

Press Revue

Frozen

(long version)





A Very Bloody Heart to Heart

Guy Duplat

06.03.17

Two years ago during the always-exciting XS festival at the National, we discovered the short version (20 minutes) of “Frozen”. A firm favourite, it was a strange word-less gem. Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola (Compagnie3637) created and interpreted the personalities of two ice-cold characters that were as lifeless as a multinational company.

Alone in the company canteen, they do not see or talk to each other while they eat their disgusting, freeze-dried lunch. All of a sudden, they discover a beating, bleeding heart. The interruption of the flesh, of something truly ‘human’ in this disembodied modern world is enough to cause panic and conflict. Aurelio wants to get rid of this “disgrace”, while Sophie feels a sort of brusque tenderness for a heart that beats at long last. It was a striking story about a one-dimensional society that was condemned by Herbert Marcuse in 1968, some 50 years ago.

An Automated World

Now they are inviting you to the long version (one hour) at the National Theatre. For those who saw the XS version, the effect is not as powerful but it is still astonishing nevertheless. Their style of word-less theatre has a strong, suspenseful narrative. The two characters remain in the canteen, trapped by the door in a set that has transformed into a battlefield.

They finally come to accept a sort of forced companionship in which they must rely on each other. The man literally gives his heart to the woman and saves her. They begin to be somewhat tender, or even sensual, like two castaways on board the same life raft. They are both linked to the same fragile heart, maybe even before they have to choose to try and save themselves. It is a metaphorical show about life. It is funny, especially at the start, as helped by the Tati-style characters, but it quickly changes into a more metaphysical and gory play. The two excellent actor-creators have to deal with a real, dripping heart on stage, as well as the tubes that link them to it and each other like umbilical cords. Even if they could have distilled it down, “Frozen” is still a unique, interesting experience in which theatre evokes life in our automated virtual world, compassion, coupledness, individualism and solidarity.

Frozen: A Heart for the Taking

Catherine Makereel

16.03.17

Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola dissect the human body. The world-less visual style of theatre pushes a disembodied society to the absolute limits.

The short version of Frozen was a standout play at the last XS festival, and it has now been adapted into a longer version (roughly one hour ten minutes), aiming to dissect the fragile carcass of our humanity. Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola have got their trusty Trachelard knife out and hope to hang from their butcher's hook the dull intestines of human nature, the raw meat of our individualism, the meagre remains from when the fat of our hopes and illusions have gone to the slaughterhouse.

Nothing in the opening scene hints at this bloody dissection. Accompanied by an elevator-music version of Tom Jones' "It's Not Unusual", in a sterile canteen, a man and a woman come to eat their sterilised lunches: a frozen soup and a salad. Lunch unfolds in deep silence, barely interrupted by the metallic sound of forks on the trays. Even the glug of the water cooler seems livelier than Marta and Angus, two dull creatures with peroxide hair and similar suits.

A Stubbornly Beating Heart

It seems like nothing could disturb the routine of these two employees, until Marta suddenly discovers a beating heart behind the plastic bowls of salad. A real, veiny, bleeding heart which beats stubbornly. This causes the man and woman to start viciously fighting each other. He wants to get rid of this fleshy organ at any cost, it is a reminder of our fragility and mortality. She wants to keep the heart as a symbol of life, beating in their depressing lives. Savage (and deadly), their fight will attach them to this heart fallen from the sky in an unexpected, incongruous way. Without revealing the rest of the story, the world-less visual style of theatre pushes a disembodied society to the absolute limits. It is an ungrounded productivity-focussed world, disconnected from the organic, natural blood and guts which are the basis of life. The metaphor is no less effective for being so obvious.



