

ZÜRCHER THEATER SPEKTAKEL

Veranstalterin Stadt Zürich Kultur

Stadthausquai 17, CH-8001 Zürich
Tel +41 (0)44 412 35 51
presse@theaterspektakel.ch
www.theaterspektakel.ch

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Zürcher Theater Spektakel 2017: Final Report A festival of extremes

The 38th Zürcher Theater Spektakel is history. It was a festival of extremes in every respect: The programme – the last under Sandro Lunin's artistic direction – had never been more extensive. It featured 50 productions, over 400 artists, contributors and guests from over 35 countries performing in 14 venues. The weather, ranging from unusually hot days to storm and torrential rain and temperatures between 10° to 32°C, caused a few challenges to the festival operation and even provided an unexpected premiere: Due to an approaching storm with wind speeds over 80 km/h, the Landiwiese had to be evacuated and four performances cancelled. Fortunately, there were no building or personal damages, not least because the spectators swiftly followed the instructions of the staff. The newly designed entrance area withstood not only wind and weather but also the rush of visitors and stood the test of an unforeseen outdoor venue.

The display of artistic positions and formats was equally extensive: It ranged from political highly explosive theatre, radical movement languages and expressive Short Pieces by young performance artists to playful circus dream worlds. With an ever surprising openness and curiosity, the audience was willing to engage in even unwieldy productions in foreign languages. Again, the figures speak for themselves: 26 000 tickets were sold, the average capacity was again 86% and around three quarters of the performances exceeded the budgeted margin. The attractive programme on the Zentral Stage, the street art on the paved spots, the varied gastronomical offer, the extreme yet mostly fair weather conditions and the specific festival atmosphere attracted around 110 000 visitors to the Landiwiese this year.

The programme

The festival opened with «Tristesse» by Anne-Cécile Vandalem, a piece about the rise of a right-wing nationalist politician capturing suspense, political analysis and individual misery in cold-blooded images of unsuspected clarity. Not less impressive was «Imitation of Life» by Kornél Mundruczó. The rotating stage has become an unforgettable allegory of a world in which all points of reference have dissolved. Both performances received standing ovations.

Two productions referred to centuries-old national epics which were reinterpreted in the light of present day. In «The Song of Roland: The Arabic Version» the Egyptian artist Wael Shawky had 20 Fidjeri singers interpret the medieval account on the crusades: The unfamiliar singing captivated the audience and cast a disconcerting light on this Christian holy war. The Malian singer Rokia Traoré followed the tradition of the griots and recounted the epic around Sundiata Keïta, the legendary founder of the Mali Empire and author of one of the first Declaration of Human Rights. Despite the cold weather, the audience quickly warmed to the power and the musicality of her oral narration. The Indonesian choreographer Eko Supriyanto dared a reinterpretation of traditional material for «Balabala»: He staged traditional, mostly male-dominated war and folk dances with a group of young female dancers. The Brazilian

ZÜRCHER THEATER SPEKTAKEL

choreographer Lia Rodrigues had the audience closely experience the power and sensuality of archaic rituals in «For the sky not to fall». Finally, Marlene Monteiro Freitas spectacularly revived the ecstasy of the antique Bacchae in her latest choreographic creation.

A whole series of productions drew on memories, either individual or collective, mirrored in present time – many of them by artists who have characterized past festival programmes: The Chinese choreographer Wen Hui tackled «The Red Detachment of Women», a propaganda ballet from the period of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, in which she would have loved to participate as a child. Mariano Pensotti's mix of puppetry, theatre and film investigated today's relevance of the avant-garde postulations made by Russian revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai in 1919. The Lebanese director Rabih Mroué had the singer Rima Khcheich enter into an enlightening dialogue with her former alter ego, the child star Rima Kamel. Boyzie Cekwana took stock in the light of worldwide increasing reactionary tendencies and, in a touching mix of melancholy and rage, remembered the times when he still had hope. The Iranian director Azade Shahriri equally looked back on the past, but from the future: In «Voicelessness» she investigated the truth of the mysterious disappearance of her grandfather from a distance of 55 years.

Three choreographers presented works bearing very different artistic handwritings: Radhouane El Meddeb's controlled and reserved approach to his homeland Tunisia, the passionate confrontation with the principle of hope by Salia Sanou from Burkina Faso and finally the expressive yet sensitive analysis of the Syrian choreographer Mithkal Alzghair of how expulsion and exile affect the body and the language of movement.

The piece «Jeden gest / Eine Geste» by Polish Nowy Teatr provided a glimpse into a very different vocabulary: The company took the audience on a fascinating, witty and clever journey through the rich and spatial world of sign language. Director Wojtek Ziemliski and his company were awarded the ZKB Patronage Prize 2017 for their accomplished artistic realization.

The format Short Pieces featuring eight very different creations by up-and-coming performers from India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, China, Lebanon, Mali, South Africa and Mexico once again provided an interesting contrast to the main programme. Six of the solos and duets were nominated for the ZKB Acknowledgement Prize of 5000 Swiss Francs. The prize went to the young Malian dancer Fatoumata Bagayoko. Her extraordinarily courageous work on the taboo subject of genital mutilation impressed not only the members of the jury but also the audience, who, for the second time in succession, awarded its favourite from the nominated productions with the ZKB Audience Prize. In a close run, Lukas Avendaño from Mexico finally won the prize for his Short Piece «No soy persona. Soy mariposa», a dazzling, very personal performance on his life as a creature eluding any sexual classification.

