

## Art for the next generation

### Award Ikarus 2008 in Berlin

Extracts from a laudation by Gabi dan Droste

The world is being presented in its complexity by simple means. That's what we experience in the production of "Rawums (:)". We experience poetic consolidations, the world expressed in the visual language of theater: Art!

#### *Humour*

A man and a woman on stage. They are two clowns without red noses: The man who again and again keels over with his chair. The woman who again and again catches an egg in the air, an egg the man drops. She is faster than him. The children sitting next to me are beside themselves with joy. They seem captured by each movement, by every action that is being repeated over and over again. The sense of humour of Rawums goes deep. And it is the aim of Melanie Florschütz and Michael Döhnert to discover the children's sense of humour. Even that of two-year-olds. At the same time they explore their own.

#### *Poetry*

On Florschütz' and Döhnert's stage a house flies, a man, a woman, a bird, a chair, they all fly – to be precise: a house made of paper, a woman made of paper, a man made of paper, a bird made of paper, a chair made of paper – all connected by a long string, moved by a stick the player is holding. She is giving her language to the things. Man, house, woman, bird and chair talk during their flight.

„You need an above and a below to be able to show what is in between“, says actress Melanie Florschütz. What is in between? The world. That flies, that falls, that dreams.

#### *Exploration*

A bag of sand falls down, a man falls down, a chair – a woman? „A man can't fly. A woman can't fly. A house can't fly...“, he says, he realises.

Then she comes and somehow starts a physical experiment in front of the audience's eyes. She does it in an impossible way: The man made of paper, the woman made of paper, the house made of paper are being connected to balloons with ribbons and they rise up in the

air. She plays with these things. Out of her experimenting the stories of the paper- protagonists develop.

So what we see is how the two characters on stage make the world their own and how they experience the world. Remarkably everything has its right to exist, the falling just as much as the flying, the possible and the impossible, the reality and the imagination. If you want to talk of making the world your own, it is an imaginary and therefore inclusive way of doing it.

Both characters and the audience start out on a journey together – into an in-between, a space between the things, between above and below. This positioning is in accordance with the reception of the world very young children have, in which the boundaries between the real world and the possible, imaginary one are blurred. The child and the artists work on the same ground, they are similar in their ways of asking and questioning the world.

This questioning is a way of presenting the world that also moves adults or, differently put, that is able to touch them when they agree to being touched, open mindedly and with natural curiosity. Then, what happens is what basically may happen to adults in contact with very small children: they are amazed, they start to marvel at things – they are curious

... And so the artist says about children: “Children have a gift of attention towards the incidents, miles away from our later learned, target-oriented, linear ways of thinking. Without any difficulty, they seem to be able to grasp connections associatively and they possess an intuitive, emotional logic.”

### *Seriousness*

“I have never experienced such a serious audience,” says Melanie Florschütz, “as in theater for children starting at the age of two.”

What Prof. Dr. Kristin Wardetzky claimed as paradigmatic for children’s theater in general is even more valid in theater for the very youngest: Children will drop out of concentrated reception as soon as they feel that they are not meant, not the ones concerned, but they will follow the story forgetting everything around them as soon as they are connected to “the umbilical cord of story-telling”.

In “Rawums (:)” the player surprisingly doesn’t look for direct contact with the children. She rather ties a cord to the audience in quite a subtle way and delicately starts a non-verbal communication. She always has an eye on the audience. It is a cord of sensitivity and creative curiosity based on the children’s trust. Döhnert and Florschütz manage to do what seems so hard: to take children seriously, to listen to them so they can understand such a theater. They manage to meet the audience at eye-level. Rarely have I met actors facing their audience with such respect.

## *Humour, Poetry, exploration and seriousness*

The work of Melanie Florschütz and Michael Döhnert shows itself to me as a philosophically motivated world-view marked by a sense of humour I love to get infected with and a poetry I love to get caught and driven by. It is a philosophical exploration of the world, with a playful lust for discovery that definitely amazes me and whose seriousness I happily share

## Vote Rawums (:)

*Vote of the Curator Andrea Kramer for the 10. Augenblick Mal! Festival in Berlin 2009*

The man fishes, no, not a fish, but a feather out of a pond (?), and the feather's little heart is beating—the feather is alive. An egg is pulled out of the hat, the hat stands up the way it wants to—no, the way the man wants it to, although the woman is wearing it on her head, and then the earth becomes the sky...

Nothing is what I think it is—and everything turns the way I don't expect it to do. A man and woman discover the world of gravity. They dream of flying. While he is trying, unsuccessfully: “

A chair can't fly. A house can't fly. A man can't fly”, a little while later she simply makes it happen.

At first the woman says “Flying isn't easy at all.” At the end, the house, the chair, the man, the woman and the canary go on a sightseeing flight around the whole world ...

Even the little members of the audience are aware of the laws of nature and how they basically function: if a feather “flies” down to the ground, nothing happens to the feather. If an egg—especially an uncooked one—falls to the ground, then you need to be careful.

Rawums (:), for two-year-olds and up, plays with what we know, and keeps surprising us with things that we didn't expect. A man drops a feather, and then a sandbag—and sings in each case.

And I realise: gravity is inseparably linked to time. The laws of gravity can be experienced by the use of just a few props, and, by using gas-filled balloons and objects made of paper, so can levitation.

Rawums (:) is an association, a series of scenes, in which causal connections are developed and worked out in a logical way. A poetic form of theatre, with amazing clarity and compactness, not a word, not a gesture too many, a story which has created its own, unusual dramaturgy. Thesis and antithesis are not irreconcilable—they complement each other to create poetry and belief, no, to create proof of things that are impossible.

Yes, a house, a chair and a man can fly.