Henrik Ibsen’s WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN Director: Sankar Venkateswaran



Playwright: Henrik Ibsen

Director: Sankar Venkateswaran

Group: Jangama Collective, Singapore

Language: English

Duration: 1 hr 25 mins

The Play

The play consists of a few final episodes from the life of an ageing sculptor, who achieved fame at the expense of personal happiness. The artist in his old age has lost his inspiration, he wanders around aimlessly, has stopped producing art works and his marriage with his young wife is at the verge of a breakdown. He comes across a deranged stranger lady, who

claims to be dead. He comes to realize that the strange lady was once his muse and model to his most famous work of art. His interests were only artistic while she suffers a certain death of soul due to the unrequited love. His wife breaks free from him to find life and love in a bear hunter, while the artist and the model dredge up and dig through a difficult past to realize that the life they led is irretrievable.

Director's Note

The questions are, why should we care about this play and the characters today? And how do we approach them? The answer to the first question, I think, is that these characters are like us, in their selfishness, denials and egos. My answer to the second question leads to another difficult question and is rather harsh. What if we deny the author his words, his rhetoric, the way the sculptor denies acknowledging a life beneath his model which then turned her into a statue! And when we do that to this play, we are left with a phantasmal envelope of silence where bodies move like ghosts and speak their silence. This might start to provoke our imaginations beyond the spoken, and we might start to see the irretrievable. We may begin to ask questions such as- are we awake? Are we dreaming? Or, are we dead? Do we need to wake from the dream or death? What happens when we dead awaken?

The Director

Sankar Venkateswaran is a theatre director and dramaturg from Kerala, India. He graduated from the Calicut University School of Drama and Fine Arts, and pursued his post-graduate training at Theatre Training and Research Programme (now Intercultural Theatre Institute), Singapore. Currently, Sankar has set up a cultural space in Attappady, Kerala, and works with the indigenous communities of the region. He is a recipient of the International Ibsen Scholarship 2013 (Teater Ibsen, Norway) and Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar 2011, and was a jury member for Zurich Theater Spektakel 2016.

The Playwright

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) was a Norwegian playwright, theatre director, and poet. He is considered by many as the ‘father of realism’ and remains one of the most influential playwrights of his time and is the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after Shakespeare. Ibsen’s dramas have a strong influence upon contemporary culture, and continue to be staged in different languages around the world today.

The Group

Jangama is a collective of five actors/performance-makers that strive to create work that may speak across cultural and linguistic barriers through their own forms and languages. The collective comprises of Lakshmana KP (India), Pooja Mohanraj (India), Hau Guei Sze (Malaysia), Caroline Chin (Singapore) and Alexander Beard (Australia). The five have been undergoing training at the Intercultural Theatre Institute in Singapore, an actor training institution that focuses on immersing actors in both Western and Eastern theatre forms. Each of them is working as independent artists in their own countries, while continuing to connect with each other and create work around the world.

Cast & Credits

Maia Rubek: Pooja Mohanraj

Arnold Rubek: Lakshmana KP

Ulfheim, a bear hunter: Alexander Beard

Irene, a stranger lady: Caroline Chin

Sister of Mercy: Hau Guei Sze

Translator: William Archer

Original cast of Ulfheim: Yazid de Jalil

Movement consultant: Lim Chin Huat

Voice and Speech consultant: Simon Stollery

Production photographer: Bernie Ng

Headshot photographer: Gabriela Neeb

Supporting Institution: Intercultural Theatre Institute

Playwright: Henrik Ibsen

Director: Sankar Venkateswaran