

***Illuminarium* – the world wants to be deceived**

Do ghosts speak to us? Can people read minds and foresee events? Is magic for real, or is only dexterity put to work? Or is it all completely different? These are questions which *Illuminarium* (*kabinet kuriózných úkazov*) („Illuminarium: Cabinet of Curious Phenomena“), another well-made work of Sláva Daubnerová, rests upon.

(Image: *Illuminarium* boasts attractive visual elements.)

The most recent theatrical opus of actress and director Sláva Daubnerová, whose *M.H.L.* was awarded the Newcomer of the season 2010 in the Dosky poll is, similar to most of her previous works, constructed as an authorial collage. Three striking personalities step into the limelight – Daniel Home, famous for his ability to levitate, Eusapia Palladino, who in deep trance caused many a paranormal activity to occur, and Viktor Ponrepo, who had ably reinvented himself from an illusionist to one of the first Czech filmmakers.

The lives of these three personalities and their contemporaries are replete with ghosts, visions, flying furniture, spells and illusions. For Daubnerová, whose performances are marked with prominent aesthetics and savvy use of video, this theme offers much. Marija Havran's beautiful period costumes and Lukáš Kodoň's video art not only fulfill the criteria of absolute functionality, they are also endowed with remarkable charm. By overlapping several projections, the audience almost sees a “real” ghost, objects in a room move around and costume changes clearly illustrate the transformation of characters and their relationships. Shame, then, that this theatrical magic grew thinner as the performance progressed, and is only given minimal space towards its end.

Illuminarium, however, is not heavy and haunting. On the contrary, Sláva Daubnerová and Emil Leeger show how Daniel Home's success was propelled by an age attuned to fabrications and inventions,

Eusapia Palladino induced certain states of trance mostly thanks to pronounced sexuality and Viktor Ponrepo was, first and foremost, a shrewd businessman. Visual magic is overlaid with apparent illusionist tricks, the supernatural is deliberately parodied and the performance thus brings a well-known truth – that the world wants to be deceived – to light.

A certain obsolescence of its theme and a less clear focus on a concrete idea can also be considered as weak points *Illuminarium*. These are probably the “price” for Daubnerová's previous extraordinary works. Still, *Illuminarium* is to be heartily recommended.

Pravda's rating: 4 stars out of 5

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Touches & Connections Festival 2012, Martin

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Touches & Connections 2012 – Illuminarium

The P.A.T. theatre is a Slovak platform for contemporary theatre, dance and new media. In the midnight hours, it presented itself with *Illuminarium* („Illuminarium“).

In philosophy, illumination is understood as a strange divine interference through which human understanding is attained. Sláva Daubnerová's performance touches upon this concept in combination with its depiction on stage and film. It plays with the idea of an afterlife in a very crafty manner, through work with lights. Every scene is bathed in light, only its kind changes. Through Daniel Home's, Eusapia Palladino's and Viktor Ponrepo's narrations, we proceed from levitation to magic and film (after a career as a magician, Ponrepo became one of the first Czech filmmakers).

The connection with God is presented as something naïve, considering the testimonies of those who have contacted their loved ones through a medium. The bleak atmosphere, reminiscent of dark rooms, is accentuated through candlelight. Placed on stage are four poles with a transparent screen, on which a variety of spaces is projected. Fast-forwarding is utilized as a reality-disturbing element, mostly in the case of mediums' levitation. Religious motives of diabolical forces are replaced with spiritual seances. In its second part, the performance turns into magicians' vaudeville acts, ridiculing their work slightly. Two performers work with hyperbole in their articulation, deliberately caricaturing the practiced

inflections of folk magicians. The performance concludes with a scene of a vain actress who ultimately agrees with her immortalizing on film.

The stories of people connected by light are conceived as soliloquies with shifting meanings. The man speaks in a distinguished tone, curtly explaining his supernatural powers. On the contrary, the woman understands her enlightenment as something heavenly and miraculous. Upon a meeting of two spiritualists, the man turns into a devilish doctor. He examines the woman as a gynecologist, suggesting a sexual act. He proceeds to defend himself, in that a medium has to be examined thoroughly so as to disprove the falseness of the supernatural power.

The old-fashioned costumes work with a certain universality. The man's tail suit boosts the importance of his words, the woman's crinoline her naivete and dreaminess. At the doctor's examination, the woman is undressed down to her undergarments. In the first part, the score evokes obscure whispers, alternating with an unpleasant ticking of a clock or largo strings. In the second part, it gains decidedly mocking features, with gongs and bells reinforcing the vaudeville form.

Illuminarium is strangely ambiguous. On the one hand, it speaks for a presence of supernatural phenomena, on the other it mocks them. A quote, "The world wants to be deceived", appears as part of a magician's trick. Interaction with the audience and looks at the stage suggest a connection of the subject matter with theatre and film. But in today's times, full of supernatural phenomena and mental transgressions of reality, *Illuminarium* is a valuable contribution. Be it because of its ambivalence, or as a reminder of the thin, almost invisible borderlines of perception.