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The Lynch Report | All hail the Hoyle and Hit parade [1]

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In the merry months of April and May, two performance festivals shook our Copenhagen: Neo-Reality, a series of alternative burlesque cabarets that were hosted by the English artist David Hoyle and produced by Warehouse 9, and Hitparade, a festival of international performance art, curated by Henrik Vestergaard Friis and Liveart.dk.

Both events brought necessary shots in the arm to the sometimes overproduced, funding-pampered Copenhagen theatre scene. They reminded us of art's power to question the status quo and ourselves.

All hail the Hoyle

Rarely is a performer so gifted as to merge provocative insight with humanism. Enter David Hoyle. He marries high-camp entertainment with razor-sharp observation. With a show that viciously bites and simultaneously sows the wound shut, his monologues reminded us to guard against conformity – to not follow the herd (I have recently witnessed cult-like behaviour in a group who, like lemmings, followed a path of bitterness and opportunism). Never has Hoyle's message been so relevant. Follow your own path. Be vigilant of the false idol, or on your guard against the all-pervading spray of advertising that so clogs the consciousness.

Few have faced their inner-demons and spat straight back at them as this man has. Having been raised in South London, I am no stranger to being bullied, whether it ended in my money being taken, face punched or being force-fed soap shavings until I was sick.

But this was nothing compared to the treatment of the 'gay fella' or 'dyke'. To see gay hate is to see an irrational, monstrous animal released. It is to see the horror of group consensus take over conscious thought and reason. I have come to know gay men and women as some of the strongest I know. Coming out and following one's true calling often comes at a huge personal cost. Often an individual must often say goodbye to dearly-beloved friends, relatives and sometimes jobs – more in other cases. Framed by the golden touch of Warehouse 9, Hoyle captured this struggle, transformed it and expressed it both as art and as a lesson in self-development.

Hitparade

From the Belgian artist Gwendoline Robin blowing herself up, to the Swedish duo White on White taking a dump on the stage, Hitparade easily matched the artistic level of any performance art festival in the world at the moment. In terms of initiative, art and theoretical discourse, it was a diamond – if indeed, a rough one.

The festival's rawness was a welcome relief to a Copenhagen theatre world so often over-produced and over-cooked. So much Danish theatre work seems taken up with explaining itself – afraid of being misunderstood, afraid of its own shadow. Hitparade inhabited the shadows and actively searched for the misunderstood. It promoted a 'take it or leave it' attitude and was not out to impress as much to say: "Here

it is, make up your own fucking mind.”

Art imitating funding

Danish stage productions are often subservient to the Danish theatre calendar and its accompanying funding system. This system promotes a calendar of production that has little or no bearing on an international circuit or indeed artistic creativity. In the current system and in the main, the making of a new work is provisional on the receipt of funding. Few artists or theatres attempt otherwise – unlike in New York, Berlin or London where it is commonplace. The chances of a Danish theatre artwork being taken up by a foreign producer is limited by the fact that the next production is either being applied for or being produced.

It would require another column to suggest ways that this cycle might be broken, but both Neo-Reality and Hitparade promote art for art's sake and seem unbothered by the consequences.

This is not a review. It is a celebration of two initiatives that can potentially align the city with a wider and more international performance and theatre milieu. Copenhagen, despite its world fame, is a city that has lagged behind in terms of innovative contemporary stage art. These festivals, along with the ongoing CPH:STAGE, suggest a possible future where art and self-expression takes precedence.