

FAMILY JOURNEY – A bizarre family in dynamic motion shots

<http://www.tanecniaktuality.cz/family-journey-bizarni-rodinka-v-dynamicke-pohybove-smrsti/>

Family Journey, with the subtitle – Story of one family night in Prague is a new production from the DOT504 Dance Company in collaboration with the choreographer Anton Lachky. But it is by no means significant that this group are a family or that the scene takes place in Prague. Still, it is possible to find exaggerated depictions of modern age lifestyles, shown between the lines of actors, dynamic dancing passages and the background of predominantly classical music.

Two women (Hyaejin Lee, Ioulia Zacharaki) and two men (Robert Anderson, Pavel Mašek) make for a very unusual family. We can see that they are siblings of different nationalities that don't have a mother or a father. They live together because they were told: "Stick together and you will be the happiest family. The happiest family in the whole world." They force themselves to believe and have faith in their happiness by teasing and joking with each other. Occasionally the jokes get a little cruel and are on the edge of being funny (sudden pulling of hair).

As if the constant laugh was a guarantee of inner happiness. Like they are afraid to stop and think about whether they are truly happy on the inside. At one moment Hyaejin Lee is practicing yoga, because "yoga always makes people happy", she's counting down the endless sitting on heels drill while the other siblings are clearly slacking the exercise, but for the sake of the family harmony they don't dare to object to anything.

At other moments they twist their bodies in different positions and their faces into peculiar grimaces by following orders of the leader Robert Anderson, who has power over them. We learn that he has received special powers. Everyone believes in his spells, he's even able to fool himself with them. An association with a religious cult also comes in mind, especially when they all start reciting together: "If you wish for something really hard, it will come true..." the association becomes stronger when we hear the affectionate, loving and slightly naive legend about a man that changed their lives and that they haven't seen for more than 246 years. Manipulation, blindness and no defiance.

Spoken word has a strong place in the production and it is the bearer of meaning. However, it ends up taking up too much space. Fortunately, words are presented by Robert Anderson with a very clear and well-articulated English, though the language can be a barrier for some spectators. But there is always something great to look at when the dancers get moving. The choreographic footprint of Anton Lachky is unique. It is dominated by fast spatial motion, dynamic, energetic movements that unexpectedly calm down, or almost fully stop. All is in harmony with the musical composition.

Especially in the passage from the last part of Hayden Symphony nr. 92 (that we can hear many times during the evening) it's as if the dancers race with the strings that come out of the speakers. During other parts, they speak with their facial expressions, that often take an almost surreal form. Lachky respects their individuality and develops their potential by building different characters. Hyaejin Lee is sometimes a fragile, frightened, half-crazy and naive girl that can instantly change her facial expression. Ioulia Zachari develops his movements in a more gentle, sensual style. He has a style of a flirt that is fully developed towards the end where he drinks a cup full of an aphrodisiacal beverage.

Robert Anderson is not only a great speaker but also a great dancer and he is very persuasive in his role of a manipulator. Not only when he's pulling the imaginary strings tied to his siblings, he is himself a puppet under his own rule. While gasping, he pulls his knee up with his hand without

touching it. It seems that the least expressive role is portrayed by Pavel Mašek that manages to draw attention mainly because he is the only one that is half naked, in a suite and wearing only underwear. He's given space to go on a rampage at the very end when he drinks all of the intoxicating fluid that sends his body into a sexual ecstasy.

The female dancers are dressed in colourful dresses, men have pale blue suede jackets. The colourful variety stands out on the bare, brightly lit stage. Simple changing projections are screened on the back wall of the stage. They are city panoramas (Jiří Votruba), which is the only obvious connection to the mention of Prague. However, the action on stage draws all of the attention. The energy poured into this original scenography has missed its effect.

Family Journey is somewhat a crazy spectacle that will make you smile and often burst into laughter. It entertains and gives us insight on interesting aspects of modern life, performed by very talented dancers with a well-crafted choreography.

Daniela Machová, NOV 10, 2017