

Rap in theatre For stagecraft without clichés

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But the basis of any use of rap in other contexts should be solid composition. This means that the beats need to be up to today's standards. Flows, rhymes and stylistic vocal devices need to be so good and contemporary that the force resulting from the fast sequence of the words cannot be called into question. In order to achieve this, people who are experienced in the culture need to be brought on board.

We have been putting rap on the theatre stage according to these principles since 2011. Sigrun Fritsch, artistic director of the PAN.OPTIKUM action theatre ensemble, got things rolling with work on the music theatre production "Romeo feat. Julia". Since then we have been developing productions together based on material from "Threepenny Opera", "Max and Moritz", "Alice in Wonderland" and our own texts.

The latest production, "Crossing Lines", was the pinnacle of the collaboration. It was the first time we contributed to a production for a Europe-wide audience. Unlike the previous projects mentioned, the songs were to be in different languages.

The plan was to produce trilingual songs with the help of an English rapper and a Spanish rapper. In order to prevent the songs from becoming a big collage, we developed an entirely different concept for each title. They were to form a unit, also in and of themselves, like the overall production comprising language, dance and rap.

For instance, the last (e.g. German) syllable of a verse in a song is simultaneously the first (e.g. Spanish) syllable in the next part (...taubes Ohr/hormigas aplicadas...). In the final song the language switches with every line. Rhymes result, e.g. between German and Spanish, ("Ich hab die schwarze Bestie in mir/ Aceptando a la bestia, la dejó morir"). The stylistic devices we developed gave the songs a pleasant compactness despite the desired multilingualism.

One can see from our work in "Crossing Lines" that a fine line is being walked with our bringing rap to theatre. While certain "natural laws of rap" are incontrovertible (and for theatre people sometimes hard to understand), we're always experimenting with new techniques which would be inconceivable in normal music culture and for which we need the theatre as a stage.

The full article you may find from June 2018 in the book:

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