

## REVIEWS

CPHCulture: <http://cphculture.dk/c711extremophiles.html>

4 stars by Michael Søby

## EXTREMOPHILES

The man made natural disasters are closing in – also on the theatre front.

At the moment Teater V is showing the play "Før vi forsvinder" [*Before we disappear*] about a man who fears to share his destiny with the snail, George, who was the last living survivor of his species. And at Krudttønden That Theatre Company p.t. presents a play about those – perhaps – last human beings on earth.

The Dane John [Lars] lives with the British Angela and Bertram at a small research station in Antarctica. Angela's husband, who also lives at the station, has not returned from his recent expedition and Angela is worried, also because she is expecting a baby.

The food rations are getting smaller and smaller, and Bertram suffers from both hallucinations and a failing memory. The others gang up against him, but it only hurts worse.

Fergal O'Byrne's play is the first of a trilogy about how people reacts in isolation. The parallels to the corona isolation of our time is undeniably relatable, although it was not originally intended, and it only helps to make the text more relevant to the audience.

Ian Burns has the play's best role as the increasingly unstable Bertram and he is getting solid support from I.a. Sira Stampe and Benjamin Stender as Angela and John [Lars].

Together with the actors, director Claus Bue builds up an increasingly intense atmosphere, and it will be exciting to see how Irish Fergal O'Byrne solves the problem in the next two plays. At least he has piqued our interest.

**Kulturkupeen:** <https://www.kulturkupeen.dk/extremophiles-paa-that-theatre-company-i-koebenhavn/>

4 stars by Ulla Strømberg

## EXTREMOPHILES at That Theatre Company in Copenhagen

Serious and well-played modern doomsday vision.

It is the world premiere of the play by the resident Irish playwright Fergal O'Byrne. And although it is probably written before corona reached the world, it hits right down into the collective anxiety and “on guard” mood that characterizes not only little Denmark, but the whole world.

For the current corona crisis can easily be translated so it seems to coincide with exactly what the main characters experience in *Extremophiles* where they sit isolated at the South Pole.

The title denotes those organisms that can thrive where nothing else can live, i.e. in extreme places. The story takes place at a scientific base at the South Pole. The radio connection disappears and likewise has one of the four expatriates temporarily disappeared out there in the cold.

On several occasions the three remaining are exposed to new changes which create anxiety and unrest. They reach stages that are primarily known from literature: What do we do if there is no tomorrow? No neighbours? No future nor food or drink for everyone?

Darwinism sets in on different levels.

In recent world history people have lived through different situations where all hope seemed out of place. This is also the case for the four people trapped inside the small laboratory. And yet there is a survival gene – and not least in these people who are scientists and at work in a place of their own choice.

It is interesting that That Theatre Company puts on the play and gets it's world premiere. The actors are both Canadian, British and Danish and this particular mix also helps to support the global atmosphere. Claus Bue has directed and sensibly chosen to use primarily classical music and especially Beethoven as background music. Wagner would also have been an option, not least because the ending has its allusions to the fourth part of the Niebelungen Ring: Götterdämmerung,

Ragnarok. An old world is coming down, but here is hope and light ahead. Also some heavy biblical allusions with the Child Jesus are included, and to add extra weight there is also a reference to Oscar Wilde's *The importance of being Earnest* where the main character is a foundling delivered at Victoria Station in a shopping bag!

The director Claus Bue sensibly bypasses the slightly heavy references and makes all actors provide good and nuanced characteristics: Sira Stampe as a modern woman who for a time gets to be the leader of the group, but has to fight for the respect of the elderly, played quite witty by Ian Burns. His hallucinations set in where reason goes out. Benjamin Stender plays the serious northerner while the real team leader, played by Canadian actor Michael Worthman, has some basic instinct and savagery about him.

The scenography is fine and clinically white. It is a pleasure that That Theatre Company took a chance here. The program is also neat and informative, but a little small in format and written in slightly too small letters. But important is all the information. Because if the play is also to be understood by high school students, who are one of the English-speaking That Theatre's target groups, it's good with some key words.

In the middle of a complicated time, That Theatre has put a lot effort into setting up the performance and thus helping to show the way forward. Because without art and culture we will not be able to cope mentally with the current crisis. For now the physical boundaries literally help to bind many of us for a time.

Can highly recommend the show, although the play's theme is unfortunately both severe and far too present-day.

**Kulturmagasinet Fine Spind:** <https://www.finespind.dk/index.php/artikler-og-billedserier-kategorier/scene/72-nyhed-scene/1529-miljo-gyser-i-krudttonden>

By Elisabeth Saugmann

## Environment-horror at Krudttønden

Four scientists are stranded at Antarctic. One is pregnant, one is old and none of them have much food left. Like that, the scene is set in That Theatre Company's new play, which runs until November 21<sup>st</sup>

Fergal O'Byrne was inspired to do *Extremophiles* after reading how the 'Halley VI research station' in Antarctica had to be moved 15 kilometers because of a sudden deep rift in the ice due to global warming.

At the English theatre, That Theatre Company at Krudttønden at Østerbro in Copenhagen, a survival drama, *Extremophiles*, about human isolation in the desolate nature, will be played until November 21<sup>st</sup>. The play is written by the resident Irish playwright Fergal O'Byrne and the actors are Ian Burns, Søren Højen [Benjamin Stender], Sira Stampe and Michael Worthman.

Is it a man-made climate catastrophe that tests a group of scientists to their extreme limit? Fergal O'Byrne calls his characters “passengers on an ice cold Noah's Arch” when forced into individual and collective moral dilemmas in isolation from the rest of the world. We follow a small group of scientists at a base in desolate Antarctica as an ice storm prepares them for a long deep winter. Due to a sudden drop in temperature, the majority of the research team went back to the supply ship. And now there is trouble in the remaining crew, Angela, Lars and Bertram.

The pragmatist Lars keeps his spirits up in the trio so that no one is seized by a lurking desperation. Bertram is drifting in and out of hallucinations due to old age and very small survival rations. And the biologist Angela, who is looking for new ways and thinking in new solutions, discovers that she is pregnant. But can they survive here at all? And if they can, what about the rest of the research team?

It does not get any easier as the base commander, Fiskler, returns to the trio. Devastated by guilt and bad conscience over having left them, he has fought his way back to the base on a life-

threatening journey in the cold. But can it be life-threatening that there may not be enough food rations left for four people? The desperate quartet only receives fragments of news from back home and they do not know if their supply ship will ever return and rescue them. As the play progresses, Fiskler's motives for returning have been revealed and slowly they must acknowledge that they are most likely humanity's last survivors on the planet.

Fergal O'Byrne has written for film, theatre, television and radio for over 20 years. He got inspired to do *Extremophiles* after reading how the 'Halley VI research station' in Antarctica had to be moved 15 kilometers because of a sudden deep rift in the ice due to global warming. "It was fortunate that the research station was so cleverly designed that all units could be moved in a relatively short time," he says.

Midst in a time of corona with many forms of isolation, it is interesting to hear about his fascination with the crew's decision to leave behind a small group overwintering in the middle of the cold wilderness to secure the base's research while the others moved. "The group that remained had to endure months of constant darkness, hunger and isolation and I have written about how it affects the human mind."