

So Circus nnenstich

Gabi Keast
Photos © Sandra Schuck

When I was in Berlin a little while back I came across an impressive circus project involving young adults aged between 19 and 26. I was fortunate enough to be able to go backstage during their dress rehearsal, and watch their latest show from the wings.

Circus Sonnenstich ("Sunstroke") performed its new circus-theatre production in the cosy theatre of the Berlin troupe RambaZamba, and it was sold out.

In a wonderful, sensitive way, relationships are formed during the performance – relationships among the artists, as a group or one-to-one; relationships between the artists and their props; and above all, relationships with the audience, who were allowed to share the artists' pleasure in their work.

Some beautiful little choreographies linked the individual acts, bringing cohesion to the show and the group and keeping a pleasant sense of expectancy in the air. In the group acts, the artists created some visually striking acrobatic figures, both on the floor and on the trapeze. Impressive in a more dynamic way were the juggling and rolling globe acts. Some of the performers are natural clowns, who have a knack of producing little gestures that never fail to raise a laugh. What made two acrobatic double acts particularly fascinating was the intensity and the depth of trust that obviously existed between the performers.

The costumes were tailored to each individual, but in similar colours and styles to emphasise the togetherness of the group. The simple cuts and



Hagen Häslar, Anja-Maria Fischer-Andrees

colours allowed each artist's personality to come to the fore. The audience were fascinated by the skill, the charisma and the stage presence of the performers, and the applause was tumultuous.

An extraordinary show – presented by extraordinary performers, all of whom might be categorised as "mentally disabled". Yet on stage it was obvious how much ability was needed to put on such an impressive circus show.

The group has been working together since 1997 with professional acrobats and dancers, as well as drama and circus teachers, who gently led them to explore their boundaries – and go beyond them. You can see how much hard work must have gone into it, but the result is an easy cheerfulness.

Michael Pigl-Andrees (artistic director), Andreas Frey (trainer, organiser), Anna-Katharin Andrees (stage director) and their team have succeeded in making circus the empowering centre of the lives of their artists. The trainers had this to say about the development of their latest piece:

"We were inspired by the artists themselves. We observed and studied: how do our artists in-

teract with each other? What is important to them? Which forms of encounter take place? We took our cues from the

artists and fed them into the creative process."

Training takes place twice a week: one three-hour session of circus skills, and one two-hour session of dance, improvisation and motion theatre. Added to that are 4-5 intensive weekend workshops, and since 2006 an annual summer camp.

"When we come up against a particular disability in training and this disability makes it difficult to do certain movements, we have to find a solution that enables our artists to meet the specific challenge they face. Or to put it a better way: the current problem enables us to look at things from a new angle. The necessary change of perspective enables us to invent new possibilities for action and thus to break new ground. Another important thing for us is to encourage the artists to take responsibility for their own actions."

As I watched them train it be-

came very apparent that these objectives are being met: all the members of the group were involved in deciding on the structure of the show, they all got their own props ready, and were more than willing to explain to me how they learn new tricks.

The team of trainers at Circus Sonnenstich have gathered vast experience in developing circus with people with disabilities, and they emphasise the importance of continuously exploring and developing new methods and possibilities. They are very willing to share their experiences with others, and are also working towards the establishment of a "centre for art and learning in motion" for people with disabilities in Berlin. No doubt they will receive a lot of support in this project from their artists, who are also very generous about sharing their experiences.

www.circus-sonnenstich.de



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Fotos © Sandra Schuck

Vor kurzem habe ich in Berlin ein beeindruckendes Circusprojekt mit jungen Erwachsenen zwischen 19 und 26 Jahren kennengelernt. Ich durfte während der Generalproben hinter die Kulissen schauen und die Show „Beziehungs-Weise“ genießen.