Mumenshchanz is dumbfoundingly excellent

Mumenshchanz, at the Colonial theater, Feb 24.- Feb 28. Sat at 2:00 and 8:00. Sun at 3:00. Tickets $13.50, $19.50, and $25.50. Saturday matinee $12.00. $15.00, and $17.50.

On a completely black draped stage, lit only by the center light, two monstrous figures emerge from the depths. Their limbs are huge tubular crepe costumes. Then they pull on vast crepe masks, mammoth things that allow them to change their voices and do the jiggling, emetic movements of their characters. These performers are not only mummers but also street performers, and they keep their faces covered up much of the time. They take it all very seriously, but they also know how to make their audience laugh.

The act begins with a scene from the first half of the show, featuring two of the troupe's main characters. The two figures emerge from the depths of the stage, pulling on their masks and开始 their movements. The audience is captivated by their theatricality and the way they seem to be coming alive.

The second half of the show brings things down to a more readily identifiable human level. Instead of losing themselves in bizarre costumes, the masks come to life in their own right. The performers play with actual human emotions and experiences, and the audience is drawn in by their portrayal of the human condition.

The show is a success, and the actors carried on the same show for several nights, both by themselves and with the "travelling group" (they trained to fit world touring demands). But the original pieces are back in the Colonial Theater with a show that is all-new, larger in scope, and a complete delight.

The show is well-paced, well-staged, and continuously entertaining. A pair of giant hands start off by drawing the curtains and getting up the stage. The short acts of the first half feature a series of amazing transformations as the players lose themselves in their great fabric costumes. The entertainment is not so much what the players do, which is very simple, but in the constant wear-they-do-they can do it. When huge multi-directed slinky slithers onto the stage, the scene changes, and the audience is left with a feeling of being overwhelmed by the sheer size and scale of the performance. The root of the show is to make things amusing again with a few more contortions. The metamorphosis from human to object and back is effortless and amazing to watch.

The second half of the show brings the audience into the real world, and the performers bring their own experiences and emotions into the performance. The characters are often witty and funny as characters interact, constructing and altering their faces and those of their companions.

The methods of expression are brilliant—original, but the actual motions are simple. There is no sophisticated Marcel Marceau—like pantomime here. It was comparatively easy for Brossard and his partners to train mimic Mumenshchanz to pull the huge demand for their performances, a practice almost incomprehensible for a mime like Marcel. Mumenshchanz is not solely interested in expression through movement in the Marseau tradition; they are more interested in using movement to catalyze the entire stage into a state of active participation. Brossard and Schurh have been greatly influenced by Oskar Schlemmer, the theatrical designer for the Bauhaus, the German art academicians, in its brief history between the world wars, defined many of the directions modern art is still taking. Schlemmer, with the use of plastic like Paul Klee, Walter Gropius (who was later dean of the Harvard Architectural School), was interested in observing the basic interrelationships of the outside world and dramatizing them on stage. The trick was not merely to recreate the real Hereabilities that defined these relationships, but to find new processes and movements that would illustrate them in a manner unique to the stage. The triumph of Mumenshchanz is that they have developed a theatrical language for showing the way man interacts with the objects that surround him, the way man leaves his image in the things he creates, and the ability of man to find things in nature that express something of himself.

The wonder of the Mumenshchanz performance is the way they effortlessly blur the distinctions between man and object, showing how they can cooperate for expressive purposes. The show is worth seeing not only for the wit and originality of their presentation, but also for the excitement of seeing the transformation of the entire stage into a creative instrument by following a very basic idea of theater.

Steve Healey