

Susie Wang's «Burnt Toast» is reminiscent of a frantic nightmare:

The Hotel of Evil

REVIEW: Julie Rongved Amundsen 15.02.20 (Klassekampen) English translation: Eivind Sæthre

Evokes feelings of nausea, fear, laughter, and fascination.

«Burnt Toast» By Susie Wang. Black Box Teater

Concept: Susie Wang, Text and direction: Trine Falch, Scenography: Bo Krister Wallström
With: Julie Solberg, Kim Atle Hansen, Mona Solhaug



PHOTO: ALETTE SCHEI RØRVIK

In «Burnt Toast» we enter a hotel reception in the US South. The scenography is realistic to the effect that it really looks like a hotel reception. The floors and walls are covered in red velvet, and we find a reception desk and two elevator doors. One elevator goes up, and one goes down, just like the sun, remarks Betty the receptionist (Julie Solberg).

In this reception, a surrealistic and dreamy horror story unfolds where blood squirts and people are drunk with straws. Furthermore, a series of grotesque caesarian sections are performed where the babies become increasingly small – as Russian matryoshka dolls, except in an almost naturalistic form.

Everything is insisting and exaggerated and a realistic universe is combined in an impressive way with strong theatrical devices.

TERRIFYING: Susie Wang's «Burnt Toast» takes place in a claustrophobic hotel reception in the US South.

At one point in the play, I feel overwhelmed: I get sick and I have to look away, and just focus on something else for a while. I can not recall that theatre has had this effect on me before, and in the moment I am unable to decide whether it is a good or bad thing.

At the same time, we can not disregard the fact that elegant theatre craftsmanship is required to balance apparent fiction with something this frightening. The entire spectacle takes place in the closed reception where the elevators are the only way out, and it seems that everything is placed underground. The scenography gives us a claustrophobic feeling, and the way the plot progresses seems inevitable, as in a nightmare.

As things are not really connected in a logical sense, it makes me think of a dream play, but the movie references are also obvious. We notice straight away when the Norwegian cast speaks English with a false American accent. It is fun, and it situates the play in a movie universe while the slightly exaggerated in terms of language, gestures, scenography, and costumes creates a theatrical effect.

Thus we are drawn into the contract of fiction and we accept the playing rules of this universe. Even though I here highlight the scary aspects of the play, it is unquestionably a lot of fun.

«The Physical Elements Create an Inescapable Presence»

The play is interestingly repulsive for several reasons. The first is purely psychological. «Burnt Toast» digs deep into our angst. It could have been seen as speculative. I come into touch with things I am really scared of, and it gets elevated to a terrifying level, which makes me constantly wonder if it means something more.

The second reason is that its physical elements create an inescapable presence. Yes, I do know that we are in the theatre, but I am seated just a few metres from the action.

I am deeply fascinated by this performance. It utilizes the theatre's possibilities to explore directions that have rarely been seen.

Not until I was on my way home did I realize how excellent Martin Langlie had handled the sound. I had to stop by a shop, and in the deserted locale this evening I noticed the humming of the deep freezers and stopped to wonder what that sound really meant or pointed at.

It was a relief when I soon realized that the horror theatre had not yet manifested itself in supermarkets just yet, but on stage it certainly has its value. If you dare enter.