



# slovenian theatre news

JULY 2024



**3JA!**  
The Lehman  
Trilogy  
**A Play for the  
Living in a Time  
of Extinction**  
Struggle at the  
Sinkhole

The Argonauts  
**A Mouse  
Called Julian**  
Spending Time  
Dancing: The  
Movements of  
Aphrodite

Paradise  
**The Welkin**

**A House a  
Home**  
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# Preface

*Slovenian Theatre News* is a new initiative of the Slovenian Theatre Institute. As publishers of the web portal *Kritika* (Theatre reviews), which features theatre reviews of the majority of theatre productions in Slovenia, we have decided to twice a season translate the reviews of up to fifteen of the best performances selected by the authors and editor-in-chief Zala Dobovšek.

Thus, we present the first issue of *Slovenian Theatre News*, which brings you the best that contemporary Slovenian theatre offers. The reviews are accompanied by a photo from the production and an e-mail address where you can get more information, video recordings of the shows, etc.

We hope that this initiative will spread the news of contemporary theatre productions in Slovenia and open the gates for Slovenian theatre to the international stages.

Gašper Troha, PhD,  
Director, Slovenian Theatre Institute

Kaja Novosel

## The Hoarse Ending of the Season

Matija Solce: *3JA!* Celje City Theatre, première 11 May 2024, reprise 22 May 2024.



Photo: Foto: Uroš Hočevar/Celje City Theatre.

»*3JA!* is thus a unique and highly individualised theatrical experience, as there are as many performances as there are spectators; this does not mean, however, that it lacks the collective experience and/or the relation to the present.«

In the towns where there is only one institutional “home” theatre (in Slovenian terms, this means all other cities besides the capital), it is certainly interesting to observe how the theatre embeds itself into the ordinary, non-première everyday life. Who comes to visit the theatre and what are their interests? Do they have an affinity for this theatre and the people who work in it? How does the theatre welcome this person, what content does it offer them, and what is its message through artistic expression? What is the relationship between the theatre and the home audience, and how can it be explored? As announced, since September, the Celje City Theatre dedicated the 2023/24 season to its home environment. With their last performance of the season, *3JA!*, conceived by director and music composer Matija Solce, the Celje Theatre has interfered with its inner-city surroundings radically, filling Celje’s streets, institutions – and last but not least, its people – in grand style.

It all begins on a platform in front of the theatre, where spectators walk down a catwalk to a pair of headphones with screwed-on broom brushes in – on a rough estimate – three colours. To an eager spectator, it would imply that, at some point, this would lead to a division of the broomy (presumably?) Trojan soldiers based on the colour of their broom plume, but it soon turns out that in this theatre story, nothing will be as expected – and that nothing at all is predictable. During

the lively, singing selection of Miss Olympus, elevated mostly due to the masks, Paris leans out of the window, irritated by the noise, and crowns Aphrodite as the most beautiful goddess, which means that, according to Greek mythology, he thus gains the love of Helen, the most beautiful mortal woman in the world – and thus the Trojan War begins. It creeps quietly into the audience, whispering in their ears as the headphones are switched on, the audience is divided into two parts and the two randomly selected halves of Paris and Agamemnon huddle together, and each one sets off on its respective “Celje” route along the trail of remembrance and (anti)comradship of some war.

The production of *3JA!* actually becomes unmanageable at this relatively early point, as it is clear that the entire performance cannot be experienced. With that, the audience is launched into a boundlessly entertaining and intriguing adventure, but above all, into a distinctly individual immersive experience that cuts across the dreamlike past and the present, that is, tonight’s reality (the dramaturg of the performance is Mojca Redjko). Every step is a new adventure, every corner a new world of its own – from the travel agency to the intervention in front of the kebab stand, to the sombre Sisyphus sipping beer, to the post-battle mess in a narrow alley, the production offers a collective experience. At the same time, virtually every spectator, crowned with a broom, composes the Trojan environment in their own way – someone is snacking on a doughnut (there are quite a few opportunities for snacking during the production in general), while another one interprets a kind of melodramatic adaptation of the Iliad, a frenzied Artemis splashes water from a water dome all over the third one, the fourth one slips a coin into Sisyphus’s beer cup ... Each theatrical act is composed of a shared experience of a journey to a set of venues where Agamemnon and Paris mingle, and all together visit small but eruptive scenes of people, gods and events. At this point, at the latest, a critique of an event in some humorous way turns into (perhaps even a tiny bit Sisyphian) self-critique, as each participant is, in fact, an indispensable piece of the Trojan mosaic – suggesting, unobtrusively, that war is made up of the individuals participating in it, regardless of how active or (more problematically, even dangerously) passive we might be.

Almost every member of the Celje City Theatre is also indispensable: nearly the entire ensemble, along with a few guests who mostly make up the band of musicians, are actively and relatively equally involved in the production. Of the guests, Anže Zevnik as Hermes is the more interpretatively exposed. However, the most important, and, precisely because of its elaboration, unnoticeable quality is the technical perfection of the performance, which in an easy, continuous flow completes and fuses spatial interventions, the random elements from the streets of Celje and their people, and sometimes also video elements, puppets (Filip Šebšajevič, assistant for puppet animation) and sporadic but very poetic and profound text (besides Solce, the other authors are Katja Gorečan and Tanja Potočnik (the author of the Greek poem)) – mostly delivered via headphones (and, of course, the broom plumes on them; the soundscape author and sound designer are Ivo Sedláček) – but no less precise in linguistic expressiveness (language consultant Živa Čebulj). The post-war bacchanalia brings the audience together and leads to the epilogue in a relaxed concert atmosphere, where there is no shortage of witty songs that tackle the legacy of Greek mythology in an activist manner (*I won't sleep with you, Apollo*), and there is even the Trojan horse, from which the title of the epilogue “*Konj*” is derived (*konj* = horse, *konec* = the end) – just one of the final witty quirks in the deluge of wacky ideas in this compelling and comprehensive theatre event, which is relentless in its dynamic pace until the very end.

*3JA!* is thus a unique and highly individualised theatrical experience, as there are as many performances as there are spectators; this does not mean, however, that it lacks the collective experience and/or the relation to the present. Listening (again, very appropriately) to the European anthem, once again gathered under a stage, just like at the beginning of the performance, the disparity of its text with current events and (in)activity of the federation of states that are supposed to be concerned, at least in theory, with the values of honesty, morality and philanthropy (?), melancholy cuts into the event, while at the same time, the audience is overwhelmed by a calm sense of privilege that, at least here and now, this staged war is over so that the spectators can go back to their homes safe and sound. The ambitious project invading the streets of Celje is thus, in its relaxed and utterly sympathetic way, also – or perhaps precisely because of this – problematic and does not come across merely as a light joke about a fairytale war but as a reflection on how to think about war and how to position within it the individual, who is (perhaps blindly) guided by their beliefs.

However, the end of the performance with the exclamation, “Thank you, Celje!”, also rounds off the season of familiarity, of attachment to the familiar environment and, so it seems, of the (new or renewed) sympathy of the audience for the theatre – and of the theatre for the audience.

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Ana Lorger

## The (In)Sufficiency of Words

Michał Borczuch: *The Argonauts*, Mladinsko Theatre, première: 9 December 2023.



Photo: Matej Povše/Mladinsko Theatre.

»The demand for equal rights thus actually means an important demand for an inclusive present and near future, while the insistence on the position of the otherness of polyamorous and nonconformist communities is a demand for a long-term goal that would lead us to the dissolution of current categories and overcoming the limitations of language.«

In the thought experiment of the ship *Argo*, which gets all of its parts slowly replaced by her sailors, the *Argonauts*, the experiment checks the anxious human aspiration for constantly defining, framing and marking to create order in the world, to survey and control it. Is the *Argo* ship still the same once we replace all its parts? That is the question that the American author Maggie Nelson poses in her novel *The Argonauts*, a mixture of autobiography, quotations and fiction, while at the same time asking herself whether words are sufficient to allow human beings to describe all the changes, emotions and metamorphoses going on in the world and people?

That is also the leitmotif of the performance *The Argonauts*, directed by the Polish director Michał Borczuch, intertwining three narrative levels with subtle dramaturgic sensibility (Tomasz Śpiewak). The first level presents the life of Maggie Nelson (Daša Doberšek), who, in the novel, writes about her experience of pregnancy and her partner relationship with a transgender male. Her story interweaves with a conversation between an artificial intelligence called Alice (Damjana Černe) and a boy called Iggy (Voranc Mandić) from the novel and documentary material the actors and actresses prepared for the performance. The latter is composed of conversations with various nonnormative Slovenian families and couples.

It includes a story of two elderly cisgay persons, followed by a story about two lesbians with a child and an interview with a girl and her trans-partner. The performance concludes with the story of the Nomad, who, more than anyone else, puts into question the concepts of family, monogamous relationships and the responsibility connected to them.

In the performance, the creative team does not focus on the emotions of sadness and anxiety that emerge as a result of discrimination and intolerance due to sexual orientation, nor the feeling of dysphoria of transgender persons and the incongruence of the gender attributed to people at birth and how they understand, experience and declare themselves. On stage, the dialogues and interviews are presented very coldly, and the conversations between the performers seem very slow at first glance, trance-like and even distant (with soft music). While the stage design (Dorota Nawrot) with colourful stained glass suggests elements of mysticism and desire to be immersed in the aesthetics of the playful flamboyance of the light design, their colourful reflection only appears a couple of times. A camera on stage records the performers' facial reactions in real time and projects them onto a wavy beige curtain where their facial expressions become distorted; at times, this virtual closeness of the gaze produces a comically parodical, even alienating effect. The manner of narrating the stories of the people interviewed by the cast is reminiscent of the verbatim speech technique, the word-for-word recreation of the written transcripts, a typical feature of documentary theatre. While the character of Maggie Nelson is presented as the most classical one on stage, she also puts analytical reasoning and philosophical considerations to the forefront of the dialogues, which Daša Doberšek delineates with great skill.

