



Quartet v4.0

WAXFACTORY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TASJA KEETMAN

Ivan Talijancic, CONCEPT AND DIRECTION: Our ever-so-slightly retitled version of Heiner Müller’s play is one of four different iterations of that work we’ve done over the years. One of them, *Quartet v2.0*, was staged in the dank, musty basement of a 2,000-year-old Roman palace in Croatia—that has to be my favorite. When the opportunity came for us to take part in the recent Performing Revolution in Central and Eastern Europe Festival, marking the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, a show by one of the most important East German playwrights seemed a fitting match. Müller doesn’t give any stage directions in his script except for the rather mysterious comment that it is set in a salon during the French Revolution and/or an air-raid shelter after World War III. Which is it? Are we in a time warp? We came up with a scenario heavily veering toward the latter choice—a dystopic future in which our two actors are the only men or women left on the planet to portray the play’s four characters. They’ve been placed in the quarantine bubble

you see in the photo on the left, as the outside environment would be deadly. It is an intelligent cube that keeps them alive and fed. This idea informs all the design elements: Sheathed in transparent plastic, the cube is rigged inside with industrial surveillance cameras, scanning the action and projecting it onto translucent screens. The audience gets the unusual opportunity to see the performers live while also witnessing intimate details of their performances in cinematic close-up. We treated this classical playhouse as a site: With only the corner of the cube perched on an apron, the rest of the set floated above the first several rows of orchestra seats, invading the auditorium.

Antonio Giacomini, VIDEO DESIGN: This version of *Quartet* had five live video cameras giving five different views of the inside of the cube—two were focused on the actions of the actors, and three provided perspectives on the space. This was the only clear, direct



way to see inside the cube, because its plastic skin served as a barrier between the actors and the audience. In some parts of the show, there were also pre-recorded, time-lapse videos with movement; these were layered with the live video feed to alter the reality of the moment. A control-panel display indicated how the cube was controlling the characters. Overall, the graphic design was very basic, very elementary.

Solomon Weisbard, LIGHTING DESIGN: We approached the lighting of this play with a futuristic vocabulary. Instead of footlights, for example, we used non-conventional instruments like arc-source lights, but to similar effect. In the world within the cube, where the characters exist, the lighting is “of their world”; outside there’s a sense of a force or a presence beyond them. The play is graphically sexual, and the way the stage is laid out—with the cube thrusting out into the audience’s space—contributes to that. The play becomes a kind of protrusion or insertion into our reality.

WaxFactory’s *Quartet v4.0* was performed Feb. 24–28, 2010, at the Abrons Arts Center in New York City as part of Performing Revolution in Central and Eastern Europe, a festival coordinated by the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The production, conceived and directed by Ivan Talijancic, featured text by Heiner Müller in a translation by Douglas Langworthy. It had video design by Antonio Giacomini; soundscape by Miha Klemencic of Random Logic; costume design by Haans Nicholas Mott; lighting design by Solomon Weisbard; scenic installation by Pavel Getov; and prosthetic design by Julie A. Gamble and Rudolf Baltera. In photo, above, Erika Latta as Merteuil and Todd Peters as Valmont.