

# Toute La Culture.

JULY 26, 2019 | BY MATHIEU DOCHTERMANN



**An "Orphan Circus" that we would all like to adopt: virtuosity, a little crazy tenderness and rod puppets**

Grotesque and poetic, made of scraps and kneaded with tenderness. It is difficult to imagine how these different qualifiers can be applied to the same show. However, this is the case with the show *Le cirque orphelin* by the Quebec company *Les Sages Fous*, seen at FIAMS 2019. In a very elaborate scenario made of rusty scrap metal, two puppeteers

create touching characters using the rod technique. A feat of dexterity in handling, a jewel of visual and scenic writing of great sensitivity. Extraordinary.

The Orphan Circus is a show that has already been performed many times since it was created in 2010. The show has already crossed the Atlantic several times to meet the French public, but we must not miss any opportunity to discover it.

## **A show that is successful in every way**

What impresses, from the outset, is the scenography, which depicts a scrap yard made all of metal and scrap metal, now or in a post-apocalyptic future, but in any case clearly at the margin of the society that produced it and then rejected it on its periphery.

Although profound humanity that emerges from the whole, a writing that allows room for the delicate and the tender amidst the mutants and the forgotten, is undoubtedly even more striking for the spectator.

It may be impeccably fluid handling of the puppets, or the acting full of delight and surprise, or the mastery and precision, which all must be praised with the deepest bow of reverence.

In short, we don't know which end to summarize the proposal, but the conclusion is obvious, so we'll start with that: this orphan circus is a little gem. Far from the ambition of a form of a large set, this all-terrain and very accomplished work is of the kind that sows poetry in its path, and ensures the happiness of the spectators.

## **Welcome to the Circus of depths !**

The pretext, in this show, is one of an improbable circus, a circus of the marginal and the abnormal, a circus that may be cruel but ultimately poetic, that makes a spectacle of waste, that makes a spectacle in the middle of waste.

We see acrobatic or balancing acts full of audacity.

We see, also and above all, in the manner of freaks shows, strange creatures, who fascinate us with their familiar monstrosity.

We witness strange transformations.

We witness the class struggle, between the frightening owner, his henchmen, and the artists locked in cages.

It shows that cruelty and difference cannot prevent love from being born. That the strong do not always win and that the weak can be victorious .

We discover beauty in the middle of rusty cans, laughter in the middle of poverty. For not everything that is gold shines, not all those who wander are lost...

## **And the acting, above all**

If we try to analyse the proposal, it is probably the acting that best ensures the effectiveness of the whole piece.

The two performers immediately position themselves as actors: long before the first puppet enters the scene, they explore the set, interact, stumble on the audience, bringing a physical clown dimension that directly establishes a very playful relationship with the audience.

Because it is a nice feat for the performers, almost silent - they must pronounce ten sentences in one hour - to mobilize a rich range of emotions, and to establish a complicit dialogue with the audience, without using the text. As is often the case with clowning, the first row of spectators will be satellite in the game that is unfolding, with kindness but also with a lot of malice.

A beautiful performance, therefore, of clownish physical theatre. There is accuracy but also a lot of authenticity in the way we serve both the show and the meeting with the audience.

## **Manipulation, brilliantly mastered**

There is a clear pleasure in playing that emanates from both performers, and easily draws the audience in. Pleasure that doubles in manipulation: in complicity with the spectators, the two puppeteers enjoy their creatures as well as the action they have on them, in a rather pleasant dynamic of setting them in the abyss.

The rod puppet technique is not the most popular, but it seems that the two performers, Jacob Brindamour and Olivia Faye Lathuillère, fell in love with the possibilities they discovered there.

As a result, they have pushed their research to degrees of both inventiveness and fluidity that have few equivalents. Obviously, the fact that they have performed the show hundreds of times probably helps enormously: the two puppeteers have such great freedom in their manipulation that they give the impression that they can do everything, everything they want. They achieve such finesse of movement that they are able to indicate complex emotional states with minute movements and positions, yet of brilliant clarity.

The dissociation of puppeteers from their creatures is very well done. And the opposition games, when the puppet characters resist the puppet manipulators, are strikingly realistic.

Perhaps some of the movements repeat themselves a little over the length of the show: after all, the field of discoveries, even if wide, is still limited, and the range ends up running out a little bit. The show, from this point of view, stops just at the right moment, before it gets tired.

## **A distinctive artistic signature**

The puppets are inspired by the people of the landfills, or the creatures of the margin, half-human and half-monstrous: worms rub shoulders with mermaids, the birdman is consumed by an impossible love. Even "the Boss", the owner of the circus, played by a masked humanette, nevertheless takes on a grotesque appearance.

As has been said, these marginal people are embodied by a gallery of puppets, which are duplicated in several sizes for rather well found scale effects. They are exclusively rod puppets, whose potential for movement is fully exploited.

Above all, their workmanship is very beautiful, whether they are small or large scale. The faces are extremely expressive, the mechanisms and grips well thought out to allow freedom for the acting. Both disturbing and fragile, they manage to provoke, at their very sight, an ambivalent mixture of empathy and a feeling of strangeness, which is exactly what the show is about.

The decor of rusty metals and tired cans is impressively realistic and coherent.

## **Subtlety, in addition to emotion**

From the show description, one might be tempted to deduce that this is a univocal or even moralizing performance, which, under the guise of good feelings, gets lost in the meanders of explanation.

This is not the case.

Above all, the writing respects the viewer's freedom of interpretation and imagination. The characters have their share of ambivalence, both visual and narrative. There is no black and white here, there is only grey.

On this neutrality, which is like a fertile ground for emotion, feelings are free to unfold. There is laughter, but also tears. There is revolt, and there is hope. There is compassion, and there is disgust.

A good show is like life, which is a kaleidoscope of nuances, a chaos of encounters and events, a maelstrom of sensations and feelings sometimes antagonistic, with which everyone must compose their own melody.

This is what allows this orphaned Circus to reach deep into the audience.

Les Sages Fous deserve several times the standing ovation that salutes their work at each performance. If you have never joined the crowd of applauding people, it is time to come and sit in front of the caravan of this Circus!

#### DISTRIBUTION

South Miller MASK, MASK AND Puppets

INTERPRETATION Jacob Brindamour, Olivia Faye Lathuillère

Puppet Countryman Jacob Brindamour

MECHANISMS AND PATENTAGES Sylvain Longpré

MUSIC Christian Laflamme

LIGHTS Patrice Daigneault

Visuals: © Les Sages Fous

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