining in Buckinghamshire

CHRISTINE ECCLES
At Rules for Living

ORANGE TREE'S NEW LOOK
Paul Miller

PLUS
EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA,
AUSTRALIA, ISRAEL
REPORTS, PICTURES
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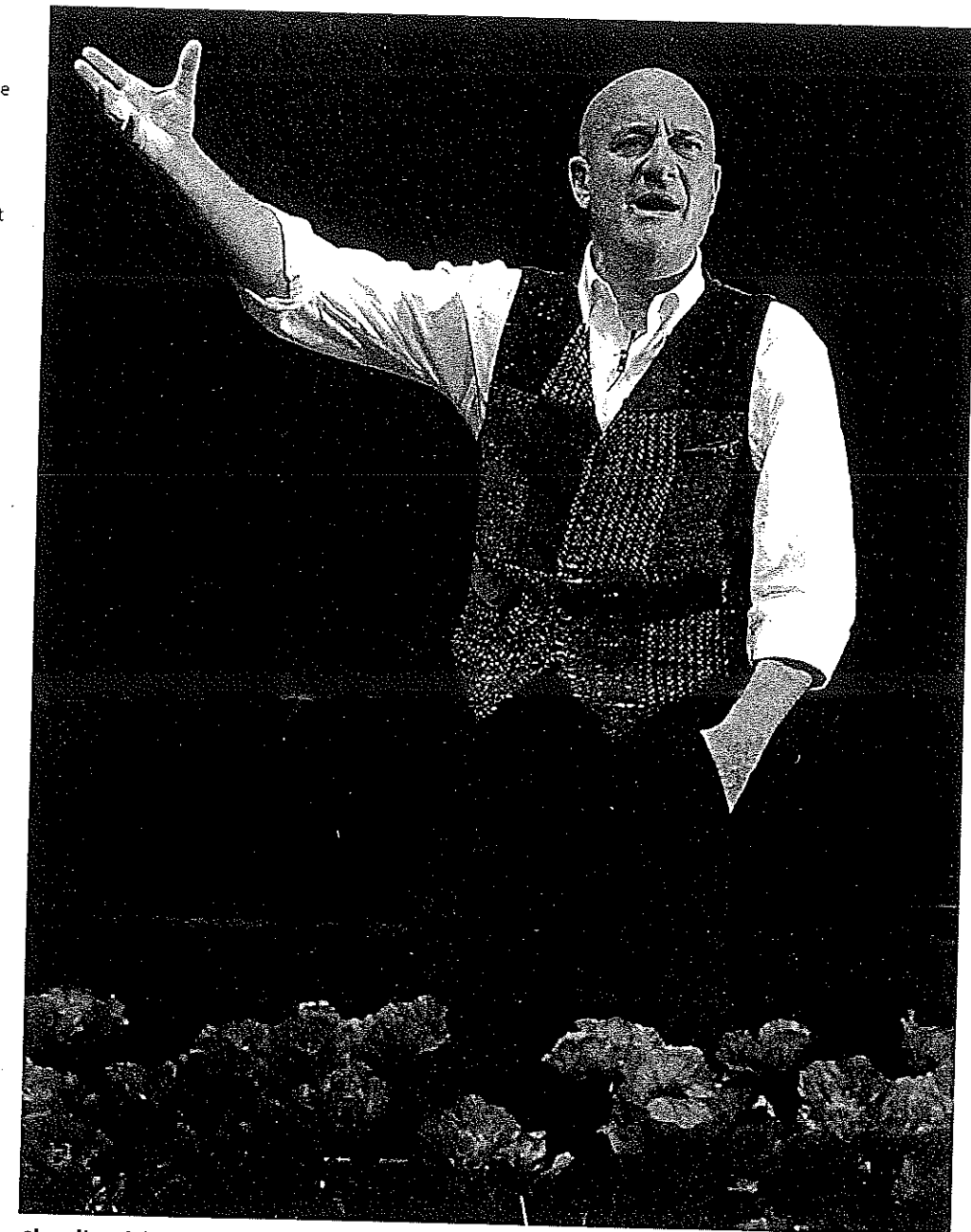
Milan

Maggie Rose

Fuckme (n), playing at Milan's Out Off theatre, consists in three consecutive monologues written by three male authors, who have each explored questions of masculinity from his own perspective; the play's subtitle, 'studies on the evolution of the male gender' might suggest the play deals with masculinity in general, when in actual fact, the characters find themselves facing extreme situations.

