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Devilishly Calm.

“The Black Spider” at the Zürich Blickfelder Festival

The bold woman hiker from Basel ought to have thought it over before. It's not that the two men by the Emmental farmhouse appear to be threatening, just somewhat peculiar. They persistently refuse to speak out her name, Christine. She on the other hand, wants to spend the night in the farmhouse, the view is simply so wonderful... Theater Sgaramusch presents – in the Volkshaus Zürich, as part of the Blickfelder Festival – an adaptation of Gotthelf's novel “The Black Spider”, in which Christine almost ends up sitting all alone on the mysterious old bench and becomes tempted to revive an ancient nightmare. But before things gets that far, Nora Vonder Mühl, Stefan Colombo and Olifr Maurmann have to explain to their audience of 8 years and older the content of the story, and clarify the matter of the stuffed hole in the bench. They do this – in less than an hour – in a relaxed storytelling fashion and with stylistic diversity.

There are plenty of tricky parts in this story: How for example do you bring the Devil on stage? Theater Sgaramusch decided, as casually as possible – after all he's amongst us. Olifr Maurmann, who until a moment ago was a portly farmer, turns up as the Devil himself, as soon as the latter is mentioned. Dangerously calm, with a slight hint of irritation, he awaits his next deal. But godlessness also has a flashy face: The ruthless Knight of Stoffeln, who's driven the villagers into

forced labour and dire need, is played by Stefan Colombo, using a form of speech reduced merely to consonants which practically merges unnoticed into the barking of the dogs whom the farmers so fear. The alert face of decisiveness and intelligence is played by Nora Vonder Mühl as Christine, the stranger in the village, the only one who dares to strike a deal with the Devil and to trick him. When the deal is done, he takes her on his arm like a bride – turns her over his shoulder and burns a kiss onto her cheek. Helplessness, tenderness, and horror all mingle into one. Even with such skilful use of theatrical means - one question remains – Does the deep inner paradox which practically tears up Gotthelf's characters become tangible? Maybe one should trust children better to be able to handle such drawn out moments of confusion and disbelief. -Tobias Hoffmann

English translation by Frances Werner