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Shakespeare's most mature fairy tale

Lightness and depth: The Ton und Kirschen traveling theatre troupe has the artistry to combine both

The seven-strong company from Glindow near Werder opens the Potsdam Schirrhof Nights with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. A poetic summer evening that leaves nothing to be desired.

By Karim Saab

Potsdam. The fantastic fairy tale *The Tempest* is considered William Shakespeare's crowning achievement. Once again, the legendary playwright condenses his own life experience into a play's characters and dialogues. The actors of the Ton und Kirschen traveling theatre company, too, have venerable theatrical biographies to exhibit and bring to bear. For decades, they have been presenting a major work of world literature every year and touring villages with their productions.

On Thursday evening, the seven-member troupe opened the Schirrhof Nights at the Schiffbauergasse cultural space. The windless, mild summer evening was perfect for the tender and haunting open-air performance.

Prospero rules over his daughter, natives and spirits

At the outset, an empty stage and a turbulent sheet of fabric are all the actors need to transport the audience to a lonely island on which Prospero years ago found himself marooned. Here, the former King of Milan is able to devote himself entirely to his real passion: magic. However, he has not lost his dominating personality. In addition to his daughter Miranda, he rules over natives, serfs and a variety of spirits.

Using economical gestures, Rob Wyn Jones embodies the power-conscious, sensitive wise man with ease. His daughter is represented by a life-sized marionette, operated by the puppeteer Daisy Watkiss. Why her body has no feet – unlike that of Ferdinand, the son of the illegitimate King of Milan – is not entirely clear, but the crucial idea is that the passionate love story between Miranda and Ferdinand is told with two porcelain faces. The texts are read by Margarete Biereye and David Garlick from the wings.

Several idiosyncrasies make Ton und Kirschen's performances distinctive and unforgettable experiences. The artists on stage understand how to reduce complex pieces to essential scenes. In doing so, they also make a virtue out of necessity when, for example, they make the best out of a lack of young actors by using puppets instead. Ton und Kirschen combines

acting with marionette theatre, dance and singing, and above all live instrumental music. They sensitively and unobtrusively crown their poetic *Gesamtkunstwerk* with guitar, cello, flutes and percussion, as well as with modern sound technology.

The accented German gives breath to a sense of theatricality

Another trump card may sound paradoxical: with the exception of the founder Margarete Biereye, almost none of the actors are native German speakers. They have painstakingly learned how to pronounce the often difficult words and complex sentences. It becomes clear with every sentence just how much they appreciate and enjoy the difficult German language, which does not trip naturally off their tongues. Their accented German alone gives breath to a sense of theatricality.

The message of the traveling theatre company from Glindow is that in the theatre, anything is possible, especially magic. There are no limits to the imagination.

In addition to the wisdom and playfulness that each of the more or less elderly actors brings to the stage, Julie Biereye, the founder's daughter, shows excellent freshness and energy, dancing and singing with aplomb.

Anyone who feared that a performance of Shakespeare's last play would mean that, owing to their age, Ton and Kirschen were leaving the traveling theatre life behind them is fortunately wrong. The premiere of a new production entitled *Es war einmal und war auch nicht* (Once upon a time and never-ever) is scheduled for 17 October at T-Werk.