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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Review of Hercules

Théâtre de Vidy--Lausanne, 18.11.2024 [ENA]

In her bold adaptation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Hercules and the Augean Stables*, Giulia Rumasuglia delivers a powerful one-woman performance that reinterprets the myth of Hercules as a sharp, irreverent satire on modern bureaucracy and the illusion of power. Originally crafted as a satire for Expo64 by Dürrenmatt, this tale depicts a nation buried under a literal and figurative mountain of manure.

They call upon Hercules, the hero burdened with debt, to clear the mess—only for him to be stymied by endless bureaucratic roadblocks. Rumasuglia's direction transforms this premise into a contemporary critique that is both humorous and incisive, highlighting the vulnerability beneath Hercules' bravado in a way that feels fresh and timely. Rumasuglia's concept to deliver Hercules as a monologue carried by a single actress is a masterstroke that adds intensity and nuance to Dürrenmatt's satire. Through this approach, Hercules becomes more than a legendary hero; he morphs into a conflicted, multifaceted character battling both external and internal forces.

The decision to make Hercules a vessel for various voices reflects the cacophony of modern-day governance, in which individual agency is often overwhelmed by administrative red tape and competing interests. The choice to stage Hercules as a solo performance forces the audience to confront the reality of this hero's isolation within a dysfunctional system, while simultaneously amplifying the absurdity of the situation. The actress (her name), embodying Hercules, skillfully shifts between voices and perspectives, imbuing each moment with both strength and subtle vulnerability. Her physicality is commanding, filling the stage with an energy that alternates between confidence and exhaustion.

At times, her Hercules is brash and assured; at others, he appears beleaguered and vulnerable, giving the audience a glimpse into the struggle behind his attempts to remain heroic in the face of impossible odds. These moments of vulnerability bring a deeper resonance to the character, challenging traditional perceptions of Hercules as an unflinching, all-powerful figure and inviting empathy for his predicament. Rumasuglia's Hercules is particularly effective as a satire on modern bureaucracy. Dürrenmatt's original critique of overreaching democracy and administrative excess finds a perfect vehicle in this staging, as Hercules, the figure of classical heroism, is rendered powerless by endless commissions, permissions, and regulations.

Through humor and irony, the production holds a mirror to contemporary society's reliance on bureaucratic

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processes that often impede rather than facilitate progress. As Hercules attempts to tackle the impossible task of cleaning up a mountain of manure, he finds himself bogged down by procedural minutiae, his heroic strength rendered useless against the intangible but all-powerful forces of red tape. The audience cannot help but recognize the parallels to their own experiences within bureaucratic structures, from endless paperwork to procedural hoops. Rumasuglia draws out the humor in these situations, using exaggerated pauses, quick character shifts, and comedic timing to emphasize the absurdity of it all.

Hercules' frustration is palpable, and the more he struggles, the more the audience is drawn into his plight, laughing at the familiarity of his dilemma while also feeling the weight of his frustration. The staging and set design are integral to the production's impact, underscoring the themes of confinement and struggle. The set is simple yet evocative, dominated by an imposing mound that represents both the literal manure Hercules must clear and the figurative weight of bureaucracy. The pile serves as a visual metaphor for the impossible task before Hercules, a Sisyphean burden that looms over him throughout the performance.

Lighting plays a significant role, casting shadows that enhance the monologue's introspective moments and spotlighting Hercules during his moments of epiphany or despair. The lighting changes are used sparingly yet effectively, shifting to create a sense of movement even within the confined space of the monologue. This dynamic interplay between light and shadow highlights Hercules' internal conflict, revealing both his power and his helplessness in different moments.

Costume design also contributes to the visual storytelling, with Hercules adorned in a contemporary twist on classical attire. The costume is rugged, with elements that evoke strength and resilience, but it is also worn and tattered, symbolizing the toll of an unrelenting struggle. This duality in costuming reinforces Rumasuglia's interpretation of Hercules as a figure both heroic and deeply human.

Rumasuglia's direction is marked by a deep understanding of Dürrenmatt's themes and an ability to render them relevant for today's audience. By stripping down the narrative to a single actor and minimal staging, she places the focus squarely on the psychological and emotional journey of Hercules, emphasizing his internal battles over his external feats. This minimalist approach also enhances the universality of the story; without elaborate sets or a large cast, the production draws the audience's attention to the timeless themes of power, futility, and human resilience.

The actress's performance is a tour de force, showcasing a range of emotions that breathe life into Hercules as a multidimensional character. She transitions seamlessly between humor and pathos, capturing the absurdity of his predicament while also portraying the toll it takes on him. Her Hercules is as much a product of contemporary pressures as he is a mythological hero, and this relatability makes the character's plight all the more compelling.

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What makes Rumasuglia's Hercules resonate so deeply is its ability to present a familiar mythological figure through a lens that feels strikingly modern. In this adaptation, Hercules is not simply a hero bound by duty; he is a symbol of anyone who has faced an overwhelming task only to be hindered by forces beyond their control. The production speaks to the universal struggle of confronting the absurdities of modern life, from the trivialities of bureaucracy to the societal expectations that constrain individual action.

This staging of Hercules is both entertaining and thought-provoking, inviting the audience to reflect on the nature of heroism in a world where traditional power and strength are often rendered ineffective by intangible barriers. Rumasuglia's vision brings out the layers of Dürrenmatt's satire, using humor to critique the inefficiencies of democratic systems while reminding us of the resilience needed to navigate them.

Giulia Rumasuglia's Hercules is a brilliant and innovative adaptation of Dürrenmatt's work, bringing fresh energy and insight to a classic tale. Her contemporary take, delivered through a compelling monologue, reimagines Hercules not just as a mythological hero but as a mirror for modern struggles. Through humor, vulnerability, and a striking minimalist design, the production underscores the futility and resilience that characterize the human experience.

This Hercules is a powerful reminder of the relevance of classical myths in understanding contemporary issues. Rumasuglia's direction, combined with a stunning solo performance, makes this production an unforgettable experience that leaves a lasting impression on its audience. It's a must-see for anyone who appreciates theater that challenges and entertains in equal measure, offering a potent blend of satire, insight, and emotional depth.

Bericht online lesen: https://culture.en-a.eu/kunst_kultur_und_musik/review_of_hercules-90259/

Redaktion und Verantwortlichkeit:

V.i.S.d.P. und gem. § 6 MDStV: Dr. Nadejda Komendantova

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