

A dancing group of atoms



Welcoming the End of the World (Laboratorio di Castaldo at the Malta Arts Festival, Auberge d'Italie) is a work based on the collaborative work of its directors, Domenico Castaldo and Mario Frendo, and its Italian/Spanish cast.

The text includes quotations from Ted Hughes, F.J. Capra and P. Auster and also from the book of the Apocalypse, and the texture as a whole is vaguely poetical.

The narrative is based on the frequently recurring predictions and fears that the end of the world is nigh.

Castaldo, one of the two co-directors, also plays a leading role as an energetic Everyman figure, desperately trying to amuse the audience and begging them to ditch their worries and be ready to admit new ideas.

In fact, the audience is invited to be active about what is said and done, to join the cast in their preparation for the supposed end, and to create individually their own interpretations of what they are experiencing.

The performers then lead the audience a merry dance involving scenes of monkey gods in the jungle, violence, apocalyptic darkness and chaos, madness, and desperate prayers to the Maker and to his Mother.

Of course, the world does not end, but has this occurred through divine intervention? The last episode of the production comes out with the poetical suggestion that we are "a dancing group of atoms, dancing among the stars."

I am not sure if these atoms are also powered by the soul that the audience are humorously supposed to have brought along with them to the show.

Like some other members of the audience, I sometimes had problems understanding what some of the members of the cast were saying in English spoken with a very noticeable Italian accent.

This did not prevent me from getting the general drift of what was being intended in some cases if not in others, an example of the latter being the episode The Searcher and the Finder, in which Ted Hughes' Cave Birds is spoken and yet I could not make it out.

I have learned from one of the co-directors, Frendo (who is also chairman of the festival) that the production is for him part of his academic doctoral work exploring musicality as an alternative form of expression to the traditional verbal one.

While I have no doubt the production sometimes succeeds in breaking the linguistic barrier and creating vital dramatic moments through music and choreographic movements, I must also admit there were episodes where I could follow what was happening only in the most superficially perceptive mode.

I have also yet to learn how to perceive the 'vibrations' to which we are asked by the play to listen, vibrations "that have been there since the beginning of time".

The production, performed in the Auberge d'Italie's old courtyard, is colourful and musically attractive. The Laboratorio's training schedule for its students from many lands produces actors who are athletic, physically expressive and able to sing. Castaldo certainly

did a good job.