

Translation of an article:

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When craft becomes art

Puppet critique: Carlo Collodi/Matteo Spiazzi: Pinocchio, Maribor Puppet Theatre



BOŠTJAN LAH/LGM

The new Pinocchio at the Maribor Puppet Theatre is a performance for children over 5 years of age, and on Tuesday morning I watched it together with five-year-old kindergarten children. They sat listening attentively to the story, at least at the beginning. When Miha Bezeljak explained that this is the 19th-century story and therefore also the costume is from the 19th century and that he has no technician and that he will do everything by himself, they were as quiet as mice. And they probably didn't have the slightest idea what 19th century, a costume and a technician are. However, when Miha Bezeljak began to stage a live piece of wood in a carpenter's workshop and almost invisibly produced vocal onomatopoeic compositions, they were snickering. For a while, it seemed that they couldn't stop. A little because the log "spoke like children" and because children probably have an innate and not yet alienated gift for reviving things non-verbally, but mainly because laughter is contagious or because children also have a natural gift for adapting to the loudest. Among other things, you know exactly what can also be learned from the story: if children skip school and are seduced by the magic of theatre, they become donkeys. Well, when we came to this transformation, it was no longer so cheerful, and the kindergarten teachers were whispering what was going on to those who sat next to them. Anyway, it was all over soon. The puppet became human. When the children were leaving the hall and Bezeljak was asking them if they understood what happened in the end, they were not quite sure. Someone answered that Pinocchio died. Exactly, it was dark, it was a little bit scary, and

very early in the performance, a wooden head emerged from the carpenter's toolbox, presenting itself as Death. In fact, not taking into account the prelude, death is almost the first word of the performance.

It's hard to understand. Not just for children. This is one of the more complex, intriguing, and therefore the most inspiring stories. The creators of the performance under the direction of Matteo Spiazzi extracted from the story the essential story of puppetry – the birth of animate being from the inanimate. Craft becomes art, not only the wood but also the tools the artist uses revive. Before becoming a puppet, Pinocchio is first a log, then a carpenter's hammer – the impacting surface is his head and the handle his famous nose. But not once does the performance address at least in Slovenia the deeply rooted notion of Pinocchio as the one who lies and is punished for it. Before the premiere, the creators pointed out at a press conference that Pinocchio is a metaphor for puppetry and a metaphor for how mistakes also shape man. The latter seems to be the most beautifully purified not moralistic essence of Collodi's story, but this is not the story we watched in the Small Hall of the Maribor Puppet Theatre. However, we saw an excellent embodiment of the first metaphor in the superbly recreated environment. Mateo Spiazzi, who with directing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Maribor Puppet Theatre three years ago already showed how lucidly puppetry is embodied in commedia dell'arte, with this performance once again proves he is a master of historical contexts. But this time, all the weight and all the credit goes to a single actor, Miha Bezeljak. He is excellent – his mime, his voice, and his movement. He can handle a piece of wood, tools, a hand puppet, and a finger puppet equally convincingly. He combines great artistry with sincere playfulness. He completely embodies the concept of the performance, except that the concept doesn't last the whole performance and doesn't hold the whole performance. It seems that after the first part (home), they have run out of ideas or time to design/refine the second and third parts (world and return home). Even though that also Collodi's piling of events and cut appear arbitrary, this performance ends to swiftly and its end hangs in the air. Probably also the length of the performance, a good half hour, indicates the dilemma. And at the end of this critique, I would also like to emphasize good performing elements. They are so excellent that they should not be ignored.

The creators of the performance

Director and visual designer Matteo Spiazzi, actor Miha Bezeljak, speech advisor Metka Damjan, costume designer Mojca Bernjak, puppet and set designer Primož Mihevc, puppets painted by Darka Erdelji, lighting technician Miljenko Knezoci. The premiere was on 19th September in Small Hall LGM.