

Tagesspiegel

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Eternal reincarnation of the old: Ton & Kirschen stages *The Tempest*

The traveling theatre company puts on Shakespeare's The Tempest and allows Prospero to let go of his conditioning and trauma only at the end of his life.

By Astrid Priebes-Tröger

In T-Werk on Thursday evening (21 September), seven players first create gentle waves with a large, light-coloured cloth, and finally a veritable storm, in which a ship with two sails disappears in waves as high as a house. This image could appear at the beginning of both of the stories that are connected and told in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. One is that of the expulsion of the Milanese Duke Prospero and his landing on a desert island. The other is his revenge on those who deprived him and his daughter Miranda of rank, name and worldly power twelve years ago.

Presently, after the storm that Prospero created with the help of his air spirit Ariel, only he is visible: Rob Wyn Jones is a tall, stately man now with white hair, a royal red cloak and an ornate staff as a symbol of his power. But why does he still need it? Apart from him, only his sensitive daughter – a life-sized puppet manipulated by Daisy Watkiss and given a gentle voice and soul by Margarete Biereye – and the spirits Ariel and Caliban live on the paradisiacal isle.

Relationships of domination and servitude

What's more, Prospero could easily relax and pursue his favourite activities, reading and magic. But it quickly becomes apparent that even here, far removed from any human civilization, he has reproduced the conditions of domination and servitude. He even feels the need to demonstrate to his daughter repeatedly that there is a clear hierarchy between them too. And on this day, when the 'tempest' is unleashed by Ariel to strand Prospero's former adversaries on his island, it becomes clear that Prospero has never got over his trauma and, above all, has retained his previous conditioning.



Powerful: Julie Biereye as the air spirit Ariel. © Marion Kollenrott

It almost takes your breath away in this intense production. And only Ariel, portrayed extremely powerfully in a green silk dress and with wonderful singing by Julie Biereye, succeeds in being his equal. To this end, David Johnston has composed some highly poetic songs for her, which chiefly provide Prospero with a lyrical source of friction.

The ensemble production, in a version based on *Tempest Project*, Peter Brooks's last theatre piece, is told in an epically broad manner, which is somewhat unusual for Ton und Kirschen. The traveling theatre company has been associated with its love for Shakespeare's texts and his language for more than three decades now, and this is vividly felt.

Not all of the international players are equally easy to understand but their soulful and complex acting and the live musical accompaniment allow you to immerse yourself in this last play of Shakespeare's almost magically. The two royal children Ferdinand, who is the son of the King of Naples, and Miranda are embodied as puppets, which is also a wonderful and logical idea. David Garlick provides the voice for the latter and they were built and animated by Daisy Watkiss and Nelson Leon.

Overcoming hierarchies

And ultimately it is they, the puppets who hang on the strings of others, who manage to develop real compassion and love (for each other). Overcoming hierarchies, as it appears in this production, is occasionally also possible through the effects of alcohol or humour, as proven by the clownish Trincolo (David Johnston), the drunken Stephano (David Garlick) and the libidinous Caliban (Dominique Prié) in their crudely comical performances.

In spite of everything, *The Tempest* remains something of a mystery in which the search for revenge is almost imperceptibly combined with the search for peace and, ultimately, freedom. One might also ask oneself (again and again) why this letting go should supposedly be possible only at the end of life and not before.

After the applause at the premiere, David Johnston, who has been on stage with Margarete Biereye for half a century, thanked both T-Werk and Shakespeare. Ton und Kirschen are now performing a text by Shakespeare for the third time, its ideas fitting perfectly in with our crisis-ridden societies. It goes to show how these times in particular offer the opportunity to finally get rid of the 'old' and the 'hard' and begin to flow, just like water.