

# TOTALTHEA



## Familie Flöz: Hotel Paradiso

in Reviews | by Michael Begg | No Comments

Tags: Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2015

I love masks. They are among our most strange contrivances, and such a mystery for something so commonplace.

In Greek tragedy the chorus masks were worn not merely as costume elements, but as resonance chambers for the ritual cries of the chorus. Their consequent mental transportation into the darkest inner realms were, effectively, masked from the audience who, nonetheless, would pay witness and, via the qualities of the mask, project themselves into a position of direct experience alongside the performer. This led to a collective sense of purgation and healing, and audiences would leave the amphitheatre feeling soulfully cleansed as much as entertained.

This mysterious lens-like quality of the mask, where one can empathise, engage and project whilst somehow remaining safe from ones own imaginings goes some way to explain the prevalence of death masks in so many international cultures.

It perhaps also explains why a gruesome little tale of multiple murders, kleptomania, family feuding and melancholic yearning, all contained within a grubby Alpine hotel, is one of the breeziest comedic shows you're likely to find at this year's Fringe.

Familie Flöz, the collective pool of theatre-makers based in Berlin who have made a mission of raising the profile of mask theatre – and have done so with conspicuous success – make a welcome return to Edinburgh with Hotel Paradiso.

Within the constraints of mime and mask they exhibit impressive emotional subtlety and dexterity, so much so that one is occasionally fooled into believing the expression on the masks themselves to have changed. Was that a smile that curled the corner of the cook's mouth as he attended to another corpse with his trusty circular saw? Did that repressed hoteliers lip really tremble as his opportunity for love and escape to a brighter life floated out of the door, never to be seen again? I could have sworn that an eyebrow arched as a plan – a dark plan – took form in the mind of the kleptomaniac maid? Surely not. Masks are frozen. They express nothing. How could they? And yet... And yet...

Flös are the continuation of a long, proud tradition and there is much in their work that pays homage to the tightly worked routines of silent cinema, especially Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd; the engagement with problematic props, the potential for multiple gags contained within familiar objects, the proximity of comedy and pathos. They are also doubtlessly assisted in capturing the audience through the familiar constructs of farce and sit-com (don't mention the Fawlty Towers comparison).

The performance is suffused with charm and executed with impressive mastery. The dark tale is lightly told and there is no shortage of laugh out loud moments. Particularly worthy of note is the dumb and dumber cop cameo. For those seeking pure entertainment there is much here to satisfy. For those curious about the role of mask and mime there is much here to ponder about how much is said, how much is communicated, before a word is ever spoken.

*Hotel Paradiso is presented by Aurora Nova and plays at Pleasance Courtyard everyday throughout the Fringe, 5-31 August, except 17 August*

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# Michael Begg

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