

Le Soir

Phantasmic visions of Orpheus and the Nonentity

Looking at technological advances of the future the Maubeuge International Theatre has invited Theatre Dumb Type from Japan and the genius Danish Hotel Pro Forma.

Operation Orpheus: 4 minutes of music by Gluck against 45 minutes by John Cage and 33 minutes by Bo Holten, all arranged in 27 scenes of unaccompanied song – both live and with help from recordings – performed by 13 figures wearing black crowns, spread on a “never-ending” staircase, fixed in a frame floating in the dark. Outside the frame on the floor, one finds the conductor with a luminous baton, conducting this peculiar choir which is almost nothing but a silhouette in obscurity. With this one enters “Operation Orfeo”, a visual opera in three acts. “Operation Orfeo” was thought-out by Hotel Pro Forma in 1993 for the Aarhus Festival in Denmark. An intelligent and fascinating entirety of mystical beauty.

With the myth of Orpheus, Hotel Pro Forma has arranged the essential. The passage on the intermediate phase between life and death, from darkness to light, the negation of the physical body which makes the ascension towards the light possible. One witnesses a surprising ritual of the body in extremely slow synchronous movements. Meanwhile the voices from the magnificent choir Ars Nova bifurcate in solos (Agnetha Christensen) and polyphonic part-singing. From “Hymns and Variations” and various other pieces by Cage as well as the very original compositions by Bo Holten.

Several times the performers make use of strange devices: an egg, a whistle, an elastic. They utilize the devices and then replace them in their pockets without anyone understanding their function. There is no correlation between this and an ordinary “theatrical illusion”. One could say that the opera is a visual perception in sound and images, raised above a specific significance but still arousing unsuspected memories. It is a stringent construction created by a magnificent optical concept which transforms and occasionally reduces the room to a complete two-dimensional place. And how can one describe this virtual descent into an oceanic galaxy flooding the entire stage and hall! We owe the respect to: Maja Ravn, Jesper Kongshaug, Jesper Jensen and the director Kirsten Dehlholm, for implementing and thinking out these rooms of light. These Danes are unsurpassed. They only performed two nights in Maubeuge and have now packed their bags again, leaving us with an admirable extract of one of our most fundamental myths “Orpheus”.

Michèle Friche and Jean-Marie Wynants