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NEW ZEALAND

Peter Falkenberg, Dr Faustus (Marlowe)

Theatre and Film Department, Univ. of Canterbury, New Zealand

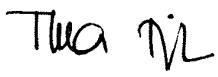
Reviewed by Prof Dr Thea Brejzek, Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK)

June 2, 2010

Peter Falkenbergs production of *Dr Faustus (Marlowe)* is reviewed here as a professional theatre production that sits comfortably within a comparable international context of practice-as-research into the research, adaptation, staging, directing and acting of historical dramatic texts.

Falkenbergs production of *Doctor Faustus* (Marlowe) represents a thorough, innovative and highly commendable investigation into the relevance of a 17th century theatre classic for todays audiences both within and outside of a university setting. While resisting a complete update of plot, text or visuals, Falkenbergs *Dr Faustus* succeeds in engaging the audience in a thoughtprovoking process as to the ethics and limits of an „ultimate quest for knowledge“ by an individual.
Utilizing historical and contemporary special effects (puppetry, masks, black theatre, pyrotechnics), intermedial techniques (a collage of early films ranging from Melies to Murnau as well as more recent internet-sourced imagery) and highly atmospheric vocal and instrumental music from the Renaissance composer Thomas Tallis to the early 20th century composer Alban Berg, and visual arts (tableaux vivants based on da Vinci and Otto Dix amongst others), Falkenberg displays an extensive knowledge of relevant cultural sources and is able to translate those into a complex network of interrelated live and mediated dramatic sequences.
Cross-gender casting (Mephistopheles and Lucifer are explicitly cast as women) aligns the potentially transgressive aspects of sexuality to those of knowledge-seeking beyond a scientifically prescribed and socially sanctioned rational method in a provocative way.
Collaborative working processes in text, movement, music and visuals demonstrate an awareness of a contemporary discourse questioning the authority of both text and author and thus serve as an exemplary educational tool in the training of young drama professionals and scholars.

Beyond being of particular relevance to the theatre and film department itself, it is recommended that the interdisciplinary approach toward research, training and teaching as demonstrated by Falkenbergs work throughout, be communicated to the Arts Department of the University of Canterbury by making productions such as the recent *Dr Faustus* readily accessible to staff and students of related departments (eg English, History, Cultural Studies) both within and outside of the University of Canterbury. It is further recommended to enable access to selected rehearsals and to arrange for discussions with the creative team and the cast to communicate research questions, processes and findings (through practice) to a wider scholarly audience and thus reception.



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