

Froggy's Delight

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By Philippe Person

The Address to the Academy

Théâtre des Mathurins (Paris) April 2013

Dramatic monologue from eponymous play by Franz Kafka, featuring Erik Stouvenaker and directed by Jack Garfein

Be careful! The character on the stage is not human. No indeed, it is an ape who by dint of sieman efforts has become human. A being more human than human who has however not forgotten his past condition and is likely, at any moment to be paralyzed by the fright of having left it: He doesn't hesitate to show the pull et marks on his monkey skin nor to claim his past smell.

Kafka has once more written a piece on the human condition and its metamorphosis.

Through his speech, a monologue where we can sense a deep self-control and perceive hints of anger and emotion, the ape precisely describes the steps of his peculiar transformation.

To give Kafka's text all of its meaning.

Jack Garfein has bet on directness. His comedian wears a 19th century suit with a top hat and a pommel cane. It could be both, Jekyll or Hyde, Dorian Gray or another character from the English fantasy literature. On stage, the background is made a blackboard where an ape and with lot of equations and arithmetics have been drawn. On the right hand side us a desk from the same period and on the left is a piece of furniture, which could be part of a courtroom and where distinguished academicians are supposed to be standing.

The ape-man takes his time, puts away cane, hat and coat behind another piece of the setting on the right hand side on the stage. We are facing a simple poster where a half ape half man face has been drawn.

The setting having been given, our ape-man is ready to start pro demo pleading!

Erik Stouvenaker has a deep, warm voice.

In turn passionate or wrathful, often expressing the physical pain he has been through. Erik Stouvenaker transmits his experience in a precise polished style, never whiny and always truthful. His black thick beard is cut in two by a large red mark. It is the mark of a bullet wound, proof that his story is true and which has contributed in giving him the surname "Red Peter".

We know that Jack Garfein has taught his actor's studio method but he has guided Erik Stouvenaker towards a search for the true nature of his character, which did not necessarily go through the way of emotional indulgence.

The Belgium comedian acts with restraint, neither excessive nor overdone.

Thanks to “The Address to an Academy”, and that title must not discourage those looking for beautiful texts and clear staging; we get to know a fine and talented actor.

The Garfein-Kafka-Stouvenaker collaboration is a proposal of ambitious modesty. With this nearly philosophical text, Jack Garfein gives us an opportunity to reflect on the human nature without sinking into lecturing, and Erik Stouvenaker an opportunity of being stirred without turning to pathos. A beautiful success full of nuances.