

Dnevnik
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A missed opportunity

Betontanc and Umka L.V.; *Show your face!*; directed by Matjaž Pograjc; Mladi levi festival, 27. 8. 2006

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We could say that the last performance of this year's international festival Mladi Levi, which filled up Stara Elektrarna on Sunday, i.e. *Show your face!*, directed by Matjaž Pograjc and performed by Betontanc and the Latvian group Umka L.V., promises more, at least at first sight, than it actually offers. The concept of this performance, which was premiered this spring, is indeed quite interesting. On the formal level already, there is an original mixture of object animation and physical theatre, which is pretty effectively carried out in practice. At the same time, this rather unusual combination (accompanied by live music by duo Silence and the saxophonist Ugis Vitins) deals with quite demanding, at times even politically engaged contents, such as emptiness of living in identity relativism of contemporaneity and disappointment with the state of the society "after big Utopias", affected by a general hypocrisy, corruption and manipulation.

Sadly, however, the performance is always stuck somewhere halfway due to its dull dramaturgy. The union of live performance and object theatre is only rarely in full swing (the Latvian animators show what they are capable of only in some scenes, truly engaging though). A poor storyline and cliché dialogues don't help the performance as a whole, even though their banality might serve as a certain "interpretative openness" within the performance, which seems as if it can't decide whether it wants to be likeable (even music seems a bit "cosmetic") or provocative, a critique of the system or an "existentialistic" metaphor, a thriller or a romantic vignette. And so in the end, it is none of the above nor it evolves into something else.

The only point where the contents and the performance are more or less successfully linked, is the animated protagonist, "the man without a face" (a small hooded Babygro, animated by up to three animators at a time), which illustrates an unimportant individual, who is "without identity" in the first place, as well as "an enemy to the society" (whose identity, on the other hand, is believed to change constantly in accordance with his daily needs). However, both sides of the protagonist gradually fade out, as certain parts in the performance seem clipped on, without radical meaning.

That way, the figure of the "puppet without a face" works best as some kind of mirror to the audience, who are led – directly even – to thinking if perhaps they are also "puppets" in the hands of politics or capital, for example, or if they are "without a face" in case they don't take a stand on topical issues or disguise their apathy with political correctness (or with cheap humanitarianism, which doesn't require any serious engagement, but offers a feeling of nobility). An appeal that one should finally show their real face is likeable on the whole, but insufficient for the performance as a whole. A missed opportunity? Indeed.