

Press Revue

Frozen

(short version)



Frozen: Beautifully Philosophical

by Yannick Butel

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XS: plays that are large, medium or small. The XS programme takes its name from the festival organised by the National Theatre and the city of Brussels. XS will feature three short plays in the Jardin de la vierge at Lycée Sant Joseph, including Compagnie3637's *Frozen*. Starring Sophie Linsmaux and Aurelio Mergola, this play explores how the smallest things can seemingly change everything!

3637

Sophie Linsmaux studied dramatic arts at the I.A.D (institut des arts de diffusion), writing her dissertation on the role of the artist-facilitator when working with actors with mental impairments. She spent the following year, 2004, in Lisbon where she was immersed in the Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema, directed by N. Nunes. Linsmaux has doubtlessly always had a taste for a complex view of reality which art enjoys getting its teeth into. Following various kinds of training, she founded Compagnie3637 in 2008 with Bénédicte Mottart and Coralie Vanderlinden. The three young women have backgrounds in dance, theatre and disciplines that enable them to stage artistic interventions in urban spaces and explore different varieties of theatre for all ages, as long as the adults haven't lost their connection to childhood. They have explored object theatre, puppetry, dance, image theatre and created plays. They identify as a "research group" and aesthetically and poetically question life's nooks and crannies through their productions. Moreover, the trio's approach to each creation often gives rise to a specific language for the dramatic world in question. It is the trio's way of tipping their hat to French dramatist Joël Pommerat. Linsmaux quotes him, "I believe that the theatre could be a place for questioning and human experience, a place where you can say something modern and raw about us and our world."

Their artistic practice and the individuality of their work have been recognised by prizes including the best newcomer prize awarded by Belgian critics in 2011 for *Où les hommes mourraient encore* and a critic's award nomination for "best artistic and technical creation" in 2014 for *Keep Going*. The Compagnie3637 are motivated by more than plaudits, however, and have sought to create unusual or unpredictable situations ever since their first creation, *Zazie et Max* (in which the world is divided into those with and without a willy). Other quirky stories include *Cortex* (a voyage through memory), *Les désobéisseurs* (a school is defended by its occupants), *Eldorado* (about showing bravery when up against a wall), *Keep Going* (the story of 139-year-old Eddie who saddled with his sister Beth, 140, and must choose between leaving for Sun City, a city for old people, or looking after Beth, who has nowhere else to turn) and now *Frozen*. Whether motivated by naivety, or an unexpected, inexplicable and improbable

rationale, Compagnie3637 invents techniques that are as unconventional as the thinking behind them.

Frozen

“What happened in the canteen between 12.45 and 1.05?” Can the question asked in the programme sum up the piece? Will the construction of the play be a bit different?

Two office workers come to an aseptic canteen for lunch. There are rows of plastic chairs and tables and chilled display cabinets full of “grub” which set off Jean-Pierre Coffe’s hysterical cries. In the background plays music that is as impersonal and sanitised as the plates and cutlery on the trays. The workers sit down at separate tables maintaining a respectful distance. The man and the woman, if we can still apply these labels, are both blond and wear grey chainmail suits. Their faces are pallid, verging on ghostly. They ignore each other. Obviously. They are so similar and resemble each other in every way, every movement, that they look at each other as if they are seeing their reflection; they cannot distinguish their differences. Here ignorance means invisibility. Only a few formulaic looks and plastic smiles exchanged in the guise of communication occasionally punctuate the situation. This is how lunch is eaten, in silence covered by ‘cold’ chamber music. The world of movement, noise and action is controlled to such an extent that the world has vanished, until suddenly...

A beating heart is visible between the bottles of mineral water. A heart, removed from its bodily home is beating in plain sight. This resonating rhythm will disrupt the funereal harmony that reigns. What follows is a silent disagreement between the man and the woman about the place of the heart in this space. Bin? Main course? Is it a relic of a kind of lost humanity that should be comforted against the woman’s chest? The disagreement evolves into a violent battle that turns the crypt-canteen upside down. It is a literal fight for a lost heart, culminating in the final explosion in which the heart is destroyed. Then there is nothing more, the stupefied faces signalling the end of the play in what has become an anarchic space.

From a distance, the play seems to bear a passing resemblance to one of Pina Bausch’s choreographies, or the flying chairs in *Café Muller*. The reference also reminds us of Heiner Müller who wrote, “yes, your heart is a stone, but it doesn’t beat for you alone”. However, these superficial references don’t really take into account the only thing that needs to be mentioned and which answers, “what happened between 12.45 and 1.05?” - nothing. Everything goes back to how it was.

Nothing, or almost nothing, because as long as we can see a parable about humanity integrated into this work, given that a heart reminds us of a (human) condition, it is still possible to be rightly worried about human passions which disrupt order and harmony. Therefore, between 12.45 and 1.05 the Compagnie3637 will have asked only one question about the place of passions (the beating heart acting as a metaphor) where we can still imagine that some people want a world of passions, others might prefer one in which we are finally indifferent to them.

All that we can say is that the answer lies between the two extremes, in the fantasy which the history of humanity has maintained. Beautifully philosophical, *Frozen* may be the only short play (30 minutes) to contradict Badiou’s *La République* and its twenty-odd lessons.