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RAISES STIMULATING QUESTIONS

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Tauranga Arts Festival 2015

SOLOTHELLO

By William Shakespeare and Regan Taylor
 Directed by Craig Geenty
 Presented by Te Rēhia Theatre Company

at Huria Marae, Wharenui, 1 Te Kaponga St, Judea, Tauranga
 29 Oct 2015
 [1 hr]

Reviewed by Gin Mabey, 30 Oct 2015

Regan Taylor begins the show with a warm and personable, "Shall I get into it then?"

However, at first I have reservations. Taylor has a box on the floor, a sheet and 3 masks which are used pretty 'rustically'. The show isn't what I would call seamless or smooth, so at first I think, oh no, perhaps this is going to be a bumpy ride ... *Othello* is a pretty heavy show as it is ...

But then the humour, charm, cheekiness, cleverly-extracted wit comes out and we all relax and start to thoroughly enjoy. I find this interesting to ponder when considering the place of comedy in a solo show and the way in which it instils a sense of trust in the audience toward the performer. This makes it all make sense.

The show isn't designed to be water-tight and slick, it doesn't need to be, and part of the enjoyment is watching Taylor 'get through' the show with all the many mask switches, flitting about, sweating and all the while conveying a giant story with many characters, into one hour, solo. He makes self-aware comments throughout, such as "...actor getting ready behind curtain...", "...I can't remember the next bit ... you try doing this!" I like this; it brings a strange kind of realness to the show, all the while being a very specific stylistic theatrical choice (again, assumed).

Regan gives a summarized version of *Othello*. He takes some words directly from the script, especially when he is portraying Othello. His Othello is mask-less and strong. His Iago has a half-mask and a menacing voice that reminds my friend of an old scheming geezer dude from down the pub. His Roderigo has a half-mask, and is joyfully idiotic, fumbling around after Desdemona.

His Desdemona has a full mask, and a sheet to portray her pale skin (I assume). She does not speak, but gives her gentle wails and moans that work just as well as speech. His Desdemona is graceful and dignified, moving beautifully and serenely. I like that he has treated Desdemona this way; I think she deserves it.

His speech switches between Te Reo, Shakespeare's own words and his abridged version of the story.

I'm not convinced that Shakespeare's *Othello* was given much new insight by this performance. I think that the play was used as a great structure and tool for this show, but it could easily have been any other play. However, the idea of 'story' itself is presented interestingly.

How can a story be conveyed in more languages than one? How much does an audience need to understand of language and how much can movement /voice /design assist understanding? What are the limits of the performer and what is the benefit of solo acting as opposed to pure story telling? How can comedy make difficult text more accessible?

I don't have the answers to these questions, but I very much enjoy theatre that makes me search for the answers. Therefore, *SoloOthello* is both a highly enjoyable show, and a very useful one as it re-opened some buried questions I have regarding theatre which I very much appreciate.

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