

Compagnie3637

PRESS

Keep Going



Troubled Waters of Old Age

Marie Baudet

03.03.14

Theatre: Meet Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola who transform themselves into super-centenarians in Keep Going, a tale which examines our relationship with old age.

Their first project, *Où les hommes mourraient encore* (2011), earned them the critic's best newcomer prize. This time, Aurelio Mergola and Sophie Linsmaux are taking to the stage to tackle extreme old age through their characters, brother and sister Eddy and Beth. The siblings are 139 and 140 respectively.

Their concept is to *"create a piece of work about old age, but veering into something fantastic, offbeat, disastrous and unlikely. We invented an age that doesn't exist yet."* This question, explains Sophie Linsmaux, *"had recently come to both of our attentions in our private lives in different ways. How do we treat our elders? What do they make of us?"* One of their sources of inspiration was Austrian Peter Granser's photo essay about Sun City. It is an autonomous town that was founded in 1960, with a population made up exclusively of seniors. *"The town seems appealing, it's sunny, there are activities for everyone and accessible hobbies. But, when you dig deeper, you realise that there are strict rules. For example, young people can visit but they can't spend the night, let alone stay there. There's a generational exclusion. In a situation like this, what common ground can both sides find?"*

These questions are not explicitly handled in the play, but they do preoccupy its creators in much the same way as the paradoxes that underpin the current ways in which we think about age. The title itself, "Keep Going" reflects this contemporary obsession with always moving forward by *"prolonging youth at all costs, an impulse that sometimes comes across as false."* Meanwhile in Sun City, *"we don't see the degeneration, death is hidden"*, highlights Aurelio Mergola.

The duo's piece does not have words but is a *"classic dramatic script and structure"*. Makeup artist Florence Thonet transforms the actors' bodies using special effects. Aurélie Deloche is in charge of staging and Nicola Testa does the sound design. Although the characters don't speak, *"around them there lots of things which talk: a DVD, the radio, exercise instructions, there is speech coming from other places."*

With help from Sophie Leso who oversees the stage movements, the body language that Linsmaux and Mergola developed for the piece dispenses with the need for words. *"We like to create our images instead of going straight to the text. The images contain more meaning and are less restrictive than words. Objects, the set, the transformations their bodies undergo, movement, their relationship and what's at stake are what "speak" in the production. It's like a treasure hunt for the audience, there are clues hidden all over the stage. We want to guide them, but equally give them room so that they can relate to their*

own experiences.”

This is exactly what Aurelio (30) and Sophie (32) have created! *Keep Going’s* characters are partly based on their own old age, *“a fantasy that drives us, and which we have the time to predict and dream about.”* Yet, beneath the style of representation that they have chosen, *“there is still our youthful energy, which can occasionally be a source of discord. We want the code to be quite clear, but it’s not a continual state in physical terms, it comes in waves.”*

What is their own perspective on the old age that they are bringing to the stage? *“It’s more of a question than an answer,”* Sophie explains, *“What role do I think the elderly should have? To what extent am I thinking about my own future?”* With their desire *“to put humanity centre-stage”*, the co-creators develop the question, the proposition, and would be particularly keen for teenagers to see *Keep Going*. *“I’ve just had my 30th birthday, my parents are 60,”* says Aurelio, *“time is marching on”*. Although cross-generational shared housing projects are becoming an increasingly popular option, essentially, *“there is not much of a connection. Everyone is on their own parallel paths, occasionally we throw each other a bridge to bring us closer when it suits us. We also tackle this isolation.”*

Old Age: Theatrical Inspiration

Catherine Makereel

05.03.14

Even if they “ne parlent plus, ou alors seulement parfois du bout des yeux” (don’t talk any more, or only occasionally with a look), as Jaques Brel once sang, we keep talking about them on stage. These days, older people are everywhere. From the phenomenal *Silence* to the *Night Shop*’s ultra-realistic puppets (25th-30th March at the National Theatre) on the one hand, and the promising *Keep Going* coming soon to Théâtre Marni on the other, old age is supplying French language theatre with a paradoxical elixir of youth!

