

11.10.2021, Mannheimer Morgen

David Weber-Krebs presents *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* in Mannheim's Zeitraumexit.



He holds her again and again: Sonia Si Ahmed (left) and Ezra Fieremans in the performance *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.

Light gradually becomes brighter. Total darkness must disappear. But there is nothing on the stage of Mannheim's Künstlerhaus Zeitraumexit. At the start of the performance *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* the public looks into an empty space. A music starts, it sounds like wafting, whispering, glimmering, animated by the voices of some ghostly choirs. As it stops suddenly, Sonia Si Ahmed appears in front of the tribune. The dancer – blue jumper, grey trousers – begins to talk, in English.

It is the story of her life, which starts in Algiers and leads her with her parents to Düsseldorf where her mother and her grandmother came from. Her father had found jobs in various places and countries. Therefore, she had spent her childhood in French Clermont-Ferrand, then in Paris and then she returned to Düsseldorf. She had decided to become a dancer. She consequently went to dance school in the Netherlands and at the Cunningham School in New York. Later on she moved to Brussels where she still lives now. She'd found a partner and had a child. Her professional career developed also. And now? People move, others die, says SI Ahmed. What should she do now?

This première of the Belgian-German director and conceptual artist David Weber-Krebs refers to Leo Tolstoy's novel *The death of Ivan Ilyich* and is a commission of the festival "Wunder der Prärie" at Zeitraumexit. Tolstoy's story deals with the court clerk Ivan Ilyich Golowin and his death at age 45. It deals with powerlessness in the face of fate and with the existential question of a well and rightly led life. The novel begins with the funeral service of the defunct. But here the public has assembled and feels by and large that this performance is not a storytelling evening but that they have attend a dance of death.

Rearing up and helplessness

Then the dancer Ezra Fieremans enters. At first he stays behind. Then he follows Si Ahmed. When she tells him how one day she had entered her deceased grandmother's room, he draws nearer and nearer to her, becoming like her shadow. She now sits on his knees, she leans on him, she plunges against his chest, he grasps her around the waist, she moans, he rocks her like a child, he lifts her, she yells and kicks her legs. This is rearing up, helplessness. He hums a song. He holds her again and again.

Staged with disturbing clarity

Where before a life was spread out, now it seems to collapse. And this happens with gruelling intensity, in an inevitability that is staged by the director and the two performers as captivating as it is startlingly clear. And yet: self-determined, of her own will - here we are as much with Tolstoy's protagonist as we are with Camus' "The Myth of Sisyphus" - the woman finally lies down on the floor. And The light gradually dims.

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