At the Heart of Human Interaction

Catherine Sokolowski

13.03.17

“Frozen” invites the audience into the claustrophobic world of a sterile cafeteria. On the menu are salads and apples, combined with repetitive music and the coldness of a professional environment in a clean, dehumanised 21st century. Humanity is at the core of this unusual, pantomime-like play that juxtaposes the heart, flesh, and therefore fragility with individualistic norms that are considered to be the cure-all for modern happiness. Two people meet each other (in spite of themselves) and are obliged to consider and even collaborate with the other in order to survive. It is a return to core values expressed through meaningful silence, from which we leave deeply affected. It is a bold concept, perfectly executed.

The staging is a mixture of shades of grey, beige, white and green (for the salad and the apples in any case). The characters are matching, both wearing dark suits, blonde and good-looking. They could pass for siblings or a couple, but they are instinctively reticent. The man pays absolutely no attention to his colleague, as though she did not exist. She seems more receptive and picks up on his hostility. They eat. All of this takes a long time and it is magnificent. It is fantastic that even a young audience can watch and appreciate this silent, practically static scene when everything outside the theatre is full of hustle and bustle, noise and competition.

An unexpected sound is heard. It sounds like heartbeats except that would be completely incongruous in the context of this cafeteria. Surely not... The woman walks towards the source of the noise, as you would expect because she is the more open-minded of the two. She uncovers a hunk of bleeding flesh, beating regularly. Overwhelmed by instinctive fear, she jumps back. The man wants to get rid of it, throw it away and forget it. From there, their relationship changes.

Captivating and almost hypnotic, Frozen demands your undivided attention. In the absence of words, audience members have to rely entirely on their eyes and their imaginations. As such, it is impossible to glance down at a smartphone or get distracted. It is incredibly tense.

Excellent acted by Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola (who are also the play's creators), *Frozen* is a brave choice, a bold step into new territory. It is a metaphor for 21st century society, human relationships and contemporary values, which draws you in first, then seduces. Artistic, original, useful and peppered with humour, *Frozen* is a knockout play.



FROZEN at the National: Hand-to-Hand, Heart to Heart

Marie Lemot

10.03.17

The lights go up in the hyper realistic setting of a company canteen; it is a professional world that is deeply impersonal and sterile. A woman, Martha, moves between the tables, upright in her high heels and her suit, tray in hand as if she is part of the set. Soon she is joined by Angus (her male counterpart), who is equally cold and disembodied in his grey suit. During the meal they begin a sort of mechanical dance of movements, each at their own table, together and alone in an almost robotic rhythm, until Martha makes a terrible discovery. She finds a living, beating, bleeding heart behind the Tupperware in one of the fridges. This organ's incongruousness will push the two characters to reveal their true selves: Angus is horrified and Martha is hypnotised. They attack each other in a fistfight, one hoping to destroy, the other to save the heart, breaking the original set into smithereens. The result of this instinctual explosion plunges them into a claustrophobic situation; the only way to escape involves the heart. Seriously wounded during the fight, they have no other option but to use tubes to connect themselves to the organ. Then, they wait and try to escape the canteen, which has become a hostile environment, revealing the flimsiness of these lost and forsaken beings' fragile humanity.

Starting from a narrative framework with a surprisingly well-maintained rhythm, the two actors set about deconstructing the values of our contemporary, productive, individualistic societies. They remind us that our humanity is fundamentally made of flesh and blood. The dystopian allure that progressively takes hold of the play is also reminiscent of the illusory control that we think we must maintain at all costs. In fact the slightest anomaly can disrupt the supposedly infallible system. The bloody organ, through its aesthetic and symbolic force becomes the running theme of this return to the basic, core elements of life. Around it, and as a direct result of it, the man and the woman evolve in a game of contrasts and ambiguities that give the story real depth. Between laughter and terror, shouting and tenderness, attachment and disgust, fear and joy, the audience members find themselves unintentionally confronted by everything that unavoidably connects them to one another.

KAROO / Cultural Creation and Criticism Platform

Frozen: How to Thaw Your Heart?

