

## **In search of the Fremdkörper**

About '*L'Intrus Fremdkörper 2#*' by Muziektheatergroep 'Het Geluid'

### **The synthesis of opera**

Opera has always fascinated me. In the first place, because it is such a unique genre in which story, music and image together form a synthesis - creating an overwhelming experience. Being overwhelmed is rare, of course. If you're lucky you get an experience like that three times during one performance. But this synthesis seems to be something directors, conductors and scenographers aim for. These people all champion their discipline, fighting for their field but at the same time collaborating on a common goal: the performance. In this way, there is a better chance for the audience to experience something truly uplifting. Music, image and story move together to lift the audience upwards - moving them emotionally in turn. As if magic takes place.

But opera is interesting for more than the synthesis. The ritualistic pomp and ceremony during opera performances makes for half the fun. For example - the curtain call. In literary theatre, the actors stand in one line, bow and leave the stage. Opera performances tend to make a complete choreography of it. Every person involved knows their position and does what is expected. Events maybe seem spontaneous: What a charming conductor for throwing one of his flowers in the orchestra pit! But after working on a few operas, I know that the whole show, down to the last bow, is carefully organised. Knowing this makes the ceremonial aspects even more enjoyable.

Of course, time honoured conventions apply not only to the curtain call and the end result, but also to the creative process. A score becomes a performance via a set procedure. For example: The orchestra should not be there during the first rehearsal, and for a director to say "Stop!" during a general rehearsal is almost a deadly sin. All these conventions and traditions are built upon the idea that the audience is moved by the heavenly experience created by a synthesis of different disciplines within the performance.

### **A new generation**

Now, a new generation of Dutch theatre makers is making its way into the Dutch theatre landscape. They are not burdened with preconceptions about what theatre should be, or how a performance should be made. This generation saw performances on location before they met Shakespeare. They saw work from Marina Abramovic before they learned to like the Dutch masters. They read Sarah Kane before they expanded their horizon with Moliere. This is the first generation of theatre makers that is taught by innovators like Gerardjan Rijnders, Oscar van Woensel and Ivo van Hove - directors and writers that are known for their innovation, that once were seen as experimental, but today are considered mainstream.

This new generation is influenced by different genres, art forms and disciplines. They use theatrical means that were once considered scandalous - as if the Aristotelic structure, the Proscenium and prudery never existed. Making direct contact with the audience, a fragmented structure and imperceptibly shifting from fiction to reality; they do it all. The content defines the form and the form determines the content. No preconceptions, no limits. Festival Cement has made it its objective to showcase this new generation. And there I saw probably one of the best performances I've seen this season, *L'Intrus Fremdkörper 2#* from 'Het Geluid'.

### **Fremdkörper**

In this performance, young theatre makers Gable and Romy Roelofsen investigate the concept of the Fremdkörper for the second time. The performance is inspired by *L'Intrus* (The Intruder) from the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. This French philosopher had a heart transplant. Interested in the intruder in his body, Nancy explored the Fremdkörper. Not only the heart, but also the immigrant can be seen as a strange figure. Are immigrants, often not accepted as one of us, perhaps seen as intruders? This rich philosophical concept is embodied in a surprising performance about intruders and strangers.

At the start of the performance, a pregnant doctor (is an infant an intruder?) explains the procedure of the heart transplant operation. In detail, we get to learn about this apparently simple medical procedure. Then, all of a sudden, the son of a patient treated by this talking doctor comes in, interrupting the explanation. In German, he yells at the doctor, "A heart transplantation, are you insane?" During his angry rant, he gets a Turkish flag out of his pocket. Is the intruder an aggressive German, or a Turkish immigrant? Next, a man in the audience stands up and starts talking about his own heart transplant. Is this fiction or reality? During this beautiful and moving story about the heart, the strange intruder saving his life, we find out that this man is a real heart patient with a transplanted heart. Then, out of nothing, a gypsy band comes on the stage. The built up intimacy of this moving story is gone. Unmasked the band starts playing. Is it the

unexpectedness? Is it the strangeness? Whatever it is, the music moves me like I've never been moved in any performance before.

As in the article by Nancy, 'Het Geluid' explores the different layers in which this philosophical concept is present and applicable. But with this performance, 'Het Geluid' takes the philosophical concept to a next level. The moment a real gypsy band comes on stage and 'disturbs' an intimate monologue within a performance about serious matters, we do not only understand, but also feel what Nancy was writing about.

### **Music theatre**

Gable and Romy Roelofsen say they make music theatre. This inspiring performance of this new generation of theatre makers, my own generation, made me think differently about music theatre. Is music theatre all about the synthesis? And is it really a genre? With *L'Intrus Fremdkörper 2#* from 'Het Geluid' in mind, I conclude that music theatre for these two theatre makers is maybe more like an ideology. Here, music theatre does not have fixed ideas about the where and when of different disciplines. There are no preconceptions about how it is made. Music theatre here, is the performance in-between genres. Of course, between music and text, but also in between theory and practice, in between fiction and reality, in between styles and disciplines and in between theatre makers and audience. This generation of theatre makers tailor their means and content to the needs of a the particular performance. They are constantly thinking outside the (black) box in search of form and content that will fit their vision and work.

Music theatre is, like the gypsy band in the performance, the Fremdkörper of the theatre world. In this small place, in between genres, there are no preconceived ideas about how different disciplines should fit together to form a synthesis. In music theatre, different disciplines do not have to perfectly fit together to make for a moving performance. I will always be fascinated by the synthesis of opera, but sometimes it is not the synthesis but the Fremdkörper that moves the most.

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