No Dreams, No Gold

INGRID BERGER MYHRE / LASSE PASSAGE

The language of the personal and the intimate

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With disarming *faux* whimsy, Brussels-based Norwegian choreographer Ingrid Berger Myhre and her partner, singer-songwriter and electroacoustic composer Lasse Passage, lead us in ‘No dreams, no gold’ into a rare theatrical experience — one where sound provides the frame through which we glimpse the ingeniously engineered, chaotic charm of their separate pasts and their present 'collaboration'.

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We are each handed a silky eye mask as we enter the theatre. Our as-yet unmasked gaze takes in the soothing image of goldfish swimming through aquatic plants, projected onto a curtain resembling that of a circus sideshow, suspended at the back. On the other side of the stage, Berger Myhre and Passage crouch on a small round rug surrounded by miniature keyboards whose on-off switches twinkle. We could be in a cosy nursery just after naptime — and indeed, the first song we hear is about sleep: Passage’s lament about an insomniac night. It quickly turns into a duet, with Berger Myhre presenting contradictory evidence — he had been snoring at the very time he claimed to be awake. The dialogue becomes a melodic, catchy number, and the universally recognisable truth of the lyrics has us rapt from the start.

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Further spoken ruminations about morning quirks and quandaries follow: “Is that cup of tea in bed every day a luxury or a necessity?” and “What about all the time all the stuff we have to do takes before we can do all the stuff we have to do?” Delivered with Nordic deadpan aplomb, the familiar trivia of their — and our — lives makes us immediately complicit.

The significance of the pause

Yet despite the overture, these artists are really quite out-of-the-ordinary. With perfectly pitched *pince-sans-rire* humour, Passage — precariously perched on a too-high stool, as in his earlier recounted nightmare — sings a deliberately over-extended, insistently repetitive ballad, "I'm a Singer-Songwriter". Not only does he have us chortling aloud with his wry rhyming verses — akin to "All I need is my guitar…, whilst at night you're worried about why you're not programmed in the Kunstenfestivaldesar…" — it is also a very good stand-alone song in the genre. Berger Myhre's revelation of her past as an amateur percussionist and above-average triangle player culminates in an impassioned, learned lecture on the significance of the pause, or rest, in music — so prevalent in the scores that triangle players must master. For us it proves an engaging meditation on the power of silence.

Although Berger Myhre studied choreography, she explains that language, semiotics, and structure are central elements in her work. In '*No Dreams, No Gold*' she integrates the personal and the intimate. The additional appeal of the show, and indeed of other pieces of hers I've seen, lies in the sidesteps she takes, giving her source ideas different forms and therefore multiple possible readings for the imagination. At one point Berger Myhre and Passage perform a dance — a joyful stamping sequence in which both struggle to follow the same complicated rhythm and square patterns on the floor. It is not a love duet; they are sometimes clumsy and miss a beat. Yet in the doing, one senses the strength of their bond and their complicity.

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As for the moment when we are asked to don our eye masks: an erotic, comic caper — the protagonists of which are the notes of a manuscript — becomes a piece of audio mastery.

By making listening a central part of our experience, they also invite us to look afresh at other, age old theatrical elements they deploy onstage: low-lying smoke, a wobbly acrobatic trick, a glinting disco ball — all craftily arrayed whilst we listen to the final, atmospheric musical number, to suggest, rather than convey, meaning.

I think we were all enchanted by '*No Dreams, No Gold*': such a clever, playful work — tender without being schmaltzy, human without being overtly confessional, tightly crafted without being predictable. It's a welcome dose of cheer in gloomy times and proof that great art doesn't have to be grand scale.