

All about today's men

Sláva Daubnerová's new play, *Twilight of Males*, opened in early October in Brno's HaDivadlo. The original work is “dedicated to all lovers of gangster films, weekend carpenters, husbands and fathers, ruthless tigers at workplace and in bed, but also to those who would like to escape from it all to deep woods”, as stated in *Twilight's* bulletin. The next performance is scheduled for Saturday, November 3. The director claims a newspaper article as the original inspiration for her and dramaturg Anna Saavedra. They learned that through synthetic estrogens contained in hormonal contraception – which enters drinking water by agency of women's urine – males of many species begin turning into females or hermaphrodites.

Endangered species?

Working with an all-male cast, the director ponders the position of a man in 21st century. What is the men's place in the context of an increasing feminisation? What are the expectations of society, of a mother, wife, daughter? What do men expect of them, and in fact, of themselves? In today's world, are men still men or do they become endangered species? What is their role in raising children? Are the 21st century men going through an identity crisis? Such are some of the themes touched upon in *Twilight of Males*.

Daubnerová and her collective speak about many a cliché and stereotype of the male world in a way that is in fact oblivious to clichés. Or, on the contrary, they hyperbolize them, and reinforce them in the acting too – playing with stereotypes they construct, only to dismantle them subsequently.

The performance is split into three parts. The first part focuses on the man in a household, the second on the career man, while the third deals with an intimate, utterly personal and concrete male world. Already in the first scene, antlers make their appearance on stage, hung on a wall by one of the actors. Antlers – clearly a symbol of hunting, masculinity, but also of infidelity. In succession, the other actors proceed to enter the stage. There, they build a sort of aquarium before the audience, momentarily transforming into fish. The aquarium becomes a symbol of their own closed world, consisting mainly of a bed, television, toilet, desk and maintenance tools.

Gradually, the aquarium turns into a rushing, hectic world of men – mostly businessmen who, in very expressive movements walk on or actually strut an imaginary catwalk. The actors express themselves not only verbally, but act out their micro-stories in space through movement and precise gesture. Responsible for the choreography is the director's longtime collaborator, actor and dancer Emil Leeger.

Every one has his story

Sure enough, the author with her collective did not avoid typically male topics such as sex, pay gap, emancipation of women. Daubnerová works with a number of types. We can recognize the typical Czech (and Slovak) “handyman”, businessmen, metrosexuals, homosexuals, sensitive and tender guys, but also brutes. And they are not simply listed – through personal histories, the men testify about themselves. In these testimonies, men uncover their “sensitive side” as well, they speak candidly about family, fear, success and failure.

Daubnerová does not judge or moralize, she simply speaks out about the contemporary man, through the general, she arrives at the concrete. Each of the protagonists has his own story, life, desires, but also doubts. Will I have success? Will I be a good son, husband, father? Will I be able to secure my family and find my place in society? Will I be able to live in a female world and still be a “real” man?

Twilight of Males is a visual performance inspired by the today's man. It is, first and foremost, about men – but certainly not only for them.

Pravda's score: 4 stars out of 5

BRNO Žurnál

mediální doména jihomoravských novinářů

brnozurnal.cz

Published: October 9, 2012

JAROSLAV ŠTEPANÍK

Restart – this is how HaDivadlo dubbed the opening of the new season. It commenced on October 5, 2012, with Slovak director and performer Sláva Daubnerová's original work *Twilight of Males*.

Sociobiological and civilization influences, emancipation of women – and a whole slew of other factors including changes in traditional social roles, positions and relations between women and men lead to glum visions, reflecting upon whether “man as a defined biological species” still exists; whether some kind of males' twilight isn't taking place. Under the director's guidance, with dramaturgy by Anna Saavedra, the experimental theatre's collective approached this complex, social-psychological issue

chiefly by means of visual performance. Music plays an essential role, but without marginalizing the verbal components. These serve to improve the performance's flow by means of light wit and irony, especially in the first half. Men, as seen through the female author's eye, are first introduced as beings fraught with insecurity of existence in aquariums of household and family, feeling oppressed and deprived of space; they even fail as handymen. Suddenly, they swagger as polished men in suits – successful, or rather forced into success, frustrated just as they were in the domestic sphere, here working hard, dressed up and perfumed in accordance with the “commandments” of a modern metrosexual. Early on, the performance provoked frequent laughter precisely with its easiness of presenting various facets of the tragicomic position of contemporary men. Frustration leads to evasiveness and aggression. The scene of group violence against an individual who “displayed a deviation” was impressive, only repeated too often. What might come off as perhaps too manifest is the “male prosecution”, armed with a load of anger towards the other half of humankind. Corresponding with the title, the conclusion shows a “twilight” or resignation of the “males”, that is those who embodied the representatives of “endangered species” on the simple stage. The final dialogue between father and son was a good endpoint, not really due to its verbal content, but rather due to the choreography, accompanied by a well-suited score. Equal costume and movement, machine-like, identical facial and bodily expression, as it were, signaled continuation through repetition. I could see myself that perfect robots are entering the stage, replacing retired, worn-out men. This restart began with a success. The male ensemble of Cyril Drozda, Jan Grundman, Marián Chalány, Jan Lepšík, Jiří M. Valůšek deserves praise for their acting and physically demanding performances. Mise-en-scène by Sláva Daubnerová, choreography: Emil Leeger, video: Jan Sebeš.

Studentpoint

studentpoint.cz

Published: October 16, 2012

KRYSTÍNA KOLIBOVÁ

Twilight of Males. Is the male species endangered?

