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**Napoli Teatro Festival 2015 Part 4**

Written by Emanuela Ferrauto

International productions have returned to the stage once again. This time, the audience is treated to a multilingual and multicultural production, both in design and on-stage, as part of collaborative effort between five people from four different countries (Italy, Australia, Colombia, and the US) known as VUELTAS BRAVAS PRODUCCIONES. The production company is the brain-child of Lorenzo Montanini, Tina Mitchell (sic), and John Alex Toro (sic) who met in 2012. Their first production, MISS JULIA, debuted in Italy at the 2015 NTIF. According to Montanini, in this confluence of language and culture, Italy is the only country mentioned in the production whose text, based on August Strindberg’s Miss Julie, is decidedly European in nature. However, the same convergence of cultures found in the original play transports the discourse to Latin America, bringing onstage the vast differences in social class highlighted through language—in this case English and Spanish.

Research carried out on the text and on body language brings onstage a reinvigorated story written in Northern Europe at the end of the 19th Century. With its social and cultural context adapted by J. Ed Araiza – who does so in a simplified manner without distorting the original text – and directed by Montanini, Miss Julia manages to capture the essence of a struggling Latin American society, which includes an American master and Hispanic servants. The stories of Miss Julie, the master’s daughter, played by Tina Mitchell, Jean the servant, played by John Alex (sic), and Kristin the cook, interpreted by Gina Jaimes Abril, all intersect and evolve almost scandalously, especially when considered within the confines of the era in which the story takes place. The rich mistress falls in love with the servant, who exploits her situation by belittling and crushing the girl’s hopes. In fact, the young woman, who is flirtatious, aloof, spoiled, overbearing and psychologically unstable, contrasts significantly with the cook, a seemingly secondary character whose moral and sentimental integrity is the link between the two social classes. The entire discourse, and the themes within it, is developed through staging that maintains perfect rhythms, cues, speed, pauses and the use of body language to create not only images but also tonality and superb story telling. These elements intersect and melt perfectly together with the narrated words.

The entire play takes place, as in the text, during the Notte di San Giovanni, the so-called midsummer’s evening festival, and is an invitation to a party. The audience is welcomed to the parterre by musicians – exceptional and young artists from ARS NOVA DI NAPOLI, who recreate the richness and warmth of popular music from Campania – and by two actors, the servant and the cook, who hand out several glasses of wine. In fact, Strindberg references the festival and the participation of servants and landowners in his work, evoking a night in which anything and everything can happen, including the complete reversal and upheaval of rigid social hierarchies. The tightly closed workings of the original setting are momentarily revealed to the audience in the beginning, only to be closed off again among the kitchen walls of the master’s house. Even the windows to the left are sealed shut, eventually broken in the end.

The fundamental themes on which the play are based, and to which Strindberg eludes repeatedly, are social hierarchy and collapse. Thanks to Miss Julia (whose name is a curious hybrid of English “Miss” and Spanish “Julia”, the languages used by actors) and her physical placement above the servants (she walks on tables, on chairs, is held by her servant) as well as her falling to the ground, facedown and suffering, the viewers can see the metaphorical switching of high and low societal roles. The idea of social collapse is outstanding and constant even within the text, perfectly brought to life by the group. The set design is bare and consists of a table, a window, and some chairs. However, the audience also forms part of the set design—they observe the scenes like spectators in a Roman arena or the jury of a courtroom. Both parties, the audience and those on stage, are reminiscent of the Spanish *corral de comedias*, not for the structure itself but the sense of total involvement. Even the violinist, Helen Yee, who composed the original score, is present during the play creating live music.

One of the most prevalent elements of this work is the constant sense of childish games: the movements, the language, and the situations. Despite the presence of a torrid affair, it seems that the characters are simply taking part in dangerous games created for children. Julia demands everything that she desires only to become disinterested in her achievements later. Her grand prize consists of men whom she can control and eventually discard. The servant, on the other hand, plays with fire by defying the master’s daughter and making her fall into his trap. The cook, who is also the oldest character in the original play, appears to know how to manage the two generations, the two social classes, the two infants that are constantly bickering. The polished aspect of this production in terms of formality and theatricality show us, once again, how the simplicity of revisiting and adapting a classic text, coupled with originality, are the key winning elements when attempting to transpose a work onto the modern stage.