

MOMIX Festival 2010: Un Autre Regard / Another Look

Momix is a great festival, well-run, valued by the local authority which hosts it and led by a committed artistic director. It is attended annually by some 150 professional promoters and bookers. Usual dates: Early February. More details at www.momix.org

The shows featured in this special programme of work in 2010, **Un Autre Regard**, were considered innovative and of high quality but had been difficult to sell to bookers.

Each show was introduced by an outside supporter in an interview session chaired by the Belgian publisher Emile Lansman. All were of high quality with unquestionably skilled performers. Ilka Schoenbein, in the Grimm tale of a queen who gives birth to a donkey, has the most extraordinary movement and manipulation skills. Her amazing talent was equally matched by the brilliance of the musician /actress with whom she shared the stage. (***La Vieille et la Bête***)

In ***Et Blanche Aussi***, a restrained narrator perfectly accompanies a scintillating and disturbing movement performance on the theme of a young girl's transition from the purity and discipline of childhood, through the secret room of emerging sexual and bodily awareness to teenage rebellion and a re-imposition of outward control.

Mon Géant. Another pair of younger actress/directors created a much simpler story, of adaptation to permanent disability after an accident. The story is of a seven year old in hospital who imagines that the nurse – herself forced to change her ambition from being an opera singer to being a nurse – changes in the night to being an angel. The third character is a giant puppet which the child dismembers in her rage at being disabled. The changes in levels of reality and the bringing to life of the puppet were movingly achieved.

La Vendeuse d'Allumettes. The Little Matchgirl story was the pretext for an improvisational style of exploration of themes of exclusion, aspiration and poverty. There were echoes of terrorism, drug abuse and other contemporary manifestations of revolt against oppression and exclusion. For some the shaping of the material and the style of playing were less well achieved than in the other shows, with considerable repetition of motifs.

La Mano was rough and brilliant puppet theatre, aggressive and vulgar comedy around the pernicious effects of flies in carrying disease from excrement to human food. A 'science lesson' precedes the main show. In this the facts of faecal to oral contamination are lovingly detailed with realistic props. The main story is of a butcher who chops off his hand while distracted by a fly. His new – larger and uglier – hand tries to take over his life so that he begs to have no hand at all.

All the shows face the audience with direct challenges to our ideas, prejudices and tastes, conventions and taboos. It is not surprising that many programmers might think twice about booking them. That artists, particularly the best ones working in theatre for children and young people, are very good at helping us through their clarity of vision, daring and skill to confront our secret fears, is confirmed by the artistic quality and impact of these shows.

France is clearly capable of producing very high quality TYA. The authorities support it. ONDA, the agency charged with supporting touring of quality work in France, may organise an overseas visitor programme in 2011. (visit www.onda-international.com) PH