

TOTAL THEATRE

Patrice Thibaud & Philippe Leygnac: Cocorico

by Tara Boland 2014-01-16

A pair of old ghosts, lingering from a bygone era of music hall and vaudeville: Thibaud, ever ready to entertain, with masterful musical accompaniment from Leygnac, his wind-up music box. The pair are little and large, master and jester, magician and his assistant, playing a dynamic with a thousand possibilities. In a stream of perfectly painted scenes, we see cyclists in the Tour de France, cowboys in old saloons, military medal ceremonies, and many more, all deftly crafted with ingenious simplicity from the music that Leygnac twinkles out from his piano and various other implements and instruments, and the incredible mime and vocal sound effects of Thibaud.

Thibaud is a true joy to watch; the pleasure that he takes in creating characters, animals, and objects for an audience is magical. He plays each one with equal detail and ridiculousness, a clown and loveable fool of the old school. Leygnac's ability to ride a piano whilst playing the ukulele and clicking out horseshoes with his mouth is equally breathtaking, this pair are genuinely a dream duo of dazzling wonder. Yet the dream-like hazy image of old players, touring their wares to ever-fading corners of the stage, also suggests a profound sadness and beauty. A frustration builds, most particularly from Leygnac, that one cannot exist without the other, and neither can exist without their audience. There is a Beckettian dynamic in their power struggle and inability to leave one another. Thibaud adores his Leygnac, but can't help but wind him up; Leygnac is disgruntled with Thibaud but knows nothing better than his piano seat. They chase each other, beg each other and even fall asleep on each other.

The only off-key note was with the scenography. The aesthetics that the music, costumes and performance create are all definitively not of this time, floating in another era. Yet the three stage screens used for shadow puppetry and chase sequences all smack of stark minimal modernity, which created a somewhat jarring backdrop for me. There were also times when scenes toppled on for a little too long, and with the show running at around an hour and a half, there could be a case for too much of a good thing. With skill, wit, and beauty spilling out at the seams, it's hard to know where to stop, but it is always best to leave an audience wanting more.

Cocorico is the cry of the cockerel and traditionally a symbol of french chauvinism. This pair certainly sound their cry, ruffle their feathers, and grab an audience's attention for their few moments in the dusty spotlight. Their belligerent belief in their craft and relentless ability to 'perform perform perform!' is disarmingly forceful, warmed by its sense of innocence and playfulness. A big slice of slick skill and old fashioned magic, their hazy nostalgic world lingers powerfully in the mind.