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Review – Theatre

Odin Teatret

The Great Cities under the Moon

Sublime revival of Brecht's theatrical legacy



Kester Freriks

27 september 2018

Seen on September 26, 2018, ExploreZ, De Meervaart, Amsterdam

The actors speak many languages: German, English, Spanish, Danish. They play Kurt Weill-like music with guitar, accordion and vocals.

The setup

in a semicircle on the stage has something of Brecht's scenography: played frontally, with an exciting alternation of text, music and singing. The performance is called / The Great Cities under the Moon /, brought to De Meervaart by the company Odin Teatret from Denmark directed by Eugenio Barba.

The moon travels across the sky and looks down on the cities of the earth.

The cities are burning with resistance, revolution, war. No matter how much people long for peace, violence prevails, everywhere. A storyteller tells about the struggle she waged for peace. Suddenly, with loud noise, a soldier in combat dress comes rushing in, with the Canadian flag sewn on his sleeve. He recalls painful scenes from the peace missions he was involved in. In Iran he saw a woman being beaten up by men, he wanted to help and bring her to safety, but his general forbade him to do that: they were on a peacekeeping mission and that was none of his business. He gives a list of similar situations, each one more intense than the other. Almost without notice but beautifully, his story turns into a gripping complaint, accompanied by guitar. He wonders if his mother worries about him. At the end, the players place flowers around the picture of a fallen 'unknown' soldier and spread ashes.

And in the meantime the moon shines over the big cities.. Brecht is not very far from this excellent and boldly directed performance. An actress gives a beautiful rendition of Catherine, the deaf mute daughter from Bertolt Brecht's / *Moeder Courage* / (1939). She speaks in sign language and wants to save the city of Halle from a devastating war invasion. She climbs up the church tower, she shouts and wails, rattling keys. In her hand she holds a paper map of Europe, with Halle right in the middle. Then the life-threatening Mackie Messer comes up from Brecht's / *Drieplantsopera* /, who sings about 'der Haifisch, der hat Zähne', and the actor kills her with a knife hidden in a walking stick.

With / *The Great Cities under the Moon* / the Odin Teatret presents surprisingly current and modern theatre; once again, we see the strength of Brecht's legacy and how sharp theatre direction can be when politics and a powerful narration form come together. Brecht is always subject to waves of more and less appreciation. Fortunately there is this Danish company that brings his significance once again to the attention, with a sublime presentation of his playing style: the actors play their role, then while they sing they stand outside their role. And so the meaning appears with even more force.

Foto: Rina Skeel