

Carlos Martínez Mime Actor

Carlos Martínez: A Magician without a Box of Tricks

The Spanish mime actor Carlos Martínez reveals to his audience the wonder and the poetry of silence

He has travelled the world for 32 years with his shows. However, the Spanish mime actor Carlos Martínez not only knows how to enchant on minimalist stages. He is also committed to teaching his craft.

This man knows how to silence people. And he does it without any aggressive gestures. When Carlos Martínez stands under the stage lights, dressed in black and with his white gloves, even the clock seems to detain its movement. The silence remains present during his occasional outburst. His expressions, which are intensified by the stark white make-up, can be read like a book. When he types on an imaginary typewriter, you forget that it does not exist. But more than his extraordinary technique, it is his poetic sense of humour that fascinates, the distinct characteristic that traces his secret connection to Chaplin. The result is, despite some moments of restraint, an intensity that can only be achieved by building up layer after layer of silence.

Neither comedian nor clown

A few days after putting us under his spell on a small stage in Zurich, we have the opportunity to watch the 59-year-old Spaniard in a school classroom in the town of Dättlikon. In the middle of the class, the master submerges an imaginary spoon into an equally fictitious yoghurt. Seventeen small hands follow him. Completely absorbed the children put their spoons into the yogurt, let it fall onto their tongues, then stain their shirts from top to bottom and longingly wonder whether the same enchantment would also work with praline ice-cream. They hold their breath. Now we know that in the upcoming days, these

children will not be bored even the TV goes on the blink. The partially bald man with his thin lips, pronounced eyebrows above eyes that at times seem to dazzle, and an indescribable cordiality, patiently transmits with didactic skill the values that reside in the strength of the imagination.

Martínez rarely leads workshops in schools, his stage programs are not necessarily tailored for children. However he does share his knowledge on a regular basis: He gives courses for dramatic arts students and corporate seminars to help perfect body language and facial expression as a communicative element of the spoken word. At the University of Applied Sciences HTW Chur, he worked on extending the visualization capacities of the students of architecture.

Basic emotions such as joy, sadness, anger and fear are universal, as well as the way they are expressed, the master comments in the interview, in which he also proves to be a friendly and eloquent interlocutor. With this repertoire of emotions, which was also the toolbox of the late Marcel Marceau, he embodies his characters in a way that is completely human and at the same time archetypal. "There is no human situation that he cannot portray and, what's more, with humour," the legendary Dimitri says of Carlos Martínez.

On stage the gestures are assembled like puzzle pieces forming scenes connected to everyday life: he puts on a virtual backpack, touches the glass of an aquarium, grabs the handrail of a bus that rocks from side to side. He delivers such masterstrokes to perfection, every movement is rehearsed, there is little room for improvisation. It's like in the music: every detail is controlled, but this does not make a master. On the contrary: those who try to impress on the basis on sheer technique, lose the essence and the sense of transcendence. Martínez is one of those who is able to achieve unity. He performs his art of reduction with a consistency like no other. He doesn't want to be a comedian or a clown, even if he could maybe reach more people with such labels. His art is poetry without verses. But globalization works in his favour, because his poetry has an inherent advantage: it doesn't need to be

translated to other languages. Consequently there is no problem when his touring leads him across Europe, to South Africa or to North, South, and Central America. In his 32-year stage career, the Barcelona-based artist has seen over a 1000 dressing rooms and even more groups of spectators, from deaf children in Jordan to adults in Brazil where, even in a cultural context forged by carnivals and other lively events, spectators were fascinated by his contrasting art form.

His work has also been enriched by occasional collaborations with Non-profit Organizations: Over ten years ago he staged the Human Rights, and currently he is touring in the country in cooperation with the Swiss Foundation for the Environment: His program **Mirage** develops scenes, that are loosely grouped around a background story, with the leitmotif of water shortage. After the interval, the actor performs a selection of his most well-known pieces.

"Silence waits patiently for someone to let it have the word," writes the native Asturian in his book "From the Dressing Room" in which he concentrates to the maximum his stage experiences. Time immemorial bears witness to the fact that it is no easy task for a professional of the dramatic arts, to conjugate leisurely rhythms and silence occasionally interrupted by sounds from the theatre, a few musical notes and the laughter of the audience. The reward, in our time of stimulus saturation, is an aesthetic pleasure of rare purity.

Boisterous Son of Silence

On telling his family at a young age that he wanted to become an actor, Carlos Martínez only received a response of pity: Poor boy, he will end up living on the street. "Even today, my aunt still thinks that I will end up begging," he says and smiles tenderly. "One of our ancestors involved in show business? Never heard of it!" However, when he accompanied his father, who moved on from working as a taxi driver to being a sales rep for an Asturian brand of butter, he noticed how his father changed his voice and facial gestures from shop to shop. Much later he realized that the dad was also, in his own way, an

actor. But as it turned out, it was his mother who finally supported his career aspirations. Apparently she had felt a similar inclination – although unspoken - before giving it up in favour of a more conventional destiny, that of a seamstress.

First he became a car mechanic, then he studied dramatic arts specializing in mime before finally establishing the theatre as his home. First he dreamed of roles like Hamlet, never imagining that he would end up on the stage all alone and in silence. As unpredictable and contrary is the path his own son has embarked upon. He is a drummer, and with that Carlos Martínez adds one final and endearing but ironic comment, "The son of silence is making noise now."

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