



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Hand Made Tyrant

Schubert Theater , 20.05.2025 [ENA]

On May 9, 2025, the Schubert Theater in Vienna premiered *Hand Made Tyrant*, a bold and incisive puppet theater production that delves into the mechanics of authoritarian power. Directed by Sarah Wissner and inspired by Erich Kästner's *Die Schule der Diktatoren*, the performance offers a satirical yet profound exploration of how dictators are constructed—both literally and metaphorically.

Hand Made Tyrant presents a world where puppets are not just characters but symbols of the interchangeable nature of authoritarian figures. The narrative unfolds with a puppet dictator proudly taking the stage, only to have an arm abruptly detached—a metaphor for the fragility and replaceability of those in power. As new puppets march in, they too succumb to the system's machinery, highlighting the cyclical and impersonal nature of tyrannical regimes. This portrayal prompts the audience to question the true identity of those pulling the strings in such a "marionette state."

Sarah Wissner's direction is both imaginative and thought-provoking. Her background in visual and performing arts is evident in the production's strong imagery and experimental approach. The puppets, co-designed by Wissner, Lisa Zingerle, and Soffi Povo, are crafted to be neutral dummies filled with the "stuff dictators are made of," emphasizing the constructed nature of authoritarian personas. The set design and lighting, managed by Simon Meusburger and Marvin Schriebl, further enhance the atmosphere, creating a stage that feels both theatrical and eerily reflective of real-world power structures.

Puppeteers Soffi Povo and André Reitter deliver compelling performances, skillfully manipulating the puppets to convey a range of emotions and scenarios. Their interactions bring depth to the narrative, making the puppets' journeys from creation to downfall both engaging and unsettling. The performers' ability to infuse the puppets with life and personality underscores the play's central theme: the ease with which society can breathe life into authoritarian figures. *Hand Made Tyrant* resonates deeply in today's socio-political climate, where discussions about populism and authoritarianism are increasingly prevalent.

By drawing parallels between puppet theater and real-world power dynamics, the production encourages audiences to reflect on their roles in enabling or challenging such systems. The play's self-referential humor and critical lens make it not just a performance but a conversation starter about the nature of power and control. The Schubert Theater's *Hand Made Tyrant* is a masterful blend of satire, artistry, and critical commentary. Through its innovative use of puppetry and compelling narrative, it offers a unique

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perspective on the construction and perpetuation of authoritarian power. This production is a testament to the power of theater to challenge, enlighten, and inspire.

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