Degenerate Art Ensemble: Imagination and collaboration

Judith van Praag

The Degenerate Art Ensemble has a faithful following in the US and Europe. Those in the know will rush to purchase tickets before the Moore Theatre is sold out. DAE's performances assure a full house.

If you haven't made acquaintance with DAE, don't be put off by the name. If anything, the choice of words covers, or packages the immense possibilities of the band of creatives that make up the company.

According to the thesaurus the noun "degenerate" describes a person whose behavior deviates from what is acceptable. In DAE's case it means the company's efforts aren't directed by the conventional standards of the theater establishment.

And yet, "Cuckoo Crow", the imaginative (newly made up) myth DAE will perform at the Moore Theatre on March 11 is a show for the whole family.

The creative team seamlessly weaves together animation, live music, movement, Butoh and modern dance, prop and set pieces, into a magical tableau, a moveable feast for the eye and ear.

Another more positive take on degenerate: "produced or growing in extreme abundance", perfectly describes the group’s strengths.

Used as an adjective "degenerate" promises behavior unrestrained by convention or morality, the verb tells us it's only getting worse.

Again, an open mind regarding this company is in place. DAE creates performances from scratch, literally “new work”, born out of chaos; a piece of a meteorite, polished lovingly, until a gem appears.

Musicians/ performers Joshua Kohl, Josh Stewart, Paris Hurley, Ambrose Nortness, Paul Walsh and Jherek Bischoff compose a visual sound stage (playing 15 instruments, including a hell of a mean trumpet), glass and installation artist Etsuko Ichikawa creates the set, in which Haruko Nishimura, is the bird, the unborn chick breaking through the eggshell, the resurrected miracle.

As always Nishimura's stage presence is mesmerizing; muscles rippling under powdered skin, miniscule movements of limbs and joints controlled by a spirited mind. Butoh gone Swan Lake and visa versa. At times sounds escape from her lips, a chick, a bird, an actor making the audience believe in her metamorphoses.

The dreamlike imagery is only aided by the creations of Costume Designers Elizabeth Jameson with Rita Wilson, and by Stefan Gruber’s fitting Animation.

DAE's longtime collaborator Rainer Groenhagen flew in from Europe to light the birds, Robin Salis signs for hairdo and Colin Ernst for Prop Design, the Sound Production is by Robb Kunz. Virginia Piper & Son of the Seattle Theater Group are responsible for P.R. and Marketing.

One of the most important words in the theater is "collaboration". Founder, conceptual artist, choreographer and director Haruko Nishimura may run the show, within a DAE performance each participant has an equally important voice.

Some more words the thesaurus offers are: riotous, turbulent, tumultuous, as well as troubled and disruptive, profligate, libertine, fast. Let's face it, DAE may very well be the New Millennium Pacific Rim Comedia del Arte. Don't miss it!

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