

Dancing with disabilities

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JOHANA MUCKOVA Divadlo Archa

VerTeDance returns with a socially conscious choreography

Although physically disabled people live in the same world as able-bodied people, the majority of society often pretends they are invisible. Sometimes the "healthy" even stare at the disabled as if they had just fallen from outer space. They admire them a little bit and at the same time are slightly afraid of them, and last but not least pity them. But why are the disabled detached from our society if the rest of the people can only benefit from incorporating them?

Simulante Bande, a new production of the dance group VerTeDance, tries to answer this question. Based on the experiences of two disabled artists, Zuzana Pitterova and Alena Jancikova, the project looks for possibilities of movement expression and cooperation between "healthy" and disabled people, while attempting to demolish social barriers and open the dialogue between them.

The authors, Veronika Kotlikova and Tereza Ondrova, aim to confront at least a small part of an unexpectedly wide range of problems which disabled people face every day in order to live "normally." Pitterova and Jancikova, together with two experienced professional dancers, Helena Arenbergerova and Petr Opavsky, portray countless life situations in which "healthy" people meet with those who didn't have such luck.

"There is a risk of slipping into simple cliché while staging the issue of disability," Kotlikova and Ondrova say. "We didn't therefore want to point at persistent barriers between physically disabled people and the majority, and rather decided to look at the issue from the other point of view. Our show is built on interpersonal relationships and love, which also bears the issues of sex and family life, which are for some of the physically disabled, as well as for the rest of society, still a big taboo."

The choreographers attempted to transfer these experiences into a condensed yet humorous form to the stage. The four have worked together in the past and have a longstanding friendship, Kotlikova and Ondrova say, and they are convinced of their "extraordinary temperaments, power of their personalities and openness."

"For a long time, we have been interested in working with people who move with certain limitations," they add. "We were of course aware of social issues and prejudices in this area, but from a distance we can now say that cooperation with Pitterova and Jancikova and especially their frankness showed us both dimensions fully."

It turned out that work with certain physical disabilities opens a new range of movement possibilities. A special modified wheelchair was created for the performance; in addition to increased stability, it is also lighter and more rotational. It allows for not only very risky and thrilling actions but functions as an interesting aesthetic element the choreographers used while creating the visual shape of their production.

"We have examined the female body, its beauty and attractiveness as well as its ranges and individual limits," Kotlikova and Ondrova say. "Limited movement became the inspiration and driving force for us. And the performers have converted their, for the uninitiated people often invisible, limitations into incredible results."

Moreover, we did manage to gradually demolish all the obstacles and barriers while working on the piece. In the beginning, we obviously felt it would be difficult, and we have to make a lot of concessions, but to our surprise everything went rather smoothly."

The band DVA, a group that has collaborated with VerTeDance on a previous production, Emigrantes, created the music for this show, which contributes a great deal to the performance. The result is an authentic work that captivates audiences, not only in content but also aesthetically, and offers another deep perspective on the meaning of disability.

Simulante Bande doesn't downgrade or sentimentally benefit from the topic in any way. It is rather a compelling piece, emotionally charged and full of breathtaking moments.

As an unusual perspective on life it is definitely a show worth seeing.

VerTeDance: Simulante Bande When: Tuesday, June 5, at 8 Where: Archa Theater Tickets: 90-150 Kc, available at the box office of Archa or online at Archatheatre. cz

Foto popis| Two disabled dancers perform in the latest production from the Prague troupe.

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<http://www.praguepost.com/night-and-day/stage/13265-dance-preview-simulante-bande.html>