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Dagbladet Information

'EXTREMOPHILES – ISOLATION AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD'. Text: Fergal O'Byrne. Scenography: Claus Bue. That Theatre Company. Krudttønden in Copenhagen. til From 21 October – 21 November 2020.

The setting is extremely claustrophobic: A small crew of glaciologists snowed in at the bottom of the world on the Antarctic lose contact with the rest of the world. They have sufficient supplies for 6 winter months. Fears about global warming and of being forgotten accelerate and as the skeleton crew try to continue to hold on to their positions of power inevitable tensions arise until someone snaps.

This is the rough frame for *Extremophiles – Isolation at the bottom of the world* for That Theatre Company at Krudttønden, (Powder Keg) This is the world premiere production written by 54 year old Irish dramatist Fergal O'Byrne, who has also written for the TV series *Hipsterverse* and who here has created the first of a new trilogy to be seen in Copenhagen.

The play is deeply disturbing and has more than a touch of the macabre about its tranquil & seemingly peaceful realism. A porthole through a wall of the base camp shows us the snow and the aurora to remind us of their desperate isolation. Our "Corona-antenna" is fully aware of the ways we all try to keep our spirits up in times of isolation and phew what a relief that thankfully they have an obligatory kettle that can make countless cups of English tea and weak powdered coffee.

### **Plenty of secrets**

The play is dramatic in a charming & elegant British fashion – with seemingly throw-away conversations, banter, chit-chat and elegant insults. Truth to be told, it's both classical and it manages to cut new ground. The script is littered with an Ibsen-esque psychological secret universe, combined with cleverly strategic plot twists à la Michael Frayn and on top of that it is seasoned with absurdities reminiscent of Beckett – all these elements combine to present what could almost be described as a contemporary Nordic tale, with echoes of stories about exciting expeditions to Greenland.

Fergal O'Byrne doesn't directly deliver many elements of danger in the actual text, but he suggests many things that hint at the critical dangers the characters face. He has also created 4 memorable figures that fit the actor's voices & national traits perfectly: A Scot, A Dane an English woman and a Canadian.

### **Loss and panic**

Claus Bue's solid, realistic scene design of the research station, supports the many underlying psychological layers of the characters. The strongest of these is the veteran member of the group who has to deal with being largely ignored in the decision-making process in their increasingly alarming situation. Scots actor Ian Burns has great charisma as the experienced glaciologist who is forced to devise his own strategy in these confined conditions to avoid losing his dignity. Ian Burns stares out at us with the kind of look people can only have after they have experienced great grief or untreatable terminal illness. He looks deeply into chasms the others have no awareness of and he makes an unselfish decision for the benefit and greater good of the rest of the team. This moment will bring a lump to your throat.

Sira Stampe plays the ice station's recently appointed female commander in what is normally a male dominated, almost military run universe. She portrays Angela with a practiced, intelligent cynicism, but she also has a resigned desperation that makes a lasting impression. Her shoulders are sadly lonely.

Danish actor Benjamin Stender plays the role of the communications expert, an irritable, but rational young man with his own private reasons for remaining at the ice station over the winter months & whose threatening physical behavior comes into play as the story develops, especially once Canadian born Michael Worthman turns up like a savage from the frozen wastes, a survivor who knows more than he lets on.

### **Fear of being forgotten**

Krudttønden (Powder Keg) is home for That Theatre Company who have since 1997 produced show after show in the intimate black box out by Fælleparken in Østerbro with Ian Burns as its artistic leader. One could hope for better funding for this company so they were able to match the scenography & lighting design with the high quality of their chosen texts and the acting. Not least because their repertoire reflects a strong mirror of society and a wish to be a porthole towards international drama – without getting lost in translation.

Extremophiles directly addresses the current climate concerns, but indirectly also our Corona fears. What these 4 stranded characters are most frightened of is never stated. Running out of food supplies? The Arctic ice melting? A new World War? Radio-active contamination? Or a political decision that would cut them off from the rest of the world? All these thoughts force us face our own personal fears for ourselves and the world. And how tempting it would be to listen to orders, put on some skis and set off into the whiteness in a last desperate attempt to maybe reach a world that still existed.