The directorial concept, which calls for precise temporal intervals, slow movements, erasure of excess, complete regulation of emotion and thoughtful statements, stems from an awareness that an approach by representing the experience of gender nonconforming persons could easily get caught up in the web of misunderstanding and non-critical presentation. In the text, Maggie's partner, Harry, criticises her novel because she cannot fully encapsulate his personality. The subtext of the performance also implies a tendency towards constant awareness and criticism towards its own position of enunciation. It would be far too naive for an institutional theatre full of normative bodies to decide to appropriate the aesthetics and expression as embraced by artists such as Gaya de Medeiros or Daniel Mariblanca, who speak about their transgender experience from their own bodies in an emotionally charged and eroticised way impregnated with nakedness and immediacy.

When speaking about gender-nonconforming bodies, theatre – the space of disguises and masks – still encounters the boundaries of the materiality of the body on stage. The director's decision to entrust Matija Vastl – an actor seemingly conforming to all societal stereotypes of maleness – with the role of Maggie's transgender partner, Harry, allows the performance to avoid theatrical disguising and metaphors which would point the spectator more in the direction of performing, disguising and roleplay than towards accepting this character, thus easily missing the point of his position and reading this body as *show* or *drag*. On the other hand, there is a hidden logic to the decision for Matija Vastl, which demonstrates what passing actually means in our society. It tests the anxiety of being still moulded by the binary logic of gender, thus making it safer for a trans man, for example, to walk the streets if he succeeds in transgressing all the categories of maleness or, rather, of our notion of what maleness is. At this point, we are confronted with the experience of nonbinary persons or rather all people who manifest to us the fact of how far away we still are from overcoming the binary categories of gender that mould us. On the other hand, we tend to understand the trans body on stage differently, as transgressive, as it throws us directly into the transcendence of gender as such.

The documentary material based on interviews with gender-nonconforming persons, to a large extent, reflects the desire of the interviewed persons to live a "normal" life, to conform despite their nonconformity, to be able to get married, start a family and adapt to their environment as much as possible. The performance also intensively deals with the question of children growing up in nonheteronormative communities and addresses social obstacles and discriminatory practices which make life difficult for such families at the legal and administrative levels (even though the performance only partly touches upon the problems of the transgender legal and healthcare issues). The concluding interview with the Nomad, embodied by Damjana Černe, presents a kind of counterpart to this desire for belonging to the heteronormative categories of family and relationships. Voranc Mandić portrays the interviewer here. The Nomad expresses otherness as a position of power from which we can extract the will for social transformation. The demand for equal rights thus actually means an important demand for an inclusive present and near future. At the same time, the insistence on the position of the otherness of polyamorous and nonconformist communities is a demand for a long-term goal that would lead us to the dissolution of current categories and overcoming the limitations of language.

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Metod Zupan

## Dancing Behind the Bars of Expectations

Katja Legin: *A House a Home*, Studio for the Research on the Art of Acting: Kruščje Creative Centre, 12 January 2024 (première: 15 December 2023).



Photo: Marcandrea.

»Dancing to the rhythm of canzoni in a comically small apartment recalls the Taylorist choreography of domestic interior designers, which would economise the housewife's movement and thus increase her productivity, rather than asking how to recognise unseen labour as labour in the crucial post-war period. Legin's poignant but persistent dancing once again subverts the expectations that popular industry, personal experience and the testimonies of older people evoke about the inner lives of women.«

"It's a small world, but not if you have to clean it." This is one of the slogans with which the American feminist artist Barbara Kruger captured the male-centric complacency and the subordination of women that enables it. Besides Kruger, other feminist artists – e.g., Marthe Rosler and Cindy Sherman, who created stereotypical images of female characters pushed by Hollywood in the 1970s series of photographs *Untitled Film Stills* – have also used their practice to draw attention to the way women are excluded from the world of high art and to their diminished possibilities for social participation. On our side of the Atlantic, despite socialist correctives, the position of women has also not been particularly easy, neither in the public nor the private sphere (as Urška Djukić's 2021 animated film *Granny's Sexual Life* so lucidly demonstrates). Even though we have seen great progress in the last decades regarding social legislation and social norms, our interest in the inner lives of our mothers and grandmothers at the personal level is higher than ever as we are catching up to the age at

which they gave birth to us and raised us. In this interweaving of the private with the historical and the real with the potential, dancer Katja Legin develops some of the lines from her previous work *Oh, How Very Ordinary* (Studio for the Research on the Art of Acting, 2021) in her latest production, *A House a Home*.

The deep empathy that is the key to unlocking this performance is evoked not only by the artist's presence but also by visceral stimuli such as canzoni and nostalgic songs coming from the speakers and by the intimate venue of the Studio for the Research on the Art of Acting at the Krušče Creative Centre ("the first repertoire performance of the newly opened theatre", as Tomi Janežič quipped). In this way, the performance also bypasses the procedures of establishing the titular house and home since it actually takes place in the artist's home, in her domestic sphere. Even if very little is needed to create a performative situation, the creative team has dedicated their best efforts to reach this goal; at the end of the hallway transformed into an auditorium, there is a realistic set design of an apartment (concept of space by Branko Hojnik and Tomi Janežič, set design by Hojnik), realised in a false perspective, which, thanks to the illusion of specially made smaller objects that appear more distant, gives the small space the appearance of a real apartment while at the same time making it look utterly cramped. Because of its small size, it is utilised to the very last inch, since every cupboard hides a prop, every drawer contains items from the lives of women trapped in the private sphere, and every suitcase is full of the emptiness that supposedly haunted them.

Given what we have described so far, you might expect the experience of the performance to be quite heavy and serious when, in fact, it is much closer to the humour of the aforementioned feminist artists, who use societal expectations for political commentary by subverting them. Legin subverts our expectations no less than three times in the very first scene: moving with melodramatic slow motion, Legin reaches for an air rifle hidden beneath the planks of the kitchen floor with distinct pathos and aims, only to, oops, shoot herself in the foot: "Oh shit" (or at least we think she shoots herself in the foot, following theatrical convention), only to be interrupted by the disembodied (and, following theatrical convention, omniscient) voice of Anja Novak in the off, who tells us that many women scream every morning because they mistakenly believe they have shot themselves in the foot. The first scene thus introduces the building blocks of the performance: the breaking of the fourth wall, the dialogue of the disembodied voice with the audience, the disembodied voice with the performer and the performer with the audience. At the same time, the performance presents a dialogue between the historical and current inner lives of women, the dialectic between them and the social situation, and the hidden question: how are they able to persist in such unfulfilling domestic roles? The performance persistently evades to pin down the logic of its course and floats between the reverse, the cyclical and the intertwining of parallels.

The opening scene is followed by a glimpse into female everyday life, mostly filled with cleaning and cooking, and instead of tired resignation or other worn-out approaches, Legin stages this through dance. Dancing to the rhythm of canzoni in a comically small apartment recalls the Taylorist choreography of domestic interior designers, which would economise the housewife's movement and thus increase her productivity, rather than asking how to recognise unseen labour as labour in the crucial post-war period. Legin's poignant but persistent dancing once again subverts the expectations that popular industry, personal experience and the testimonies of older people evoke about the inner lives of women.

The different staging principles from one act to another (besides dancing and slow motion, we also see clownish attempts at holding an overwhelming quantity of suitcases and pantomimic skiing) make the whole performance feel almost vaudevillian. The scenes are strung one after the other in a somewhat crude manner. However, this potential weakness of the piece turns out to be its strong point (Kaja Lorenci collaborated in part of the process, while Janežič acted as artistic consultant). Tomaž Grom's inspired sound design also stimulates the scope of staging imagination. With each new scene, Legin expands the interpretative and associative scope of what we see. It is not only about the grandmother, who we recognise from Marina Sremac's old-fashioned clothes and styling, but also the way her story intertwines with Legin's. The woman is an everywoman, representative of a specific class and Katja Legin in person. The only arguably superfluous element in this strategy is the presence of Janežič (albeit masked), whose quiet entering on stage does not justify the extension of the solo into a duet.

Perhaps the best way to enter the multi-layered production, however, lies in the element that initially appears as the most arbitrary in the way it is included. It is a clip from the film *Opening Night* (1977) projected onto a screen. The film never explicitly explains this, but the carefully selected excerpt quickly clarifies Legin's interest in it. The film director John Cassavetes, together with his partner and actress Gena Rowlands, made films that were more attentive to the female experience of the world than his contemporaries. Moreover, in her approach to the formation and embodiment of her characters in the films, Rowlands never pitied them – tragic as they were. Instead of portraying them as victims, she imbued

all of them with the dignity that their unenviable situations deserved. Just like Legin, she managed to find power in powerlessness.

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Nika Arhar

## The Story of American Dreams, of Men, of Course

Stefano Massini, adapted by Ben Power: *The Lehman Trilogy*, Mini teater, 8 October 2023.



Photo: Miha Fras/Mini teater.

