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NATIONBACK

THEATRE

EXPERIMENT IN FUSION

PATTARASUDA conveys, without words, the poignance of a love lost.

NUNi's new play sets a Greek myth in a contemporary Bangkok frame

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SPECIAL TO THE NATION

After receiving critical acclaim for "Mozart in Mischief", staged at the Thailand Cultural Centre last November, NUNi Productions has again spiced up the Bangkok theatre scene with an interdisciplinary and intercultural performance, "The Orpheus Schemata". Staying true to the company's full name – "Never Underestimate New Ideas" – innovation rules in their adaptation of the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, which could be subtitled "how we go through hell to find our loved ones in order to lose them eternally in the end".

The two young directors Pattarasuda Anuman Rajadhon and meLe yamomo have aimed at creating a new kind of theatre that prioritises emotion, memory and experience over narrative, and is intended for an English-speaking audience.

However, what this reviewer experienced last Saturday evening at the Makhampom Studio were three heart-breaking, contemporary stories of love expertly told, passionately re-enacted and inventively recounted through the use of mixed performance media – stage acting, dance movements and opera singing – as well as visual and sound designs.

But in this 57-minute, high-tempo performance, three languages – English, Thai, and Russian – were spoken, making it rather text-heavy. Although English was the predominant one, a few important monologues were delivered in Thai with no English subtitles, unlike the times when Russian was used.

On a positive note, Pattarasuda and yamomo's creativity in visual and sound design proved that neither the size of a playhouse nor the budget need limit an artist's imagination. For example, each scene was ingeniously set in a BTS or MRT station – with, fittingly, the first at Morchit and the last at Hua Lamphong. On the four small screens that formed the backdrop upstage, the audience watched video images and listened to the soundscape of each station. This not only added more clarity and meaning to each character's "journey", but also drew the dramatic incidents closer to home for the Bangkok audience.

However, there were moments when flashing visuals threatened to upstage the actors, and in such an intimate playhouse some audience members inevitably felt overloaded.

Performing various roles, Pattarasuda and yamomo (yes, they were triple-tasking!) commanded the stage with vivid characterisations and clear delivery of lines.

A magical moment came when Pattarasuda, as an English woman who was forced to part with her Burmese boyfriend due to political circumstance, was fervently chopping onions at a table. No words were uttered here, but the audience was deeply touched, our imaginations allowed free emotional rein.

The two Assumption University professors were efficiently supported by their skilful student actors, though there were wobbles in confidence here and there. Renowned baritone and co-artistic director of NUNi Saran Suebsantatiwongse made an impressive cameo appearance singing an aria from Gluck's opera "Orfeo ed Euridice", adding yet another layer of art and meaning to the performance.

In the end, "Orpheus" was a highly praiseworthy effort, the kind of production that could, and should, be improved simply by a trim here and and a cut there to allow a little more time for the audience to feel each character's torment.

Interestingly, place "Orpheus" alongside "B-Fest's Showcase" and "Welcome to Nothing", both performed in the past few weeks, and you may notice that there are more exhilarating dance and theatre works going on in the capital than you think.

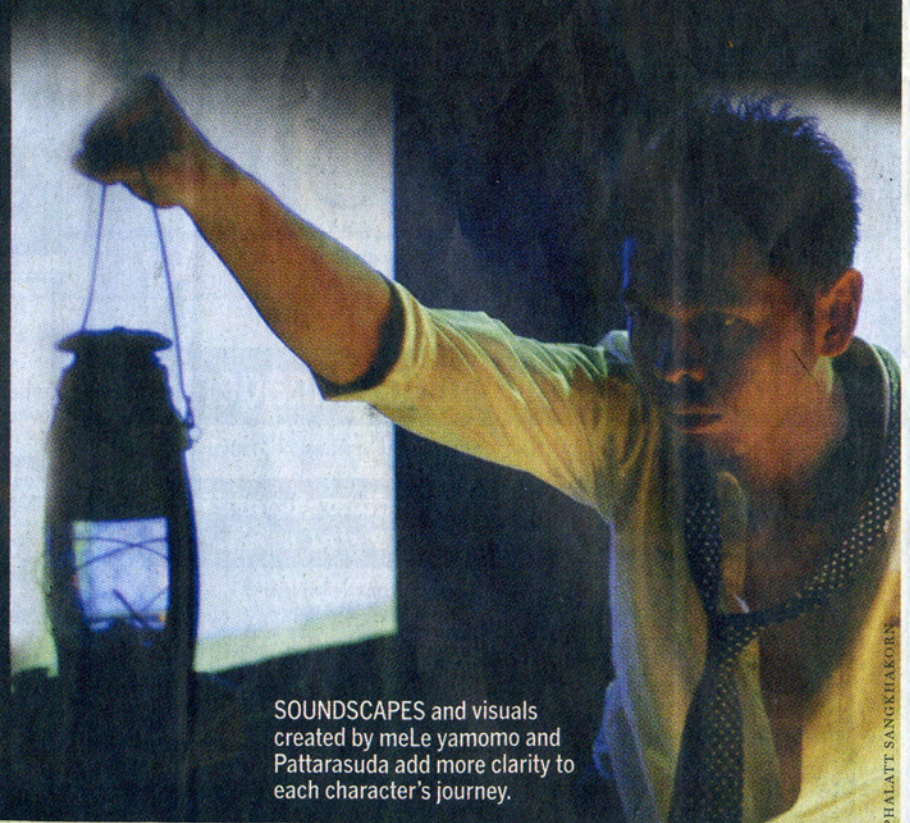
It's also worth noting that all three commendable productions share one characteristic – the local artists' international exposure, either through spending time abroad or collaborating with international artists.

Evidently, they witnessed and were inspired by what's going on in the world of contemporary dance and theatre, and now they're adapting their experience to fit the audience despite the limitations at home.

They are succeeding because they're not merely imitating what they've seen before, and they are refusing to underestimate the intelligence of their audience.

"The Orpheus Schemata" continues its limited run this weekend (Friday, May 16 to Sunday, May 18). For more details, visit www.NUNiProductions.com.

'THE ORPHEUS SCHEMATA' blends three tales of love and loss inspired by the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.



SOUNDSCAPES and visuals created by meLe yamomo and Pattarasuda add more clarity to each character's journey.

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