The average life expectancy in Belgium is 79 years old. In Europe we are living longer and longer lives, but has society considered the consequences of this phenomenon? What role should we give our senior citizens, and equally, what roles will they give us? Are new ways of living possible? These questions sparked the imaginations of Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola, who explored similarly fertile fantasy territory in 2011 in *Où les hommes mourraient encore* (*When man used to die*), a difficult-to-pigeonhole visual poem about death. This time, the young creatives drew inspiration from (among other sources), a Peter Granser photo essay about the unusual town of Sun City in Arizona, which is purpose-built for the elderly.

“It’s a small, autonomous town where even the sheriff is elderly,” explains Sophie Linsmaux. *“At first glance it seems idyllic, like a holiday resort, but when you look under the surface, you realise that old age is disguised and that anyone under 55 isn’t allowed to stay. It’s a town where the living is good, but youth and its accompanying cheekiness are banned. This really questions our social models and the ideals about different people living in harmony. In our first piece, we examine death; if we get rid of it, how does that affect the way we live in the present? In a similar vein, this time we look at how would we be today if we didn’t have the mirror, the reflection that is old age?”*

Super-Centenarians

With *Keep Going*, its two creators dive into the troubled waters of old age by imagining themselves in the skin of two super-centenarians. Eddie, 139 years old, lives a reclusive life in his tiny apartment, carefully arranging things, tending to his window box and singing love songs at karaoke. Eddie has been harbouring a dream for several years: to go to Sun City. His sister Beth is 140 years old and lives by herself in a tidy little apartment. A former P.E. teacher, she looks after herself and spends every day fighting the signs of ageing. But when she loses her pension, she has to move in with Eddie, compromising her brother’s dreams of leaving to restart his life. Over time, Beth becomes more and more clingy. What about the weird puddle in the middle of the living room? *“It’s another dialogue-free show but this time there’s real narration. We had fun distilling down this narration into costumes, set design and objects that change as the situations change. The story unfurls like a treasure hunt. It’s not realistic, more like a strange fantasy, our faces are aged but our bodies are those of young actors, which causes a discord.”* It puts into perspective our society’s view of old people, decrepitude, the body, the cornucopia of inspiration that is as fertile and varied as films like *Amour* or *Tatie Danielle*, Van Gogh’s painting (*Old Man in Sorrow*) or Simone de Beauvoir’s literature (*The Coming of Age*).

A Meaningful Wordless Fantasy

Marie Baudet

13.03.14



Time to turn the spotlight on a tidy little apartment. The microwave has just pinged. A long awaited parcel has just arrived; it's a DVD that brings good news. Eddie, 139 years old, can go and live in Sun City, a dream-like town whose population is entirely made up of retired people, under the Arizona sun.

Except his sister Beth has just turned up, not just for a visit, but to move in. At 140 years old, she can no longer live independently.

Since winning the critic's discovery prize for *Où les hommes mourraient encore* in 2011, Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola have been developing a subtle approach in which the body, movement, objects, situations, looks, habits and weariness speak for themselves.

Dreams and Frustration

This time the two young actors, aged 30 and 32, are taking to the stage transformed into super-centenarians thanks to Florence Thonet's makeup and prosthetics. With Sophie Leso overseeing choreography, they occupy this little world, populated by dreams and frustrations. At the heart of the play is Eddie's agonising indecision: should he set off in a Hawaiian shirt to fulfil his long-awaited dream or stay at his sister's side and look after her? Either way he has to *Keep Going*.

The meticulously realistic start, helped by Aurélie Deloche's staging, quickly gets weird. There is an element of fantasy, in which the actors' youth contrasts with the old age of the characters as he makes a few leaps, or when during the dark interlude the white clock has turned into a candyfloss-pink cuckoo.

Echo Chamber

In a world where looks and youth reign, the Compagnie3637 make daring choices with unusual resonance. Never silent, despite the lack of words, thanks to Nicola Testa's sound design, the play is also precisely written. *Keep Going* sparkles with visual and audible details- reminiscent of Tati-, the result of the actors' careful observation, imagination and their quirkiness.

With meticulous movements, incorporating a mix of compassion and irony, they delve into one sibling's outraged perfectionism, the other's tendency to daydream as well as their elation and despair, concern, cruelty and tenderness.

Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola Question Society's Take on the Elderly and their Bodies, and their Role in our Communities

Didier Beclard

13.04.14



Eddie is a normal 139-year-old man, something of a perfectionist and driven by a dream that is about to come true. He wants to build a new life in Sun City, a town in Arizona that is a paradise for pensioners, where “there’s always someone to do activities with”. Everything is going to plan, until none other than his big sister turns up. The former P.E. teacher takes good care of herself. She dresses a bit like an eccentric teenager and seems to fight the signs of ageing. Meanwhile Eddie is dressed head-to-toe in grey and seems resigned to precise routine, soothed by the tick-tock of the clock that keeps track of the long minutes. Without an income, and therefore anywhere to live, Beth settles in and takes over her brother’s clean, but somewhat dull, life. However, good health isn’t guaranteed and things start going wrong for Beth. Eddie clings to his American dream and is ready to abandon her sister with only a vocal memory-aid and no carers. A love-hate relationship gradually develops between the two wrinklies.

Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola did not take the easy route when writing and acting in *Keep Going*: they decided to create a play without dialogue. However, they create this bleak, decrepit world with strength and inventiveness thanks to movement, pictures and images with an eye for detail that is often surprising, like the new clock which testifies to the arrival of the new flatmate, or the young plant which turns up in the flat, grows and dies. Caked in makeup (a must if you want to pass for 140), the actor’s movements sometimes betray their youth. Far from making the piece less coherent, these movements are a breath of fresh air for the serious atmosphere. Similarly, a syrupy surprise song full of sequins and glamour makes a welcome marked contrast to the rest of the play.

In this topsy-turvy world, Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola question society’s view of old people and their bodies and the role they could have in our communities. They fantasise about an idealised old age in which each individual, irrespective of age, has a place in society that is respected and respectable. In doing so, they question our attitudes to our elders in terms of solidarity, help, neglect or mistreatment, after all, unless you die, ageing is unavoidable.

Keep Going

Jean-Marie Wynants

19.03.14

Eddie is in a good mood today, he just received the DVD he was waiting for, and has rushed to put it in the player. Idyllic images of Sun City, an American town for the over-55s, appear on the screen. Eddie, who is well into his hundreds, can already see himself in the sunshine, surrounded by people his age. He has been dreaming of this last trip for a long time. In his small, slightly withered home, all of the belongings that are not purely functional are there to remind him of the US. He puts on a Hawaiian shirt to watch the DVD, to great effect.

Of course, it is at that exact moment that the doorbell rings, announcing his sister Beth's unexpected arrival. Suitcase in hand, she glides in, ignoring her brother's disapproving look, and grins, revealing her t-shirt with its 'I love my brother' slogan. More shocked than touched, Eddie does not want to drag out the situation. His dream is within touching distance, and he will not be held back by his sister, who is even older than he is. He pushes her out the door and locks it behind her, and goes back to preparing for his trip. Beth insists as she did not come empty-handed; she has brought her entire life with her, packed in suitcases, boxes and bags.

In *Keep Going*, Compagnie3637's Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola explore the world of old age and solitude. "*Old age is a shipwreck, old people are the wreckage,*" this Chateaubriand quotation is printed in the play's programme. The show is certainly about this idea of disaster, a disaster that our world, which is built around youth culture, refuses to see or even imagine. This "shipwreck" that the duo embody in front of the audience is helped by Florence Thonet's impressive make-up, which transforms the actors into decrepit geriatrics.

The play does not resort to preaching or trivialised sentimentalism; we are immersed in the world of visual theatre. Without the protagonists uttering a single word, everything is easy to follow. At first, we are reminded of the silent films of a bygone era, a cross between Chaplin and Keaton's work, with a generous helping of Tati for good measure. We laugh often and a lot. Then as time passes, marked by the haunting ticking of the clock, the two little characters become increasingly touching, credible and real. There is still laughter, but there is also emotion, especially in a poignant scene in which Eddie bathes his sister who is no longer able to take care of herself.

The play is packed full of subtle ideas, and is complemented by Aurélie Deloche's perfect staging (which has a few surprises of its own). Meanwhile Sophie Leso's choreography does not shy away from the absurd, occasionally revealing flashes of the actors' youth under their characters. Eddie and Beth live alone together until their eventual decline. Predictable maybe, but the final image is an intense, surprising swan song.

This is a funny and touching must-see play for all ages.



Cinquante degrés Nord

Jean-Marie Wynants

Arte Programme 18.03.14

<http://www.rtbf.be/video/detail-cinquante-degres-nord?id=1904060&t=259>

The End of Time

N.N.

