

SAWDUST SYMPHONY at Korzo in The Hague



My wife's father was a lumberjack so I must declare, if not an interest, then at least a bias or a certain positive pre-disposition to a show that includes logs or wood cutting.

Tonight's world premiere of *Sawdust Symphony* was presented under the *Cirque Mania* umbrella, and while there were certainly circus skills involved and a lot of sawdust, I think the link could give the wrong impression or at least create a few preconception. The fact is that *Sawdust Symphony* is unique; I have not seen anything like it on stage, in the circus ring or anywhere else. I guess the nearest thing to it would be *Cirque Berserk*. There were echoes of Dada, Samuel Beckett and even *Alien* and moments of breathtaking brilliance, inspired originality and astounding wit.

The performance started with our three protagonists – Michael Zandl, David Eisele and Kolja Huneck – arriving on stage each carrying their tools and a bucket full of bits of wood. They then raced each other to complete a construction task, making something from their wooden scraps. One used screws and an electric screwdriver, another used a hammer and nails and the third, glue, and lots of it. While Hammerman was the first to finish his small chair, the one made by Screwman was the only one that survived being sat upon. Glueman's chair failed the test completely and by this time he was already doused in dripping white PVA.

There followed a series of cameos with Hammerman doing more hammery things, Screwman doing things on a lathe and Glueman getting stickier and stickier.

I should also add to the above list, technical wizardry. The whole piece revolved and evolved around dozens of trap doors in the stage through which hammers, chisels, nails and performers appeared and disappeared. This was incredibly complicated and precise and must have involved producing a score not unlike that of a . . . err . . . symphony. Hammerman was constantly frustrated in his quest to hit the numerous nails that kept popping up all over the place and Screwman was frequently interrupted by Glueman, flying through a trap door and

crawling across the stage to his bucket of glue which he continued to apply to himself in liberal doses until he resembled a slippery white version of the monster in the film *Alien*.

To say more would provide spoilers but I will describe the finale which took place in a sawdust snow storm. Hammerman had his head in a log and finally managed to hit the nail on the head – literally, Screwman spun like a whirling dervish while holding a giant mallet made from a log and a broom handle and the slimy Glueman stuffed his shirt with sawdust from the piles that had mysteriously appeared like molehills around the stage. One of the funniest moments for me was almost a throw-away as Glueman, buried up to his waste, shirt stuffed with sawdust, and looking like a victim of a white tar and feathering, wistfully mouthed the words of *Mack the Knife* which provided the music for the final sequence. He was so covered with wooden gunge that I doubt if many of the audience were aware of his silent karaoke vigil, but it tickled me. Loved it.

The three guys really put themselves through it for this show and I pity the poor person who has to clear up after them. Messrs Zandl, Eisele and Huneck will be picking bits of wood out of their hair for days or, in the case of one of them, finding bits glued to unexpected places and probably getting stuck to his seat on the way home – not to mention the splinters.

This was the first time I had been to the Korzo in more than a year and a half and this show made me realize how much I had missed it. *Sawdust Symphony* was the perfect choice for the theatre's return to more or less normal, combining all the things the establishment espouses. I enjoyed every minute of the show. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant. **Michael Hasted 24th September 2021**