

## Review of **Dust- Wilde & Vogel** and **Golden Delicious** at the **Figure it Out Festival**

by Dr. Andrea Despot and Mascha Wilke

*“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.”* These are the first sentences of Genesis in the Torah, the First Book of Moses in the Old Testament.

In the play **Dust** the story also begins even before the world came into being – in a space without memory, which, to form, first had yet to be created in the “back of our heads.” What a scary and at the same time liberating idea. Memory- memories are constructed, they are fleeting, fluid and ever-changing.

This idea sets the tone for this masterful play by Wilde & Vogel [DE] and Golden Delicious [ISR], performed during the **Figure It Out- Festival** at the Westflügel in Leipzig on July 11, 2022.

The distinctive Israeli-German cooperation raises many questions about the relevance and ambivalence of memory. Deeply personal and family memories of childhoods spent in Germany and Israel, meticulously described spaces, family members and disturbing, sometimes funny and at times traumatic events are told in a unique, interwoven and very empathetic way.

We hear about a “typical” childhood in Erlangen, a football-match in 1982, wild pigs in a forest, Americans taking care of Germans to “not do strange things again“, a picture of an uncle in a German uniform and a German grandfather, who does not speak much, but chain smokes despite the fact that his legs had to be amputated. A depressing speechlessness is the feeling one is left with.

An Israeli family history involving different European and Mid-Eastern places of origin like Košice, Uzhhorod, Vienna and Alexandria is told in a fast-forward fashion. The further back in time the events take place, the faster the pace of narration and the blurrier the memory, retrievable in glimpses or through music only. The Holocaust, concentration camps, death marches and the crossing of three borders - - as predicted by a fortune teller – are inevitably part of these memories. But they are never at the center, are almost told in a by the way fashion. Is the viewer spared the details- or have they been lost in the course of generations?

For example, we learn about Blima, the strict orthodox grandmother, who in the eyes of her granddaughter is the worst cook ever, but is most notably an Auschwitz survivor. Although she regularly returns to Auschwitz with groups of young orthodox girls, to talk about her survival “due to the human spirit”, she refuses to take her granddaughter with her.

With whom do we share our memories? What can be spoken about? What is unspeakable? Is this theater stage a safe space to share intimate and painful stories? Some memories hurt so much, that they have to be told in one’s own language - like

the near-death story of the little sister, which we first hear in Hebrew and which is then translated into English.

Sometimes there are no words, language reaches its limits. This is the moment of the puppets, who can bridge the void, the empty space and create a new common experience and memory. The figures then turn out to be members of the ensemble/cast.

The play is also an encounter of different manifestations of aesthetics: Giacometti-like -puppets, balancing on strings, colorful Tupperware containers and jelly-fish-balloons. Like the different narratives and memories- of the descendants of Holocaust survivors and German perpetrators- the aesthetics cannot blend, they can only be shared side-by-side.

Singing together and playing instruments together – whether practicing a violin concert by Bartok on stage, or singing songs like “Yiddische Mame“ or “Leila“. These are the moments, where the different, singular and individual memories and perspectives cease to be the play’s real protagonists. Suddenly a dialogue, a common experience in the here and now seems possible.

The play stands in stark contrast to the often criticized ritualized practices of official or public Holocaust remembrance. It does not attempt to reconcile experiences, perspectives and memories- when they cannot be reconciled. There is no attempt for an affirmative lesson for future generations - through remembrance or history. The play does something more subtle and therefore relevant and perhaps longer lasting. It attempts to create a space of individual remembrance, where different memories can be expressed and shared. In that way, something highly important is achieved, the memories are now part of a play and thus will not be forgotten in the „desert of silence.“

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