The show, produced by the Dionisi theatre company, is given unity thanks to the single set, a large metallic frame that Alex Cendron, who plays all three characters, positions differently for each piece. Giampaolo Spinato's *The Animal Professor* focuses on a middle-aged university teacher, who misuses his power as a teacher to be able to sexually abuse his students. He unashamedly describes his relationships with these girls, revealing the twisted logic with which he justifies his insatiable appetite for sex. Unfortunately, the unending flow of obscenities, coming from the lips of this misogynistic individual, proved difficult to listen to. Not so for the other two plays. Massimo Sgorbani's *Memory Traces of a Family Man* unveils the inner workings of the mind of a young father and husband, in a sequence of finely orchestrated fragments, which flit through time and space. As the father talks to his son about his heroes, like Cassius Clay and Popeye, or the dangerous work reserved for men, like deep sea fishing, he reveals a lot about himself, namely his conviction that this macho world is the one his son should strive for. Instead, in the fragments involving his wife, the man admits to being violent with her, especially in defence of the way he chooses to educate his son.

By contrast the protagonist in Roberto Traverso's *Sunshine* engages in a confession to his wife as if she were sitting listening to him. He delves into their marital relationship and his feeling of exclusion due to the wife's possessiveness of the son. Then he makes an astonishing revelation: he has forgotten their son in the back of their car on a hot summer's



Claudio Bisio as the Father in Michele Serra's one-man piece, *Father and Son*, at the Milan Piccolo. Photo: Bepi Caroli.

day and the son died. The man quietly manifests a wide spectrum of emotions, love, hate, regret, guilt in a piece which throws up some important questions about the father figure. Carlo Compare skillfully directs actor Alex Cendron in this challenging play that grapples with a subject rarely dealt with in contemporary Italian theatre.

At the CRT theatre I caught *La parola padre* (*The Father Word*), written and directed by Gabriele Vacis. The subject is once again masculinity seen this time from a woman's point of view. The play draws on a series of interviews, which the director made with women from Italy, Poland, Bulgaria and Macedonia during a workshop that ran at

Cantieri Teatrali Koreja, Salento Repertory Theatre in Puglia. Subsequently Gabriele Vacis turned the women's stories about their fathers and their homeland (in Italian 'padre' and 'patria' are etymologically close) into what is a stunning piece of physical theatre, combining words, music, stage images and dance. The set is made up of a huge wall of empty plastic

water containers, which the women knock down and rebuild several times, an action which seems to suggest the perpetual change, turmoil, and conflict characterising their lives. At this contemporary crossroads, as Vacis defines the situation, the women reveal their relationship with their father, which varies greatly according to where they were brought up and how the father has coped with them leaving home. The show is multilingual, with each character speaking in her native language, but then translated

simultaneously or consecutively by another performer.

At the Piccolo Teatro I caught *Father and Sons*, a one-man piece, inspired by a short story, *Sdraiati (Lying down)*, by the Italian writer Michele Serra. The evening I saw the show the huge auditorium of the Piccolo was awash with teenagers, who had come to see well-known film actor Claudio Bisio in the role of the Father. The set conjures up a dream sequence, with many small desks and tables filling the stage, a

wardrobe and mirror, suspended on high, and a model of a miniature mountain in one corner. As the Father tells his story, addressing his invisible son, two musicians, on guitar and violin, accompany him, introducing the short, disjointed episodes and underscoring the pace and rhythms. Like many fathers today, the protagonist manifests his doubts and insecurity about his paternal role, confessing his inability to understand his teenage son who is laid back and uninterested in politics or social issues. There are some hilariously satirical moments when he describes his son

trying to climb a mountain or doing his homework sprawled on the settee. The young man manages to study Plato, while messaging, watching television, listening to music on his ipod and eating a wurstel. And despite this multitasking, he receives an excellent mark from his teacher. Serra's deftly drawn tragicomic picture of a contemporary Italian family is superbly brought to life in Claudio Bisio's nuanced performance directed by Giorgio Gallione.