Irene Chamorro Guindel

13.03.17

In Frozen, Compagnie3637 invites the audience into a frightening, claustrophobic world. The dialogue-free show manages to say a lot about what it means to be human. Between bursts of laughter and somersaults, Frozen puts humans centre stage, and makes us reflect on the human condition.

On the stage is a company canteen. Everything is very square, very clean and very sterile, like an operating theatre. In the background is an elevator-music version of “It’s Not Unusual”. An employee walks into the room, fills her tray and sits down. Then shortly after a man arrives and does the same thing, sitting far away from her. They start eating in silence: their routine is practically identical, their movements are like echoes but they barely look at each other. This realistic situation is also absurd and funny; their attitude is meticulous and calculated, almost robotic, making them a bit ridiculous, even more so because we have all found ourselves in similar situations.

This scene, reminiscent of Mr. Bean and Monty Python, is quickly interrupted. Suddenly, like an explosion, something tears their routine apart. Among the salads in the fridge is a beating heart.

From that moment on, everything falls apart.

The two characters react viscerally when confronted by this disturbing object. It is as though, through the intrusion of this very human, very bodily object, they are jolted awake from a long coma. At first, the man tries to get rid of the organ; meanwhile the woman is strangely drawn to it. So they launch themselves at each other in a hand-to-hand fight, leaving both of them seriously injured. The only option they have is both terrible and very straightforward- they both must connect themselves to the heart via little tubes and live together trapped in the room.

The story that follows is somewhat reminiscent of castaways on a desert island. We see the two human beings trying to survive in awful, unbearable circumstances. To do so, they must dig down into themselves, becoming aware of their humanity and instincts. They transform before our eyes, becoming animals driven by violence, hunger, desire and love.

Thanks to this absurd and humane story, *Frozen* tries to make us aware of our own bodies, not just the version of ourselves that we project for society, but also the version which makes us human beings.

The performance highlights a paradoxical truth about western society- on the one hand we place a very high value on the body and physical appearance (so much so that we are to some extent defined by it), and on the other hand it is still taboo, especially when it comes to illness, death or simply when we think about it in more biological terms.

The beating heart raises the audience and the characters' awareness of our mortality, and the fact that if we are alive, it is because of the object they have in their hands, something that we also have inside ourselves. By extension, is also a question of revealing the superficial nature of our society, this disembodied world that places enormous value on excellence and success, but neglects human relationships and social problems. The (re)discovery of this organ scares us and fascinates us in equal measure. Everything that emerges as a result is bodily and pure, they become two living beings who combine to try to survive.

In my opinion, the most incredible thing is that all of this is expressed without uttering a single word for the entire duration of the play. We find ourselves in front of silent, visual theatre. The actors embody the notes of a strange melody, as though they are driven by a sort of physical division. In this division, we find a musical core, the music being composed of a series of little cheerful songs, as well as other noises which accompany the action: gurgles, shouts, groans, crying and sighs.

The objects on stage are used to great effect. They are used in an original way, whether to adapt to their context or to undermine it. In this way, they are as alive as the characters, and also make their own noises. The overall soundscape, in combination with the lighting design, gives rise to a set in which every element is of equal importance, each tool working to create a clear, understandable story.

This scenography is very different to the text-based theatre that audiences are used to, but it is nevertheless touching and strangely familiar. I am reminded of silent cinema, but also cartoons and comics. We watch the show in a different way, wanting to decode what the characters are thinking, trying to understand their actions by interpreting their movements and expressions.

We feel even closer to them, we identify more and we are more involved with the action because we are also trying to survive, to think about the different possible escape-routes. We therefore also feel more free to laugh, cry or even talk. We are alive.

The characters and the audience become one: humanity facing adversity, true connection confronting superficiality, instinct against rules. The way humans and the body are treated,

as well as the lack of dialogue, means that like at a dance show or an exhibition of fine art, Frozen acquires universality, like a universal language buried within our human nature.