

NOVYE IZVESTIYA

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Moscow, Russia

POETRY OF A TRAMPOLINE

By OLGA EGOSHINA

Canadian Cirque Éloize has come to Moscow for the second time. A couple of years ago, the Cirque artists put on a show created by Daniele Finzi Pasca called "Rain", ending with an actual rain shower on the stage of the theatre, which had been named after Moscow City Council. This time around, Pasca presented another performance with the working title "*Nebbia*" (Fog), dedicated to the Italian grandmother of the stage director.

Once upon a time, Meyerhold dreamt of actors possessing the flexible, playful bodies of acrobats, capable of using gestures and movements to express any nuance of thought and hint of emotion. It seems that the dream of this great reformer of Russian stage produced the creators of the new European circus. In their performances, the Cirque artists (each specializing in well-defined fields: acrobatics, jugglery, clownery, aerial performance, etc.) once in a while broach on a related art, such as singing, dancing, or hosting. Understandably so, Production Director Daniele Finzi Pasca feels he does not know with whom he deals: actors performing circus feats or circus artists performing theatre.

Swiss-Italian Pasca has created his own style, combining theatre, circus, pantomime, clownery, and his own world of everlasting childhood. We can only guess how his time in jail affected him (he was imprisoned for refusing to perform military service), not to mention the three years he volunteered in India to help sick children. His tender, joyful world is built on a tripartite foundation: faith, empathy and grief.

The performance of "Rain" put on at the last Chekhov Festival brought the audience to a state of total bliss. This new show, "*Nebbia*", opens with two clown hosts: the shaggy and corpulent Gonzalo (Gonzalo Muñoz Ferrer; all performers use their real names on stage), and shy Stéphane, the quiet lamplighter with his lantern hung like a fish on a rod. Light flickers and provides glimpses of the faces of the hosts, who speak in a mix of Italian, English, Russian, French, Spanish and pseudo-Esperanto, talking about fog in the city of their childhood... How thick it was and how easy it was to get lost in it... They say goodbye to each other, leaving the audience not knowing for sure whether they were to meet again.

This performance's circus acts seem to drift out of childhood memories, fantasies, fears and loves. Unbelievably beautiful girls, obviously straight out of boyhood dreams, jump over skipping ropes or hover on silks as if gravity did not exist. Ruthless teacher Karabas-Barabas tortures one pupil, while encouraging another (of course, he is teaching circus arts)

comes from school neurosis. A butcher shop, with carcasses hanging as a background to an odd juggling act using carving knives, and a dance between the butcher's daughter and her "knight" undoubtedly flashes from the nightmares of a child. Having hid the trampolines behind a frame, Daniele Finzi Pasca has turned gymnasts' jumps into genuine flight. Bodies emerge out of nowhere and disappear, suspended in the air "gravity-free", once again taking the audience back to childhood dreams full of flight.

Seamless tricks become poetry. Stage images are reminiscent of Impressionist art. The lack of safety wires and longes adds energy and risk to this entire harlequinade, which appears simple, but masks how truly masterful the performers are. There are many first-rate circus acts that come out of the "*Nebbia*". An aerial acrobat works miracles on strips suspended between grate bars. A contortionist turns his back to us, tying his body in a knot, and still manages to turn his neck almost 360° to smile at the audience. And then there's a juggler juggling while dozens of hula hoops twirl around his body. He turns his back to the audience, unzips his trousers, and starts spinning another hula hoop on his... yes, you can guess which appendage!

The circus tricks are performed precisely to the musical and lighting accompaniment. Watching the "*Nebbia*", people can suddenly understand how tired the creator was of the imprecise, inaccurate, botchy work in dramatic theatre. One understands how much the theatre arts have lost, now oblivious to the quest of Meyerhold, his bio-mechanics, and how much circus has gained by integrating the many skills and secrets of dramatic performance. The circus acts here integrate both *lazzi* from the *Commedia dell'arte*, and method of using ironic running commentary. Even the props used seem to have their own set of rules: glass globes on fishing rods, kites flying from one wing to another, flying spheres with propellers, all evidently from various forms of theatre. One of the best moments in the performance is the finale of the first act. On a stage flooded with reverse lighting, a forest of perched sticks stands. Roaming among them, fooling around and calling to other artists, a performer places a plate each pole, and makes them spin. Empty space comes to life, filling in with movement and sound.

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Written and Directed by DANIELE FINZI PASCA