»[I]t dismantles the story not critically, through the muted premonitions that spread within it but by yielding to the impulses that dance, add and multiply, have fun and thus move the world according to their own interests.«

*The Lehman Trilogy* is a sweeping saga of the Lehman family. It ranges from the mid-19th century, when the first of the three brothers sets foot on American soil and opens a small dry goods and clothing store in Alabama, still strictly adhering to Jewish customs and keeping the memories of native Bavaria alive, to the end of the 20th century, marked by the death of the last member of the board of directors of the New York corporation bearing the name of its founders, when the adage of eternal growth and risky business models of the new economic reality drive the corporation to bankruptcy and global financial collapse. The trilogy also illustrates the evolution of the American dream, capitalism and financial systems, as well as the history of a society driven by it over the last two hundred years. The enormous body of text of Stefano Massini's play, which Ben Power adapted for London theatres into a condensed text for just three actors and director Peter Petkovšek translated into Slovenian, operates with the magnetic power of rhythmic narrative and recurring motifs, is almost like an epic poem, echoing the hypnotic mechanism of the relentless flow of history and, more importantly, the expansion of capital. This perpetual motion machine of progress, development, crisis resolution, the search for opportunity, and the urge to succeed encompasses the essence of a vast conglomeration of events and people spanning three generations and beyond while charting the fates of the three brothers and, gradually, everyone else around them. Igor Samobor, Branko Šturbej and Gal Oblak are entrusted with the demanding acting task of a concentrated narrative, which shifts between direct addressing to short dialogues and from the narratives and roles of the central characters – the

brothers and their descendants who take on important roles in the family business – to the positions of all the other characters, even if only appearing marginally.

As an adaptation to the large body of thematic material, the costume design by Gordana Bobojević features neutral black suits and white shirts, the music (Peter Žargi) only occasionally underscores the atmosphere, with no music to accompany the rhythm of words, and the basic premise of Sara Slivnik's set design with wooden chairs and three simple, moveable tables, can easily represent the working area of a modest shop or a chaotic business office in New York, or be adapted to other occasional settings. Meanwhile, a scroll of paper on the back wall presents the changing signs with the name of the Lehman brothers' company.

However, the space also fills up with various props, in keeping with the directorial departure from the narrative minimalism of the stage. In directing the play and the onstage action, Petkovšek, more often than necessary, departs from the restrained, subtle narrative tone of documentary outlining and strives to present a greater range of acting expression, especially in the transformation of the drama characters, as well as in the variety of onstage action. The central additional element supporting this is paper; by tearing it up, mixing it with water and moulding and draining the pulp in the process of manufacturing paper in a shop in Alabama, it evokes the "small change" that the brothers make by retailing to poor farmers. It could also refer to the processing of cotton or, more generally, to the making and production of something (as yet) indeterminable or the persistence and expectation of making a slightly better income through hard work, which already anticipates accumulation, with sheets of paper becoming the obvious sign of contracts and various financial instruments in the banking and stock exchange environment of New York. In contrast, their multiplication, tearing or scattering becomes an eloquent gesture of managerial and business success (or failure). However, regardless of their suggestive potential, these stage actions outline a parallel, symbolic trajectory of meaning, which does not offer added value to the text by evoking individual accents. In the gestures it sometimes appears detached or redundant, while at other times, it is more successfully integrated into the narrative thread. Add to this the omission of the three-part division and all external signs of the temporal segmentation of the narrative – although the general timeline is clearly indicated in the spoken text through the ageing of the characters, the appearance of younger generations and events, and the features of the social context – some otherwise unnoticeable cuts or omissions (dramaturg Urban Zorko), and the merger of the entire action of the "invincibles" up to the crash of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929 into the vast bulk of the first part of the production, the final result is somewhat convoluted.

The impurity of the structure and the bloatedness of the stage give the impression of a lack of trust in the narrative itself, the drive of the words and the escalation of their unrestrainable expansion (as well as the expansion of the family business, investments and the global economic system) is replaced by a sense of rushing through a jungle of information. The effect of objective purity, dosed in the distance of the rhythmic narrative through a third-person account of the protagonists' own lives, which leaves the perception of events to the spectator, is largely replaced by acting affectations, which, due to the concentrated and complex subject matter cannot take shape in any other way but through particular accents and perspectives of interpretation, concerning individual fragments, and even then with questionable success. Here, Igor Samobor and Gal Oblak balance the personification and narrativity of their central characters with sufficient sophistication. Samobor, in particular, manoeuvres between the embodied and the detached in a minimalistic but telling fashion, which suits both the role of Henry, the eldest, more prudent Lehman brother, and that of Philip, the decisive child of a new generation, who was born for the elusive Wall Street. In line with his position of Mayer, the youngest of the three brothers, of whom no one expects to be a leader but who nevertheless knows how to blend into the environment or resolve the tensions between his older brothers, Oblak appears to be softer, more affable, with a conviction that does not force its way to the forefront but rather manifests as a solution that he offers exactly when one is needed. With a similar unobtrusiveness, he also sketches Robert, a third-generation immigrant, an art lover who brings through his university studies a new critical attitude towards the old-fashioned family banks and investments into industry whilst he is overwhelmed with the task of saving their corporation from going under and looking for a way to restructure it amid the great economic crisis. When it comes to imbuing his characters with personal(ity), Branko Šturbej is the most expressive of the three. Even though the second brother, Emanuel, has a temperament "like gunpowder", Šturbej's expression seems overbearing with its expressive comic overlay, which might indicate an ironic commentary of the character and the considered phenomena. However, it could also just be a character marker. Last but not least, in his role of Herbert, who opposes the fiction of stock market numbers and makes his mark in the reality of politics, he also acts with a light-hearted conceit that stems from the actor's impulse rather than the character itself. Moreover, this goes above all, more or less, for all the female and child characters portrayed by all three actors. To the extent that they feature at all, they are all portrayed

as giggly, flirtatious and jocular, which might be a reflection of the times, perhaps, but one that overemphasises stereotypes and lacks a proper contextual-performative context.

Here is a clearly outlined image of a world written and created by men: men talk, men shuffle around papers, add and multiply figures, dance and fool around, and thus, the world turns. From slaves on plantations, credits, the American Civil War between North and South, to stock markets and financial trading, the Great Depression, economics and politics, marketing, globalisation, and privatisation. From trading in cotton, coffee, iron, coal, oil and cigarettes to investing in railways, the war industry and post-war reconstruction, securities trading and the birth of market strategies of selling and buying regardless of real needs. It is a world in which new generations trample over the traditions and old values in search of new possibilities and new fulfilments of old dreams. *The Lehman Trilogy* is a depiction of this world, which levitates between the forces of survival and greed, ambiguously blurring the line between them in some of the characters (Henry, Mayer, Robert) while clearly emphasising the latter in others (Emanuel, Philip) – albeit for different reasons. It is an image that, in its vastness, assembles from fragments of huge, important social phenomena to tell and, in the sheer pleasure of narration, also simultaneously dismantles the story of one family and of our time. Nevertheless, it is also an image that, under the direction of Peter Petkovšek, misses the target, as it dismantles the story not critically through the muted premonitions that spread within it but by yielding to the impulses that dance, add and multiply, have fun and thus move the world according to their own interests.

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Nika Arhar

## The Non-verbal Formation of the World

*A Mouse Called Julian*. Ljubljana Puppet Theatre, 14 March 2024.



Photo: Nika Hölel/Ljubljana Puppet Theatre.

»It, however, forgoes the words – a proper animal language which has no recognisable, meaningful sounds accompanies the action – and this engages the audience in a different and more active investment into discerning the action, the situations, the characters and their emotions.

This approach turns the very act of watching and experiencing the stage performance into a challenging adventure, while any exaggerated messages of stale and pedagogically stereotypical classical values of mutual assistance and friendship recede into the background, ... «

*A Mouse Called Julian* is the directorial debut of long-time Ljubljana Puppet Theatre animator Asja Kahrmanović, based on Joe Todd-Stanton's picture book of the same title. It is a puppet performance intended for preschool children (ages 3+), firmly rooted in charming visuals and a playful and precise engagement with the animation of the animal characters and the liveliness of the stage world. Such a starting point is dictated by the very central quality of the picture book template, namely its strong visual narrative with rich details and a clear dramaturgical line, accompanied only by short sentences that comment on, complement and add emphasis to the illustrations. Clearly referring to this visual conception, the performance keeps the action of the book. It, however, forgoes the words – a proper animal language which has no recognisable, meaningful sounds accompanies the action – and this engages the audience in a different and more active investment into discerning the action, the situations, the characters and their emotions. This approach turns the very act of watching and experiencing the stage performance into a challenging adventure, while any exaggerated messages of stale and pedagogically stereotypical classical values of mutual assistance and friendship recede into the background, given that the central situation is somewhat problematic since it involves an encounter of a solitary mouse and a fox, i.e., a couple of anthropomorphised animals which in their natural environment would be prey and predator.

The performance, however, overcomes content simplicity and event minimalism in general by interlacing it with a lively and exciting performative treatment, crucially characterised by the visual design by Jure Engelsberger and set design by Katarina Planinc. The latter establishes a scaled-down “replica” of the natural environment with a circular outline of an organically undulating, hilly surface on a rotating stage surface while lucidly reaching further with an elaborate bigger picture that shows us also the underground spaces with its branching root system, stones in the stream bed and, for example, carrots growing beneath the surface, which normally remain hidden. The scenic image, with its varied natural-looking nooks and crannies, realistic features and intricate details like, for example, moss, mounds of vegetation, a mushroom island and an old wooden bridge, imbues reality with a fairytale quality, thus depicting nature as an enchanted world. The mouse’s home in the hollow of a tree stump is particularly full of various small objects, with a round window in which the fox gets stuck, a swing in front of the door, and a carefully cultivated herb and vegetable garden with signs on little tags where Julian is clearly enjoying himself among the flowerbeds or plucking a carrot or two. The same attention to detail, which tells its own spatial story, is evident throughout the forest-meadow landscape and its underground. Although it is (clearly) visible only from the seats close to the stage, the fullness of this habitat makes an impression from afar as well.

