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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Peer Gynt

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Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* is one of the theater's most enigmatic characters—part hero, part antihero, and wholly elusive. His journey is a grand, surreal exploration of self, winding through the landscapes of Norway and across continents, as he tries on and sheds identities in his lifelong quest for meaning. Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson's production at the Akademietheater embraces this epic journey with a modern intensity

feels both intimate and universal, pushing Ibsen's work into the realm of existential exploration. Central to this exploration is Mavie Hörbiger, whose portrayal of Peer Gynt captures the character's restless spirit and tragic flaws in a way that resonates deeply with contemporary audiences. Mavie Hörbiger's *Peer Gynt* is nothing short of extraordinary. In assuming the role of a character traditionally played by male actors, Hörbiger challenges and expands our understanding of Peer, presenting a figure who is both daring and deeply vulnerable. Her portrayal captures the essence of Ibsen's "self-realizer"—a person who constantly reinvents themselves, searching for purpose in an often absurd world.

Hörbiger's Peer is impulsive, curious, and contradictory; she channels the energy of a dreamer and a deceiver, a soul forever in conflict with itself. What makes Hörbiger's performance so compelling is her ability to convey both the bravado and the fragility of Peer. She portrays him as a dynamic character driven by relentless curiosity, and yet, beneath her confidence lies a character haunted by insecurities and regrets. Hörbiger has an expressive physicality that allows her to switch effortlessly between Peer's swaggering arrogance and moments of quiet introspection. She moves across the stage with a boundless energy that captures Peer's insatiable desire for experience.

Yet she can bring that movement to a halt with a single, intense glance, showing Peer's underlying despair. Her monologue during the play's final scenes, when Peer confronts the emptiness of his life, is particularly powerful. Hörbiger strips away the character's bravado, revealing a man who has lost himself in the pursuit of meaning. Her voice cracks with vulnerability as she confronts the consequences of her choices, capturing Peer's tragic realization that he has missed out on life's true essence. It is a haunting portrayal, filled with regret and a poignant longing for redemption, which resonates with anyone who has ever questioned their own purpose.

Director Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson has crafted a production that explores *Peer Gynt* as a meditation on

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identity and selfhood. The staging embraces both the vastness of Peer's journey and the intimate questions it raises, constantly asking, "Who am I?" The production's design, led by Daniel Angermayr, is a blend of surreal and minimalist elements, grounding the fantastical journey in a stark visual style that emphasizes the inner landscape of Peer's mind. Arnarsson's direction is marked by a deep respect for Ibsen's text, yet he isn't afraid to interpret it through a contemporary lens, allowing the themes of identity and existentialism to emerge with clarity and urgency.

Arnarsson's approach is especially effective in scenes that blur the boundaries between reality and illusion. The production makes ingenious use of lighting (designed by Paul Eisemann) and soundscapes (composed by Gabriel Cazes) to create an atmosphere that feels both dreamlike and unsettling. The lighting shifts fluidly between warm and cold tones, mirroring Peer's emotional state as he moves from one identity to another. Cazes' music is haunting and ethereal, underscoring the surreal nature of Peer's encounters with mythical creatures and his own fears. Together, these elements create a world that feels expansive yet claustrophobic, a reflection of Peer's own inner contradictions.

The small ensemble cast adds depth and dimension to Peer's journey, with each actor playing multiple roles that represent various aspects of Peer's psyche and the world around him. This minimalist approach allows the production to shift seamlessly from one setting to another, from Norwegian mountains to Egyptian deserts, without ever losing its focus on the character's inner journey. The ensemble's versatility highlights the fluid nature of Peer's reality, as characters appear and disappear, reflecting the transient nature of his experiences.

Each member of the ensemble embodies their roles with commitment and sensitivity, whether they are portraying mystical creatures or figures from Peer's past. Their interactions with Hörbiger are dynamic, often mirroring the play's themes of duality and self-reflection. The scenes with Solveig, Peer's long-lost love, are particularly affecting, capturing the tragic beauty of a love that remains unfulfilled. These moments serve as reminders of the life Peer has forsaken in his relentless search for self-realization, grounding the play's abstract themes in a deeply personal story.

Henrik Ibsen wrote Peer Gynt as a "dramatic poem" that delves into the complex nature of human identity, a theme that resonates even more powerfully today. In a world where we are constantly encouraged to reinvent ourselves and project our own "best versions," Peer Gynt feels like a cautionary tale. The character of Peer embodies the pitfalls of unchecked ambition and self-centeredness, yet he also reflects the universal desire for meaning in a world that often feels meaningless.

Arnarsson's production brings this theme to the fore, presenting Peer's journey not just as a personal quest, but as a universal exploration of what it means to be human. The modern elements in the staging, such as

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minimalistic costumes and abstract set pieces, place the story in a timeless context, allowing audiences to see themselves in Peer's struggles. Through the lens of Hörbiger's performance, Peer becomes a mirror for our own anxieties and aspirations, a reminder that the search for identity can sometimes lead us further away from our true selves.

The Akademietheater's Peer Gynt is a triumph on multiple levels—a visually striking production that captures the poetic nature of Ibsen's text, while also grounding it in themes that speak to today's audience. Mavie Hörbiger's performance is central to this success; her Peer Gynt is a complex and captivating figure whose journey reflects our own uncertainties about identity and purpose. Arnarsson's direction, coupled with the work of a talented ensemble and design team, makes this production a rich and immersive experience that stays with you long after the final curtain.

Ultimately, this Peer Gynt invites us to confront our own desires for meaning and self-understanding, encouraging us to ask, as Peer does, "Who am I?" In a world obsessed with self-realization, this production reminds us of the importance of looking beyond ourselves, of finding meaning not in the endless pursuit of identity, but in the connections we make along the way. It is a moving and thought-provoking work that reaffirms the enduring power of theater to explore the human condition.

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