21.03.14

At 139 years old, Eddie has only one dream, to spend his golden years in Sun City far from his cramped apartment. It is the Arizona town for seniors where the weather is good and the town is full of promise. However, his sister Beth's arrival disrupts his regimented routine and forces the dapper granddad to re-evaluate his plans. Aurelio Mergola and Sophie Linsmaux continue to explore the dialogue-free visual theatre that so impressed us in their previous piece, *Où les homes mourraient encore*. In *Keep Going* the two creatives transform themselves into pensioners, create a carefully considered repertoire of movements in a set full of surprises. These are fifteen minutes that raise a lot of questions. Let yourself be surprised by this cheeky and occasionally biting tale about the passage of time, living with another person and the care these two geriatrics receive.



Resist? Yes We Can!

Suzane Vanilla

08.04.14

Hands, feet, bodies and images are worth a thousand words! Do we need to try and find or imagine a dictionary of body language? *Keep Going* is reminiscent of a silent film, albeit in colour and without wooden, stereotypical acting. The play does not contain any dialogue, but does not lack storytelling; it seems to belong to a new genre known as “visual theatre”. It was created live, on stage, from the imagination of the team on the first day of the project.

Eddie (Aurelio Mergola) lives the peaceful, rather restricted life of an old bachelor. He is a perfectionist and loves the USA, but his quiet life is interrupted when his older sister arrives. Beth (Sophie Linsmaux), is also single, and arrives at his house to ask him to put her up after an implied loss of income. Neither of them utters a single word throughout this original production. Its creators, Linsmaux and Mergola, are fantastic actor-dancers, and promote this dialogue-free, story-rich theatre excellently, throughout a series of little scenes that manage to “say” a lot. In contrast, movement and image take on a new kind of eloquence, as it is easy to follow the established plot. Eddie has just received a DVD in the post. Wriggling with pleasure, he plays it on the TV in his little, neat room, but he’ll never fulfil his American dream of going to Sun City, Arizona (the only words we hear are the English of the advert for the perfect town for seniors). Despite his initial misgivings, he has to look after his older sister as she needs more and more care.

We witness the ups and downs of their flat share, as well as Beth’s overall decline in health. Among the most touching scenes is one in which Eddie bathes his sister. It is moving but also made more dramatic by its contrast to the overall light-hearted, fantasy tone of the play. It borders on the absurd when at one point we see them relive their youth, dancing. Florence Thonet’s makeup is remarkable, as are Noémie Vanheste’s vintage props and Nicola Testa’s sound design. These are important elements for re-creating Beth and Eddie’s narrow world; these wrinklies (140 and 139 respectively) are believable (even though the actors themselves are only 30 and 32). Although the characters are old they have kept themselves in fine fettle. Are we looking at a realistic future? Aurélie Deloche’s realistic set design is not futurist however, and is more suggestive of our era and our homes. We rediscover the importance of acting with the entire body, it is a language that has fallen out of use (for example, unlike humans, elephants can share information with each other by moving their ears). In *Keep Going*, the tiniest attitude, look, way an object is held, movement or infinitely small change is full of meaning: the mundane in particular, but also in the foreshadowing of inevitable degeneration.

A close observation of the problems that come with ageing

This very funny play is also intensely thought-provoking. In our sterile society, talking about ageing or old age is something of a taboo. We camouflage reality, giving rise to a new, more palatable vocabulary of “seniors”, “golden agers” and “passing on”. Our protagonists are “mature” rather than old, and they are part of a separate group of people that are a heavy burden for a modern society preoccupied by constant Progress and Growth. “Oh age my enemy” as Pierre Cornielle wrote. No more rage, no more despair, can some kind of harmony or acceptance be reached? New social trends lead us back to a more old fashioned way of life in which the elderly lived as part of multi-generational networks such as their family or their village. Nowadays in major urban areas, the elderly either live alone (although according to Gilbert Bécaud, solitude does not exist), or they are gathered together in retirement homes of varying calibres, from luxurious to grim. The title suggests that we need to find something to do (and keep doing), but what? What about our daily routine? Our relatives if we have them? Our lifestyles? What kind of life should we lead and why?

The fundamental concept of the play came about after its creators saw Peter Granser’s photo essay about Sun City, a real town that is exclusively for wealthy pensioners. They then constructed a plot based on their careful, observations of elderly people. They tried to be honest, but also kind and accurate in their portrayal. They have every intention of making this “really cool” play accessible to everyone and want to attract as wide an audience as possible.

