

Theatre CHOREA
„Po ptakach/After The Birds”
"Western Mail"

It was quite a heady time for Cardiff theatregoers: the convoluted machinations of Renaissance Italy in Greg Cullen's Botticelli's Bonfire from the National Youth Theatre of Wales at The Sherman and here at Chapter a take on a classic Greek comedy known more by repute, I suspect, than in performance.

After the Birds looks at Aristophanes's Athenian satire afresh – indeed, for many of us, reminded us that the play existed other than a piece of theatre history. The bawdiness and protofeminism of Lysistrata may have ensured that the author's name is better-known than many of his contemporaries (The Birds dates from 414 BC) but he's hardly staple fare.

But it's not really Greek comic drama that's on offer here, in this co-production between the Polish Theatre Association Chorea and Welsh dance-theatre company Earthfall, but a very now mix of choreography, politics and music that in an hour can set your hair on end, thrill you and drain you.

The cue that's taken from the original is the story of a group of rebels who attempt to create a new, pure, uncorrupted society halfway between humans and gods; at least, that's what we're told, although only occasionally does any overt political satire actually get across, partly because the show is performed in Polish. (...)

What we can see to be taken from Aristophanes is the choral tradition and the idea of the chorus representing the birds (a device used in his other comedies like *The Frogs*, *The Clouds*, *The Wasps* and so on), but a chorus that can fragment and a utopia that can end in a few feathers.

But even a passing acquaintance with the original satire perhaps allows us to share the vision here of a new Europe that promises to be no more honest than the old, with such fears communicated not just by any words but by the marching, the control, the violence.

Content apart, I suspect that it was the pure theatricality that engaged the sell-out audience at Chapter and from the opening minutes there is an electricity that suggests that we are witnesses to something very very special. It is in part the rigour of the production, in part the utter commitment of the performers, in part the quite beautiful singing from Theatre Association Chorea, in part the sheer passion that engages and moves us. As an ensemble and as individuals, the company are so impressive.

Those who were lucky enough to see the Gardzienice company when they visited Wales from Poland will know that this extraordinary ensemble are quite unique in their combination of music, physicality, storytelling and ideas, and Chorea brings together some of the leading members of that company with younger performers – the age range here is wide and there are faces and styles recognisable from years ago. Put them together with Earthfall under Jim Ennis and Jessica Cohen and the chemistry, perhaps not unpredictably, results in a remarkable show.

Reviewed by David Adams, „Western Mail” 16th September 2005 (Earthfall, Chapter Arts Centre)