

INNER MIGRANT

Media Review

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In the *Inner Migrant* production, DynamO Théâtre and the Portuguese company Teatro O Bando explored the integration process and incorporated some strikingly imaginative staging.

As the late Quebec born singer Pauline Julien used to sing so passionately, “Do you believe it possible to invent a world where they wouldn’t be any more strangers?”. Developing along those same lines, the play’s narrative aims to humanize the thorny and complex issue of welcoming immigrants into a new world. The production is geared for children 8 years and up.

During the 55-minute performance, audiences follow the journey of the likeable Antonio, who left his native Portugal to settle in Montreal in the 6th floor of an apartment building. He regularly has to return to the

immigration offices to make his new citizen status official. With his long coat and black hat, he moves from one location to the next on his bike. Yet deep inside, he is torn between the hopes for a better life here for himself, his wife and children and the wistfulness of a past that he must learn to leave behind. Luckily Antonio will be meeting Francis who plays different instruments, including keyboards and violin. Completing this duo are on-screen accounts of men and women who chose to come and live here.

The set features a tree on the left and Francis’ shop on the right. In the middle stands an imposing grey (mountain-like) structure that eloquently depicts the various locations in the play. Thanks to door handles that seem to appear magically, audiences find themselves in front of Antonio’s apartment building or in the waiting room of the immigration offices. To emphasize the alienating aspect of this last location, the actor has fun writing down and drawing bits of information with a piece of chalk on the ground or the wall.

Although the themes are tackled somewhat predictably, Jacqueline Gosselin’s directing offers many amusing surprises. For instance, Antonio opens a tiny door in the top section of the set to wish a good night to his offspring. In another both funny and moving scene, he draws a small square on his vest before delicately positioning a handle on it and revealing his throbbing red heart. From beginning to end, the play is a surprise package of sorts. Its approach demonstrates how a father has the chance of broadening his horizons in new surroundings. Just before the production concludes, blue skies and smiling immigrant faces appear and show authentic fragments of poetic hope-filled words.

Yves Simard’s moving performance as the main character greatly adds to *Inner Migrant*. His portrayal of Antonio avoids the pitfalls of a cartoon or a tear-jerking character. He is rather determined to make a name for himself in this unknown society. It strikes of authenticity. Luckily the actor can count on Francis Guérard, a multi-talented partner on stage whose interpretation during the many musical moments adequately supports the whole range of emotions pervading the text. It also bears witness to the tight partnership both in the lively sequences and more melancholic moments while the violin sweetly envelops one’s ears.

Showing interested and delicate sensitivity, *Inner Migrant* is on the whole a beautiful dramatic account on human solidarity.

Dynamo
Théâtre