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Event of Wit, Energy and Dark Charm

Scala Wien, 11.12.2025 [ENA]

The production “Adel verpflichtet” staged at Theater Scala is a masterful revival of a black comedy with razor-sharp wit, frenetic energy and a deliciously dark spirit. As interpreted by Theater zum Fürchten, this version captures fully the original’s audacious balance between humour and horror, absurdity and social satire. The piece, directed by Robert Notsch, brings to life the twisted tale of ambition.

It also brings aristocracy, and murderous ambition with boldness, flair and remarkable theatricality. From the first moment, the performance grips the audience with its brash energy and the promise of a wild ride: this is not a polite drawing-room comedy, but a theatrical explosion where dark deeds, gallows humour and human folly collide in rapid succession. The 25 roles — handled by a small ensemble — are performed with such dexterity, versatility, and comic — yet sinister — timing that one hardly notices the complexity behind the staging.

The narrative — loosely based on the 1949 film and earlier literary source — centers on a would-be nobleman, desperate to secure a title, who resorts to murder to climb his family’s hierarchy. The absurdity of this ambition, combined with the macabre method and the cold humour with which it is treated, creates a tone that is at once satirical, grotesque, and darkly comic. On stage, the compact cast fluidly assumes multiple identities; quick changes, shifting alliances, and a multitude of character traits make for a theatrical kaleidoscope. This “tour de force” — six actors playing around 25 roles — offers a showcase of pure theatrical skill.

The energy never flags, the pace remains tight, and the audience is swept along in a rollercoaster of laughs, shocks, and moral absurdities. The interplay between the condemned nobleman and his executioner — who is both professional and grudgingly fascinated by his aristocratic “client” — frames a bizarre but mesmerizing philosophical discourse: not only on guilt and justice, but on the absurdities of class, lineage and social ambition. The play doesn’t strive for realism but embraces the caricatural, the heightened, the exaggerated — and does so brilliantly, inviting the audience to laugh, shudder, and reflect all at once.

Under Robert Notsch’s direction, the production achieves a seamless balance between chaos and clarity. Despite the numerous role-changes and complex narrative, the audience never loses the thread: each scene builds on the previous, tension accumulates, and the final acts carry real dramatic weight. The transitions — both in character and mood — are handled with impressive precision, ensuring that even the darkest

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moments retain a sharp comedic edge.

The unique intimacy of Theater Scala's space — small, visceral, and with the kind of immediacy that only a compact theatre can deliver — enhances the experience. The confined space, minimal distance between audience and actors, and the sense of shared tension make the dark comedy more immediate, more potent, more alive. Given that Theater Scala historically prides itself on being a space for challenging, "black" theatre, this production feels perfectly at home there.

Costume and character transformations — despite the small cast — are handled with resourcefulness and clarity. Each actor makes the most of the theatrical tools at hand: voice, posture, timing, gesture. This multiplies the effect: the absurdist murders, the shifting identities, the campy aristocratic airs all become convincingly ridiculous — and chilling — at once. "Adel verpflichtet" is more than a macabre comedy; it is a biting commentary on class — on the obsession with titles, heritage, and the ruthless ambition that social climbing can engender. In a time when social inequality, inherited privilege, and the dark side of ambition remain relevant, this play's satire cuts deep.

Moreover, the creative decision to revive this work in Vienna, in 2025, speaks to the vitality of independent theatre — its willingness to take risks, to provoke, to challenge taboos. Theater zum Fürchten continues to show that theatre need not always be polite, comfortable, or conventionally "beautiful." Instead, it can be disruptive, unsettling, provocative — and deeply entertaining.
For audiences looking for something outside traditional theatre fare — for darkness, wit, urgency, and raw energy — "Adel verpflichtet" offers exactly that. And for lovers of bold ensemble work, theatrical virtuosity, and dramaturgical nerve, it stands out as one of the more compelling offerings this season.

In sum, "Adel verpflichtet" at Theater Scala is a great success — a black comedy delivered with style, precision, and fearless theatricality. It is a performance that surprises, unsettles and delights. Through skillful direction, an agile cast, and an atmosphere tailored for raw intensity, the production brings the grotesque, absurd, and humorous elements of the story into sharp, vivid focus.
As a theatre expert, I can say confidently: this is a must-see. It reminds us of the power of small theatre to deliver big impact. It renews faith in ensemble acting, in daring dramaturgy, in comedy that is more than mere entertainment — but a mirror to our social obsessions and human weaknesses.

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