While the central plot thread is the failed feast planned by the fox with the mouse as an item on the menu, which turns into a shared, friendly picnic, this is nevertheless part of a bigger whole. This is the forest, full of life, both plant and animal, and its dynamics, emphasised by the rhythm of the rotating, or rather, circularly moving path of the stage. Here, fireflies light up in the evening, bunnies scamper by casually stealing a carrot, at some point, we see a hedgehog on a skateboard, and another time we notice a mole having an earthworm for lunch. There is also a fleeting premonition of danger when an owl is swooping over the mouse taking his walk and the moment when it hesitates to decide whether to run away from a puppy or stop to play with it, in which the mouse cleverly escapes it. The mouse’s walks, as well as the daily and nightly routines of other inhabitants or visitors of the meadow and forest paths that unfold as the stage moves, flow with the accentuated and lively rhythm that, on the visual level, is reminiscent of the effect of a silent film, which is underlined by the musical score played by the duo Zajtrk (Sven Horvat and Laura Krajnc). This universe functions as the background against which the central plot twist between the mouse and the fox emerges as its vital part.

Gašper Malnar, Zala Ana Štiglic and Ajda Toman give the animal characters a specific way of speaking, a kind of fictional gibberish, during which we can often detect similarities with real words. The meanings of the words are unclear (the only “human” word is the name of the dog when its owner calls it). Nevertheless, a grown-up spectator can unambiguously understand what the dialogues are about, perhaps due to the very principle of this fictional language. – the animators appear to know the content and “proper” words or thoughts of each spoken line very precisely – but also due to the very clearly presented situations, which are socially quite simple and easy to read, as well as the puppets’ precise manner of speaking. These factors make the lack of a familiar language offer a constructive challenge to children’s audiences to interpret or construct with language the undefined spaces of the story and the personal and social circumstances of the individual characters and situations by themselves. In addition, the animators’ excellent voice performances create a distinct sound layer that contributes to the diversity of the overall stage image; undoubtedly, this also has a humorous effect, but from an (admittedly anecdotal) personal impression, this functions with grown-ups. We might say that *A Mouse Called Julian*, with its performance strategy and particular ideas (the puppy, for example, resembles the legendary Radovedni Taček, and he is called Nace), also provides plenty of entertainment for the grown-ups (and, with the dedicated realisation of their own impulses, its creators as well). However, this is not to the detriment of its primary addressees. Several animation solutions might appear as mere humorous flashes at first glance. However, there is more substance to this and also “clues” as to how to understand a particular action.

The production is constantly aware of its target audience. Accordingly, it creates an adorable and lively image of the animal world, which skilfully distributes its time between a focused narrative and a broader view or witty details, directing the short but rich action with an acute sense for pacing, continuity and flow (dramaturg Benjamin Zajc) with a well-coordinated animation team. On stage, Julian, the mouse, is not necessarily as reclusive as the mouse in the picture book, and the production does not aspire to communicate any elevating thoughts about getting to know others and accepting them. However, starting from – and with – a concrete event, it demonstrates how helping others in adversity can lead to something beautiful, even though by rescuing the fox stuck in his window, the mouse actually resolves his own problem. Alternatively, perhaps it “merely” shows us that sharing an adventure can bring us closer together. And that is quite enough. For *A Mouse Called Julian* wants to dictate neither topics nor questions nor the doctrines, feelings, appropriate actions or emotions (that are usually attributed to or expected in certain situations). Instead, it establishes the conditions

for the individual spectator to decide all of this for themselves through carefully elaborated non-verbal framing of a world and story and its gentle wit.

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Maša Radi Buh

## Fold on, Lean on, Move on

Andreja Rauch Podrzavnik: *Origami*. Old Power Station, 6 Dec 2023.



Photo: Tomo Brejc.

»We should not overlook that the production is subtitled as ‘a study’. This designation can account for the dramaturgy of its structure, which comprises a series of sketches. At the same time, it shapes the spectatorial apparatus in advance, mainly by limiting the expectations connected to ‘completeness’ (thus warding off any expectations of a ‘performance’).«

The choreography of the performers, who gradually move across the space, delineates creases and folds on the white paper. These are the material traces of an event and the passage of time, or, more precisely, of the final scene of the performance *What I Carry With Me* by the choreographer Andreja Rauch Podrzavnik. At the time of the previous “edition” of her practice in the format of a feature-length dance performance, her focus was on interpersonal relationships. The choreography, an improvisational practice, embodied them at a micro-level, capturing their dynamics in the individual’s body and the quality of his/her movement; the movements of the performers were replete with adaptations and reactions to others, like an organism in constant coexistence with everything that surrounds it, and as a metaphor for the individual’s embeddedness in numerous systems, from society to the global ecosystem. Rauch Podrzavnik also carries over the imprints of this community, or rather the very concept of a large sheet of paper functioning as a witness to action, to her latest project with the title *Origami*.

Even though the title, referring to the Japanese art of folding paper, suggests an encounter between physicality and the visual arts, the latter seems to remain caught up primarily in the visuality of various paper objects/figures. In contrast, the bodies primarily encounter materiality – the most affective is the contact between the body and the paper, as their touch produces both friction and the softness and smoothness of sliding. The paper is foldable and fragile at the same time, and something is released at the moment when an action or a movement causes it to crease or fold since the folding or breaking

also reverberates in the sound quality of the transformation. The quality of movement developed and characterised by Rauch Podrzavnik mixes precision and measure in the execution of individual movements, the embedding of bodies into space (hence the accentuated or meaningful reference to visuality and spatiality). It is intertwined with tenderness, caution and restraint, at certain moments, even with nonchalance. This is a quality pertaining to something that resembles a calmness of inner peace, a channelling of energy not towards the outside – it is not screaming expressionism or performative effort – but rather a contemplative movement happening here and now, at the moment, in response to the impulses of the overall action.

In *Origami*, the interplay of human bodies recedes into the background. At the same time, the movement designers (besides the choreographer, these also include Katja Legin and Bojana Robinson) and the space designer Peter Rauch shift their attention to the contact with the material and the space through their own placement in its always-becoming and changing visuality, which emerges as the paper poles are moved, folded and repositioned. The juxtaposition of supersized paper hyperobjects also reminds us of the dimensions of height through the fly system. A trick effect of elevating the space suddenly reveals how small the performers are while at the same time opening up empty spaces in the air, which are filled by music (Josip Maršić) and light (Jaka Šimenc). Each of the elements explores the forms of dialogue in its medium, which can be intertwined with other forms of materiality – light achieves this with the creation of illumination, darkness, shadows and reflections; at the same time, the music makes use of layers underlined by multiple melodies, sounds and vibrations so that it, too, appears to be folding together with the space and the paper.

The series of sketches, to use a name inspired by the visuality of the format itself, slowly glides off into emptiness but not literally. The space remains full. Only the relationship between the bodies and the materials is slowly changing as cardboard is added to the paper, building different sculptures due to their thickness, less voluminous in their four-dimensionality, with fewer folds. What is left is a loud, dissonant emptiness where, in the end, the bodies appear much less harmonious and attentive than at the beginning, and the interpersonal relationships dissolve into apparent individuality. We should not overlook that the production is subtitled as “a study”. This designation can account for the dramaturgy of its structure, which comprises a series of sketches. At the same time, it shapes the spectatorial apparatus in advance, mainly by limiting the expectations connected to “completeness” (thus warding off any expectations of a “performance”). It also calibrates the spectator’s attention since, instead of interpretation, we can observe a combination of circumstances that change based on given parameters: the fragility and strength of the paper and cardboard, its flexibility, its sonority and, last but not least, the way the image of the space changes with each sketch. Rauch Podrzavnik makes it clear that she wants to focus on processuality to allow us to focus on the time for observation rather than the dance performance as a well-rounded, meaningful narrative whole. However, the public presentation of this study, its manifestation as an event, implies the subject of the research process, taking into account the processual orientation of the practice of the particular choreographer in question (who regularly facilitates improvisation events with the title *Special Edition*), as well as perhaps a certain narrowing down, a temporal focusing of the activity into several smaller sketches, in order to open the event in its presentational nature to the public so that, designated as a “première”, it perhaps attracts more of an audience than just an open gallery or studio presentation. In this way, *Origami*, a visual art-performance study, communicates with the problems of the current cultural model since well-rounded production units are more likely to evoke a professional response, which in the current state of our critical-reflexive territory still endeavours to reflect also on more complex and long-term processes. On the other hand, I can also discern parallels between such a format and the processuality or openness of dance forms – historically most strongly anchored in the advent of postmodern dance – but which have had a lasting presence in the field ever since. This is an interesting moment of dance, its strength and contribution to the theatrical context, where there are incomparably and dispensably fewer opportunities to see such experiments, attempts, sketches and other forms in which the meaning of exploration is revealed as part of the artistic practice.

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Kaja Novosel

## The Wackiness and Emotion of Old Age

Matteo Spiazzi: *Paradise*. Celje City Theatre, 1 December 2023. Repeat performance on 2 December 2023.



Photo: Uroš Hočevar/ Celje City Theatre.

»In the slow everyday routine of the care recipients, the production also highlights the quality of life in the (late) autumn years under institutional care, its critical edge directed particularly towards the cold robustness of the staff who, despite being presented in caricature, leave the audience with the uncomfortable sense of the reality of caricature in everyday life.«

The first impulse of the performance *Paradise* is space: a large meeting room with two windows and no corner retreat worth mentioning. Although it is tidy and contains everything that is needed to spend some leisure time in relative comfort, it also feels plastic and sterile, with the air of homeliness further reduced by objects such as a smoke detector and fire alarm, a fire extinguisher, and a green pictogram plan of evacuation for people with disabilities (set designer Primož Mihevc). This halfway attempt at creating an air of familiarity serves as the starting point for a reflection on the institutional care of the elderly, who are the driving force behind Matteo Spiazzi's production about the people and life in a nursing home. *Paradise*, however, is not only about the intimate stories of individuals but also about societal attitudes and responsibilities towards this vulnerable group.

