

La Ribot's realm of the senses in Geneva

By Alexandre Demidoff, September 6th 2018

The creation of Madrilenian artist La Ribot, "Happy Island" is a garden of earthly delights in which five dancers with disabilities shine. It is a hymn to the libido, beyond prudish morals, to be experienced at festival La Bâtie until 9 September.

The dream of a misty afternoon. Trees, twisted by the wind, as guardian deities. Between two stumps, the grass bursts into life as a dozen boys and girls kiss, embrace, crumple together, three, four, five at a time. It is the garden of earthly delights, the repeal of the rules of propriety, an amorous celebration hither and yon, a revolution of children, an island bacchanal, a hymn to joy imagined by La Ribot, the artist from Madrid based in Geneva since the early 2000s.

This filmed sequence takes the audience into the heart of *Happy Island*, an extravagant fairyland, playing at the Le Grütli theatre as part of the La Bâtie festival until 9 September. The performers of this amorous rumble are from *Dançando com a Diferença*, a troupe from the island of Madeira. Each of them has their own physical or mental disability that, rather than being a limit, opens the door to a poetic odyssey. The company's Portuguese director Henrique Amoedo wanted it thus when he founded the company in 2001.

Since the 1990s, the work of dancer and choreographer La Ribot has always sought to cherish differences, to find the posture that stands out, disrupts our common understanding, and forces us to look in a different way: The art of choosing distinction. She made a mark with her celebrated *Pièces Distinguées*, wonderfully resonant sketches performed in European theatres, galleries, and museums. Her encounter with *Dançando com a Diferença* was an opportunity to continue this search for the rare gesture.

A fugue at the margins of normality

So what is *Happy Island*? A fugue, a gallop at the margins of normality, a manifesto of love. In a twilight of the Cotton Club, a staccato piano writes its own law. To the wild sounds of the keys, a child savage offers a feathered headdress to a black-haired beauty, the captive of a wheelchair. She frees herself at once, crouching with her Indian plumage in her fingers. Oak trees are assailed by fog in a video playing in the background. At one point, to a mesmerising sax, a woman in silver knickers rears up, splits and arches like a Venetian bridge, pursued by the black felt-tip marker of her friend on the loose.

Libido set free

Happy Island is an enchanted world. A dreamer launches a disk into the sky, followed by another, making eyes at the stars. Sensually, a young woman traverses the stage, exulting in her extravagant red tulle dress. La Ribot and her performers have dared to achieve this breakthrough, lifting the veil on the sexuality, dreamed or otherwise, of people deprived of a voice on the subject – or any other for that matter.

Happy Island is a realm of the senses, joyful and rustling. Filmed images of the abovementioned bacchanal, with Cupid's inebriated kids in full action, are at the heart of the party. Meanwhile, on stage, the dancers compose, lying down, a single body, a river of tenderness. In the video, at one point during the show, they testify to this learning of freedom. A young woman says that she could not have imagined being able to dance on stage and that she must have been born under a lucky star. *Happy Island* is a geyser that propels its audience high into the air.