

A Younger Theatre

Theatre through the eyes of the younger generations

Review: Öper Öpis

Posted on 15 January 2010 Written by Jake Orr

How often can you say you have been to see a show at the theatre, and been completely blown away? Taken somewhere where only the imagination can dream of such things, or perhaps just drawn into a story and then seeing it explode in front of you?

When watching *Öper Öpis* at the Barbican Centre by Zimmermand and de Perrot I am reminded of the following quote written by Lyn Gardner from The Guardian in her article 'Theatre Must Chance... Us':

"When I'm in the theatre, I want to feel as if some kind of risk is taking place, that I might be taken somewhere I find scary – that the performers will surprise me and as a result I will surprise myself."

Öper Öpis is for me, that moment of being taken somewhere that surprises you – a place you find so compelling and intoxicating that you have to remember to breathe. *Öper Öpis* is quite literally breath taking.

So what happens when you take 5 circus/physical theatre artists, 1 choreographer and 1 music genius, throw them together in a collaborative melting pot with the aim of producing a piece of theatre? The answer: a night worth remembering! *Öper Öpis* enthralled my senses, made me gasp and laugh in all the right moments, no wonder it was the opening event for the London International Mime Festival 2010.

There are so many points to make about this performance that it's hard to know where to begin. There is the stage design, the musical score, the choreography, the circus acts, the energy, the delivery, and on and on the list goes...

We are met by Zimmerman and de Perrot setting the stage – a collection of odd wooden blocks that they position into place along the front of their tilted stage. Then looping of sound is captured from the falling of the blocks as they get knocked over. Gradually this is combined with music, to create a surreal sound scape that underscores the whole performance. This music is put together masterfully, at times the bass rumbled through the Barbican Theatre as if in a club and coupled with the scratching of records in the loop it's hard not to get lost in this sound scape alone.

The performers of *Öper Öpis* are odd, when compared with each other they represent two ends of the spectrum, from little to large in weight, to small and ginormous in height. They can only be described as a bit of a freak circus show – yet looking beyond their appearance (which in turn is comic), these performers are skilled beyond belief. They dance, they juggle, they throw themselves around the stage, the jump off each other and perform tricks to integrated with the music that it becomes as one.

Some highlights for me included the slapping of thighs from the largest of performers creating a looping thigh repeated slaps in the music to the areobatics act who suddenly produces a chair instead of the other performer from no where.

It is hard to know where to look during the performance, as the action happens on a stage that tilts with the performers as they move. This design beautifully mirrors the performers in their balancing acts of leadership and contrasts of shape and size. The stage rocks from one side to another never fully settling into place before the performers push it into another direction.

The choreography of the piece is crafted in such a way that the 70 minute performance flies past. No wonder the show won the Swiss Dance and Choreography Award in 2009. It is executed in such a manner that the performers are alive with energy and skill. There is no dialogue but what better language that of the way a body moves in space?

Circus is often an under appreciated art form but Zimmerman and de Perrot have turned it into something much more than just tricks and skill. Their blending of music, dance, circus, and performance creates an inspiring show.

Öper Öpis is part of the London International Mime Festival 2010, and also in association with the Barbican Bite 10 programme. The show is only on until 16th January 2010, but check out Zimmerman and de Perrot's [website](#) for clips and more tour dates.