

REVIEW of Heart of a Cabinetmaker

In an interview with TVR Cultural in 2022, Sarah Brown, playwright, international performer, creator of site specific shows and Fulbright scholar from the University of Memphis, USA, talked about the fact that, once she arrived in Sibiu, she created a play in which the main character was a place: a synagogue, which impressed her by its long history and multitude of stories that seemed to demand the right to be told. A Secret About Joy premiered on 24 June 2022, played in the very place that inspired it, and was presented at FITS 2022.

Another defining place for the cultural richness of Transylvania, the Evangelical Church of St Mary in Sibiu, is the character around which Sarah Brown has built another performance, Heart of a Cabinetmaker - the story of a Transylvanian Saxon, premiering in the FITS 2023 program. Six actors from the National Theatre of Sibiu, Daniel Bucher, Johanna Adam, Ali Deac, Fabiola Petri, Daniel Plier, Benedikt Häfner, together with the Bach Choir, recreated the medieval world in which a young carpenter, Bartholomew, overcomes all obstacles because he follows his heart.

The setting of the play, the impressive evangelical cathedral, whose construction in Gothic style began at the end of the 14th century, when the action of the play is set, creates a very credible sense of entering another time. It is a time where people and Guildsmen led their lives according to the divine model, which they seek in precise measurements and realize in creations that approach perfection. The vertical dimension, in the production directed by Sarah Brown, is not only a spatio-temporal coordinate, but also a symbolic one, as the main character's search is guided by the belief that all his actions reflect his connection to divinity and to the parents whom he never got to know, but whose constant presence he feels every moment.

The young orphan, a carpenter who arrives in Hermannstadt (Sibiu), makes his entrance into the show by wandering through Transylvania "the land beyond the forest", arriving in a world where to exist means to have the support of a whole network of people, belonging to a family or guild. The height to which his spirit reaches is not enough in a world that is predominantly horizontal and organized according to the strict rules of medieval craftsmen.

The conflict is the confrontation between the inner universe - the heart of the carpenter - who is searching for his purpose, and the outer universe - a society that does not allow paths that circumvent its strict code.

The protagonist is the symbol of a person who is becoming aware of his inner freedom, which he claims and pursues without hesitation. Bartl (the familiar diminutive of Bartholomew) is able to listen to his heart and teach those around him to live the same way. His arrival in Hermannstadt is at first viewed with great reluctance, but his kindness towards those who despise him, his honesty, his naïveté break down the real or symbolic walls behind which people hide who do not want to welcome the young man into their community. The folk-tale scenario also brings to the audience a love affair, happily resolved, as the carpenter finds his mate in Kati, the daughter of a blacksmith who also breaks out of the social mould by opening a bakery. Opponents become friends, the hostile world is finally happy to accept the different one, in a performance that relies on naturalness and simplicity.

The subtle acting, in which there is room for both cunning and depth, is joined by a chorus that highlights the important moments of the action, with interventions that oscillate between strength and delicacy. Among the high columns of the cathedral, in front of the altar, sometimes in light, sometimes in semi-darkness, the actors and choir recreate a community whose links with the medieval world are evident in its setting, its posture and its language. But historical contextualization does not block a reading in a wider, human context. The orphaned child who imagines his mother as a weaver of rain, the girl who has lost her father and heals her grief by imagining that he is now a blacksmith in heaven - bending the light and turning it into rainbows, the parents who grieve at losing touch with their rebellious child, or the young man who blames himself for his brother's death - are not characters who belong only to the medieval Transylvanian world, they are human types in whom the audience can easily recognize themselves.

A Carpenter's Heart is a performance with a bright message, played with joy, a sensitive story about the boundless power of love in all its forms.

~ Ioana Clara Enescu

<https://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/27654/Ioana-Clara-Enescu/Inima-catedrala-Inima-de-tamplar-povestea-unui-sas-transilvan-la-FITS-2023.html>