

Jury report ITs Festival 2011 International Programme

The International Programme consisted of theatre, dance and performance - of student projects and of big shows directed by the experienced directors of acting schools. The shows came from 4 continents and thus from very different contexts, backgrounds and from schools with very different approaches.

Following the performances the jury tried to develop a set of criteria. Crucial for us are the specific personal signature of a work, the awareness or even the economy of theatrical means, the ability to compose a show in layers and with a specific rhythm and by doing so allowing the spectator space to develop their own interpretations, the willingness and the ability of going to depth with your ideas.

We saw two ensemble pieces directed by professional, experienced directors.

“The Altruists”, a collaboration between the Otto Falckenberg Schule München and Toneelacademie Maastricht is an energetic, technically well-done piece, which nevertheless remains a bit academic in the visible effort to give the actors a platform to present themselves. With all its speed and virtuosity it rushes past too many punchlines in the text.

The Russian **“Hamlet – the beginning”** by the St. Petersburg State Theatre Arts Academy has similar qualities and problems, although it clearly comes from a tradition rich in emotions and theatrical acting. A very good ensemble centred around a very talented actor in the main role of Hamlet plays a work full of ideas that in the end do not get developed thoroughly. This richness, which might also be read as a lack of understatement, cannot conceal the absence of an interpretation of the text. And one might ask if the ensemble is not too obedient towards the inherent hierarchy of theatre and especially theatre schools.

These performances seem to lack a real interest in making a statement about the world we live in. The same goes for almost all the dance productions. The two productions from Link Dance Company from Perth, Australia, **“I said ha ha”** and **“The project in the field”** show dance with a big smile. They are gentle, poetic, kind, impressionistic, but maybe too cautious, safe and neutral. They were combined with two pieces by London’s Transitions Dance Company from Trinity Laban Conservatoire. **“The other/s”** choreographed by Martin Nachbar makes a perfect match with the Australian productions with its poetic lightness. It adds a special vaudeville flavour and grotesque humour as well as an openness toward the audience. The second part of the London programme **“Left to Write”** by Melanie Teall shows the technical skills of the company in an intense, relatively traditional modern dance choreography that follows the structure of the music precisely and thoroughly.

All this humour and poetic beauty leads to one big question: Is there nothing else you want to work on in these times?

“Undergrowth” by the Salzburg Experimental Academy of Dance, a choreography by Maya Lipsker, is less formal. It presents a dysfunctional gathering of people which might be a family, or perhaps another sort of community. The performance finds strong visuals with the use of animal masks, of set and props, but also with the spatial grouping of the ensemble. Powerful scenes seem to come from different

threads, which makes the show multi-interpretable and leaves the overall impression of a great variety of not clearly connected ideas. More hard decisions might have given all that good material more consistency.

Chang Xianoni's choreography "**Tuesday**" from Beijing Normal University is a tight, clear formal composition with lightness and preciseness in the movement. As often with performances from different cultural backgrounds the audience would need more information on the context. The theme of individual vs group is clearly visible. Maybe this opposition is more represented in the character, while it is less clearly intrinsic or thoroughly explored in the performance. Maybe some cultural codes are hard to decipher for a European audience.

Overly clear is certainly a quality of "**Bad people in Guantanamo**" by Academia Teatrale de Roma, directed by Fabio Omodei. The company has a message and is full of anger. Unfortunately they totally forget to transfer a political statement into a theatrical language, thus the statement is mere resentment and we see what we already knew in images much weaker than the television images the show refers to.

The complete opposite is offered in "**Käppkka**" by Anna Peschke from the Institute für Angewandte Theaterwissenschaft at the University of Giessen. In an installation full of little machines, strange creatures and suitcases with wondrous objects, the audience sees a character captured in her own small claustrophobic world. This work between theatre and installation is almost too fragile and private for an audience. Maybe it would be more inviting and develop its charm more successfully with tours through the room for one visitor at a time instead of in the form of a theatre setting.

The highlights in the great variety of theatre-making we saw are three productions that chose very different approaches. On the shortlist for the prize are: "Tucké Royale" by Tucké Royale from Ernst Busch Schule Berlin, "Insert Picture Here" by Soetkin Demey from Rits Hogeschool in Brussels and "The Parallel Prowls" by Payam Laryan from Tarbiat Modares University in Tehran.

Two performances choose a radical subjective approach with the performers starting with their own body, their own person, their own history. "**Tucké Royale**" shows a pseudo-hermaphrodite. Tucké Royal introduces her identity as an interpretable construction and compares it thus to theatre. With a wild use of many differing theatrical means she constructs a show on transformation and hybridity and is permanently deconstructing her construction. She puts her theme into the form. That is smart and overwhelming but very often lacks control. It is far from perfect but has a personal signature and it gives the audience the freedom and the challenge to construct their own story.

"**Insert Picture here**" by Soetkin Demey is similarly subjective, but totally different in the minimalist use of means. In an almost speechless, intense and painfully physical performance Soetkin portrays not only a person with anorexia, as is announced in the programme book, but asks the big question of identity. What is my body? Am I the result of my body or is the body my object? Who am I? What makes me me? The performance is strong in form, personal and sincere. Some moments of understatement might make it even stronger, but the combination of clear aesthetic choices, personal approach and interpretability make this an impressive statement.

A clearly political approach tries Payam Laryan's "**Parallel Prowls**". Through the stories of three persons wanting to commit suicide and a narrator, whose trustworthiness can be doubted, he reflects on a society where the lack of chances lead to desperate decisions. Subtle acting with rich characters, a clear aesthetic form and a tricky storytelling reveal a strong political statement behind the story of three desperate persons. Even taken out of the Iranian context and presented to a Western European audience this show transports its ideas and thoughts in a convincing way.

From the three productions on the shortlist the jury wants to reward the artist and the production that is the greatest promise that is not yet fulfilled but that is given. We are most curious about the future work of the winner.

The winner is: "Insert Picture Here" by Soetkin Demey from Rits Hogeschool Brussels.

Amy Gale, Tom Rummens, Rainer Hofmann

ITs Festival International Programm Award Speech

Considering both theatre and dance productions for this prize proposed a challenge in itself. Following the performances the jury tried to develop a set of criteria. Crucial for us are the specific personal signature of a work, the economy of theatrical means, the ability to compose a layered work with a specific rhythm, and by doing so allow the spectator space to develop their own interpretation.

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Payam Laryan's work "**Parallel Prowls**" tries a clearly political approach. Through the stories of three people who want to commit suicide, and a narrator whose

trustworthiness can be doubted, the work reflects on a society in which the lack of chances leads to desperate decisions. Subtle acting with rich characters, a clear aesthetic form and complex storytelling reveal a strong political statement behind the story of three desperate people. Even taken out of the Iranian context and presented to a Western European audience this show transports its ideas and thoughts in a convincing way.

From the three productions on the shortlist the jury wants to reward the artist and the production which holds the greatest promise. That promise is not yet fulfilled, but it *is* present. We are most curious about the future work of the winner.

The winner is: “Insert Picture Here” by Soetkin Demey from Rits Hogeschool Brussels.

Amy Gale, Tom Rummens, Rainer Hofmann