

Made in China - but attention, it is high quality - Solo for Lu

[Magdalena Pantáková](#), Kulturissimo.cz, 26.3.2012

The Archa Theatre on the 28th of February, 2012 introduced a versatile artist Jing Lu in an intimate scenic monologue, Solo for Lu. She had been developing the show for almost a year with director Jana Svobodová. In the final shape the show offers incredible commitment and admirable performance of the protagonist.

Generally the whole performance is framed by a kind of imaginary conversation with the audience - Jing Lu asks the audience, if they have any questions. Not waiting for the reaction of the audience, she anticipates questions and answers them. Right from the beginning it's clear that a significant issue affecting the entire production is the relationship of Czechs, hence Central European society to China - their beliefs, thoughts, meaningless clichés, and even prejudices. Using multi-genre forms, Lu offers a truly uncensored look at her own life, her relatives, and both her homes. She combines dance, music, sound, vocals and spoken word. Through her own story she gets over to wider social issues.

The creative duo, Svobodova and Lu, worked on the basis of documentary, or social theater. Certainly the inherent basis for the development of their production is many years of their friendship. Their collaboration on many projects since 2001, contributed to openness which Solo for Lu offers. The use of Lu's life stories are based on her personal experiences, situations, impressions, dreams and memories. In a wooden box Jing Lu brings to the stage some of her personal belongings. With their help she acts her hour and a half-long monologue. Music, sound and lighting design are her equally important peers. At a table on the stage, Lu works with a loop station, this is a device that records sound and reproduces it in a variety of mix variations. It helps create an environment, which just tells whether it is street noise of her hometown (shouting of the vendors on the market, the bells of the bikes), factory producing biscuits (mechanical motion machines, buzzing), school, or jogging behind her father on bike. She creates the sounds by beat-boxing or by using real objects (knives, pipes, flutes, plastic bags, bells, combs). The accompanying music by Michal Nejtek gets inspired by those sounds, and thus together they form a perfect symbiosis.

Lu is creative and playful. When she remembers her beloved parents, her father's briefcase is a sufficient symbol and at one point his portrait is projected on to it. She is not afraid to go into direct contact with the audience. Each member of the audience, after the entry into the hall, finds on a chair a piece of paper with Chinese characters. For most of them, it is unintelligible text. In a scene regarding the birth regulations in China Lu asks for the house lights and calls for a reading of the official (and cruel) decree. The paper is then posted on the wall. This is followed by the story of her mother's clandestine pregnancy and the birth her younger sister.

By a light and confident manner Jing Lu encompass the entire room. She moves also beyond it, out of sight of spectators (using a side hall, back stairs). The light design by Pavel Kotlík perfectly tunes the whole scene and underlines the atmosphere of the individual parts of the play. The comic scenes alternate with chilling elements, all with elegant balance. Solo for Lu perhaps is not for everyone, because it requires a sensitive and receptive audience who are not afraid to think about themselves, to contextualise and be inspired. Definitely such audience will not be disappointed. We can be proud that for the last sixteen years Jing Lu decided to live in our country. We got an unusually fervent performer, which Jing Lu certainly is.

Do you want to ask Lu something?

Marta Harasimowicz , Nový prostor, 12.3.2012

The long-term collaboration between Jana Svobodová and Chinese actress Jing Lu has resulted in the creation of a theatrical testimony of a migrant as well as a confrontation with a disturbing picture of our society.

Jing Lu repeatedly asks the audience: “Do you want to ask me something?” Partly she answers the questions she expects to hear, and partly she answers what she wants to talk about. The real experiences of dancer and singer Jing Lu show us the social differences in her two homes: China and the Czech Republic. Besides sharing her personal stories, desires, memories and dreams, Lu holds a mirror up to our schematized, often xenophobic ideas and prejudices.

Sound: an acting partner

The collaboration of Jing Lu and director Jana Svobodová can be seen mainly in the care and intimacy of the story of the main and only character. The episodes from the life of Jing Lu in China and after her arrival in the Czech Republic are selected and arranged more according to the emotional relevance for the actress than for the requirements of a rationally built drama. Lu tells her story, but only what she wants to tell, without violent construction. This creates a moving closeness between the actor and the audience.

Ms. Svobodová lets Lu play according to her own nature and frees her from artificial and unnecessary gestures. Lu reacts to impulses from the outside (music, images or speech from the public), returns to the roots of communication, where reaction always follows an action. Lu even produces impulses herself right on the stage, either using a sampler to create sounds, which she loops, or working with the space and in relation to objects on the stage. Their meaningful legitimate existence and mutual stance are then gentle clues to knowing the actress.

The sound samples that Lu records and then plays were formed by composer Michal Nejtek into the composition. The sound component is important not only as an impulse to reaction, colouring of the atmosphere or testimony through song, but also as an acting partner for Lu. And even though there is only one actor on stage, she creates other characters either by transforming herself, or through the imaginary people with whom she converses.

Do we know more than just Chinese noodles?

But she focuses on more than just her personal story. Much more far-reaching is her confrontation with social discourse with respect to Chinese immigrants and China generally. Lu presents the theme of our hypocrisy and prejudices towards Chinese culture and mistaken clichés. The pigeonholed notions of Czech small-mindedness demonstrate that we do not really know anything. Cursory moralizing entreaties such as “For you we’re just Ching or Chong” perhaps make the whole problem seem slightly banal, but only in the sense that Chinese people are also only people with their own life stories.

Jana Svobodová’s social theatre work is individual in two ways. The stage resources that the director employs to tell the theme in balanced combination: music, visuals and the spoken word are used not as showy ends in themselves, but to create a harmonious whole. Lu plays with light, with sound, with photographs of her family, with movement and with the space so effortlessly that there is no doubt about their partnership. This is also connected with the second side of the director’s individual approach to the material and the actress. The strict focus on the theme and clear transmission through theatrical language is a welcome and time-tested approach, when form serves content.

Art and theatre serve mainly to present us with a different world, to question belief systems and

force us to rethink the status quo. *Solo for Lu* is another successful project in a series of politically engaged productions which are being created at the Archa Theatre. Work with current problems, with people in the here and now, opinions on the actual state of society and creation of dialogues with the audience is a benefit for contemporary theatre productions.

OTHER RESPONSES:

“I saw the premiere yesterday and I really liked it. It was worked out to the last detail. Just keeping the audience’s attention for more than 80 minutes on the stage is an accomplishment in itself! Go Jing go!”

Monie Kim

“With one body and one voice she manages to bring a whole world on stage.”

Jitka Polanská

“A powerful performance... it is profound, with moments that are heartrending and moments of gentle humour.”

Helena Klímová