



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Gripping Theatrical Experience: Verbranntes Land

Schauspielhaus, 24.03.2025 [ENA]

Some performances do more than entertain—they challenge, provoke, and demand reflection. *Verbranntes Land* (Salty Irina), presented at Schauspielhaus, is one such production. This deeply unsettling yet electrifying play grips its audience from the first moment and does not let go. Through an intense and masterfully crafted narrative, it confronts the realities of right-wing extremism, systemic violence, and the courage required to resist.

Set in a city suffocating under the relentless heat of summer, *Verbranntes Land* does not merely tell a story; it immerses its audience in a world of fear, complicity, and resistance. The premise is immediately gripping: people are disappearing, yet the authorities show little concern. Anna and Eireni, the two protagonists, suspect the truth—that these are targeted acts of racist violence. Instead of accepting passive helplessness, they make the bold decision to infiltrate a nationalist summer camp to uncover the truth. The tension in the play builds relentlessly. Anna and Eireni must suppress their own identities and emotions, pretending to share the hateful ideologies of those around them.

Their mission is perilous not only because of the external threats but also due to the internal strain it places on them. Can they maintain their façade without losing themselves? And when faced with the brutal reality of the camp, what strategies will truly combat fascism—political alliances, careful planning, or raw courage? These questions give the play a philosophical depth that lingers long after the final scene. Rather than offering easy answers, *Verbranntes Land* forces its audience to confront the complexities of activism, morality, and personal sacrifice.

A play as emotionally charged as *Verbranntes Land* requires actors of extraordinary range and commitment, and this production delivers in every regard. The chemistry between the two leads is nothing short of mesmerizing. Their relationship, filled with stolen glances and unspoken fears, is portrayed with both tenderness and raw intensity. The way they balance their growing feelings for each other with the dangers of their undercover mission adds an additional layer of urgency to the drama.

Anna is played with fiery determination, her sense of justice clashing against her deep-seated anxieties. Her performance is both intellectual and visceral—she is calculating, aware of the risks, yet unable to ignore the pull of her emotions.

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Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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Eireni, on the other hand, embodies a quieter but equally compelling strength. Her moments of silence, of careful observation, are as powerful as her moments of action. The contrast between the two characters makes their partnership all the more captivating.

The ensemble cast is equally brilliant. The young nationalists at the camp are portrayed with an eerie authenticity, their camaraderie chilling in its casual normalcy. The script does not resort to caricatures—these characters feel unsettlingly real, making the play’s message all the more urgent. The moments when Anna and Eireni’s cover is nearly blown are heart-pounding, and the unpredictability of the supporting characters keeps the tension sky-high.

The production’s staging plays a crucial role in its impact. The oppressive summer heat is almost tangible, achieved through an evocative lighting design that bathes the stage in golden, feverish hues. Shadows stretch across the set, creating an ever-present sense of unease. The physical space of the camp is brought to life with meticulous detail—canvas tents, fire pits, nationalist banners flapping in the wind. Yet there is also an element of minimalism, allowing the audience to focus on the raw intensity of the performances.

Scenes transition seamlessly, with moments of hushed intimacy giving way to bursts of violence or paranoia.

The director masterfully controls the pacing, knowing exactly when to let silence linger and when to push the tension to its breaking point. The moments where Anna and Eireni are forced to participate in the camp’s rituals—whether in song, salute, or casual conversation—are some of the most unnerving in the entire production. The audience, like the protagonists, feels trapped in an environment that is both alien and terrifyingly familiar. Beyond its gripping narrative and outstanding performances, *Verbranntes Land* is a vital piece of political theater. It does not simply depict the dangers of right-wing extremism—it forces the audience to reckon with its insidious spread in modern society. The play’s questions—how do we fight fascism?

How do we maintain our values in the face of fear?—are as relevant now as ever. What makes this production so powerful is its refusal to provide neat resolutions. Resistance is messy. Fear is real. And the battle against hate is not won in a single moment of heroism but in sustained acts of courage. The play’s final moments leave the audience in a state of breathless uncertainty, a choice that feels deliberate and necessary. *Verbranntes Land* is a play that refuses to be ignored. It is thrilling, devastating, and, above all, essential. With its razor-sharp script, breathtaking performances, and a direction that amplifies both suspense and meaning.

It stands as a shining example of how theater can be both artistically brilliant and socially urgent. For those

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who believe in the power of storytelling to challenge the status quo, this production is unmissable. It is not just a play—it is a call to awareness, a reminder that complacency is not an option. Bravo to Schauspielhaus for bringing this necessary work to the stage. Theater at its best does not just reflect the world—it demands that we engage with it. And Verbranntes Land does exactly that, leaving an audience both shaken and inspired.

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Redaktion und Verantwortlichkeit:

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

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Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
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