



Cast members DJ ALX, Tiago Rodrigues, Paula Diogo, Tonan Quito and Claudia Gaiolas (L to R) prior to their performance at Garajistanbul on Monday night.

PHOTO © SUNDAY'S ZAMAN - ONUR ÇOŞAN

PORTUGUESE REVOLUTION OF SILENCE SWEEPS 5TH İDANS FESTIVAL

LATİFA AKAY İSTANBUL

“If a window would open,” a theatrical production by Portuguese director Tiago Rodrigues, made its Turkish debut this week with two performances at the Beyoğlu-based Garajistanbul, as part of the ongoing annual İDANS İstanbul International Contemporary Dance and Performance Festival.

Seventy-five minutes of comic theatrical genius, the play, a product of the Mundo Perfeito (Perfect World) theater company directed by Rodrigues and Magda Bizarro, manages to touch upon some of the most fundamental presuppositions of society -- language, media, the trust invested in politicians and figures of society, concepts of normality, the necessity of speech and the worthiness of news -- without any of the pretentious philosophical airs such discussions are often adorned with.

Featuring a four-man cast of Paula Diogo, Claudia Gaiolas, Tonan Quito and Rodrigues himself, the four actors, positioned in front of a wide-screen video projection of a television news broadcast, “dub” the news readers’ words with inch perfect lip-syncing to deliver an altogether new text in a performance that substitutes public discourse with an intimate one to find delightfully absurd ways to talk about the day that has been. The group is joined on stage by the diligent DJ ALX, whose intricate soundtrack includes a number of bass guitar solo performances.

Written by Rodrigues, the piece, which premiered at the biennial Alcantara Festival in Portugal in May of last year, derives its name from poet Alberto Caetano’s verse: “There’s just a closed window, and the whole world out there / And a dream about what one could see if a window opened / Which is never the same as what one sees when the window opens.”

Behind the scenes

The question a neutral observer may ask of course is what place a very much stationary theatrical performance has in an up-and-coming contemporary dance festival.

“We were very excited to be invited to İdans,” Rodrigues explains in an interview with Sunday’s Zaman the afternoon before the second performance. “And not just because of the caliber of the event and the fact that there are people I really adore and respect taking part in the festival,” he says, revealing that he is simultaneously thrilled and terrified that leading UK choreographer Jonathon Burrows would be amongst the audience at that night’s performance, before continuing: “But because, of course, this is a dance festival and our performance is not only mainly based predominantly on speech and has very little movement but it also features long periods of silence. I think this says a lot as to how dance is refreshingly open to interpretations and other forms -- ironically

our next stop is another dance-related event, the Explore Dance Festival in Bucharest.”

The first time any member of the team has ever visited İstanbul, Rodrigues reveals that reaction to the first performance from the Turkish audience had been interesting.

“What I’m always curious to find out are the reactions of people in the place we are performing this piece when the subjects of the production to us are essentially Portuguese. The Colombian author García Marquez, for example, always wrote about small villages in Colombia but despite this narrow focus, you always had the feeling that if he tried to make his works more universal it would actually have a counter effect. Ultimately it is the locality of his works that makes them so universal. Yesterday, it was

which sweeps the nation. It is also very much about the anchor [newsreader]; during the first half of the show his words are dubbed with a completely different text, and then midway through the performance, when the silent revolution sets in, the anchor also falls silent and we start to voice what he is thinking whilst he remains ... very much on screen, in silence. The idea,” Rodrigues continues, “is essentially focused around the concept of dubbing the news -- for news you have a firm that employs journalists to produce this product every day. This product is not only presented as the absolute truth, but it is presented as the most important of all the news of the day. Of course this is a lie -- yes, this news may be relevant, but what is most impor-

first staged in Portuguese and then completely revised in English. The strikingly pale skinned Paula Diogo masters the sorrowfully, mournful news reader expression to a tee, while Claudia Gaiolas, who first worked with Rodrigues in 1998, dubs the stammering, halting speech of jaded politicians and seemingly witless reporters with an ease that has the audience on side from the word go.

Not just one meaning

So a theater production that tells news that never makes the news, does the cast then consider the message of the performance to be intrinsically political?

Rodrigues is strongly against such an idea. “I have never been interested in declaring a message of my works. What I am interested in, however, is talking to the audience after and seeing what they make of it -- even if I don’t like it. In saying this in many ways as we developed the idea it became very evident that the performance and the dubbing was all about language, so we felt that the storyline should also be about language. To some people I think there is a very clear message, for example ‘We should be silent more often,’ but this isn’t up to us to dictate.”

The unassuming Quito is keen to add, however, that despite the cast’s refusal to subscribe to the idea of a firm political message of the performance, that to his mind the concept of doubling or dubbing anything is innately political, which in turn dictates that there is a certain political undertone to the performance.

A show that evolves in its second half into a philosophical discussion of silence and processes of thought and analysis, what could at first be considered a pure parody of those suited and booted figures that are supposed to act as pillars of societies, soon takes on a much more intimate focus on the individual. As Rodrigues himself puts it, “It is the birth of a new journalism, on the human scale of a stage, where the glance between two actors could have the same weight as global warming.”

We are confronted with the reality that there are indeed silent interactions that take place regularly in our lives without our even noticing the lack of speech -- the lingering eye contact, presumptions, wordless heart-break, chemistry of touch, watching and waiting intrinsic in the pursuit of another in a club or a night out. And then of, course, there are different types of silences, comfortable silences, seemingly endless silences, heartbreaking silences and of course, awkward silences. Ultimately the audience is left reflecting that despite the noise and chaos of everyday life, how lonely many people really are and how superfluous words can often be -- silence may well become us.

“I can think better now,” Rodrigues says, in a line from the play voicing the thought process of the silent newsreader. “Well at least I can think -- it’s comfortable. It’s easy.”

Seventy-five minutes of comic theatrical genius, ‘If a window would open,’ a product of the Mundo Perfeito theater company directed by Rodrigues and Magda Bizarro, manages to touch upon some of the most fundamental presuppositions of society today



nice to realize that there were a few things we proposed in the performance as absurd fiction that people felt they could really relate to their own lives -- for example, at one stage in the play a governor of an island decides to ban certain words after a flood, and after the performance we had a few audience members telling us this was actually something that they, as Turks, felt they could relate to as there have been times in Turkey where certain terms have been banned.”

An epidemic of silence

“The performance,” Rodrigues says, “is essentially about communication and about revolution through an epidemic of silence

tant and relevant is so subjective. What we do in our performance is we take what we see and consume every day as truth, put something on top of it and present it as a valid possibility. Everyone would think two planes crashing into two giant skyscrapers would be sci-fi, but of course now we accept that as a plausible occurrence.”

The performance is indeed rooted in an intriguing idea and one that really needs to be watched to be fully appreciated. A mere five minutes in on night two at Garajistanbul, and the four actors have the audience enchanted. The dubbing is almost impossibly flawless, all the more impressive in light of the fact that the performance was