MÄRKISCHE ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG, 11 October 2026
Premiere in Potsdam

Pulcinella! The Popular Traveling Theatre Troupe Ton und Kirschen from Glindow Clones an Italian Clown

By Karim Saab

Ton und Kirschen traveling theatre presents: *Pulcinella!*
Photo credit: © Jean-Pierre Estournet

Every year, Ton und Kirschen surprises us with an unconventional stage production. This time, the dynamic Margarete Biereye (81) and her husband David Johnston (79) offer a vivid exploration of the character of Pulcinella. The nine performers, spanning three generations, pull out all the stops in confronting a Brandenburg audience with a piece of Romantic theatrical tradition.

Potsdam. On the spectrum of international clown figures, Pulcinella stands out as a particularly cunning rascal. Dressed always in white, this rustic rogue wears a black mask featuring an exaggerated, hooked nose, and is topped off with a tall white hat.

This folkloric figure's appearance resembles that of a baker, a cook or a servant. Pulcinella emerged 500 years ago from the rowdy folk theatre of Naples. Driven by a desire for personal gain – plenty of food (preferably spaghetti), as little work as possible and, of course, *amore*, *amore*! – Pulcinella's greatest joy lies in outsmarting those around him.

Pulcinella! is the title of the new production by Ton und Kirschen which the traveling troupe will take on tour through various villages in the summer of 2027. On tenterhooks, one might well wonder what the exclamation mark signifies: perhaps a pointed character study? Or does it suggest that this solitary anarchist deserves a little more respect? The German Kasper – a character who constructively explains the world to children and upholds moral values – serves as a direct antithesis to Pulcinella.

Cooing pigeons, squawking seagulls and bleating sheep

Over the course of 65 minutes, a series of zany scenes unfolds without any discernible narrative thread. While some moments could do with some context, there are certainly some striking highlights. Very few words are spoken and the production as a whole leaves an impression of genuine chaos.

Several recurring motifs can be identified. Pulcinella can be translated as "little chick" and the performance features cooing pigeons and squawking seagulls – creatures that blur the line between animal and human. A goose (a must-see) and a flock of bleating sheep provide a rustic contrast to a pair of courtiers who surprise the audience with circus-style dance interludes.

There can never be too many Pulcinellas! Ton und Kirschen traveling theatre
Photo credit: © Guillaume Méziat

The exclamation mark in the title is well-justified as the stage occasionally transforms entirely into "planet Pulcinella". There is no single hero here; instead, there are up to seven dreamlike, tragicomic figures – not quite identical, yet dressed in similar attire.

In the 18th century, Tiepolo multiplied the solitary figure of Pulcinella

This multiplication of a singular, individualistic persona was not an invention of Margarete Biereye and David Johnston, who developed and directed the piece. As early as the 18th century, the painter Tiepolo conceived of the idea, at once carnivalesque, burlesque, comic and surreal, of cloning the clown, turning loose entire squadrons of Pulcinellas. Such mind games continued to evolve throughout the art history of the 19th and 20th centuries. A collective of anarchists – an intriguing, paradoxical contradiction in terms.

A spirited scene from *Pulcinella!*
Photo credit: © Guillaume Méziat

At the premiere on Thursday at the T-Werk in Potsdam, the Ton und Kirschen company – with its sensuous, imagery-driven theatre and musical elements – effectively thumbed its nose at those audience members who might have been expecting a specific message or statement. It would be hard to push aestheticism any further.

The internationally diverse group, which spends its summers on a meadow by Lake Schwielowsee in Glindow, has long enriched the independent theatre scene in Brandenburg with a style of sensuously evocative visual storytelling more commonly found in Romance-language countries.

The level of dedication to costumes, masks, lovingly crafted props and puppets, soundscapes and live music is truly hard to surpass. The nine performers, spanning three generations, strive to create imagery that gives a helpful nudge to the imagination.

Info: Pulcinella! *from 9 to 11 October, 8:00 p.m., T-Werk, Schiffbauergasse 4 E, Potsdam.*