



Photo: Alette Schei Rørvik. Scenography: Bo Krister Wallström

## Grotesque, Transgressive and Fine Tuned Theatricality

**In the last part of her horror trilogy, Susie Wang leads us into an airconditioned Twin Peaks-ish nightmare characterized by something unseen yet timeless.**

**REVIEW** 14.2.2020 Chris Erichsen. English translation: Eivind Sæthre

The theatre company Susie Wang has worked hard and efficiently and has now, three years after it was formed in 2017, come to the last chapter in their «horror trilogy on human nature». The members have backgrounds from performance oriented theatre, mainly Baktruppen, but they don't seem to bother too much about that. Susie Wang's works have a distinct theatrical precision, quite different from Baktruppen's rawer, more process-oriented expression. The similarity lies in a playful, ironic root chord with a matching nineties post-apocalyptic atmosphere (sources which normally are reliable have, in the queue at Kiwi (Norwegian supermarket) whispered that Baktruppen – may – be about to make a move again).

### Mad Max for the Avant Garde of Performing Arts

«Susie Wang grew up with a shattered world view, but rather than reflect the world in fragments, we have started to pick up the pieces and reassemble them in theatrical storylines», they write about themselves. Through the first two chapters of the trilogy, *The Hum* and *Mumiebrun*, they have in a short time established themselves as a kind of Mad Max for the avant-garde of performing arts. The apocalypse finds its way into little everyday places and situations: the beach, a museum and now a hotel

reception, and is expressed through the actors' increasingly odd behaviour, as if it was an everyday matter. Extreme events take place, at a strikingly slow pace. There is no need to hurry, even though the events are totally crazy. The world falls apart in slow motion, moral, ethics and old truths start to crack, but we adapt, comb our hair, brush our teeth and try to keep going. Until we can not anymore.

*Burnt Toast* takes place in a sterile carpeted hotel reception, perhaps somewhere in the American Mid-West. In the middle, we find the reception desk where the muted, friendly what-can-I-do-for-you-today receptionist (Julie Soberg) reigns. At the back of the elevated scene floor, we see the two obligatory elevator doors, through which the hotel guests come and go. We are in an airconditioned Twin Peaks-ish nightmare where everyone speak a more or less American English, with a compressed, dry and «near» voice, as it sounds in such rooms without a resonance. This is where a completely insane love triangle slowly unfolds between the receptionist and two hotel guests. Mr Iwas (Kim Atle Hansen) is a dubious, slick, somewhat mysterious traveller with sunglasses, cowboy flares and boots. He carries a metal briefcase that turns out to be central to the plot. Miss V (Mona Solhaug) is a single mom with an uncanningly true to life baby which she breastfeeds from large breasts with oversupply – which looks very much like the receptionist's silicon breasts.

### **Pandora's Box**

I am one of those who usually don't care too much about the plot. This is why I seldom feel guilty about telling the story from a theatre performance. Usually, they are about something else and more important. But in this case I hope critics restrain themselves. In *Burnt Toast* the details of the story are of the utmost importance, as in a classic crime/horror story where the mystery is gradually revealed, and in this case it is actually not really revealed at all. *Twin Peaks* is, as previously stated, a possible point of reference, with underlying elements of vampire comedies, *The Shining* and a story with many layers, like a Pandora's box with new elements inside the element. We are drawn further and further into an infernal universe of doom where Susie Wang's use of illusions is turned up yet a notch.

«This has never been shown on a theatre stage before!», I heard from several independent conversations after the curtain had fallen. Maybe except back in the really old days. No, not in the established bourgeoisie theatre salons, but maybe in the most spectacular and grotesque sideshows for common people, those off-circus shows swarming with illusionists and deformed creatures?

*Burnt toast* contains some of that variation in esthetics and expressions. On our way in I spoke to a painter who voiced much of this contradictory excitement many of us experience when exposed to horror movies and splatter esthetics. We detest it, but still we keep coming back to it. Before the spectacle started, I mentioned Tarantino, whereupon she quickly exclaimed «I can't stand Tarantino». She found a seat next to the exit, just in case, but remained seated throughout the whole show!

## **Slow Pace**

A central feature of the expression is the slow pace. Nothing really happens, but his static dream-like nothing carries an expectation of something. Something that we never really get to know what is.

No matter what: in the middle of this unseen there is something timeless and old-fashioned about this expression, a combination of something grotesquely transgressive and fine-tuned theatre. All elements and details fit perfectly together as in a jigsaw puzzle. Bo Krister Wallström's scenography and Martin Langlie's work on sound and music is characterized by this perfect combination of distinctive uniqueness and perfect tuning. It is obvious that it is not the first time these guys have worked together!

But what is the meaning? is a timely question. The surprised, naked facial expressions of the experienced and blasé Black Box audience is answer good enough.

PS:

This autumn the heart of the home, the kitchen, is next in line in the first part of a trilogy on violence. This spectacle will, surprisingly enough, be played consecutively for a month, in Kilden teater in Kristiansand, of all places, where Valborg Frøysnes, actress from Mumiebrun, has taken over as head of the theatre. The will to take risks, or lack thereof, is a much debated topic in Norwegian theatre. This initiative gives that concept new meaning!

The barricades are falling. One by one.