

UND

REVIEW

At least I need not kiss/ Academy of Theater, Radio, Film and Television, Slovenia



At least I need not kiss is a Slovenian student performance thematically bordering between life and death and attempting to unlock the eternal mystery of the afterlife. As the monologue in the third scene suggests by recounting small pleasures in life – The taste of...Mother's milk/Mashed carrots/Apple sauce/Broccoli/Spinach and mashed potatoes, by exploring death, as a side effect this play also celebrates life. These topics deeply resonate with the bleak uncertainty of COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 reality, as well as with tragic motives in the German literary movement Sturm und Drang (that often explored the dark side of human nature and states such as revenge, death, suicide, castration, etc). The dramatic text was inspired by the plays of Romanian-French playwright Ionesco and loosely based on plays of British playwright Howard Barker (*The love of a good man*, *The Europeans*, *Ursula*, and *The possibilities*) and directed by Dorian Silec Petek. The storyline is fragmented, non-linear and consists of personal confessions, songs, monologues, and one dialogue, and a large part of the performance is built on non-verbal language, corporeality, and gesticulation. Elements of the absurd are reflected in the characters being stripped down to fragments of memories and emotion, or in the endless interchange of life and death. The peculiarity of this performance is obvious since its first scene – the ensemble of 8 young student actors is portraying a group of (mostly) elderly people in mourning. This contrasted setup of youth exploring old age, decay, and death gives the play unusual skewed point of view and visual and relational complexity. The introductory scene resembles still photography or a fresco with all the actors 'frozen' and painted into the set, waiting (for Godot?) around an empty chair belonging to the deceased. Special consideration throughout the play was given to the light design that played a significant role in emphasizing the theme of mortality and creating a ghostly and at times grotesque atmosphere. Grotesque exaggeration is most noticeable in acting/performing, in a funeral scene in which the family and friends of the deceased lose control of their emotional reactions, or in a haunting vision of hell in which the inhabitants are driven by their animalistic drives and desperate to grab the blinking light hanging from the ceiling. The body, repetitive ritualistic dance, and crooked deviant movements in this scene were used to express inner and outer turmoil, pain, and hopelessness. The costume designer Tina Bonca cleverly

avoided the stereotypical black-and-white concept of hell by choosing golden coats (the color perhaps implying greed as one of the deadly sins), and the same can be said for the scene's set design, in which the sliding walls are closing down on the tortured prisoners. The concept of the afterlife, even though it perhaps draws inspiration from medieval morality and miracle plays, does not stem from a traditional notion found in monotheistic religions, but from the authentic director's and the Artistic collective's vision. The final scene, the abstract conversation with the Death, and the chatty female protagonist horizontally laid down on the surgical table, is necessary for concluding the main point (and reminding us we humans know very little about death – How do you know you're mortal? How do you know? You don't), but also comes as a structural and compositional surprise as this is the only scene in the performance using traditional theatrical language – dialogue and dramatic situation with clear relation between 2 characters. The funeral scene, even though well executed and rich with touching, tragic and on occasions, comic situations, was disproportionately long compared to other scenes and had few situational repetitions not adding much to the performance as a whole. Nevertheless, *At least I need not kiss* is a successfully delivered ambitious performance; it doesn't refrain from exploring the dark nightmarish corners of human experience, but it also, almost unintentionally, deals with life's peaks – with love, memory, and finding a glimpse of humor even in death and loss.

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