

Crazy Old Me | Karin Schäfer Figuren Theater



In her latest theater work, Karin Schäfer tackles the subject of aging. What does it mean to grow old as a puppeteer, as a theater maker?

The eyes may become weak, the hands shaky, the posture stooped, the world around us faster and faster. The processes on stage become ever more demanding, the memory ever flatter. Things are slipping away, quite literally.

What remains is the will to play, because none of this can be taken too seriously. Making theater means experimenting, having the courage to fail and the urge to persevere.

Here she is: one hundred years old, her face a mask that only allows a distant glimpse of who she used to be, who and what she used to perform.

Memory is her constant companion: younger, more beautiful but by no means reliable, often even annoying.

The challenges of everyday life, the studio and the stage: day after day... more challenging.

So what can be done? Facing up to ageing means giving it a new meaning. If keeping up is impossible (and how could she keep up with her younger, more beautiful, supported and challenging colleagues) then we need to reflect on what is possible. That's what this play is about.

Image by image, scene by scene, she fights for and reclaims her profession. If the eyes become blurred, then the planned paper theater also becomes blurred. If the hands become shaky, then shaking is part of the play. If hearing is difficult, then silence is a must. Every theatrical and personal challenge demands a staged and creative re-evaluation.

In the process, she repeatedly - and often literally - struggles with her memory. So she succeeds in what she has set out to do - without wanting to.

Ageing is possible, creates new perspectives and opens up unexpected dimensions.

Background

At the same time as the global pandemic hit, Karin Schäfer had to cope with a (different) serious illness. While the theater world largely came to a standstill, her own world was also thrown back to diagnosis, healing and convalescence.

As the cultural sector slowly got back on track, she initially focused on her second passion, the visual arts, and developed a new line of work for herself: the SEAmaps.

Crazy Old Me now marks her return to the world of theater.

A world that has changed, just as she herself, as a theater maker, has changed over the years. This was the best moment not only to create a new play, but also to reflect change per se in her play.

Specifically, the very change that affects us all equally, even if we resist it to varying degrees: getting older, and ultimately: getting old. Whatever this may mean.

Ultimately, this is also an issue that affects our society as a whole: it is becoming increasingly older, while at the same time a comprehensive cult of youth is being practiced.

What does this shift mean for the individual, what does it mean for women in particular, for the role they want, should, may, must...?

Crazy Old Me approaches this question from a very personal, individual point of view, which at the same time reflects the relevance for one or even several generations of independent, self-confident, active and creative women - who nevertheless have to face up to change and ageing.

Realization

Karin Schäfer performs solo, mainly portraying two characters: the protagonist, an ageing puppeteer, represented by a life-size figure, and "The Memory" of the main character, personified by Karin Schäfer herself, who thus plays both roles simultaneously.

The action takes place in the puppeteer's workshop, where she sets about continuing to work on a piece that she started a long time ago but then - due to unforeseen circumstances - left undone. It is to be her first premiere in a very long time.

All the tools and materials are still in place, everything is as it always was - except for her. Her eyes are weak, her hearing is failing, her hands are shaking and her movements are unsteady.

When she realizes how much this is affecting her work and how close she is to the abyss of failure, she begins to find a new approach and a new solution for each of the scenes she originally planned. Solutions that, on the one hand, correspond to her age and the limitations that come with it, but on the other hand would not even be possible without her age and without these limitations.

The play is conceived almost without words and focuses on the power of the visual language of contemporary puppet theater. Music plays a key role, played by the puppeteer herself on an old-fashioned record player to accompany her work.

Although some of the songs used are well-known classics, they are newly adapted and recorded as cover versions by young artists in collaboration with Karin Schäfer.

Cast

Idea, concept, play: Karin Schäfer
Director: Naemi Friedmann
Design, characters & stage: Karin Schäfer
Collaboration & stage assistance: N.N.
Production & PR: Peter Hauptmann
Consulting / outside eye: Almut Schäfer - Kubelka
Lighting: Piotr Znaikowsky
Music: various musicians (requested)

Premiere

August 29 and 30, 2024 as part of the International Puppet Theater Festival PannOpticum in Neusiedl am See, further performances in Vienna / Eisenstadt / Mattersburg / Graz / Berlin

As with all previous plays by Karin Schäfer Figuren Theater, the play will then be available for guest performances at home and abroad.

Karin Schäfer Figuren Theater

Karin Schäfer Figuren Theater is an independent theater from Austria (Europe), based in Vienna and Neusiedl am See / Burgenland.

Karin Schäfer (artistic director) and Peter Hauptmann (production & organization) work exclusively and full-time for the theater all year round.

A core team of independent collaborators is involved in the artistic development process in our workshop and, depending on the production and performance series, our ensemble is complemented by artists from various disciplines - visual arts, music, drama, dance, video, new media, performance.

Starting from classical puppet theater, which Karin Schäfer has developed over the years into her special kind of visual theater, we process input from a variety of different areas in our plays and set ourselves new challenges in terms of content and form in each production.

All of our productions to date have been designed in such a way that they can not only be seen in a single performance series, but are also available for long-term guest performances at home and abroad.

Over the years, our theater has been invited to guest performances and festivals throughout Austria and in over 45 countries around the world. Many thousands of people have seen our work and - regardless of language, culture or origin - have received it enthusiastically.

In its work, Karin Schäfer Figuren Theater relies on permanent further development in terms of content and form in the respective new productions, coupled with consistency and continuity in the specific implementation.

Karin Schäfer

born and raised in Vienna, studied puppet theater at the Institut del Teatre in Barcelona (Spain), where she also founded her first theater and worked for a total of seven years.

Back in Austria, together with her partner Peter Hauptmann, she founded the Karin Schäfer Figuren Theater, which has since produced a large number of productions on various themes, using different techniques and for all ages.

Under the label "Visual Theater", she initiated a form of theater in which the focus is not so much on the text, but on the image, the visual fascination; magical, visual experiences and stories that are comprehensible to all people, regardless of age, origin and place of residence.

She and her team work starting from the classical forms of puppet theater, which they constantly expand across disciplines, e.g. with dance, music, visual arts, new media and the integration of video and self-produced animated film sequences together with the live performance on stage.

All the productions she has created to date are available for touring at national and international level, her theater has been invited to guest performances in more than 45 countries worldwide and has received a great number of awards.

In 2003, together with Peter Hauptmann, she founded and directed the international puppet theater festival "PannOpticum", which takes place in Neusiedl am See and brings the most important international names in international puppet theater to Austria every two years.

The Karin Schäfer Figuren Theater has been invited to 45 countries worldwide, including guest performances, tours and festivals in Austria, Germany, Turkey, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Greece, Poland, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Lithuania, Israel, Luxembourg, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Senegal, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Korea, China, Japan, Taiwan and the USA in the last six years alone before the pandemic, making it one of the most internationally successful independent theaters from Austria.

Production management

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