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Brandenburg touring theatre

Perfectly Accompanied by Sound Effects

In PULCINELLA!, the touring theatre company Ton und Kirschen from Werder (Havel) tells the story of the titular nonconformist through techniques that range from the poetic to the rather crude.

By Tom Mustroph

Schnoz party: a scene from PULCINELLA!
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The opening is given over entirely to the animal protagonists. At first, there is only a loud bleating; then, half a dozen billy goats burst onto the stage, baaing and performing classic leaps and bounds. The Ton und Kirschen ensemble members wear mischievous goat masks (designed by Joséphine Biereye) Some look fierce, others astonished, still others joyful. One of these wild creatures – an animal associated since antiquity with Dionysian uninhibitedness – eventually discovers a large egg. Two puppeteers, using long poles with strings attached, cause the egg to crack open, revealing a baby Pulcinella. Even at this early stage, the infant sports the long nose familiar from *commedia dell'arte*.

The introduction was atmospheric at the premiere venue, the T-Werk in Potsdam. What followed was an episodic portrayal of the character's life, at times quite coarse – the "upskirting" scene with his female partner, for instance, could easily have been omitted. However, Ton und Kirschen are at their strongest when they lean into the physical prowess and musical talent of their ensemble members. At such moments, the atmosphere shifts between festive celebration and passionate squabbling. The entire performance is almost entirely wordless, with the action perfectly underscored by sound effects.

The desire to dedicate an entire evening to the servant-clown figure from Italian commedia dell'arte has been on the minds of founders Margarete Biereye and David Johnston (who also direct and perform in the piece) ever since they

established their traveling theatre company, now based in Werder (Havel). As far back as 1992, their daughter, Joséphine Biereye, crafted the first five masks for the troupe. “They appeared in a single scene of our very first production and would occasionally resurface in brief interludes within later shows. Their mysterious nature has truly endeared them to us,” explains Margarete Biereye regarding their origins. More than three decades later, Pulcinella and the other long-nosed, masked characters have finally taken centre stage.

In the final scene, the character is transported toward the afterlife on an old cart surrounded by billowing stage fog and flowing fabrics, while a gate opens to the world beyond. Here, one can begin to imagine the enchantment this production will evoke when it is performed during the upcoming outdoor season in picturesque, open-air settings, such as the courtyard of the Grunewald Hunting Lodge.