

40 Years Without a Word In a Universe of Whimsy

While my inner grump tried to scoff at "Mummenschanz," my inner kid seldom stopped grinning. Sure, this Swiss mime troupe, which goes by the same

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**THEATER
REVIEW**

name as its production, has been producing similar shows for 40 years. But its longevity is well earned, and in an age of ceaseless special effects, its low-tech feel is unexpectedly energizing.

In the 95-minute "Mummenschanz," playing at the Skirball Center, Slinky-like tubes, sluggish blobs and lots of other peculiar characters populate dozens of unconnected skits. Some scenes last barely a minute — plotless, whimsical sketches open to all sorts of interpretations. Others tell a pithy tale to set up a laugh or two. Quite a few more are melancholic or forlorn. And all are delivered without a word.

In the show's cleverest piece two clay-faced beings mold their masks into countless kinds of animals, then take on the appropriate characteristics. It's an act the company first performed decades ago, and it's still crowd pleasing.

The same goes for a pair of

"Mummenschanz" continues through Sunday at the Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, 566 La Guardia Place, at Washington Square South, Greenwich Village; (212) 352-3101, mummenschanznyc.com.

Mummenschanz
Skirball Center

creatures with rolls of toilet paper hanging from their heads, who strip off sections while enacting a droll story. Lighting and shadows are also used to fine effect on a mostly bare stage.

Some theatergoers may protest that "Mummenschanz" hasn't changed much over the years. There's truth in that criticism. A review in The New York Times of the ensemble's 1977 pro-

*A troupe's approach
hasn't changed.
That's the point.*

duction, which went on to a three-year Broadway run, often reads as if it were written for the 2012 staging.

Yet if the troupe hasn't changed, the world has; now the show is particularly vital to young audiences who've been raised on beeping gadgets and headphones, and rarely experience the extraordinary power of silence.

One of those is my iPad-addicted 9-year-old daughter. She smiled, eyes wide, throughout "Mummenschanz." Her first words upon leaving the theater? "I have to text Mom to tell her about this."



MUMMENSCHANZ

The effects in a Mummenschanz show are pointedly low-tech.