

Journey to Persephone – My Experience

I had the joy of participating in the project ‘Journey to Persephone’ (in the summer of 2015), which has led me to discover a new way of creating theatre art. My background in theatre is more traditional: I studied drama at the University of Hull in England, and became familiar with conventional acting and theatre. As an artist I became deeply disappointed in the off-stage drama and politics of the theatre world, so much so that I broke off my studies and didn’t participate in theatre for years. I found that the competition and corruption distracted many of the artists from the essence of the art itself, which for me is to present the wisdom and beauty of a particular theme and to shine a spotlight on a new perspective (for example, to see the humour of life or the beauty of human interaction). It also seemed to me that the ego of the actors often clouded their performance behind technical skill and appearance, yet they often lacked in authenticity. Ideally theatre is a rich platform for the meeting of many talents, where the sharing of skills becomes more important than competition.

Thus it was a very refreshing experience for me to work in this more organic project, which was not merely about the end goal of delivering a polished performance, but also about the process itself. Working on this project felt like a natural unfolding, and much of the process was based on connecting with the other performers in an authentic way and each artist exploring their own creativity in the moment. There was more flexibility and flow to the process compared to any other theatre experience I’ve had. The rehearsal process was also different in the sense that the actors didn’t present or pretend a character, but rather worked on embodying the essence of that character. This made the acting more raw, more real and more personal. In many ways this experience was also spiritual for me: through the intuitive process I connected to subconscious parts within.

In my opinion there is much value in exploring the many potentials of this new ritual theatre, especially discovering new ways of how the audience-participants can become more involved in the experience. The audience should be honoured as active and creative participants. The most healing form of theatre is when the participant truly connects with the performance, and through that finds a new connection to themselves. Then this new form of ritual theatre can become an experience where the audience-participants come to be inspired, but there is also a space to integrate what they have received from the performance and ideally also a space to express their insights and impressions.

Theatre for the purpose of entertainment and commercial theatre have their value, but in addition theatre has many other, still unexplored, potentials. For me the best theatre experiences I’ve had as a viewer were the ones where the play created a space for reflection: Seeing a story from the distance, as the observer, teaches the viewer to observe the bigger picture in their own life. What I would have loved as a member of

the audience was a discussion with the artists afterwards and a space for sharing insights with others. It is important to remember that theatre takes place on many levels: the psychological, the emotional, and the spiritual/subconscious/intuitive level.

Much remains to be explored in the field of how to implement the wisdom of ancient ritual theatre into modern settings. How to apply this form of theatre to a modern audience who might not be interested in indigenous rituals but can still benefit immensely from this deep, healing and intuitive form of art? These are questions that open many new and interesting potentials for the development of theatre art.

Testimonial by Kim Seppälä