

Grausig

Unidram – June 2004

Gruesome, kitschy, magical

Enthusiastic response to Australian puppet theatre / About 1400 visit Unidram

By Ulrich Criiwell

Numbers, especially audience numbers, are relative. So far, 1200 or perhaps 1400 people have visited the Unidram performances. This may perhaps not sound like much, but considering the rather small theatre spaces of the T-Werk in the Schiffbauergasse, over five days this represents a considerable audience number.

Thursday night every seat is occupied; the mood is electric: Today for the first time in Germany the 'Black Hole Theatre' from distant Australia performs with its puppets. Using cushions, new rows of seating are created by the indefatigable Unidram team, and the hall fills to what may well be record numbers. 'Caravan – bloody hole fiction', the piece by the Australians is called, and the synopsis has obviously worked like a magnet, since the description announces murder and manslaughter and of course sex. 'Pulp fiction' are the thrilling stories found in cheap novels, which in this country are read only secretly. The Australians make use of the conventional narrative structures of these wonderful stories and create, through the stage set, a timeless, brutal tale from the world of the circus reminiscent of various films. Unlike in the cinema, however, the most brutal scenes here are, thanks to the puppets, given a cheerful rendition¹.

Yet it would be unkind to the audience to suggest that the reason for the large crowds lay merely in the sensationalist nature of the programme description. As Jens-Uwe Sprengel, one of the festival directors, explains in regards to the preferences of the Off-Theater festival visitors, puppet theatre has consistently been popular in recent years. Because of the positive response, he says, puppet theatre has become an increasingly established part of the festival programme. Sprengel mentions three productions this year where seemingly childish puppets have played the main parts.

¹ Übersetzung – (lit) translation

It's not only the people of Potsdam, however, who have apparently acquired a taste for this. The Australians have already performed with their puppets in Ireland, Great Britain and Hong-Kong, and now, on Thursday, finally also in Germany. 'Caravan' was a highlight this year not merely because of the unofficial record audience numbers; it was quite simply entertaining, but also gruesome and sometimes kitschy and then in turn magical.

Translated by Anja Tanhane