

Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung, 23/09/2023

Traveling theatre company Ton und Kirschen fire up the imagination machine

*Ton und Kirschen, the Glindow-based traveling theatre company, has taken on Shakespeare's comedy *The Tempest*. The premiere was in Potsdam on Thursday evening. A celebration of the imagination.*

By Mathias Richter

White sheets hang in the background. Otherwise the stage is empty. The actors of the traveling theatre company Ton und Kirschen need nothing more to fire up the imagination machine in the audience's heads. Another sheet pulsates across the stage floor, the undulation slowly building in intensity, a little sound from offstage and then it breaks loose: *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. The Ton und Kirschen version, based on Peter Brook's adaptation, premiered in Potsdam's T-Werk on Thursday evening.

With Ton und Kirschen, the power of the imagination reigns supreme

The theatre ensemble based in Glindow (Potsdam-Mittelmark) needs little to keep the imagination aflame. A small toy ship capsized by the waves of cloth tells us what we need to know. That's all it takes. Because on stage the power of the imagination alone reigns supreme, ignited by the witty and spirited performances of the actors. Their concern is to lay bare the core of Shakespeare's 1611 comedy: the relationship between nature and culture, submission and resistance, and ultimately the mechanisms of power and the arduous struggle for freedom and self-determination.



Before the dwarven uprising (from left): Caliban the servant (Dominique Prié) with the petty bourgeois Stephano (David Garlick) and Trincolo (David Johnston). In the background, the air spirit Ariel (Julie Biereye). © Source: Marion Kollenrott

Shakespeare poured the history of civilization's complicated ramifications into a compact story. Prospero, the former Duke of Milan who prefers to occupy himself with esoteric matters rather than governing his people, is usurped by his brother Antonio and swept away to a deserted island with his daughter Miranda. There the intellectual nobleman is confronted with commoners and, above all, with the dangers of nature.

Shakespeare and colonialism

But the educated Prospero knows how to use the forces of nature to pursue his exalted goal. He intends to raise the savages on the island to be good people – a classic colonial project. To that end he employs the air spirit Ariel, who helps him to civilize the foolish Caliban through work. And when his brother Antonio appears with the King of Naples in ships off the island, Ariel ensures that a storm of revenge brews. However, Ferdinand, the king's son, washes ashore and Prospero's daughter Miranda falls head over heels in love with him.

Ton und Kirschen is an international ensemble founded by the Brit David Johnston and the German Margarete Biereye. The actors, often cast in dual roles, sometimes speak with a British accent, sometimes with a French one. This is what renders their play simultaneously so cosmopolitan yet so universal and only makes the substance of Shakespeare's *Tempest* seem even more fundamental. At its core is the question 'What is freedom?'

Love – steered by dark forces

The love story between Miranda and Ferdinand is played out by two puppets animated by faceless black figures. Their voices are provided by David Garlick and Margarete Biereye from the side of the stage. Thus, even love becomes a spectacle controlled by distant powers.

The children's love is the story within the story, as Prospero, played by Rob Wyn Jones, does everything he can to steer the couple's emotions. Prospero, dressed entirely in white and with an equally snow-white mane, is the master manipulator who directs the fates of others in a godlike manner. He also has the power to promise even the air spirit Ariel freedom if he only serves him for long enough.

Julie Biereye plays the spirit with powerful dynamism and fair distaste for Prospero's impositions, but is ultimately willing to cause unrest and discord where it appears necessary, for the most part among the inhabitants of the island and, in particular, between the always-drunk cupbearer Stephano – his perfidy brilliantly portrayed by David Garlick – and the cunning philistine Trincolo – played by David Johnston himself.

Freedom as a misunderstanding

These two see freedom in the ruthlessness of an every-man-for-himself struggle. They are ready to exploit even the lumpen servant Caliban to mount a dwarven uprising. He, played by Dominique Prié, traverses the stage almost always bent double. He exhibits the body language of the subjugated and is someone who even Prospero causes doubt that he could ever become a free person.

But where does the colonizer's power end? Can freedom, whatever one thinks it should be, be imposed from outside? In the end, Prospero relinquishes his power and is ready to reconcile with his adversaries and the world. Without transgressions, there could yet be some kind of freedom. And then at last perhaps even peace.