The basis of the performance is essentially Italian commedia dell'arte, which the director and author of the text turns in the direction of the grotesque, eschewing the standardised characters: the large human head masks with melancholic, wrinkled expressions, designed and crafted by Alessandra Faienza, are enriched by subtle characteristic details such as

the narrowness of the face, the nose, the tightness of the lips, bags under the eyes, large (and sometimes hairy) ears ... In combination with socially marked costumes, which position the old people in a certain social and educational class (costume designer Dajana Ljubičič) and individualised slow movement (leg-dragging, walking with crutches or a walker), the mask gives each character a unique personality, which in the absence of words – strangely enough – becomes even more evocative. The complete absence of gesticulation and verbal acting establishes a performing model that builds up complex content with tiny bodily movements and interactions, making the dramatic characters and their flailing bodies seem even more vulnerable and thus multilayered. It is particularly thrilling to observe how the eleven-strong acting collective becomes unified in their expression, which is otherwise virtually never the case with such a large cast in the verbal drama, where the actors' faces are uncovered (and thus express individual expressions). The identity of each masked character can only be guessed by their height or hands, so the concluding bow and unmasking of the cast is a positive surprise, a testimony to the meticulous preparation and complex work of all the show's creators.

The performance focuses on a routine day in a retirement home where a lot is going on, despite the apparent monotony (the bored nurse, the changing of the date on a menu that seems to feature the same meal every day). The impersonal common room functions as the centre of socialising, which soon turns out to have both advantages and disadvantages. In an attempt to enjoy their favourite pastimes, the residents often disturb each other, which leads to comical physical and personality clashes. The central stumbling block is the (single) radio set and different musical tastes of the residents, snooping and petty thefts, curiosity and intrusiveness, the dissatisfaction with the food and consequent peddling of treats, including alcohol; the production abounds in the situation comedy which the immovable astonishment of masks makes all the more amusingly bizarre. The old people, capable of showing warmth towards each other despite their naivety and slowed-down choleric fits, are contrasted by the three employees of the retirement home (Lucija Harum, Manca Ogorevc, Maša Grošelj), who demonstrate resignation with everyday life in the cold monotony of their work: a care recipient is just another chore in the day to be ticked off, whether this means preparing their daily medications, cleaning up only for visitors to see, or taking snapshots of the set of a birthday party, which remains just that – a set, not an actual celebration of a personal holiday.

Although the criticism of the retirement home staff is partly justified, the stereotypical presentation is somewhat unproductive and mitigated only with the sentimental ending, which partly breaks the otherwise stereotypical monotony and consequent apathy.

The gems of *Paradise* are mostly hidden in the small and simple sparks, which can go from mocking comedy to the touching tragedy of life painfully slipping away in seconds. Absolute comedy can be found in the scene of an old woman peddling her goods from a huge shopping bag attached to her walker (with the option of paying for these goods via credit card) or practically any action of an occupant who is picking up, dressing and helping her elderly companions, but also always ready to beat each one of them with her handbag (magistrally interpreted by Rastko Krošl), as well as in the scene of the whole group watching the classical Slovenian film *Blossoms in Autumn* on TV which is constantly interrupted by the enthusiastic sports fan occupant flipping the channel to a sports programme (a consequence of having two remote controls). On the other hand, we are moved by the visit from a grifter relative of an aristocratic old lady in a wheelchair, a proper birthday celebration with a musical surprise (following the nurse's photo session) and a new patient who refuses to let the staff inspect one of his suitcases because he keeps in it some old photos, as well as an urn ... The range of emotions varies at an effective pace, which does not play on corny sentimentality despite the continuous sentimental golden-oldies musical background, but rather realises that many a moment of life is most precious precisely in its simplicity (dramaturgy by Tatjana Doma). Regardless of their age, however, the characters seem to have an unflinching desire to belong to either some other individual or a community, which is expressed especially in the more bitter nuances of life in the retirement home, when individual occupants get overwhelmed by sadness, frustration, anger – or (as a consequence?) too much alcohol.

The day in the retirement home concludes with a quiet, romanticised death; what is left of the deceased is a photograph on a corkboard and a tiny souvenir in the pocket of the old man who had grown attached to him, and everything else goes on routinely, with all the small joys and disappointments, while life ebbs and flows away, slowly coming to an end. *Paradise* justifies its subtitle of a bitter comedy in all its nuances: the comic, amusing scenes of disagreement and human character or physical flaws are as precious as the bitter twists and turns of life, which can still hurt even the venerable and experienced old-timers. In the slow everyday routine of the care recipients, the production also highlights the quality of life in the (late) autumn years under institutional care, its critical edge directed particularly towards the cold robustness of the staff who, despite being presented in caricature, leave the audience with the uncomfortable sense of the reality of

caricature in everyday life. *Paradise* is an unpretentiously touching and warm play about life, which in the final act lulls the occupants to a nostalgic dance (with fairy-tale subtleness also including the deceased man) to the cheesy evergreen hit *We'll Meet Again*, thus giving us a painfully small hope that there is still a place for compassion for a fellow human being and neighbour in the emptiness of everyday life – even if that person only became a neighbour by accident, ending up in the same retirement home.

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Jaka Smerkolj Simoneti

## Ecological Awareness in a Time of Extinction

Miranda Rose Hall: *A Play for the Living in a Time of Extinction*. Slovene National Theatre Maribor, 17 October 2023.



Photo: Peter Giodani/Slovene National Theatre Maribor.

»Contentwise, the monologue focuses on the sixth great extinction of animal and plant species (which is happening at this very moment) while formally addressing the issue of one's carbon footprint through a form of self-sufficiency – all the energy needed for the performance is produced by two cyclists on stage.«

In recent years, theatre, especially institutional drama theatre, has struggled to address one of the most widely accepted current problems: ecocatastrophe. In today's repertoires, this has become almost an obligatory subject that various artists have been approaching in various ways, ranging from primarily content treatment at the level of dramatic texts to more radical performance strategies that attempt to pass from words to action. We can point out two major difficulties that such performances often run into. The first one is the very topicality of the ecocatastrophe, to which we, the spectators, are exposed daily through both news outlets and other artistic channels. As a result, the performances often seem to be lagging behind the news, film documentaries and round tables, as much of the information they convey is already familiar, especially when their starting point is the knowledge horizon of the average individual rather than that of experts. In this sense, the very position of enunciation of the theatre often functions as preachy, cynical or hypocritical. The second difficulty is the complexity of the subject, which seems to have countless causes and consequences, and the staged selection can often represent mere snippets that appear simplistic and naïve. Theatre, which is, in principle, more adept at raising complex social questions than answering them, is thus challenged by what it can say on the subject while remaining

theatrical. Confronting these fundamental questions has brought the current climate in the Slovenian theatre landscape to the point where we are witnessing a vibrant creative engagement with these challenges in distinctly diverse ways, from more documentary-oriented approaches to the return of classical plays in new productions in which the harmony of man and nature is heavily emphasised. The production *A Play for the Living in a Time of Extinction* by American playwright Miranda Rose Hall, directed by Tin Grabnar and staged on the Small Stage of the Slovene National Theatre Maribor, also falls into this trend. Contentwise, the monologue focuses on the sixth great extinction of animal and plant species (which is happening at this very moment) while formally addressing the issue of one's carbon footprint through a form of self-sufficiency – all the energy needed for the performance is produced by two cyclists on stage. The production is part of an international “co-production” of several theatres replicating the performance of *A Play for the Living in a Time of Extinction* (originally directed by Katie Mitchell) in local contexts to avoid the pollution of touring.

Grabnar has dealt with the topic of ecocatastrophe in the past, notably in his puppet productions (*The Sky Above*, 2020; *Vanishing World*, 2022, both at the Ljubljana Puppet Theatre), but never so directly and without any accompanying fictional framework. The visually modest production (set designer Matic Gselman, costume designer Suzana Rengeo) unfolds in front of the audience in the relatively open form of Minca Lorenci's narrative, in constant communication with the audience. The production also flirts rather timidly with minimal audience participation, the effect of which is to be found primarily in the wider atmosphere of the whole event. The creative team manages (which is a commendable achievement, given the monologue form of the text) to create a distinctly unpretentious environment. Lorenci delivers the monologue in a manner that is neither moralistic nor cynical.

What is more, there seems to be a kind of restraint involved in her interpretation, a necessary question mark about the whole event, which extends beyond the performance, both in terms of content (as a question about our collective response to the ecocatastrophe) and metatheatrically (as a question about the aforementioned issues of the positioning of the theatre towards the subject). Even if it is a “replica” of a performance, the creative team handles the material sovereignly, with Minca Lorenci complementing it with memories and more intimate narratives, thus fully asserting the autonomy of the performance and, above all, bringing home the fact that what we are witnessing is not some lecture, but an expression of feelings produced by the imminent prospect of (our?) extinction. This relaxed sense of mutual trust, almost a pact between the audience and the performer, who does not create a dramatic character on stage but justifies the text with her presence as something living and sincere, allows the performance to gradually build with extraordinary subtlety, accompanied by Mateja Starič's abstract but beautiful soundscapes, until finally, without us even noticing, transforming from a relaxed conversation into a fully-fledged monologue with the audience immersed into darkness and Minca Lorenci's inspiring presentation of the image of the end of the world with genuine emotion.

