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Photo: Maurice Korbelt

Family Enterprise

Julie Jaffrennou's generational piece "Fin de siècle" premiered at the Freiburg E-Werk.

Annette Hoffmann, Mai 2023

If "Fin de siècle" were, let's say, a family business, it would be an example of a failed generational transition. The old still lingers heavily in the room, the atmosphere is characterized by melancholy and nostalgia, and the new has not yet emerged or found its place. Most of us are not people of the century, but rather born somewhere in between, more like thresholds and transitions. However, the end of a century is still perceived as a watershed moment. The new production by Compagnie LaPerformance, "Fin de Siècle," is indeed a family enterprise. The adult performers, Tjadke Biallowons, Alice Gartenschläger, Olivia Maridjan-Koop, and Michael Schmitter, are juxtaposed with the adolescents Paul Bartdorff, Nurya Cremonesi, Lilith Korbelt, Yoel Schneider, and Rania Seiter. They are all related and friends, which gives the 90-minute performance a very familiar and intimate tone. And this generational difference is the driving force and conflict of the evening.

However, at the beginning, it seems that everyone is stranded on an island, and it's not just the historicizing costumes, the tailcoats, and voluminous skirts that evoke failed hopes from the Romantic era (costumes: Charlotte Morache, Katja Weecke).

Ytong blocks are piled up, and they are not the only architectural structures in the hall of the Freiburg E-Werk, which is completely emptied out, allowing a clear view of the windows. One can see the industrial character of the space, and it looks a bit like a workshop and a dream landscape, created by Clemens Botho Goldbach with various building blocks, floor plates, foils, and sparse branches that appear to have been ravaged by war. Beginnings or endings are laid out everywhere, depending on one's perspective. But caution seems to be necessary; everyone breathes as if under stress, and there is loud chirping (sound: Ephraim Wegner, Tom Schneider). Michael Schmitter, who, in his fur-trimmed brocade coat, looks a bit like King Lear, takes the first stone in his hand, puts it on the ground, and stone by stone, the company will move forward as a column. Only to end up back at the pile of stones in the end. Julie Jaffrennou displays her often quirky humor also in this new performance. Then comes the first determined step into the open, which becomes a liberation for everyone. "Fin de siècle" explores various motifs and scenes. Two of the young performers build a retreat, blowing up a balloon that quickly passes back and forth between them. The happiness is short-lived, as they are subjugated by the older ones with just a few rearranged stones. Another time, the young actors carry the weakened elderly into the interior of an enclosure and sit with their backs to the audience, acting as guards. But life has not yet escaped: for a brief moment, the adults dance joyfully and secretly. There are many moments of great tender closeness between mother and daughter, as well as thrones falling and combat scenes, with boxing gloves omnipresent in the staging. And after an hour, the performance changes its temperature, everything becomes faster, more dynamic, and also happier. The new emerges from the old; that is the right of every generation, while it is the right of the older generation to not find everything old to be bad. However, in times of dwindling resources and rising temperatures, this is less certain. "Fin de siècle" is occasionally a bit too enamored with its wealth of ideas and could have benefited from some cuts, but at the same time, it is a very charming celebration of life.