



BE Next - perhaps a glimpse into the future of the BE Festival

Be Festival – Saturday

Birmingham Rep

As BE Festival 2018 drew to a close, Saturday's performances showcased an eclectic mix of art with pieces that had been developed previously at the festival.

We saw the return of last year's Audience Award winners, Greek company OCD Ensemble, as well as the acclaimed company from Italy, Sotterraneo, with their award-winning piece Overload.

We were also treated to a performance by young and emerging artists from the festival's youth programme. The final night concluded with the awards ceremony, which gave credit to each night of the festival and the performers within it.

The first performance of the evening came from an enthusiastic group of young performers who are part of the BE Festival's youth theatre company called BE Next. The company is a year-round project and is aimed at giving young performers from the ages of fourteen to nineteen the opportunity to be inspired by world theatre.

Each member of the company uses English as a second language at home and BE Festival aims to fuse youth and culture with this immersive project. The show that was presented to us was a fantastic curtain raiser and it explored the themes of fear.

At the beginning, we saw a group of young people sitting in a line on stage conversing and mingling with each other, clearly having a good time. They had a microphone and one by one they gave their opinions on some of the performances they saw throughout the course of the week.



OCD Ensemble from Greece with *The Cave*

This was a refreshing account, especially when comparing one's own thoughts with what they had seen. Suddenly, more people arrived on stage, showing a full space of young performers and the whole performance gave a sense of pride in emerging projects and young performance. They were unafraid in talking directly to the audience, even giving one member an instruction to run out of the auditorium into the hub.

Their concept was highly effective. They used a bag as a prop and made a colourful debate on the fears of unattended baggage and in turn, allowed us to think about general day-to-day fear itself.

The BE Next project allows young performers to grow through art and culture. They created a topical and entertaining piece that linked in well with the festival's themes and showed what the new generation have to offer.

Next up were OCD Ensemble who performed, and won an award at the BE Festival last year with their cultural show *Before Athens*. It was an immersive look into Athenian culture of the past and present, using live video and music as material to tell their story.

Their show this year was entitled *The Cave*. It was an abstract commentary on Plato's text. The sixty-minute performance was an extraordinarily modern piece of theatre and like their previous piece, it drew on operatic music, live video streaming and images from popular media to produce a cultural commentary.

The piece was entirely stylised and completely interpretive. It was certainly memorable due to it being a piece that steered away from our usual concept of theatre. They were perhaps too bold in their choices at times, as the message was not fully received due to the overload of media used. Their idea was interesting, however the execution left something to be wanting.



Sotterraneo with an updated Overload

The night ended with what could be described as a comedic, yet dark performance by Sotterraneo. Their performance in 2016 saw a half hour version of Overload, which presented the idea of how small our attention spans really are in an age of information overload. This year, we saw how the piece had developed during the two-year period.

It was wonderful to see the same essence of fun and enjoyment, giving us short and snappy scenes lasting for under a minute. With each scene change, the audience had to stand up which swiftly lead into a new sequence. They depicted every day circumstances, recreating sports, animals and famous public figures with a sense of humour and familiarity. As in 2016, we saw the return of fake fish in a tank, reminding us of research showing that the human attention span could actually be similar to that of a goldfish.

It was pleasing to see the company in action for a full hour this year. Their new development bought darker themes for us to take into consideration. Their piece ended with the idea of death, particularly considering whether even within our last moments, do our minds still wonder and have the same attention span as they would do as if it were another day?

Their energetic and humorous piece gave us a funny account of the human attention span. It also made a fantastic point in saying that we live in an age of information overload and presented the repercussions of humans having to compute the physical and mental responsibilities that we must account for in modern life.

BE Festival closed with an awards ceremony and after party, celebrating the impact of performance art within Europe. It is a fantastic festival with Birmingham Rep being the host. BE Festival does not however stop at the final evening. The festival supports artists year round with the development of their pieces. The festival also takes events to the continent, allowing audiences from all cultures and cities to be entertained by art and culture. Until next year.

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