HaDivadlo premiered a new play, *Twilight of Males*. „Dads“ in sleeveless shirts and boxer shorts, metrosexuals hungry for success or a transvestite – none of these were missing from the stage.

Slovak author Sláva Daubnerová's new *Twilight of Males* was a big success at its opening night on

October 5 in Brno's HaDivadlo. A collaboration with dramaturg Anna Saavedra, the work is inspired by an article in the Respekt magazine, dealing with the changing rate of male to female fish in ponds, caused by contamination. The problem lies in hormonal contraception containing synthetic estrogens. These enter drinking water through urine and cause a catastrophe – disproportionately more females are being born. Considering this fact, Daubnerová points to the human males, and whether these are endangered as well. Is a twilight of males drawing near?

Paradox: women emancipating, men feeling oppressed

How are the men of 21st century? What expectations are imposed on them? A theory on fish becomes a sophisticated play, calling for compassion with men. Here, men are shown as beings who feel they aren't being heard, and so their meaning and a *raison d'etre* increasingly vanishes. Military service is no longer compulsory, their “manly” use as protectors of family and state is no longer there. They aren't even capable of beating a nail to a wall and hang a painting, to speak nothing of being great battle heroes. Advances in emancipation caused women to have equal or bigger salaries, which leads to frustration or even feelings of worthlessness. So how about raising children, do the men of today take part in it? Rather not, they are pushed back, with the child-rearing in the grip of a firm woman's hand. Sons lack a fatherly role model, necessary for integration in society. And so, a cycle emerges – son misses a father, who misses a father, and so on.

Five men in designer suits call for recognition and power!

A parallel to the animal male case is made clear in an allegory – with men as fish, situated in what reminds of small aquariums. Actors first enter the stage in a typical “dad” attire – boxer shorts, sleeveless shirts, socks. They discuss their underprivileged position in society, being led by their wives, who wield absolute power over them. In the next part, we are introduced to five young men in suits who are only after two things – power and career growth. Another brooding theme touches upon fatherhood and men's rights in raising children. Is it science fiction, or are human males truly endangered and underrated species?

Brilliant performances and a breathtaking choreography

If you decide to see this unique performance, you can already look forward to the cream of the crop among actors: Cyril Drozd, Jan Grundman, Marián Chalány, Jan Lepšík and Jiří M. Valůšek. Emil Leeger is in charge of the outstanding choreography. If you want to see men satisfying themselves with anything they get their hands on, a singing transvestite, terrific paraphrases on a “typical” man and a

perfectly thought-out concept performed by an experimental theatre, do not hesitate. It's worth it!

Lidové noviny

Vol. 25, Nr. 246 (October 20-21, 2012)

KATEŘINA SLÁMOVÁ – BARTOŠOVÁ

theatre critic

Man as a vanquished fish?

Sláva Daubnerová presented her vision of the future man in HaDivadlo

For her new work in HaDivadlo, author and director Sláva Daubnerová was first inspired by a notice on a threat for males, represented by hormonal contraception residue in drinking water. The result is a tragicomic glimpse into the male world in 21st century, on the one hand defined by loose boxer shorts, on the other by confident gestures and fitting suits. The director (a Slovak performer intimate with new media) came up with a strongly visual performance, despite its abundance of text. Movement becomes the chief means of expression, complemented by video – which will probably engage more than the performance's message itself. Lightly ironic, *Twilight of Males* deals with the male role in three parts: at home, in the career field and – put simply – in relationships. We first encounter the man in the privacy of home. The first part is grotesque in character, as well as tellingly dreamlike. Choreography is inspired by the vision of ecological catastrophe as mentioned above, transforming it into relaxed, unhurried gestures of the characters floating through the stage as if in a dream or underwater. Actors augment the floating style of their movements and actions (for instance, the men move all kinds of furniture) with a carp-like opening of mouths. They end up shut in improvised aquariums, exhibits on display confined by frames of a painting, wardrobe or a television screen.

Comical at home and at work

The slowed-down movements are contrasted with comedic moments, in which the characters' male nature manifests itself in hysteric copulation with objects or confessing an inability to do small handiwork. Also, confessing to the humiliation caused by their more competent significant others. Men at home are shown as the most comical beings – males and carps with transformed sex, handymen fighting against nails in apartments.

The image of a man that follows – a success and power machine – is the most dynamic one, founded on a gradating choreography – a hasty strut, passing by each other, stereotypically repeated gestures;

expressions of one's indispensability and meaning. Movement multiplies, gradually taking up contact elements, achieving a character of dance and culminating in an act of violence.

The last man is the burnt-out one, stripped of his suit, aiming for peace in woods. A broken relationship, estrangement with children (the authors drew on seminars organized by the League of Open Men). Visuals concentrate on “torsos” – the characters half-naked, deformed, controlled by mechanical movements.

The performance will captivate with its visuals and choreography, as well as the acting. Although the author and dramaturg are both women, with the male ensemble all taking authorial parts, the male and female views on the topic in question offer no striking divisions. The play mostly deals with predictable themes, without ambition to delve deeper. In this respect, it is similar to dramaturg Anna Saavedra's *A Secret Message from the Planet of Mothers* (*Tajná zpráva z planety matek*), to which *Twilight of Males* serves as a sort of counterpoint. It also balanced on an edge of cliché, overshadowed by stark humor and frankness. *Twilight of Males* avoids this trapping with its choreographic stylization, but not quite.