



Jérémy Engler - L'Envolée Culturelle (www.lenvoleeculturelle.fr) - 22 July 2017
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A true and comic Mussolini!

The Avignon Off festival, as his older brother, is an international event, as proven by the great number of foreign works interpreted in their original language staged this summer. However, there are some actors which make an effort to interpret their shows in French for the first time in this festival, as in the case of Tom Corradini. This Italian artist resuscitates Benito Mussolini from 20 to 26 July 2017, at 7 pm, at the Garage international in his show *Gran Consiglio*.

A true introspection

On 24 July 1943, the Great Council of Fascism meet to discuss the removal of Benito Mussolini. While the Duce waits for the final ruling in his office e exploits this opportunity to meditate on his life and what it was lacking. This introspection begins with an explanation on how he rose to power, showing us the secrets of a great orator, aiming at inciting the masses with his ideas. To explain this, Tom Corradini quotes a number of tenets contained in Gustave Le Bon's book, "The Psychology of Crowds." The actor delivers a lesson in politics and reveals us how to manipulate a crowd – taking inspiration from a book that must have been in the hands of all our politicians. Later we discover the defining moments of Mussolini's life, in greater part based on his memoirs and biographies. 60% of the show is based on real events and tells us the true story of the dictator, the rest is left to the imagination of the actor-writer. To build his stage work, which alternates between a documentary and a one-man comic show, he also takes inspiration from the correspondence between Churchill and Mussolini.

It is the first Italian show with Benito Mussolini as sole and only character on stage, which means this theme is still too touchy for Italians, but thanks to laughter, some truth can be tackled face on and we are also able to criticize the Duce at the same time. The strength of this *mise en scène* is to show a dictator who is lucid in his choices, lucid in his misdeeds, lucid on their implications, but who is at the same time very human and jesting.

A course of satirical history

This show is regularly staged in schools and we understand why, given that it allows to enter, in a visual way, in the life of Mussolini and the stage games found in the interpretation by the actor downplay the situation. We discover an Italian man who «loves his mama and food like all Italians». Stereotypes fade one after the other and we pass from

an authoritarian speech to total discredit the second after. His decorated military uniform and his severe and grave stance impress the audience, and he's perfectly able to impersonate the dictator, but at the same time his clowning talent enables the actor to ridicule him at the same time. If some jokes are delivered under the belt, they are nonetheless delivered in a very fine manner. The caricature easily takes over, as everything that makes Mussolini a terrifying dictator is scaled down to a lower level. For instance, a dictator puts his homeland above anything and always praise it, to such an extent that when drinking a glass of milk, he thanks the cow who donated her milk for the good of the motherland. ... In the same way, each time that he affirms his authority or reminds us of his great gestures, a dialogue with Hitler immediately follows, lowering his prestige and forcing him back in his ranks. Any glamorization is followed by a comic humiliation, in order to criticise the tyrant reminding us of what kind of person he was. Tom Corradini's derision leads us into the absurd, for instance during the correspondence with Churchill, who seems more interested in culinary advice rather than foreign policy. The strength of this show is to retrace the life of the true Mussolini, showing his human and dictatorial side, without passing a real judgement. Judgement is replaced by the discredit of everything he said a minute before and not by denunciation. Something that makes of this one-man-show a brilliant and very clever performance!