

# Review of Susie Wang's "Licht und Liebe": When your Holiday Paradise Turns into Hell

**Do you miss being able to go on a tropical holiday? Susie Wang's new horror-inspired theatre production "Licht und Liebe" will soon cure you of your desire.**

5 stars (out of 6)

Review by [Mode Steinkjer](#)

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## “Licht und Liebe”

By Susie Wang

Director: Trine Falch

Cast: Mona Solhaug, Kim Atle Hansen, Selome Emnetu

Kilden Theatre

KRISTIANSAND (Dagsavisen): “Oh dear”, an elderly voice in the audience bursts out as the first actor walks out on stage. Dressed only in swim shorts and with a pale bluish skin tone in contrast to the pink wall, the turquoise gate and the “sandy beach”, he hobbles forward with blood dripping from a cut under his foot. But everyone who is familiar with the Susie Wang theatre company knows that a concerned “oh dear” doesn’t cover the half of it, and that a little scratch can soon end with the loss of a limb or two, while the blood gushes and the head boils.

Susie Wang was brought to Kilden Theatre by Valborg Frøysnes, one of the ensemble's previous actors, from the award winning play "Mumiebrun", now theatre director in Kristiansand. And the production, which gained its title "Licht und Liebe" only after its premiere, is one of a little group of theatre events that have challenged the South Norway public, and visitors, during the past year; plays such as "Mysteries" and "Jonas".

This world premiere performance of "Licht und Liebe" is by one of Norway's most form-conscious theatre companies, a company that consistently combines the familiar with the hideous, and beauty with elements of shame and repulsion. And all of it created in a highly aesthetic idiom where the individual figures become hostages of the colour spectrum. The underlying playfulness is so deeply embedded in the creative process that they even break away from their mother tongue and enter into a fantasy world where the prototypes can be blown up into grotesque or deformed protagonists. That explains why the dialogue here is in German and English, but it is never so advanced that even the least linguistically gifted among us can't understand it.

In their last production, "Burnt Toast", it was like moving into a David Lynch hotel, occupied by guests with broad American accents. This time the story is based on a German couple on holiday in the sun somewhere in Africa. Let's imagine that the film director Ulrich Seidl (admittedly Austrian) makes a splatter version of life's inherent ugliness, about German tourists who invade the sunny coasts of erstwhile colonies, as he did in "Paradise: Love". As if that's not horrifying enough, director Trine Falch claims that it's the uneasiness which characterises Japanese, and even more so, South Korean horror films that inspires a theatrical production that strives for a taut genre rather than free-flow.

Titles signed by Oscar winning Bong Joon-ho and the now me-too branded Kim Ki-Duk come to mind, films where the word "not" clings to words like 'nice' and 'normal'. The humour is burlesque, even a smidgeon speculative, and not at all without bubbly fantasies about tentacles and human taboos. In addition, Susie Wang takes on the challenges presented by the limitations of established genres, and thus creates special effects (Fanny Antonsdottir) that might even be impressive in productions much bigger than this one, but then presumably without the shabby charm.

**The subject matter varies from production to production, but the performance is recognisable, particularly in the way the actors distract your attention in certain scenes when things begin to get out of hand. It**

**might be a gesture that a side glance barely captures, a disappearance, or something threatening that emerges from within.**

For the public, much of the fun eventually lies in discovering and speculating about the what and the how. And we should not forget Martin Langlie's music, which is one of the production's stronger elements, a sweeping and resonant soundtrack that underscores and conjures up the threatening as well as trivial and happy elements.

The plot in "Licht und Liebe" is a "Vacation from Hell" story. It is day one in paradise, and an eclipse of the sun has been predicted. The German couple has been on the beach, but they still haven't received the keys from their Airbnb host. Sabine's (Mona Solhaug) shoulders and back are already bright red, but she has booked a table at a restaurant. Barni (Kim Atle Hansen) would much rather remain on the attractive patio with a beer, *Sonne* (the sun) and her. Despite scorched shoulders, a gnawing bikini and a bleeding cut, applying sunscreen and toasting with beer and wine is ever so pleasant. But while they are enjoying themselves on their reclining lounge chairs under the scorching sun, they are surprised by their exuberant hostess Armani (Selome Emnetu) who enters on a scooter, wearing a gold helmet, ditto shoes and a tight-fitting, spangled dress. Things will soon be smouldering beneath the surface, with misunderstood kindness, wounded pride and a toxic cosy atmosphere.

**The hostess has a guilty conscience because the keys have not shown up yet, and she insists on preparing food for them. Sabine says no thanks; Barni smiles to accept the invitation. A messenger delivers a big lump of goat's meat. They are of course vegetarians – they are German after all – though they are reluctant to tell the hostess. Their indecisiveness will soon bring about events they can hardly control any better than their surroundings. Sabine reluctantly agrees to prepare the meat, and while she is firing up the "grill", the lump of meat comes alive between her legs. In keeping with all good "films", we will not reveal any more of the plot.**

Susie Wang was founded by the actors Mona Solhaug and Martin Langlie, together with members of the artist collective Baktruppen, Trine Falch (Director) and Bo Krister Wallström (Set Designer). In other words, players from the 90s who today are challenging the apparent conformist spirit of the times by creating theatre which back then would have been frowned upon on the free art scene. Yet their gaze continues to be a slightly satirical probing of reality, so that the takes on reality and the character types are also spot on. The German husband is presented here as a sheepishly smiling weakling, clumsy and ignorant. She is efficient, but inflexible and petulant. And the Airbnb hostess is the strong and demanding woman who takes the whole thing a notch too far.

**What is simmering beneath the concealed facades? Human beings are predictable in the sense that we wish to adapt to our surroundings, often in ways that can be misunderstood. To say yes to a friendly gesture can be just as destructive as saying no, and in Susie Wang's world these emotions become substances that are ready to burst, oozing out slime and horror. But Trine Falch balances it all with compassion, beauty and a measure of kindness towards the figures they put through the wringer.**

As a member of the audience you can frolic in metaphors and search for intellectualising associations, but first and foremost "Licht und Liebe" is terribly good entertainment, as muggy as a heat wave in the tropics and equally humorous in a boundary-transcending way. The [theme of the] performance, as the title indicates, is light and love, where the lure of the solar eclipse causes the strangest desires to literally blossom, for better or worse.

Translated by Francesca M. Nichols