

# Edinburgh International Festival 2014 – REVIEW – Delusion of the Fury \*\*\*\*\*



Quadrangularis Reversum, Cloud-Chamber Bowls, Belly Drums, Spoils of War: even just the names of the outlandish instruments invented and constructed by American maverick composer Harry Partch are astonishingly evocative. That's without even hearing the weird, alien-sounding music they produce – for in the 1940s and 50s, he rethought the fundamentals of music – its tuning, its rhythms, its functions – and dreamt up a whole new orchestra of bizarrely beautiful instruments to put his radical ideas into practice. And it was these instruments, reconstructed by German maker Thomas Meixner (Partch's originals had become too fragile for performance), that Ensemble Musikfabrik brought to Edinburgh for one of the highlights of this year's International Festival.

*Delusion of the Fury* brought a young, mixed crowd to the King's Theatre, and it was likely that few knew what to expect. What they got, though, was a riot of colour and noise, intoxicating music from Partch's exquisite sculptural instrument constructions, and a performance that was as thoroughly entertaining as it was baffling. It interwove two tales of futile anger – a Japanese Noh-inspired story of a ghost warrior returning to forgive his slayer, and a farcical Ethiopian folk tale of lost goats and deaf judges – which brought the performance nicely in line with the Festival's themes of war and conflict. But most memorable was the sheer verve of Heiner Goebbels's stylised, madcap production – with gleefully misspelt scene titles, duct-tape animals, rich, acidic-hued lighting and a river cascading through the set.

Even Colonel Sanders made an unexpected appearance.



It was exactly the kind of astonishing visual inventiveness needed to do justice to Partch's admittedly slow-moving, ritualistic (and fairly bewildering) drama. But his music, delivered with utter conviction and passion by the Musicfabrik players, constantly swapping from instrument to instrument, was never less than startling – and utterly beguiling. From the soft, microtonal caress from the Surrogate Kithara dulcimer that opened the evening, through to the belly-wobbling throbs of the pounded Marimba Eroica and the ear-tweaking squeals from the Chromelodeon organs, it was like nothing you'd ever heard before, but thrilling and magical in equal measure. The Musikfabrik musicians threw themselves into everything, disrobing and changing their junkyard costumes for different scenes, cueing each other across the set, playing as if they knew the music inside out (which they probably did).

It was no doubt a risk for the Festival to bring such an outlandish project to Edinburgh, but it paid off in one of 2014's most memorable, exciting and startling events – it was exactly the kind of ambitious undertaking that the Festival was made for, and it paid off magnificently.