

Öper Öpis at the Barbican Centre, review

Öper Öpis takes your breath away and leaves you, as good mime should, speechless. Rating: * * * * *

By [Dominic Cavendish](#) Published: 3:57PM GMT 14 Jan 2010

What does it all mean?: Oper Opis

Prepare to be utterly astonished. I can't quite believe I'm writing that about the London International Mime Festival. Usually it would be something along the lines of 'Prepare to watch weirdly dressed people from the Continent embark on some forgettable clowning, footling dance-work or excruciating puppetry.' Yet, hailing from Switzerland, Öper Öpis ('Someone Something'), the curtain-raiser to 2010's jamboree, is something really special.

At first sight, it looks like nothing much: a scruffy man in shirt, jacket and tie (Dimitri de Perrot) rolls a microphone round and round a small triangular wooden-block, amplifying the sound. It turns out he's recording this simple, chimp-like investigation on a customised turn-table, and he sets the sound on a loop. A second man (Martin Zimmerman), crouched beneath the other end of the raised platform stage, lifts his head through a trap-door, causing a row of similar coloured wedges to go into a domino-style tumble: this noise, again, is added to the loop, and so on, de Perrot swiftly proving a wizard at constructing a live, constantly shifting soundscape.

If you wanted to do nothing more than marvel at world-class larking-around by a DJ, this would be the show for you - as everything from basic needle-on-vinyl 'scratch' sounds to arbitrary samples grabbed from multiple LPs are melded into the mix with split-second finesse. Screeching whistles combine with ethereal waltz-music, the sound of thighs slapping together becomes a techno-beat. De Perrot's sonic input is barely half the story, though; it's what happening on stage that takes your breath away and leaves you, as good mime should, speechless.

The performing area tilts this way and that sending items of furniture, together with the six performers - the gaunt, boggle-eyed Zimmerman chief among them - sliding all over the place, as if on the dance-floor of some sporadically storm-tossed ship. During the course of 70 minutes, all of them contribute

'how-do-they-do-that?' acrobatic feats so remarkable they often resemble optical illusions: one woman makes an entrance like a circus freak, with only hands for feet, another undulates like a wave on the bucking palms of the company's strong-man. These antics are executed in a po-faced absurdist fashion while being charged with animal magnetism and sensual suggestion. What does it all mean? That man is a slave to rhythms beyond his control? That we are all objects? Who knows? And when the quality of the 'play' is so out-of-this-world, who cares? Just go.

Tickets: 0845 120 7550. To Sat. Details: www.mimefest.co.uk