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Queens live dangerously

For their new piece, Theater Sgaramusch, Schaffhausen's theatre for children and adults, has rummaged in the history box and dug up the story of Elisabeth and Mary. The drama around two Queens, driven by the greed for power, whilst the men operating behind the scenes instigate putsches, has been reduced to the essential; love and death. Maybe not entirely accurate but with a great deal of humour and intrigue this complicated story of power and betrayal is told in such a manner that everyone can understand.

Theater Sgaramusch's new piece is an amusing theatrical radio play for children and adults. The bitter fight for the English throne between Elisabeth and Mary Stuart is played out live and includes galloping coconut-shells and a storm in a bucket. Of course at the end Mary loses her head. Or was it just an apple? This special drama has reduced the story to just its essential elements. Maybe not entirely accurate but with a great deal of humour and intrigue this complicated story of power and betrayal is told in such a manner that everyone can understand.

In the centre a huge recording tape placed in a bookcase, in the front a table, an old tin bucket, two microphones, and the flags of England and Scotland. This is how the stage is presented to the audience at the beginning. "Queen" is a so called theatrical radio play.

Invisible in the beginning

The actress Nora Vonder Mühl and the actor Gerhard A. Goebel are not visible at the beginning. To be heard is a voice from the off, leading through a journey into the past. The story begins – logically – with the births of the two queens, Elisabeth and Mary.

500 years ago conventions were rough and being a princess wasn't easy. Elisabeth lives in exile in the country after her father has beheaded her mother, and is only considered half a princess. Mary on the other hand, due to the fact that Scotland is short of cash, is engaged to a rich prince whilst still a baby, and sent to him to France.

Only when Elisabeth has already become Queen and Mary's husband, the Frenchman dies, do Nora Vonder Mühl and Gerhard A. Goebel enter the scene. She puffs into the microphone imitating a storm, while he reads the next part of the story from a book. The two narrators are in the midst of recording "Queen". They have to give each of the characters involved a voice; the Queens, the advisors and the lovers, as well as imitating the clatter of hooves, the sea, wind, rain and explosions. The audience witnesses live how a radio play is made and sound effects are created. When the coconut shells are clapped together, it's enough to close your eyes and already the horses are galloping across the stage, and when properly applied, a tin bucket can easily replace an entire ocean. Even the audience has their part, when the subjects are called on to cheer their Queen.

Clearly enthusiastic

The narrators are committed with enthusiasm and get drawn more and more to their characters. Are they really arguing as Queens, or is it going to

continue backstage? The boundaries between narrator and character become vaguer and they suddenly start reinventing the story. That's when the voice from the off interrupts the narrator; to bring things back to order. After all, the content is historical and the past cannot be rewritten. Mary Stuart's head must roll, the ending is given. But until it gets that far, the audience receives an hours worth of entertainment.

“Queen”, the theatrical radio play has something to offer to both children and adults. Funny sound effects, a bit of clamour, and a simple and clear language speak for this children’s play. The gentle underlying humour and the small puns amuse the adult spectators. For example, the advisors who turn up as word machines - technical advisors in both senses.

Or the small plastic toy, as a last rest of the unpleasant “Didli”, is almost dark-black humour. The story of Elisabeth and Mary is actually quite gruesome, but Sgaramusch has turned it all into the best of entertainment.

Barbara Ackermann

English translation by Frances Werner