In the background, two screens display the amount of energy produced by the two cyclists (at the première, the show was literally powered by Tine Borin and Samo Fras Pečlin). It is here, it would seem, that the majority of the unexploited stage potential of the performance lies since, unlike the narrator, the mystery of their journey through the production remains hidden in the details of them sipping water, wiping off sweat and cycling incessantly – which also provides the elementary rhythmic frame of the sound production. There is untold contextual potential hidden in the energy input required to generate the electricity for the performance, and the on-stage presence of the cyclists is performatively immensely interesting to the spectator. The feeling is further enhanced by the fact that the two cyclists are considerably smaller than the actress. At the same time, the text frequently refers to the image of the mother as a vivid depiction of the relationship between the planet Earth and the animal and plant species inhabiting it. As a result, the fact that the production is fueled by the bodies that will inhabit this devastated, extinct Earth, while the words and emotions are left to another (older) generation, is all the more striking. A meaningful image which, alas, remains insufficiently thematised in the production.

*A Play for the Living in a Time of Extinction* thus does not offer any answers to the question of the ecocatastrophe, and, in terms of content, it does not present any distinctly new information. Rather, it opens up a space for confronting the (inevitable?) fact of extinction and, in this way, allows the spectator to experience a full range of emotions. The production's main quality, which lies in the consistency of its content with its form, promises to gain its full potential in future productions if it realises that theatre can no longer avoid taking responsibility for its ecological debt, regardless of what stories it chooses to perform.

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Evelin Bizjak

## A Reconstruction of a Violent Occupation

Jernej Lorenci, Dino Pešut and the artistic team: *The Pohorje Battalion*. Ljubljana City Theatre, 8 January 2024.



Photo: Peter Giodani/Ljubljana City Theatre.

»While the director might aspire to reach beyond ‘history, politics, ideology and mythology’, the paradigm of the ‘heroic and suffering us’ and the ‘violent others’ all too quickly recreates the demonisation of the foreigner and further enhances the polarising discourse that fails to envision a community beyond national and cultural borders.«

While the performance of *The Pohorje Battalion*, coproduced by the Ljubljana City Theatre and the Ptuj City Theatre, premièred last year, on 8 January 2024, the anniversary of the end of the final battle of the Pohorje Battalion, it was presented to the audience in Ljubljana. The result of the collaboration of the director Jernej Lorenci and the Croatian dramaturg Dino Pešut, a frequent guest in Slovenian theatres, is a devised performance aiming to present the human side of war beyond ideology and mythology. Since the director is aware that due to a lack of personal experience, he is not qualified to judge it by himself, he lets those who experienced war directly speak about the fate of their birthplace.

In the first part of the performance, the actors use a combination of historical sources and memoir testimonies read from various literary works, such as *The Pohorje Battalion* by France Filipič, to present from various viewpoints the lasting presence of the German occupation regime that spurred the growth of the partisan movement. After a tragic scene of dehumanising internalisation of the ideology of the Germanification of the Slovenian population, enacted by Jure Rajšp in the role of a translator and loyal adherent of fascism through a dialogue with a representative of the German authority (Matej Puc), the destructive scale of German occupation is additionally layered with the help of several personal narrative fragments. The stories of the dissolution of various organisations, cultural and educational institutions, and the destruction of literature vividly depict the destructive consequences of the occupation on the cultural and national autonomy of the Slovenian nation. The image of the occupation based on preexisting records comes to life through

individual cases as a complex system directed against the liberation efforts of Slovenian people while at the same time paying homage to literature, the vehicle of Slovenian national identity that faced mass destruction during the German occupation.

The actors seated on chairs organised in a frontal, semicircular arrangement (set design by Branko Hojnik), reach for books, read passages from them and thus convey distanced experiences of the occupying forces, embodied in the individual memoirist notes of men and women and children who experienced the war directly. Presented as verbatim theatre, the documentary material eludes representation and often remains on the verge of a neutral reading. The resulting distance aims to strip the recurring motifs of arrests, unexpected deportations, violent interrogations and the general economic, spiritual and physical degradation of individuals in concentration camps of any sentimentality. This avoidance of impersonation is most meaningful in the laconic listing of the names and surnames of the victims of war. In this way, it theatrically enacts the dehumanisation of the anonymous victims of fascism and shows how the threat of totalitarian rule fabricates people with no individuality. However, the initial acting distance, implemented with the intention of a neutral reconstruction of a historical event, is not carried out consistently, as the co-creators' attitudes to the represented material become increasingly permeated by explicit sadness, crying or restrained pain. These emotions break the boundary between neutrality and performative highlighting, transforming it into an emotional expression that sometimes falls into romanticisation. A more effective way of recreating the pain is through minimalist actorial actions, characteristic of Lorenzi's directorial style, which viscerally recreates the experience of violence in the immediacy of physical exertion. These include, for example, actors persisting in certain body postures, which become more and more strenuous with time, or Rajšp standing in the middle of a pile of ice cubes barefoot for several minutes, which is accompanied by the description of the final battle of the Pohorje Battalion. Even by listing the names and surnames of the fallen partisans, the performance does not personalise the victims of war but rather depicts them.

The numerous personal narrative fragments, most vividly the farewell letters of those condemned to death, are in the first part verbalised as isolated, fragmentary flashes, weaving a mosaic of violence, as if, due to its magnitude, it could not be condensed, told in a single, narrative. In the near absence of a dominant voice (taken over by factual historical material for the sake of informational clarity and connectivity between the individual stories), what reaches the spectator is a democratically organised plurality of voices, the complete opposite of the tyranny of their experiences. However, the montage dramaturgy of passing between many different stories, which fails to build well-rounded characterisations of their narrators, bypasses the formation of a clear narrative line. The result is a dense and dispersed material filled with data which calls for an almost too precise focus on the spectator's side, often tested also by the constant alternation of actors as the bearers of particular identities. The uneven distribution of dialogue material which reduces most of the actors to silent presence does not quite manage to justify the size of the actor collective (Mojca Funkl, Mirjam Korbar, Nina Rakovec, Lara Wolf, Branko Jordan, Primož Pirnat, Matej Puc, Lotos Vincenc Šparovec, Gaber K. Trseglav, Gašper Lovrec and Jure Rajšp). Nevertheless, while the spectator might miss much from the multitude of information, one cannot fail to soak in the atmosphere, which the actors convey by their intensive inner life and restrained experiences, despite their often lingering presence. Belinda Radulović's historical costume design adds a key dimension, as well as the subtle makeup, which unites the actors' exhausted faces in a synchronous listlessness, apathy, terror, fear and fatigue after the terror endured, similar to that expressed in the blow-up of the transformed face of the concentration camp survivor Jože Hvala.

In the second part of the production, the scattered constellation of narrative flashes, aided by German and Slovenian reports and testimonies, comes together in the final showdown of the Pohorje Battalion, when on 8 January 1943, around 2,000 soldiers of the occupying army surrounded the battalion camp at Osankarica. The struggle is more effectively epitomised by the more exact dissections of the ordeals of the key agents, with the national hero Alfonz Šarh and his sons, who were killed in the conflict, taking centre stage. Through the unravelling of their struggles, the detailed description of their appearances through photographs, and the lyrical arrangement of Karel Destovnik – Kajuh's *Remember When You Brought Me Jasmine*, they come to life as well-rounded characters with emotional depth, as if they were entitled to a more complex portrayal due to their heroism. The narrative connectivity is also reinforced, as the previous fragmentation consolidates in a narrative, almost lecturing approach of the acting collective. The director parodies the alienation of such a recapitulation through a change of rhythm and atmosphere, which follows the unveiling of the battalion's successful actions and the New Year's Eve celebration before the fatal attack with musical accompaniment, dancing and generally excited light-heartedness. The television screen, positioned in the middle of the action, acts as an element inconsistent with the prevailing historical aesthetics and establishes a contrasting tension between the representation of violence and the tragic nature of its content, thus contextualising the contemporary media treatment of wartime violence.

Using detailed descriptions of the events and dramatisation, which consists of describing the effects of the firearms or stimulating the spectator's imagination by physically reconstructing the pose of a killed partisan woman, the course of the battle transforms into a more theatrical representation of the massacre. The representation gains an additional dimension by recruiting volunteers from the audience to join the actors on stage to recreate the disproportionate numbers of the attackers and the members of the Slovenian resistance. This brings the reality of war as a distant, historical event into immediate reality. The multitude of minimalist staging approaches, which do not lend themselves to a unified directorial aesthetics but rather traverse diverse staging principles, is further enriched by Jure Rajšp's final scene, in which he reexamines the experience of the death of the last fighter in the battle.

*The Pohorje Battalion* highlights the suffering and heroism of our ancestors, thus reinforcing the political framework of the community, which, according to Vlasta Jalušič, acts as a defence against the rise of a totalitarian regime. Although there is no denying the devastating dimensions of World War II, the reconstruction of the occupation's violence as a killing machine conveys a dangerous message. While the director might aspire to reach beyond "history, politics, ideology and mythology", the paradigm of the "heroic and suffering us" and the "violent others" all too quickly recreates the demonisation of the foreigner and further enhances the polarising discourse that fails to envision a community beyond national and cultural borders, thus coinciding with nationalist hatred at the core of all international conflicts. It would be more productive (and increasingly necessary) to reflect on how we could move beyond the polarising view and strengthen integration and solidarity with others today.

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Metod Zupan  
**Barefoot, How Well It Shakes**

Matej Kejžar: *Spending Time Dancing: The Movements of Aphrodite*. Pekinpah & Matej Kejžar, 10 April 2024, Old Power Station Elektro Ljubljana.



Photo: Matija Lukić.

