

CRAZY FAMILY JOURNEY: DANCE AND LEGEND

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Amidst the autumn list of premiers, another new production excelled - The Family Journey from the DOT504 Dance Company. The choreographer for this piece is Anton Lachky. This playful show is balancing on the border of reality and fantasy, it captures the audience with its wide vocabulary of movements and although it is hard to find a serious topic in it, it manages to distinctively entertain the audience. It is a combination of mystification and dynamic contemporary dance.

There are four of them and they are a family. Not because of family ties, but because someone told them. A mythical man with supernormal abilities that granted them everlasting joy of life and with it, immortality. In the exposition, each of the characters presents their own vocabulary of movements and expressions. The affected Hyajin Lee with an expression oscillating between a sweet girl and a demon. The rollicking Ioulia Zacharaki. A dynamic muscular element in the form of the British Robert Anderson and our somewhat more judicious representative of Czech dance, Pavel Mašek, who draws from his four years of experience from working in Wim Vandekeybuses Ultima Vez dance company. As spectators we have become used that during the duration of most projects the cast changes, so to talk of a permanent assemblage would be a bit of an exaggeration. However, with this premiere, DOT504 is returning to the elements that used to be its biggest characteristics, to a dynamic and physical form of dance. We see new faces, but a familiar approach to movement that we associate with the company.

After a successful entrée in which this group dances and literally dominates the space with energetic jumps, rocking jumps, the smaller Brit also with elements of break dance, the flow is suddenly interrupted with spoken word and its use brings chills to our bodies. Again? Couldn't the energetic, dynamic dancing do fine on its own?

True, the story with which the creators have based the jolting moves with is too complicated to grasp with dance alone, and the main speaker Robert Anderson pleases with his Oxford dictionary. Because of the international ensemble, it was only logical to choose English as the main spoken language.

Yet, despite this, it is a trend that encourages to perceive contemporary dance as an entertainment for a narrow group and because of such a trivial thing like the use of spoken word, it is inaccessible to a wider middle-aged or older audience, that often don't understand other languages. And because of that, they are so to speak, out of the game. And that's a shame. Even though we are global, international and many other things. We do need the general audience.

So in this production we see a blend of fantastical legends and the life of four beings with a sole purpose in this world, to enjoy life – with dancing to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, joga meditation, a pantomimic game of animals and objects or by drinking miraculous aphrodisiacal beverages. Each of their motives and actions changes into motion.

At one point their bodies are relaxed, then suddenly tense. They isolate movements as if their limbs and torsos want to jump apart. The next moment they are like puppets – one of the études draws from this eternal theme that never gets old when done with wit and precision. Or when Robert Anderson gives life to his index finger which then dictates the movements of the rest of his body. And meanwhile, there is still the question hanging in the audience's head, where did the inspiration or the story that shapes the existence of this crazy family come from? Who is the model for the

mage that made their transformation possible? Cagliostro, Althotas, Saint Germain? There must have surely been a historical or literal inspiration...

I expected a little bolder work with the scenography and projection. A well-known artist Jiří Votruba collaborated on the visual aspect of the production, but he didn't get a lot of room to work with except for the discreet projection depicting the panoramical contours of Prague. But for most of the time the stage and the wall behind it are white and they create a very unpersonal backdrop to the four dancers - girls in women dresses and men in blue velvet suits.

The series of movements and pantomimes must have their message, because Robert, during the last moments of the productions says something along the lines of: our family is perhaps odd, but it is happy and contempt, so everything is as it should be. They are simply fine even though they are not normal. The same behaviour that we've seen in the last premier of the drama debuted on the New Scene of the National Theatre.

We're at a point in time where creators explore differences, but with a very benevolent approach and a mild overstatement. As if they were trying to insure us about our own sanity. We live in a time of oddity and opulent freedom. We should only wish that it lasts and if ecstatic dance is all we need to be happy let us have it.

Score of the review author: 80%

Lucie Kocourková, NOV 6, 2017