

TOGETHERNESS OF DISTANCING AND EXPERIENCE

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The House of Bernarda Alba by **Federico García Lorca**, directed by **Vazkressia Viharova**, set and costume design by **Zarko Uzunov**, choreography by **Mila Iskrenova**, music **Asen Avramov**

Cast **Tsvetana Maneva, Yordanka Kuzmanova, Reni Vrangova, Teodora Ivanova, Bilyana Petrinska, Emanuela Shkodreva, Ana Papadopulu, Zhoreta Nikolova, Mariya Sapundjieva**

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Photographer Simon Varsano

The House of Bernarda Alba by Federico García Lorca, directed by Vazkressia Viharova

Perhaps this is Federico García Lorca's play most often staged in Bulgaria, and elsewhere. Just in the past two years the text has undergone three different stage interpretations in Bulgaria, each of them causing a lot of attention. This is the second time Vazkressia Viharova has staged this text: now this performance is quite

different from the first one; in any case her approach is somewhat more psychological, but not realistic; non-ritualistic and rather ironic this time.

Why this Lorca's drama in particular is so popular in our theatre may be subject to further in-depth analysis. I will merely outline some major highlights. For ex-

ample: the well-researched proximity of Bulgaria and Spain during the entire 20th century as both were more “rural” countries, especially in the first half of the century: in mentality, in forces of production and interests, in the terrible and inevitable struggle with the land; in their South European proximity to the burning summer sun, with the preserved – to some extent – patriarchy in their provincial regions, with the almost coinciding periods of political dictatorship, but also with the power of that matriarchy that continued and secured male power: where men either died because of hard work and disease, or worked abroad... *The House of Bernarda Alba* as a metaphor for Spain can refer to Bulgaria in the same way.

Well, this is just a mythological series about proximity but it also points to some more general symbols. First, the *Mother* symbol: Magna Mater, giving birth and swallowing, life and death, calming and threatening (here this pair, even if reversed, does not change), suggesting devotion to land and passive acceptance of natural phenomena. The Mother is also the Mother of God, and the God’s Bride and Mother Dolorosa, mourning the death of her son. She is also the Virgin. She is also hatred born out of love. Her aspects are in Maria (Bernarda’s mother, the madness of the norm), in the daughters such as Magdalena, Martirio, the martyr, and others. (Besides, the Mother is also the most significant and tragic character in *Blood Wedding*). The Mother is also the *Home*: a womb and a



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Tsvetana Maneva (*Bernarda Alba*)

tomb, a temple and a hiding place, a fortress and a prison, our small world but also the universe. *The House of Bernarda Alba* signifies the mother's power but fortified, amplified twice. Amplified to self-burial.

It is precisely because of its concentrated symbolic imagery, even charged with boundlessness, that the drama plot may refer to the time of Lorca, and the time before him, and the time after him. Both now and ever. V. Viharova has chosen the times of the 1960s when the Mother's power and tradition – isn't it the Mother of power? – was disintegrating because of the student unrest, sexual liberation, when the mysterious smile of Mona Lisa was replaced by the smile of Marilyn Monroe, the protest against the wars, the freedom of the hippies and drugs; the time when President Kennedy was murdered – and that felt as if they simultaneously had destroyed the Father (the president in general) and the Son (as the youngest president and hope of the nation). In the meanwhile, a TV set from that period shows from the stage some of those landmark sequences. However, ultimately, we should not go too far with the desire to justify why the text is set precisely in the 1960s: those times of change. But which times are not really? Everything resembles a trick and a game.

The set designer is architect Zarko Uzunov and he has chosen for the stage space some pieces of furniture of elegant eclecticism: a heavy living room furniture with a couch and two tables with white covers. In the background there is a covered mirror. A parlour that must be con-



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Tsvetana Maneva (Bernarda Alba) and Ana Papadopulu (Adela)

cealed as a parlour just as the nature of women in the play is concealed but visible; concealed in order to be noticed even more. The heavy tables somewhat resemble the uncomfortable, unusable living room tables from the 1960s. Their role is mostly to echo the commanding and ritualistic strokes of Bernarda Alba's hand and the strokes-responses of her daughters which rather resound the mixture of consent and discord. The motional lines made for the actors by Mila Iskrenova are not realistic but they have yet to become pure dance. There is an overt eroticism in these

movements but naturally they are an external manifestation of the inner feeling. In addition, there is an alienating irony in them.

Moreover, the eerie atmosphere of the performance is precisely in the togetherness of distancing and experience, of actresses' movements and words. They are in fact one body, which is always different and somehow fleeting in its entirety. Merging from one movement into another, from one gesture into another, from one word into another. It is as if the head and upper body belonged to Bernarda, the others seem to be its limbs: more in number because this is a monstrous body, of course. It is at the same time menacing and funny, unified and disintegrating, walking synchronously but somehow staggering. The grotesque Maria Josefa (Bernarda's mother played by Yordanka Kuzmanova) is indeed the extreme perspective of united feminine diversity that has its movement, still alive, brimming over with outbursts, unrestrained movement into the daughters played by the actresses Reni Vrangova, Teodora Ivanova, Bilyana Petrinska, Emanuela Shkodreva and Ana Papadopulu. Zhoreta Nikolova (Poncia) adds but also creates a certain counterpoint to that complex movement of the Woman.

Opening the text with this almost merry key hardly aims to de-dramatize it and thus "up-date" it. But the text undoubtedly comes closer to us in this performance: in that seriousness, hypocrisy, and a bit of acting: as it is in life, indeed. The undoubted centre of the performance is the character of Bernarda Alba, yet another creative success of Tsvetana Maneva. In a strictly measured rhythm and laconic expression, all her emotions and impulses pass as if in a stream refracting in different currents along its way: from the dark, deep whirlpools of tradition to the play of feminine jets that have gushed on the surface, again out of somewhere deep down, inexhaustible and unbreakable.

After the psychological and realistic, ritual and motional stage interpretations of Lorca's drama, it is as if Vazkressia Viharova's performance accomplishes a synthesis of all of these. So far so good. And where to from now on?

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*Translated by
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