



Interview with Monique Corvers, director of “Miss Ophelia”

Questions to Monique Corvers

1. Please tell us what brought “Miss Ophelia” to Beijing, China.

Seven years ago, A.S.K (Arts Space for Kids) invited us to perform Miss Ophelia for 3 weeks in Shanghai. The artistic director of ASK, Forrina, was touring the world seeing shows and she heard about Miss Ophelia because we have performed that show in many countries. She desperately wanted to show it to a Chinese audience and it was a big success in Shanghai and audiences loved it. I fell in love with China and I’ve always wanted to come back. Forrina and I kept in touch, but obviously, the pandemic happened and then, well new, hybrid ways of collaborating surfaced and now we're doing this co-production and building this whole show in China so I'm really happy that we have this opportunity now and that it premieres in Beijing, which I think is great.

2. What’s the story of “Miss Ophelia” mainly about? When directing it, what techniques have you adopted to ensure audiences both young and old can understand the story?

Miss Ophelia is about a woman who was born with a soft and quiet voice. However, her parents (parents sometimes have high expectations of their kids) wanted her to become a famous actress. However, with a soft voice you can’t, so she became a prompter in the theatre, which she tremendously enjoyed. The story is about her life. I think she's a wonderful character because she's a kind of hero of resilience, a person that you don't see on the stage shining but a person in the prompter's booth beneath. When she has to stop working because the theatre is closing she meets a shadow and she takes the shadow with her because the shadow has no one to belong to. So, you could say that it's about a character that embraces the shadow side of life which I think is something that we find harder and harder to do, and in a way is key to a happy life.



3. Why did you choose to use boxes to present the story?

We use quite simple material for the show because it's a story that is actually not about glamour, it's about a down-to-earth simple, open-hearted woman so I think we use simple honest materials. And I really enjoy the sheer creativity of using stuff in different ways so it's not just plain cardboard it's also desk lamps that become teacups. And I think the creativity of the show - creativity connects with resilience. Curiosity, creativity and resilience come from the same source.

I'm not a director who always uses the same materials, I do like a lot of technical and digital media, however, I do like to combine old school creatively with high tech but Miss Ophelia is a show that needed this particular form.

4. Can you please share with us the features of its music? Among 30 segments of music, which one would be the theme music that audiences may remember after they see "Miss Ophelia"? How did you arrange the order of all the music?

Het Filaal, our theatre organisation, collaborates with a composer (Gábor Tarján) and mostly we have live music with live musicians on stage. When we started doing this story (Miss Ophelia is based on a book by Michael Ende) he said, well if you want to do this story (it's such a big story about shadows and life and death) you'll need a whole Symphony Orchestra on stage because the ideas in the story are so big. You couldn't do it with one cellist or one guitar player in the corner. So he made a soundscape for us, he collected music and sometimes mixed it with city sounds or seascape. There's all kinds of music in there and there isn't one piece of music that stands out more than the others. I think the precision with which our actors work as well as our set is also reflected in the soundscape, and I think you can tell it's been chosen by a composer who knows what the music



conveys to the audience.

5. “Miss Ophelia” has been performed in many countries, for example Australia. What are the differences and similarities between the feedback of audiences from different countries?

We have toured this show in the UK, USA, Australia, and more places that I just can't think of right now, and actually, they're more similar than they differ and I think that's really nice. I enjoy that because in a way there's a deep connection that we're all humans and that the shadow side of life means the same for all of us. Obviously, there are individual differences, but in a way, deep down, it's about how you deal with life's adversities.

It's a show that's sometimes funny, sometimes moving, and parents in a way can worry that it'll be a little bit too moving for their kids, but kids don't agree with that, and that is the same all over the world.

In Shanghai, a father came up to me after the show and he said “This show's a bit sad”, and I said. “Yes, it is” and he asked why, as it was a children's show, and I said, “ Well, sadness is a part of life”. If you ask a child after seeing the show what she or he thought was sad, they never mention Ophelia dying, they always mention the Landlord (who evicts Ophelia from her apartment) and I think that's so clever because death is a truth of impermanence, but the landlord is an avoidable evil, that should not have happened, and I think that's what is wonderful about this show, that kids can discern that. And we had a lovely conversation with the kids afterwards. We shouldn't underestimate them, they really do know that life is not always ‘Pink and Glossy’ so they do need stories that are the opposite and talk about how life can be hard, but that there's always a way to bounce back, and that resilience is much more important in life than things that are fleeting.



6. “Miss Ophelia” will be on stage in Beijing from October 12th to 29th. And later it will tour to three other cities in China. What are your expectations of its touring in China?

The three weeks in Shanghai seven years ago made me really look forward to this because the audience really loved it. They enjoyed the story and appreciated that there was an interpreter on stage, and also the actors spoke a few words of Mandarin. As theatre makers, we want to share the work we make. It's just a short span of concentrated time and space and it's an experience that you want to give to people and I hope they will enjoy it.

I love meeting audiences in other countries. The Netherlands is such a small country, so for me as an artist it is so important that now and then we can tour the world and meet other people and other audiences and see how that works. And I think Miss Ophelia is one of those shows, that is, quite universal in a way. Every culture has old ladies, that seem a bit invisible, and that nobody pays attention to, and it's nice to have a character like that, not a traditional hero, but someone, you wouldn't notice on the street almost. In a lot of cultures, that works really well. She's a 'hero of acceptance' but she has the resilience to carry on, and that speaks to us all.