



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

## Review of Die Puppe by Sirene Operntheater

Reaktor, 06.11.2024 [ENA]

The Sirene Operntheater's production of *Die Puppe* is a daring and thought-provoking journey into the essence of artificiality and human ambition. This performance, conceived by Kristine Tornquist and composer Christof Dienz, explores our age-old fascination with artificial beings – from lifelike dolls to humanoid robots – and their promise to fulfill humanity's desires for mastery, perfection, and immortality.

Through a fusion of haunting music, evocative performances, and avant-garde staging, *Die Puppe* confronts its audience with deep questions about our relationship to technology, creativity, and self-identity. The production opens with a stark and intriguing set designed by Michael Liszt, featuring a darkly illuminated space populated by mannequins and puppets, expertly crafted by Roman and Markus Spiess. These lifeless forms evoke both curiosity and unease, drawing the audience into an otherworldly arena where creation and control are constant tensions.

Tornquist's direction skillfully blurs the boundaries between humans and their artificial counterparts, challenging the audience to consider where the line truly lies between creator and creation. Tornquist's concept for *Die Puppe* resonates deeply with the themes of artificiality and ambition. The puppets serve as silent witnesses to humanity's unyielding desire to replicate itself and transcend its limitations. The staging brilliantly enhances this theme, with mannequins that remain lifeless yet eerily present, symbolizing our fascination with beings that look human yet lack autonomy. This production explores not only the aesthetic beauty of these figures but also the unsettling realization that such creations are perpetually under human.

Christof Dienz's score for *Die Puppe* is both captivating and unsettling, a carefully crafted soundscape that mirrors the eerie quality of artificial beings. The music, performed by the ensemble PHACE and featuring a wordless vocal performance by Anna Clare Hauf, melds organic sounds with mechanical rhythms. The inclusion of Jakob Scheid's automated drummer adds a fascinating layer, amplifying the sense of estrangement as mechanical beats intertwine with the human voice and instruments. Dienz's compositions tap into the uncanny, echoing humanity's discomfort with entities that look and sound human but lack an organic soul.

The score enhances the themes of the production, reflecting the audience's conflicted emotions toward artificiality. At times serene, almost meditative, the music then shifts abruptly to discordant tones that evoke an uneasy presence. This duality of Dienz's music mirrors the themes Tornquist wishes to explore:

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the allure of artificial perfection contrasted with the underlying fear that our creations may soon surpass us. Dienz's score is an inspired complement to Tornquist's vision, enhancing the thematic interplay between harmony and disruption.

The performances by the Serapions Ensemble elevate Die Puppe into a mesmerizing experience of physicality and precision. Each actor, including Elvis Alieva, Ana Grigalashvili, Zsuzsanna Enikő Iszlay, and others, executes movements that blur the line between human and puppet. The ensemble's choreography explores the rigidity and fluidity of puppets, oscillating between lifelike motion and mechanical precision. They inhabit their characters with an eerie stillness, demonstrating their command over movement as a means of storytelling.

Tornquist's direction leans into this physical exploration, using the ensemble's presence to evoke the puppet-like characteristics of human behavior when under control or manipulation. The performers' carefully controlled gestures create an illusion of limitation, as if they are only partially human, caught between states of autonomy and obedience. Their portrayal of artificiality resonates with the audience, amplifying the production's exploration of the artificial, the human, and the space in between.

Anna Clare Hauf's vocal performance, void of words but rich in emotion, is a standout element that connects the human with the machine. Her voice melds seamlessly with Dienz's score, creating an additional layer of alienation and intimacy. Hauf's vocalizations are ghostly, suggesting a soul trapped within the constraints of artificiality, yearning for expression but unable to articulate it in words. Her presence bridges the divide between the human performers and the artificial constructs on stage, a haunting voice that underscores the production's themes of identity and autonomy.

Die Puppe is as much a visual marvel as it is a theatrical experience, thanks to Tornquist's collaborative vision and the contributions of the technical team. Marlen Duken's costume design contrasts the human performers with the artificial aesthetic, dressing the actors in muted, uniform attire that blurs their individuality. This uniformity heightens the sense of artificiality, furthering the notion of the "constructed human" as a figure stripped of uniqueness.

The lighting, managed by Jan Maria Lukas, is an essential element in creating the production's atmosphere of estrangement. Lukas's lighting design uses shadows and minimal light sources to accentuate the eerie quality of the puppets and the human performers alike. Strategic, flickering light reflects the artificial pulse of life, illuminating the performers in fragmented bursts that emphasize the incomplete nature of their movements. In these moments, light becomes a tool to reveal and conceal, underscoring the idea that artificial life, no matter how convincing, is never complete.

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Additionally, the innovative use of sound and video by Germano Milite contributes to the sense of disorientation that permeates the production. The subtle integration of video projections adds layers to the narrative, merging images of human faces and robotic figures, hinting at a world where the organic and synthetic are virtually indistinguishable. In *Die Puppe*, Sirene Operntheater presents an experience that is as challenging as it is captivating, inviting the audience to ponder the complex dynamics between creator and creation, human and machine.

Tornquist's conceptual approach and Dienz's atmospheric score merge to create a work that resonates with contemporary anxieties about artificial intelligence, control, and what it means to be truly human. This production underscores that despite all efforts, artificial beings, whether puppets or androids, can only mimic life – they are but shadows of humanity, created yet never fully realized. The production's beauty lies in its ability to use art as a mirror, reflecting humanity's relentless pursuit of perfection and mastery over creation. *Die Puppe* leaves its audience questioning not only the role of artificial beings but also our role as creators and manipulators, casting a critical eye on the impulses that drive us to bring forth "life"

This is a performance that lingers long after the curtain falls, a mesmerizing exploration of humanity's dreams and fears as seen through the lens of the artificial.

In sum, *Die Puppe* is a triumph of modern theater, blending music, movement, and visual art into an existential exploration of the self in an age where the boundaries between human and artificial grow ever thinner. Sirene Operntheater's production challenges us to reflect on our own desires and limitations, reminding us that while we may yearn for perfection in our creations, we may never escape the imperfections of our humanity.

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**Redaktion und Verantwortlichkeit:**

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