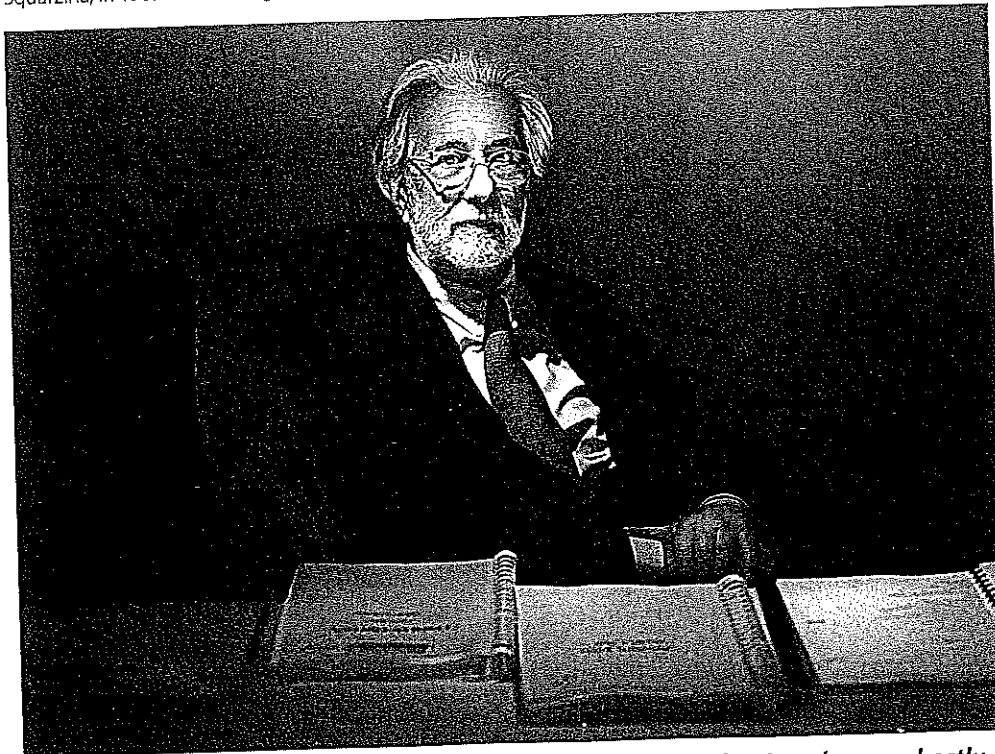
On February 21 Luca Ronconi passed away in Milan after a long illness. He was indubitably one of Italy's and Europe's most talented stage directors. Following a childhood and adolescence spent in Tunisia, he moved to Rome, where he studied acting at the Accademia Nazionale di Arte Drammatica. After working as an actor with leading directors, such as Luigi Squarzina, in 1963 Ronconi began

directing. From that moment he never looked back. The recipe of his success: his passion for research and febrile curiosity regarding fundamental questions about past, present and future society, coupled to an exceptional talent. For five decades he worked at the helm of prestigious theatres, like the Teatro di Roma and Turin's Teatro Stabile, as well as at festivals, like the Venice Biennale. Since 1998 his name has been

associated with Milan's Piccolo Teatro, first as artistic director and then as resident director and artistic consultant. Ronconi was an eclectic figure who moved seamlessly between classical theatre, contemporary works and opera. Seminal productions, include Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1969) and Karl Kraus's *Last Days of Humanity* (1991); both were conceived on a grand scale in site specific venues, the former at

Spoleto's San Nicholas's church, the latter at Turin's former Lingotto factory, characteristics, marking Ronconi's directorial style.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Ronconi never tired of staging living Italian dramatists; in the present season at the Piccolo he chose to direct, to audience and critical acclaim, Stefano Massini's *Lehman Trilogy*, the story of the Lehman brothers and the 2008 financial meltdown. At the same time he had an eye on theatre outside Italy and in recent years introduced the work of Rafael Spregelburd and Michel Garneau to Italian audiences. Nor did he cease to surprise, by making shows out of highly unusual materials. He honed *Infinities* (2002) from the eponymous book by Cambridge cosmologist John David Bower, while for *The Devil's Mirror* he collaborated with leading economist Giorgio Ruffolo. Luca Ronconi was also an outstanding and dedicated teacher; his latest venture was his own school, Il centro teatrale in Umbria, where crowds of young practitioners descended every year. His funeral was a quiet affair, with relatives, friends and students, reflecting the way the maestro lived and worked. I'd like to finish with his own words: 'I learnt to get to know the world through theatre. As a teenager I felt totally shut off. Then when I started work as a director, not as an actor, I learnt to get to know other people and myself.'



Luca Ronconi, the celebrated Italian director who died in Milan in February shortly before his 82nd birthday.