

1. Shakespeare Festival, 2014
Performance **POOR POOR LEAR**, based on William Shakespeare ("King Lear"), produced and performed by: **Nina Sallinen**, Helsinki, Finland/ Los Angeles, USA

An interview with Nina Sallinen **By Irina Šubakov**

Q: Why did you choose King Lear?

A: We, me and my director and writer friend chose "King Lear" because we needed a classic play for a character. In Finland, all the old actresses and actors do their last performance before they retire, and it's like the swan song of their whole career, usually these performances are something very pompous, they try to squeeze everything, all of their talent into that performance. And these are usually pretty terrible performances, because they try too hard to make them funny and sad and, you know, singing and dancing, comedy and tragedy... So we needed a piece for the character so we decided - let's look at Shakespeare. So pretty quickly, as we read King Lear, realised that King Lear is like a diva himself. And that is like our symbol - the king is the diva, from the acting world. That's how we've started. And then the scenes of the show were kind of the same, like what we were discussing. So we picked only the parts which were suitable for our show.

Q: And why as a female - why an old actress doing King Lear and why not King Lear himself?

A: I wanted to play a character that was not a sexual character. Because my thesis in drama school was about woman as a hero, and I always felt that the men got to play much more exciting parts. I like playing man's parts. That's why we made the character so old so she wasn't like sexually involved anymore, and that she wasn't someone's girlfriend... Typical female parts. So the role was not defined by a man. That was the main issue for me - then it didn't matter if she plays men or women, but there's no like political statement about that. I personally like playing man's roles.

Q: Why did you do it as a monodrama? Why a one person show? What are the benefits and what the fallbacks?

A: Well I have never done a monologue before and I received a grant from Finland to do my own work. It wasn't planned to be a monologue at first, we were about to have another old lady sitting on the stage and then it was like - we don't need this. It was a nice challenge as an actor to do a monologue, because you carry the whole show, you can't blame anybody else if something goes wrong, you are responsible entirely. And I learned a lot about acting that way, because you're pacing the show, and I allowed myself - every show can be different. And still it gives the same message. For instance, some part was very funny last night and now it's not funny, it doesn't mean it's a disaster, it's just a different tone. Or if I cried at that point yesterday, doesn't mean I have to push myself to cry at that point. However it lingers and feels it's okay. Because you're not responsible for other actors to get the same cue from you, and sometimes when you're acting in an ansamble, you feel like - they need that from me, every time. And sometimes, when you know each other very well, you can move around, you know, but you don't want to disappoint them or betray them that way. You are more disciplined that way. So, in a monologue, you can be more free in that sense but you're also responsible, that's an interesting combo.

Q: What new can we read out of Shakespeare today?

A: Well, in my show it's just like some parts of the play, not the entire King Lear. So I use it as a bouncing board for my own purposes and I like working that way anyway, making it your own, taking whatever I need... And since I don't have to pay for the rights, you know it's old stuff, you can rip it apart, do what you want with it. You make it more personal that way. You mean what you can do with Shakespeare today? I think you can do whatever is personally important for you, as an artist. What do you want to say about the world? Or what is your subject matter, what you are focussing on. And in my play, we focussed on old age, kind of regret, and things like that, so we emphasize that in the show, we pick those parts. But even if the whole show was produced and so forth, it is always a personal thing; you don't have to go by the rules. So if you find something in it that moves you, then you go for it. I think, if you don't have a personal reason why you're doing something, then it's dead as a director. And then as an actor, you find it in the role itself, and possibly, hopefully in the show itself. But if it doesn't mean anything to you, if you don't resonate with it, it leaves you cold. It's just a robotic thing to do then. It can look fancy and all that, but - it's dead.