

Spelling Spectacle

INGRID BERGER MYRHE

Puzzling / Pleasure



Oonagh Duckworth
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Kaaitheater / De Kriekelaar, Brussel

‘Spelling Spectacle’ is a 3D jigsaw, shuffled and reshuffled. Three quirkily dressed women are simultaneously in, and creating, the puzzle’s picture. Within an almost bare white stage setting, the landscape keeps changing too, from exterior to interior, from night to light. We the audience are peering, trying to guess how it all fits together. Riveting, funny and frustrating all at the same time, it’s like the best of parlour games.

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At the start we are not even sure if it’s the start. The first performer, Nicola Gunn dressed in cut-off jeans and red socks, neither a costume nor streetwear, wanders in and asks us to think of a number between one and ten. ‘Seven’ someone pipes up. The tone is set, we are part and parcel of the act. ‘No, keep it to yourself’ instructs Gunn as she asks us to multiply and subtract other numbers, all in our head. There are mind games at play here too.

Enter two other performers, Ingrid Berger Myhre and Ida Wigdel, also *frip* store clad and just missing the mark of trendy. Standing staring straight at us, their gaze is playfully probing. Suddenly, springing into action, they begin a full-bodied choreographed variation of ‘one potato, two potato’ or that other nameless accelerating hand-stacking game we’ve all fallen into fits about as children. Lined up, one dancer makes a gesture: holds a thumb in a fist, flips a chin, extends an arm, whilst the one at the back of the queue jumps to the front, replicates it or makes a variation on the same gesture.

Round the space in a circle they go. Chinese Whispers, *Telephone Arabe,* Simon Says…what is it all saying I’m wondering, are they ‘spelling’ something with these gestures, is there a story being told? Their triple cavorting sometimes takes them straight into the walls of the theatre, and once, right out the door. Are they trying to escape? If I’d done research prior to, I would have discovered that Berger Myhre’s obsession is semiotics, and the mechanics of this work are based on reactions to specific rules. ‘Spelling Spectacle’ was following a predefined

logic. The tantalizing randomness was written in.

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Not knowing this I am perhaps even more enchanted by the world that is being built before me. Foley-like sound effects, light and gesture seem to interact with perfect spontaneous synchronicity. Part Jacques Tati-esque mime, part minimalistic post-modern phlegm with the odd disco dance thrown in, the whole seems to be dangling narrative threads that remains just out of our grasp. Quite a while into the piece the three performers arrive with household objects: a red fire extinguisher, a yellow dish cloth, a blue dustpan and brush, and leave them neatly arranged in a square in the middle of the otherwise still pristine white space. What will their part in the game be?

Things are clearly not what they seem. Gunn, having pulled down a suspended microphone to waist level, awkwardly bent double, breathily request us to retrieve the number we’d thought about at the beginning of the piece. Is this the final dénouement? No spoilers here. Did I mention that the space is geometrically demarcated by hanging curtains of different consistency? One opaque, one diaphanous made of multiple hanging thread, two others are venetian blind style. They’re just like the work itself: now we can see straight through it, now we’re back in the dark, what we thought were its rules of play are flipped over on their side.

Watching Ingrid Berger Myhre’s ‘Spelling Spectacle’ was to revel in feather light, artfully dosed slapstick humour laced though a rigorously ‘contemporised’ precept. A beautiful and seriously witty antidote to the over-garnished commercial Christmas circus ‘magic’ blaring outside.