

An awesome hell ride through the First World War

THE LAST DAYS OF MANKIND, direction: Paulus Manker, costumes: Aleksandra Kica, sound design: Andreas Büchele, audio supervision: Jakob Maurer, space concept: Georg Resetschnig, technics: Klaus Österreicher, Florian Scholz, Raoul Sodringa, Sebastian Ziebinski, requisite: Mark Hellgoth, lighting: Christoph Rosenberg, special effects: Tissi Brandhofer. With: Iris Schmid, Judita Suchy, Bernhard Bauer, René Rebeiz + 19 further actors + a school class of 10 children. Prod. Reinhard Schreiber, WIENER NEUSTADT.

Over a thousand different characters in 220 scenes. Thus Karl Kraus' monumental work published in 1922 on about 800 pages about the madness of the First World War. Due to its huge dimensions *The Last Days of Mankind* is considered impossible to stage in its entirety. Paulus Manker ventured to take over this task. And the result is staggering. After having staged 75 scenes in July 2018, this year Manker offers a recast version of almost 100 scenes in seven hours. It is not his first mammoth work. For more than twenty years, *Alma* (dedicated to Alma Mahler) has seen 470 performances on three continents.

Thirteen different spaces are used in a decommissioned factory of the Second World War, called the Serbian Hall, in Wiener Neustadt (about 40 minutes away from Vienna). There are, among others, a kitchen, a bathroom, a Viennese café, a fifty-bed military hospital, an editorial office with old-fashioned typewriters. At least six scenes are performed simultaneously on the ground floor as well as on the first floor and in the hall itself, but also outdoors, "on the battlefield". Spectators are invited to rest on editorial seats and in hospital beds or are urged to climb in vintage wagons to be transported outdoors. A wide musical range and flames of torches bestow a doomsday-like atmosphere. The performance starts with Richard Strauss' "Thus spoke Zarathustra".

More than mere witnesses to war scenes, viewers are invited to use their smartphones. The QR codes distributed in the 136-page book included in the ticket price of 145 euros encourage participants to browse Kraus' text. The elaborate set design, the gorgeous costumes, above all the actors' performance provide a perfect image of the spirit and demons of that time. Both director and actor, Paulus Manker interprets a Major, takes care of lighting and serves the audience a copious dinner (the actors are also waiters!). Altogether an overwhelming art work. **Irina Wolf**