»The latest performance in the series of Kejžar's attempts to liberate dance from choreography resonates all the better in our time of hyper-productivity. While revisiting tried and tested methods might appear more like a cop-out than an actual answer to hyperproduction, Kejžar is well aware that such a return does not reproduce the old but is rather always entering into a fresh dialogue with the sedimented.«

We enter the Old Power Station through the back door, or is it that we are actually crossing the threshold into Matej Kejžar's mind palace? All over the place are exhibited artefacts that we could have seen in his previous performances: the white coverall from *White* (2014), the unicorn's head and hammock from *Movements 9* (2021), the rope from *Spending Time Dancing* (2022). Just like the title of the performance – *Spending Time Dancing: The Movements of Aphrodite* – the set design by Petra Veber and Kejžar himself effectively introduces us to the artist's long-standing interest in composting, as he himself once described this. It is not an auto-retrospective performance but a kind of resistance to the capitalist imperative of creating more and more, always something new, always creative; an imperative that is very much present in tenders for public funding and, according to Kejžar, in the concept of choreography itself. The artist thus presents a new link in the chain of his quest to liberate dance from choreography as the leitmotif in the liberation from these imperatives.

The dancers/creators assume their starting positions: Lana Hosi in a hammock, Luka Švajda starts balancing on a low-hung tightrope, Mark Lorimer circles the stage surface in a spinning motion, and Kejžar is slowly working with an Ikea Bekväm podium close to the ground. All of them are immersed in their own material (each with their own stage trajectory,

movement intensity and development), guided by a kind of internal dramaturgy. The movement is controlled but soft, slow but distinct, up to the point when Hosi stands up from her hammock and begins to pace the stage in a relaxed, casual stride. In a relaxed manner (a mixture of Croatian and English), she begins to describe the choreographic process; her fellow dancers follow her lead, never falling into uniformity, each performer retaining their specific dance character.

The relaxed energy, underpinned by minimal interventions into space, the edge of which is lined with unveiled windows of the hall, begins to deepen. The artistic team establishes a meditative atmosphere, which allows us to slowly immerse deeper into the dance expressions while the sky outside the Power Plant slowly gets dark. The creators start repeating certain movements; when the paths of two dancers intersect, they both stop, as we gradually start to unravel the logic of the dance – until it changes. Kežžar starts to perform Hosi's movement procedures; by introducing permutations, Lorimer does the same with Kežžar's procedures, etc. This repetition is an expression of neither modern reflections of choreographed phrases nor postmodernist scores but rather of imprints, echoes of the material of one dancing body, modified through the specific features of another. The direction of the dance authored by Kežžar thus reveals the creative process and highlights the collective nature of inspiration, exercises and, finally, creation in contemporary dance.

*Spending Time Dancing: The Movements of Aphrodite* features contemporary dance in the true sense of the word and pretends to be no more than that. The foaming from which the titular Aphrodite was born is not represented mimetically. Rather, it takes the form of movement research, the emergence and interdependence of movement impulses, like the mere shifting of weight from one sit bone to another. The team looked for such inspiration not only in mythology but also in popular music, everyday objects and Kežžar's dance history. We should not forget that all the co-creators of the performance had already worked with him at one point or another in his career, establishing bonds and mutually influencing each other.

In a sequence that is somewhat drawn out, but nevertheless stands out in terms of overall impression and contrast with the whole production, the stage empties out like the sea before a tsunami until Mikael Marklund splashes onto it, outlining the traces of the movements of the dancers that were there before him in a varied language of multiple dance idioms. Dressed in a cheap tutu (Tina Pavlin, Kežžar), he performs an imprint of the paths travelled by the dancers before him. His hands perform their gestures and weave them into a comprehensive solo. Finally, he steps on a tomato waiting for him like a Chekhov's gun ever since Kežžar announced this would happen much earlier in the performance. In the performance as a whole, which is designed according to the principle of deconstruction, Marklund's solo represents a kind of intermission and, at the same time, a synthesis, a culmination of the established parameters and an introduction to the last part of the performance, which does not continue with breaking those parameters, but rather with their reappearance.

The liberation of choreography – understood both in its narrow sense as well as in its broader intertwining with the imperative of choreography – proceeds not only from not dancing to music, to 5, 6, 7, 8 to memorised sequences of movements and phrases but, rather, emerges from a turning point in the conception which turns to the titular time. *Spending Time Dancing* establishes a specific kind of temporality. When one is doing what one enjoys, time passes oh so quietly. However, the digital dials projected onto the wall of the auditorium remind us that the subjective perception of time can slow down as well (on one of the dials, for example, the second hand only moves once every four seconds), and this is the key to immersing oneself in the performance *Spending Time Dancing: The Movements of Aphrodite*. The dancers do not dance according to set choreography. Rather, they move into diverse dancing states. The choreography of the event condenses and dilutes these states and their compositions over time, announcing and performing them; however, it unravels its immediate causality away from time. But it also takes its time in realising this. The immersion in the performance and the states that build it up are like running a marathon; it takes much more time than announced in the programme. However, this time flies by in a flash.

The latest performance in the series of Kežžar's attempts to liberate dance from choreography resonates all the better in our time of hyperproductivity. While revisiting tried and tested methods might appear more like a cop-out than an actual answer to hyperproduction, Kežžar is well aware that such a return does not reproduce the old but is rather always entering into a fresh dialogue with the sedimented. In doing so, he takes the freedom for himself and the audience to go deeper, which is proverbially most ostensibly lacking in hyperproduction.

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Blaž Gselman

## The Neverending Exhaustion of the Working Man

Lovro Kuhar – Prežihov Voranc: *Struggle at the Sinkhole*. Prešeren Theatre Kranj and Ptuj City Theatre, 27 March 2024.



Photo: Nada Žgank/Prešeren Theatre Kranj.

» The stage action reflects the destinies of the multitudes of working people for whom the working day never ends and thus experience their lives as a neverending rat race.«

What should the staging of Prežihov Voranc, the pseudonym of Lovro Kuhar, mean to us almost a century after he wrote his literary texts? Somehow, he has been pushed to the semi-periphery of the Slovenian literary canon. He is recognised more for his short prose works, while one could say he is ignored as a writer of long prose forms. This is perhaps symptomatic; the structure of his three longer novels, *Požganica*, *Doberdob* and *Jamnica*, deviates from the dominant novelistic form, which, as official literary scholarship tells us, was only fully developed by Cankar, who set the model. Voranc's novels, however, do not feature a single central protagonist but rather a collective. He depicts social conflicts by reconstructing diverse positions in the structure of social relations rather than by reconstructing and rationalising the tensions arising from these relations in the immediate experience of an individual, i.e., by a highly developed psychologisation of the central character. In his long-form prose, Voranc thus does not attempt to give a representation of the protagonist's self-awareness as an unproblematic totality. On the contrary, he leans towards the decentralisation of the protagonist by juxtaposing the conflicting positions in the collective. This can also be perceived as the principal reason for the ambiguous status of the writer among the literary classics.

However, this goes for Voranc in his long-form narratives. His short form is a bit different. There is no room for such branching narrative structures (the mere empirical fact that all the novels mentioned above are over five hundred pages long probably speaks volumes). The term "social realism", commonly used to characterise his fiction, usually serves merely as a smokescreen so that commentators have something to say about his narrative at all, standing in as a substitute for any

concrete reflection with argumentative power. This is why the staging of *Struggle at the Sinkhole* with the subtitle *A Theatrical Sketch* can also be understood as an attempt to say something about this text without simply loading it up with instrumentalised concepts and prefabricated categories that are not able to say anything new and real about this literature (anymore).

The transposition of Voranc's narrative, namely its staging, is oriented precisely against such epistemologies. In the past, director Jernej Lorenci has already successfully positioned himself in opposition to the "academic" reading of literary classics, for example, when he managed to brilliantly "deconstruct" Tavčar's *The Visoko Chronicle* on the main stage of SNT Drama Ljubljana. Of course, short-form prose is clearly distinct from long-form. In the former, Voranc captures only details from a wider social fresco that he can depict in the latter. In *Struggle at the Sinkhole*, we follow the fate of the Dihur family of cottagers and small farmers in seven pictures. Not unlike in his novels, Voranc is not so much concerned with psychologising his characters as with the material conditions in which they struggle to survive, which are dictated mainly by nature and social tensions in the form of pressure from the big peasants, the landowners.

The theatre collective approached the staging of literary material in a way characteristic of the director Jernej Lorenci, namely in two narrative planes. The first one consists of the narrative approach, which delivers the audience almost the entire novella, with only a few smaller cuts and condensations that were introduced so that the rhythm of the narrative and action of the performance would increase more evenly from the beginning to the end (dramaturg Marinka Poštrak). Darja Reichman, Živa Selan and Branko Jordan (a former member of the Prešeren Theatre ensemble, this time featuring as a guest actor in the Kranj cast) narrate the story (in turn). Each of them manages to find their own way of interpreting the story; however, these do not differ drastically from one another and seem very effective in combination with the progression of the narrative rhythm. Darja Reichman starts off the narrative with a bit more excitement and zest, Živa Selan continues in slightly more realistic tones as various disasters descend on the family, and Branko Jordan concludes the story with utterly naturalistic and colourless vocal nuances, making it clear that the Dihur family are practically drowning in the disaster. At the very end, Darja Reichman resumes. Through their performances, they treat the audience to a small storytelling festival, which can only be spoken of in superlatives.

