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Neumarkt Theater Zürich, Freitag, 6. November 2020

whistleblowerin / elektra - Neumarkt Theater Zürich - Anna-Sophie Mahler's documentary theater evening finds tragedy in the present with music by Richard Strauss

Alone in her struggle

from Andreas Klaeui

Zurich, November 5, 2020 Whistleblowerin / Elektra - The title of the evening is its dramaturgical program: Yasmine Motarjemi is a scientist and specialist in food safety. She worked for the World Health Organization (WHO) until Nestlé poached her as the company's food safety manager. Motarjemi became famous because she filed a mobbing case against Nestlé and eventually won.

Extent of a tragedy

Nestlé first promoted her and then dropped her cold. Warnings about safety risks - for example, cookies that babies can choke on, or melamine additives in raw materials supplied - were not well received. Motarjemi was isolated in the management team and dismissed in 2010.

"I have served society for over thirty years," she now says bitterly. "I have provided people with work, brought scientists to Nestlé, educated and trained work colleagues. They use my work, quote my research. They move up the career ladder, become head of this, head of that, professors, directors. And in court: I stand alone. Alone in her struggle: like Elektra. We often say so easily that something has the dimensions of a Greek tragedy. Anna-Sophie Mahler takes this literally.



Elektra today and yesterday: The actress Sascha Ö. Soydan and the soprano Mona Somm © Cristiano Remo

On the stage are two women, the opera heroine with roots in antiquity and the heroine of today. There is the annihilated top manager in everyday dress, who for fourteen years allows herself no mistake, not even in private, so as not to make herself vulnerable in her struggle. The Richard Strauss heroine appears in fiery red opera robes.

Conditions on Lake Geneva

The actress Sascha Ö. Soydan reports with emphatic restraint, with almost agonizing composure, about the scandalous abuses the security manager is trying to fight against and the crude bullying with which she is to be brought to a halt.

With skeptical astonishment she notes that theater people are interested in her, who has always been surrounded only by scientists. Shyly she tells of her "Jardin de rêves et de souffrance", which is just about to bloom.



Hoping for catharsis: Sascha Ö. Soydan © Cristiano Remo

In the measure in which she exposes herself to her story again, she struggles for composure. The spectator is stunned by the conditions that apparently prevail on Lake Geneva. Behind a square basin, the Garden of Comfort and Sorrow blossoms in almost surreal Vallotton colors, later a Hodler Lake Geneva prospectus sinks in front of it, and finally, for Elektra's performance, the view into the red-golden tiers of an opera house.

Transcendental Dimensions

All this promises hold and beauty where there is none. The singer Mona Somm intervenes with expressive interjections from the Strauss score, most recently with a longer scene in which all the emotionality that had previously been held back with so much effort finds its grandiose outburst. Even if this emotional underpinning and aestheticization, which is to a certain extent based on the division of labor, may seem somewhat mannered at the beginning in her efforts to create a pseudo-dialogue between the two women, it is proving to be increasingly helpful because it provides a counterpoint that gives space. For it lifts the court case into the timeless dimension of the classical tragedy that this story truly has. The viewer experiences it with Eleos and Phobos. And hopes for catharsis.

whistleblower / elektra

Documentary theatre with opera singing
World premiere
Concept and direction: Anna-Sophie Mahler,
Production design: Sophie Krayner,
Research and concept: Sylke Gruhnwald,
Musical adaptation: Stefan Wirth,
Sound design: Marcel Babazadeh,
Dramaturgy and concept: Julia Reichert.
With: Mona Somm, Sascha Ö. Soydan
Premiere on 5 November 2020
Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes, no break

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