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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Theatrical Triumph: Liliom at the Burgtheater

Burgtheater, 29.03.2025 [ENA]

With *Liliom*, Ferenc Molnár's timeless drama, the Burgtheater has once again demonstrated its unparalleled ability to bring classic works to electrifying new life. Under the visionary direction of Philipp Stölzl, this production transcends mere revival—it reinvents, reinvigorates, and redefines the very essence of Molnár's poetic tragedy. With a breathtaking visual aesthetic, a cast of extraordinary talent, and a deeply resonant interpretation, *Liliom* is not only a triumph of theatrical artistry but also a haunting meditation on human frailty, love, and redemption.

At its heart, *Liliom* is a deeply moving tale of a man who cannot escape his own worst instincts. *Liliom*, the charismatic yet deeply flawed fairground barker, is both magnetic and self-destructive—a character who captivates with his bravado while breaking hearts with his inability to truly love. The play's themes of social injustice, personal redemption, and the cyclical nature of violence resonate as powerfully today as they did in 1909, making this production feel strikingly contemporary.

Stölzl's adaptation, in collaboration with Thomas Jonigk and based on Terézia Mora's sharp and poetic translation, heightens the contrasts within the play—the raw brutality of *Liliom*'s world against the tenderness of those who love him.

The result is a production that is as devastating as it is mesmerizing, oscillating between moments of harsh realism and dreamlike fantasy with breathtaking fluidity. From the moment the curtain rises, it is clear that Stölzl has crafted a world of astonishing visual power. The set, designed in collaboration with Franziska Harm, is an immersive masterpiece—a darkly evocative recreation of reality that teeters between the magical and the menacing.

The lighting by Michael Hofer plays a crucial role in shaping the mood, casting long, haunting shadows that reflect the moral ambiguity of the characters. Kathi Maurer's costumes, meanwhile, are impeccably detailed, grounding the production in a historical reality while subtly hinting at its allegorical dimensions.

Equally impressive is Ingo Ludwig Frenzel's evocative score, which underscores the action with a haunting blend of melancholic waltzes and pulsating modern rhythms. The music weaves seamlessly into the fabric of the play, heightening its emotional impact and reinforcing its themes of longing and loss.

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Every performance in this Liliom is infused with extraordinary depth and nuance. The titular role demands an actor who can balance brute force with vulnerability, and the lead performer delivers a tour de force performance. His Liliom is a man of contradictions—swaggering yet insecure, cruel yet achingly desperate for connection. He embodies the character’s tragic fate with such intensity that even in his darkest moments, he remains heartbreakingly human.

Opposite him, Julie is portrayed with luminous grace, her quiet strength providing the perfect counterbalance to Liliom’s volatility. Their chemistry is electric, making their doomed love story all the more devastating. The supporting cast is equally stellar, with each actor contributing to the richly textured world of the play. From the cunning yet pitiable criminal elements to the gentle, hopeful figures who believe in second chances, every character feels fully realized and essential to the narrative’s emotional power. One of the greatest triumphs of Stölzl’s Liliom is its ability to transcend its historical setting and speak directly to contemporary audiences.

In an era of economic instability, social upheaval, and struggles for dignity, the play’s exploration of class division, personal agency, and the consequences of violence feels eerily relevant.

Stölzl does not sentimentalize Liliom’s story, nor does he excuse his failings. Instead, he presents him as a man trapped by his circumstances and his own demons, making his ultimate fate all the more tragic. The production’s final moments are haunting in their ambiguity—does redemption come too late, or does it never truly arrive at all? The audience is left to grapple with these questions, ensuring that the play lingers in the mind long after the curtain falls.

With its masterful direction, stunning visual design, and powerhouse performances, Liliom at the Burgtheater is an unmissable triumph. Philipp Stölzl’s bold and poetic vision breathes fresh urgency into Molnár’s classic, making it a production that is as emotionally shattering as it is artistically exhilarating. For lovers of great theater, this is a rare and unforgettable experience—a play that not only tells a story but also compels us to reflect on our own capacity for love, forgiveness, and change.

This Liliom is not just a revival; it is a revelation. Bravo!

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