All the narrators are very precise in their pronunciation, taking their time and space to convey Prežih's rich language tinged with dialect (language consultant Maja Cerar). Their stage performances are even more challenging as the three participate in the other, i.e., directly enacted plane as well. Gregor Luštek is the undisputed protagonist of the mimetic representation of the performance (also a guest in the cast; he appears in the production in alternation with Blaž Setnikar) who takes on the role of the father Dihur, as it is not hard to guess. The role is physically extremely demanding, testing the actor's abilities to the limit, be it in long dancing parts (with mother Dihur), hanging on parallel bars, or in a long sequence of running in place while carrying farming tools in his hands (Luštek is also the choreographer of the performance), the protagonist thus features as an abstract representation of the neverending exhaustion of the working man described in the short story.

The stage reconstruction of Dihur's struggle is an abstract depiction of the literary original. It is constituted precisely by the relation between the diegetic and mimetic narrative planes, maintaining a distance from the concrete representation of farmwork in the literary narrative. Other elements of theatrical language thus sustain the material existence of this relationship. Branko Hojnik's set design contains both concrete and universal elements in a condensed stage space with parallel bars in the centre and four chairs, some farming tools and buckets filled with soil and water. Belinda Radulović's costumes represent a highlight of the performance that is closer to the archaic rural environment. Lighting designer Nejc Plevnik alternates between layers of warm and cool nuances, giving the space of acting an alienating depth that significantly prevents any simplistic identification with the presented stage material. Branko Rožman's musical material – another indispensable moment of Lorenci's theatre – further reinforces such an experience.

The synthesis of all these elements imbues the production with a certain universality in representing every working person of the present. The features of neverending work, its repetitiveness, exhaustion and even the resulting body transformation are all characteristic of the working person in the grip of modern-day capitalism. This makes us think at least of Žiga Divjak's production of *The Bailiff Yerney and His Rights*. Although the latter is based on documentary material, while *Struggle at the Sinkhole* relies on a fictional text, both succeeded in portraying a representation of something that transcends mere individual subjectivity. The stage action reflects the destinies of the multitudes of working people for whom the working day never ends and thus experience their lives as a neverending rat race: when they get home from

work, housework chores already await them, on-call work stretches their working day to the limit, atypical or even informal work forms of force them to accept horrible working conditions, etc.

Thus, we could answer the question we posed in the beginning about the importance of performing Voranc today approximately like this: the specific way of theatricalising his short fiction can prove very successful, precisely if it manages to distance itself from directly replicating it. The solution for the “theatrical sketch” was to abandon any hope of direct identification with the “literary sketch”, that is to say, by liberating the former by producing a different form that could become the vehicle for new meanings.

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Jaka Smerkolj Simoneti  
**The Patriarchate Is Within Us. In Our Bodies**

Lucy Kirkwood: *The Welkin*. SNT Drama Ljubljana, 23 March 2024.



Photo: Peter Uhan/SNT Drama Ljubljana.

»This emphatically considerate and precise production of *The Welkin* implicitly addresses the audience with the question, when will we be able to see such representations also in harmony with the stage depictions of men?«

Writing about the British playwright Lucy Kirkwood's *The Welkin*, one might quickly fall into the trap of reflecting on the text instead of the performance. The nearly four-year-old play is a distinctly masterfully written text, with clearly articulated and precise content drawing strong parallels with modernity, constructed into a refined narrative framed in a relatively conventional form. The story of the murderer Sally Poppy and a twelve-member jury of dowagers who must decide whether the convict is pregnant, which would exonerate her from the death penalty, is a study of the internalisation of the patriarchal structure, set in the past, in the time of its origins. We can certainly read the text as a literary work of art in its own right, and we should also mention the excellent accompanying comments written by Milan Ramšak Markovič, Nina Dragičević, Zala Dobovšek, Nika Švab and Sebastijan Horvat that published alongside the text in the theatre programme (editing and proofreading by Arko).

The director, Sebastijan Horvat and the creative team are aware of the potency of the play and follow it quite faithfully in the performance. We could designate the dramaturgy of Milan Ramšak Markovič as one of condensation, introducing some welcome parallelisms (for example, the highly effective parallel progression of the third scene, "Execution Day", and the fourth one, "Inauguration of the Jury"), positioning the text cuts precisely within its fusion and transformation. Where a diversity of voices flows from one to another, thus making spoken words become very concretely realised on stage, it focuses clearly on the core deliberation of the jury as the central piece of action, in which, paradoxically, the director allows himself to be most free and loose. Except for a couple of focused moments, Horvat deliberately dispenses with

orchestration, concisely leading the narrative all the way up to the hall by establishing clear and clearly demarcated atmospheres, operating in the same manner in the story's final denouement as well.

In contrast, during the central debate, the director withdraws and gives space to the cacophony of voices, allowing for conflicting moments. This results in constantly closing in and moving away from the material, with emotional investments that can be shattered the very next moment. This is an outstanding quality of the production, which may initially seem quite challenging for the viewer to follow but will surely continue to grow with further synchronisation of the cast. In the undertones, this also subtly draws attention to the reality of how rarely we see such a large number of female voices on stage, the voices of lower social classes, and this is a particularly powerful characteristic of the production. Similarly, the costumes by Belinda Radulović, who breaks up the predominantly historical costume design with carefully measured contemporary details (the women's footwear, the doctor's costume), find their place in the transitions between closing in and moving away, ensuring that the production never fully slips into romanticised idealisations of the past, but rather keeps reminding the viewer to maintain a connection with the acute present (the director achieves a similar alienating effect by the appearance of the cigarette and the lighter). The long dresses also function as a kind of counterpoint to the text, which is mostly concerned with the female body, as they present a negation of this physicality. The women's bodies disappear in the drapery, making it impossible to look beneath the layers of fabric and glimpse the secrets they carry under their clothes, let alone under their skin.

While one could speak of increasing the potential of the dramatic text in these segments, it is Igor Vasilijev's set design (assistant Katarina Majcen, lighting design by Aleksandar Čavlek) that contributes the decisive turn of the screw by adding a distinctly ecofeminist perspective to the performance. The acting surface is pushed out into the auditorium, and the spectators are positioned in the role of the bloodthirsty people who are eagerly waiting for the hanging in front of the court palace. The intensity brought by the proximity balances out the lack of visibility due to the elevated stage (this is one of the few performances that are better to see from the mezzanine or the balcony). On a plain metal platform, reminiscent of a kind of giant drain (and of an all-seeing eye from the bird's eye view), there is no other element to be found. There is nothing to sit on, nothing to lean against, which emphasises the focus on the actresses. Behind this metal platform, we can see a looming forest. This juxtaposition of the "pure civilisation" and "untamable wilderness" is constantly creating tension: culture and nature, women and men, the murderess and the jurors. The opening sequence, underpinned by the just slightly overpompous music by Drago Ivanuša, is one of the most powerful scenes that we have seen on the stage of the SNT Drama Ljubljana this season. The actresses cleaning the floor, which very creatively replaces the opening stage direction of the play in which the author describes the daily chores of the members of the jury, gradually enter the world of patriarchy, (co-)create it and – before they have a chance really to become aware of it – get trapped in it. It is worth noting that the première gained an additional imposing touch by the catastrophic weather conditions reverberating through the auditorium during the performance. At times, it almost seemed as if the thunderclaps were accents added by the director.

Besides the text, which comes to life in Tina Mahkota's excellent translation with the help of down-to-earth language consulting by Arko, it is the actresses who take the forefront in the performance. The quality of the cast is outstanding. Maruša Majer, in the role of Sally Poppy, is striking in the passionate pursuit of her own monstrosity, with the thought of how much the audience wants to sympathise with her character constantly present in her. Consequently, her acting is about developing strategies for preventing the spectator from doing so. She brilliantly and full-bloodedly indulges in the rage, debauchery, violence, threats, and all that is often denied to stage depictions of female characters. Alongside her, the local midwife, Elizabeth Lizzy Luke, represents the last pillar of the old world in the jury box. Nataša Barbara Gračner portrays her as unable to understand the insensitivity of society, which will soon begin prioritising the opinion of male doctors. Her determination and self-confidence gradually erode in the face of (patriarchal) reality. The humour, which is mainly present in Saša Pavček's Judith Brewer, Eva Jesenovec's Mary Middleton and Maša Derganc's Hannah Rusted characters, is very precious in the text-heavy material. The cacophonous and, at times, chaotic setting further brings to the fore the more restrained Helen Ludlow, played by Iva Babić and Ann Lavender, played by Nina Ivanišin, Peg Carter, played by guest actress Mina Švajger, and the initially mute Sarah Hollis played by Vanja Plut, whose hypnotic focus and powerful presence create one of the production's most transcendent creations that emerges as a most necessary counterpoint to the density of all that is spoken. The jury is rounded out by Silva Čušin's Charlotte Carry, Sabina Kogovšek's Kitty Givens, Pia Zemljič's Emma Jenkins and Zvezdana Mlakar's Sarah Smith. Although one could nitpick about some moments in the entire constitution of the characters that appear a bit too caricatured and stereotypical or unnecessarily illustrative when approaching the lower social stratum, it all results in a chorus of psychologically diverse and believable stage personae emerging before the spectators as they become more individually depicted in the second, more focused part of the performance. Alongside them, the performance features the excellent Igor Samobor as Mr Coombes and Nejc Cijan

Garlatti in multiple roles of Frederick Poppy, the voice of The Justice and Dr Willis, thus spanning a kind of temporal arc from the time of the action of the play to the present day.

This emphatically considerate and precise production of *The Welkin* explicitly addresses the audience with the question, when will we be able to see such representations also in harmony with the stage depictions of men? When will such energy become a common feature? What are all the theatrical commonplaces we take for granted that have not yet been thoroughly put into question and may be blocking the view from undreamed-of potentials? This undoubtedly memorable and powerful production might have deserved a more striking final crescendo. Even so, it is still one of the highlights of this season at the SNT Drama in Ljubljana.

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