



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

A Macabre Delight: Burke & Hare at its Darkly Comic Best

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Bruno Max's *Burke & Hare: Eine Ballade über Angebot und Nachfrage* is a masterful blend of dark humor, historical intrigue, and biting social commentary. Set in the gritty, fog-laden streets of 1828 Edinburgh, the production brings to life the infamous true story of William Burke and William Hare, two graverobbers-turned-murderers who found a grotesque yet lucrative way to supply corpses to the University's desperate medical faculty. The result is a black comedy that is as sharp as it is sinister, dissecting not only the ghoulish deeds of its protagonists but also the moral ambiguities of a society willing to overlook evil in the name of scientific progress.

The genius of Max's production lies in its ability to balance the macabre with moments of laugh-out-loud humor. From the moment the curtain rises, the audience is swept into a world where death is both commodity and punchline, a grim reality heightened by the witty and often irreverent dialogue. The moral line between right and wrong is blurred in this portrayal, and the audience is left questioning the characters' ethics—and perhaps their own.

The strength of this production rests largely on the shoulders of a stellar ensemble cast, each of whom brings a distinct energy and personality to the stage. Anaïs Marie Golder, Katharina Krause, Lisa-Carolin Nemeč, and Stephanie-Christin Schneider deliver standout performances, offering a spectrum of characters who embody the social realities of 19th-century Edinburgh. They navigate the play's shifts from humor to horror with finesse, ensuring that the audience is never too far from either a chuckle or a shiver.

Paul Barna and Raimund Brandner, who play the titular Burke and Hare, are the beating heart of this dark narrative. Barna's portrayal of Burke, a man who begins his descent into murder somewhat reluctantly, is nuanced, drawing the audience into his internal conflict as he justifies each grisly act as a means of survival. Brandner's Hare, on the other hand, is a more sinister and calculating figure—less conflicted about their crimes and more eager to seize any opportunity for profit. Together, their chemistry is undeniable, creating a dynamic duo whose wicked deeds are as compelling as they are repulsive.

The supporting cast, including Bernie Feit, Max Kolodej, Christopher Korkisch, Thomas Marchart, Robert Notsch, and Jörg Stelling, round out the world of *Burke & Hare* with vivid portrayals of doctors, drunks, and other shady Edinburgh denizens. Their performances add depth to the play's exploration of class, greed, and survival in a society that places profit over morality.

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Robert Notsch's stage design plays a crucial role in bringing 1828 Edinburgh to life. The dark, minimalist set reflects the grimy, shadowy nature of the city's underworld, with fog rolling in from the wings and dim lighting casting eerie shadows across the stage. The simplicity of the set allows the audience to focus on the characters and the action, but it also amplifies the sense of claustrophobia and moral decay that permeates the story. One moment, the stage is a dark alleyway, and the next, it transforms into the cold, clinical interior of a medical dissection room—places that seem to blur the line between life and death.

Sigrid Dreger's costumes and Gerda Fischer's mask design further enhance the period setting. The grimy clothes of the lower-class characters and the more refined garb of the upper classes serve as visual reminders of the social divide at the heart of the story. The masks add a ghoulish touch, particularly in moments when the dead are on display—whether on stage or in the imagination of the audience.

Fritz Rainer's musical compositions offer the perfect accompaniment to the action. The score, with its ominous undertones and macabre melodies, heightens the tension of the more suspenseful moments, while also providing a playful counterpoint to the dark humor that runs throughout the play. At times, the music feels like it's drawing the audience into a twisted carnival, where each death is both a spectacle and a business transaction.

Rainer's score also complements the shifts in tone, from the grimness of the murder scenes to the satirical jabs at Edinburgh society's obsession with scientific advancement. This balance of musical moods helps to maintain the play's momentum, ensuring that the audience remains engaged in both the moral dilemmas and the absurdity of the characters' actions. What elevates *Burke & Hare* beyond a simple tale of murder and mayhem is its exploration of moral ambiguity. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Burke and Hare are not the only villains—though they are certainly the most immediate ones.

The doctors and medical institutions that eagerly accept their corpses without questioning their origins are portrayed as complicit in the crime, driven by their own hunger for knowledge and prestige. Dr. Knox, played with a detached and clinical air, represents the institutional demand that fuels the murderous supply, raising questions about the cost of progress and the human lives sacrificed in its pursuit. The play's dark humor forces the audience to confront these ethical questions in unexpected ways. Moments of levity arise from the absurdity of the situation: the characters justify murder as merely a matter of supply and demand, and the audience is invited to laugh along—until the laughter gives way to discomfort.

The play holds a mirror up to modern society, asking whether we, too, are willing to turn a blind eye to atrocities as long as they serve a greater purpose. Bruno Max's *Burke & Hare* is a darkly comic gem that delivers both laughs and chills in equal measure. Its clever script, combined with strong performances and atmospheric staging, ensures that the audience remains captivated from beginning to end. The play's

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exploration of moral complexity—of how far people are willing to go in the name of profit and progress—makes it not only entertaining but also thought-provoking.

This production reminds us that while the story of Burke and Hare may be set in the past, its themes remain eerily relevant today. In a world where exploitation often goes unnoticed, Burke & Hare challenges us to consider our own complicity in systems that prioritize profit over ethics. At the same time, it offers a macabre sense of enjoyment, proving that even in the darkest corners of history, humor can be found.

In short, Burke & Hare: Eine Ballade über Angebot und Nachfrage is a must-see for fans of black comedy and historical drama alike. It is a theatrical experience that will leave you both entertained and unsettled—an unforgettable reminder that sometimes, the dead tell the most intriguing tales.

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