

“Passport” - A collage of refugees

Michael Handlezalts, Haaretz newspaper

A political-absurd dialog by Brecht, an exchange of correspondence between two intellectual Jews, and the testimony of a war refugee – "Passport" generates an intricate and enjoyable experience for both mind and emotion.



Acting virtuosity at its best: Doron Tavori and Naomi Yoeli. Photo: Nathan Shchori

The director and adapter Yael Cramsky took three texts that have completely different natures: a dialog between two refugees from Germany that takes place in Finland in 1940, written by Bertolt Brecht, an exchange of correspondence between Gershom Scholem in Jerusalem and Walter Benjamin in Europe from 1933, and memories of a refugee from the Second World War in Russia by Yeshayahu Kagan (her father), and from these three texts she created a collage of viewpoints and acting styles that are intriguing in terms of their content, and are admirable due to the visual intention and result, as well as the level of acting.

In the background, on the wall, hangs a clock with the numbers of the years between 1933 and 1940, and the scene is a box of gravel in which the characters move, touching but not touching. Eyal Zusman, who, during most of the play appears with bare bony upper half, moves the dial between the years, and acts as the storyteller of this play, and at the same time he speaks of the experiences of a refugee and the

distress inherent in them, in a dry, businesslike – and therefore effective – manner. At the starting point and time, in 1933, Walter Benjamin, the ultimate refugee even in his own world, wonders about his possible place in the crumbling Europe, and shares his distress with his childhood friend Gerhard (Gershom) Scholem, who lives in Jerusalem, and sounds focused on his Jewish-Zionistic experience in the Land of Israel, and is seemingly condescending especially in his worried words. Both of them move ceaselessly, reaching close to one another but never meet, despite the expression of closeness between the two. Roey Maliach-Reshef well expresses Scholem's decisiveness that is closed within itself, and Michal Weinberg brings to the stage a unique, enigmatic and unsettling presence in the wandering image of Benjamin.

In between, the physician Zippel and the socialist Kalle meet in a tavern at a train station in Helsinki, and speak of the relationship of a person with their passport, of order, regime and war, in dialogs that are alternatively absurd and brilliant, and here we can see a real acting concert: Naomi Yoeli in the part of the down to earth, quotidian Kalle, which touches the hearts with some simple corporeality, and fascinates with a by-the-way hand gesture of farewell, and on the other side Doron Tavori in the part of Zippel, a virtuoso that fascinates the spectator to each and every one of his hand gestures or brow movements, while he does wonders in refinements of totally unfounded, but amazingly logical texts, which sound extremely logical when looking back (and forth).

All these together is united into a unique experience that requires concentration and attention to the various texts, their layers of meanings and the complex emotional intellectual contents, generates great interest, and is very enjoyable thanks to the visual adaptation, in which, so it seems, every detail or movement is imbued with intention and meaning. And thus, although I am certain that I haven't deciphered the depth of all the details in this work, I enjoyed it tremendously while following its course, as well as when I come to recall it.

"Passport", a play according to texts by Bertholt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem and Yeshayahu Kagan. Translated by: Doron Tavori and Harel Cain. Space and costume design: Dina Konson. Lighting: Yair Vardi. Original music: Ofir Bar-On. Dramaturgy: Freddie Rokem. Direction and adaptation: Yael Cramsky. Itim Ensemble Hall (4 Nahmani St.), April 29.2014.