

Oh, dear time!

Shortly after its world premiere, Billinger & Schulz's performance 'Zeit/Temps' is seen at Frankfurt's Mousonturm. And what is on offer is extremely original.

By Melanie Suchy



Billinger & Schulz present history and theatre.

Photo: Florian Krauss

The title 'Zeit/Temps' that Verena Billinger and Sebastian Schulz have given their new creation is so terse it's actually original. After all, the one thing that will happen in any stage production of any kind with a beginning and an end is that time will pass. Though time in the theatre is special because a conscious perception is often aroused of time passing, of its relativity, of it speeding up and slowing down. Fortunately Billinger & Schulz, who come from Düsseldorf, studied in Frankfurt and Giessen and now as successful choreographers have shuttled back and forth between the two regions for several years, don't lecture their audience about their title theme. Instead, they entertain them.

They take three and a half hours for this. But that shouldn't put anyone off. The production, which premiered at the small Forum Freies Theater in Düsseldorf in April, takes its audience so kindly and skilfully by the hand that there is no hint of irritation. People go along with time – or, to be more precise: with the times.

The audience is encouraged to sit on chairs or the steps of the auditorium at the edge of the space and to move around freely, even if many of them remain seated. They whisper to their neighbours because there is something museum-like about the whole experience: when you watch you see other people watching. Instead of streaming out of the space in the interval as

one does at the Wuppertaler Tanztheater, everyone stays put and the refreshments are brought to them.

History and theatre

What Billinger & Schulz exhibit is history. And theatre. Society: the nine dancers wear costumes, wigs, hats, stuck-on beards. At the beginning in sweeping floor-length skirts and clothes with frills, with the gentlemen in trousers, waistcoats and shirts. They stand around, exquisite and erect, almost motionless, in a way no one would do today. They seem genuine – but what is that?

They cast glances. Change their posture and distances from each other, take a few steps, bow down to someone, look up, look past, chat soundlessly, dance a polite ancient court dance, one hand laid upon another. The different skin colours are not concealed with make-up so additional historical-geographical speculations are added to the few snippets of represented stories or relationships that one attempts to catch hold of or decode. And as the proceedings allow themselves time, there is also the space to observe oneself doing this.

The costumes change, becoming lighter and more dandy-ish for the men and a sort of Arthur Conan Doyle appears. Time advances, history progressing in jolts or layers, not like in a textbook. For a while two brightly-clad hippies romp around the space with a lady dressed in white. Worlds apart. Now music is played: “Come on let’s twist again” and more. The glances between the performers and to the audience become bolder, more of a come on, like the poses: bending their hips, hands resting on their sides or holding cigarettes. More touching and a brilliant mood. The Nineties bring with them a total party, at high volume with the physical exhaustion of both dancers and their characters hopping around and in the choreography they execute together. In their pushing, shoving and kissing – a time reference! – Billinger & Schulz quote their own earlier pieces ‘Violent Event’ and ‘Romantic Afternoon’. Such a cuddly historical film forces one to ask oneself how it is going to end. How does ‘Zeit/Temps’ imagine the future? This is not revealed here. That is the most important and most irritating part of this long performance – which is so sweet, so well-mannered, so physically relaxed, so ordered in terms of identity. It’s a fantasy. Watch out for the gag reflex.

Source: F.A.Z.