The Philippine performer Eisa Jocson and the Indian actress Mallika Taneja had previously debuted at the festival with their Short Pieces. This year they both presented their new works in the main programme: Mallika Taneja showed her duet «Sorry for the Interruption»; Eisa Jocson her first group choreography, in which she sharply and radically analyzed the Disney «feel good» industry.

New forms of participatory art turned the spectator into an active participant: In the installation «Worktable» by Kate McIntosh the visitor was given the opportunity to destroy and create at the same time; the Japanese theatremaker Kuro Tanino had the audience waltz with performers of small stature. The New York company 600 HIGHWAYMEN, winner of the 2015 ZKB Patronage

ZÜRCHER THEATER SPEKTAKEL

Prize, again displayed its unique talent for working creatively with amateurs: Together with volunteers from the audience they reenacted the plot of a story.

The wide range of Swiss stage works was marked by two premieres: Tim Zulauf's «Trollhaus», a loop-like evolving multi-media theatrical event on the intertwining of the digital and the real world. Eugénie Rebetez presented «Bienvenue», a solo, which again gave proof of her versatile talent as movement artist, comedian, singer and dancer.

The extended family programme with two circus productions (Bêtes de foire and Cirque Inextremiste), two children's theater shows (Cie. Barbarie and Orłowska, Perlstein, Kläy) as well as the artistic-musical performance by Post uit Hessdalen was very well received. Together with the concerts they were amongst the best-selling productions of the festival.

Facts & Figures 2017

Programme: The programme included 50 productions of companies and solo artists from 39 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and Latin America.

Performances: 141 performances were subject to charge. Four performances had to be cancelled due to bad weather, one due to a cancelled flight.

Ticket sales: A total of 26 000 spectators attended one of the shows subject to charge, the same amount as last year.

Percentage of seats sold: With 85% of seats sold, the budgeted margin of 75%, was again clearly exceeded. 76% of the performances exceeded the budgeted margin.

Advance booking: Around two thirds of the tickets were sold before the start of the festival with around 60% of the tickets purchased online.

Box office: The weather-dependent sale of spare tickets was a little less used: Around 4500 tickets were purchased at Landiwiese box office and at the Rote Fabrik. The newly introduced Last Minute Offer (30 minutes before the start of the performance, two tickets can be purchased for the prize of one) was well received and will be continued next year.

Total number of festival visitors (including performances): around 130 000

We are inclusive!

In 2017, Pro Infirmis's «Kultur inklusiv» department denominated the Zürcher Theater Spektakel an inclusive cultural event. Apart from infrastructural and greater communicative measures, the festival again undertook a series of endeavours in order to make the programme even more accessible to visitors with disabilities: Two performances (Tim Zulauf, Cie. Barbarie) were offered with audio-description, eleven productions had German, eight English surtitles; twelve productions were amplified by induction loops. Additionally, «Jeden gest / Eine Geste» by the Nowy Teatr introduced the audience to the world of sign language and was awarded the ZKB Patronage Prize 2017.

The radio workshop for children with or without impairment was very popular and could take place twice. Thanks to the generous support of the Stiftung Denk an mich and in collaboration with Procap and the radio school Klipp+Klang, the various offers could be implemented. Furthermore, the Theater Spektakel together with the department «Kultur inklusiv» of Pro Infirmis invited promoters of inclusive cultural events and those interested in becoming so to a network meeting in order to view the various measures on site and to exchange experiences. The response was huge: Over 70 cultural promoters from German-speaking Switzerland participated in the event. A further step towards a future in which inclusion in the cultural sector is a matter of course.

ZÜRCHER THEATER SPEKTAKEL

Gastronomic services

The extreme weather conditions reflect in the turnover of the restaurants and bars. The days with midsummer temperatures could not compensate the losses incurred due to storms and the sudden cold spell on the last four days of the festival. Accordingly, the turnover is lower and the budgeted contribution of the gastronomic services is likely not to be reached this year.

Partners

The Theater Spektakel is an event organized by City of Zurich Kultur and is generously funded by its main Partners Zürcher Kantonalbank, Swiss Re and the Canton of Zurich as well as by the media partner Tages-Anzeiger. The directorate of the SDC, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Migros-Kulturprozent and the Patrons of the Festival engaged themselves as further partners with a substantial contribution.

The redesign of the entrance area was made possible by a substantial contribution of the Lotteriefonds of the Canton of Zurich and was sponsored by the Patrons of the Festival.

In addition, the following institutions funded the festival (budget 4,5 million Swiss Francs): Ernst Göhner Stiftung, ZH-REFORMATION.CH, Ars Rhenia, AVINA STIFTUNG, Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, Ambassade de France en Suisse and Italian Cultural Institute Zurich. Contributors of substantial in-kind sponsoring were KIBAG AG, Zürichsee Schifffahrtsgesellschaft and Verkehrsbetriebe Zürich. The festival direction would like to thank them and all other companies, which supported the festival with material and logistic contributions.

Zürcher Theater Spektakel 2018

The 39th Zürcher Theater Spektakel will take place from Thursday 16 August to Sunday 2 September 2018. The advance booking will start on Wednesday 11 July 2018.

This was the last festival of our co-director Sandro Lunin. Following ten successful years, he hands the artistic direction over to Matthias von Hartz, who will direct the festival together with Delphine Lyner and Veit Kälin as of 1 November 2017.