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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Darkly Enthralling Triumph: Cachafaz with Raw Intensity

Jugendstiltheater, 16.03.2025 [ENA]

With Cachafaz, the Austrian premiere of Oscar Strasnoy's gripping music theater work, audiences were treated to an unforgettable evening of musical daring, visceral storytelling, and an unflinching exploration of the human condition. Based on the 'barbaric tragedy' by Copi, Cachafaz is no conventional opera; it is a raw, uncompromising, and yet strangely poetic descent into a world of crime, survival, and impending.

Under the expert musical direction of Walter Kobéra and the stark yet evocative staging by Benedikt Arnold, this production electrifies from start to finish. Benedikt Arnold's direction takes the bleak world of Cachafaz and magnifies its brutality, while also infusing it with moments of unsettling beauty. Monika Biegler's set design is both sparse and suffocating—a decrepit boarding house stands as the primary setting, its decaying walls and dimly flickering lights evoking a sense of entrapment. This space, both physical and metaphorical, underscores the opera's themes of marginalization and existential despair.

The production does not shy away from the grotesque and the violent, yet it avoids gratuitous excess. Each moment of brutality is carefully orchestrated, forcing the audience to confront the harsh realities of the characters' world. And yet, within this bleakness, the production finds poetry—moments of eerie stillness, where shadow and light play against the starkly minimal set, heightening the tension and drawing the viewer into the emotional abyss of the protagonists.

Norbert Chmel's lighting design plays a crucial role in shaping the opera's hypnotic atmosphere. A deliberate use of dim, sickly yellows and harsh neon blues creates an otherworldly sense of unease, mirroring the descent of Cachafaz and Raulito into their fateful doom. The final scenes, bathed in an almost surreal red glow, seem to dissolve reality altogether, leaving only the inevitability of their tragic fate.

Strasnoy's score is nothing short of masterful. The composer weaves together traditional tango rhythms with jarring contemporary elements, creating a musical landscape that feels both seductive and dangerous. The pulsing beats of tango serve as a ghostly reminder of Argentina's cultural fabric, yet they are twisted and manipulated, layered with discordant harmonies and unexpected rhythmic shifts, reflecting the dissonance of the opera's world.

Under Kobéra's direction, the amadeus ensemble-wien navigates this complex score with extraordinary precision. The strings throb with an almost unbearable tension, while the woodwinds inject a manic energy

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that underscores the grotesque absurdity of the libretto. The percussive elements—sometimes whispering, sometimes exploding into violent bursts—serve as a relentless heartbeat, propelling the drama forward with an urgency that is both exhilarating and unsettling.

The success of Cachafaz hinges on the intensity of its two leads, and both Andreas Jankowitsch (Cachafaz) and Felix Heuser (Raulito) deliver performances of extraordinary depth and commitment. Jankowitsch's Cachafaz is a force of nature—his powerful baritone shifting effortlessly from seductive smoothness to brutal intensity. His presence is commanding, exuding both a dangerous charisma and a deep-seated vulnerability that makes his inevitable downfall all the more tragic.

Cachafaz is not an opera for the faint-hearted, nor does it offer the comfort of resolution or redemption. Instead, it is a fiercely uncompromising work that forces its audience to grapple with uncomfortable truths about power, oppression, and the cost of survival. This production, with its unrelenting intensity, striking visual world, and exceptional musical execution, is an unmissable triumph.

Strasnoy's opera, paired with Copi's provocative text, reminds us of the raw, unfiltered power of theater to disturb, engage, and haunt long after the curtain falls. This Cachafaz is a production that sears itself into the memory, a masterpiece of modern music theater that leaves no one unscathed.

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