

【藝評空間】

Teatre Animal *Like Cat and Dog* - creating a world of imagination

文 Catherine Yau

What would you do if you were given a white paper and a black pen? Some of you might write a story on it, some might draw pictures. Nacho, the artist in *Like Cat and Dog* did the same. He drew his beloved characters on the paper, and even transferred them to the big white paper-like screen in the centre of the stage. And, magically, the characters started to move and play with their own creator.

Like Cat and Dog is the brainchild of the Spanish company Teatre Animal with original idea by Leo Ferrer and Lluís Petit (whom is also the character Nacho of the story) and directed by Judit Ortiz. Using simple black-and-white line drawings and projection techniques, adding on them a lot of imagination, the team successfully created an intimate world of animals, friends and life to the little kids and their parents in Hong Kong.

“Imagination will take you everywhere”

Nacho showed the audience his line drawings of his friends Cat and Dog, he then drew them onto the screen. While Nacho was still drawing Cat, Dog started to move, they were animated. This excited the little kids, they shouted to get the attention of Nacho. Nacho very cleverly engaged the kids right in the beginning of the performance.

Cat and Dog not only started to move, they began to fight; cause as the expression ‘like cat and dog’ suggested, they are in constant argument, they never like each other. Nacho therefore drew them a boxing arena, for them to fight ‘properly’. Nacho narrated the fight in a line-drawn microphone. His lively account livened the fight further. Yet wait, Cat stuck out its claws, trying to threaten Dog. Even with the persuasion of Nacho, Cat refused to withdraw. He therefore drew a fountain on the screen. Cat, as with all cats, was afraid of water. Dog sprinkled water onto Cat with a hose to make it retreat. Dog was happy, it tried to stop the water, although the clumsy Dog stepped on the hose, and when it let go, water flooded, and the boxing platform very soon turned into an ocean.

Nacho was anxious, but the creative artist soon thought of a solution. He drew a stopper (like one at the base of a bathtub), unplugged it, and all the water together with Cat and Dog were sucked into the hole and was finally saved.

Albert Einstein once said “Logic will take you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere”. The company created a world of imagination through moving images and in placing unrelated images and plots together. They offset expectations and challenge logical thoughts.

Another technique the creative team often uses in the work is the jumping in and out of the characters. The characters in the screen will move out of the screen and became two-dimensional board characters, and the artist will go inside the screen and became a lined image to interact with the other characters. This also proves to be an interesting technique in blurring the reality with the imaginary.



All about Friends

Like Cat and Dog is also about friendship, how to befriend and connect with another person whom might have very different characters than yourself. In the story, Cat is fast and clever, and cunning sometimes; Dog is very strong, yet sometimes clumsy too. They are not friends at first, yet after some experiences together, they also could be friends. This theme is certainly very close to the life of the kids.

After Cat and Dog left, Nacho is bored with no friends around, and with his creative mind and pen again, he drew other animal friends to be with him. He is also suggesting that friends do come and go, and you could always make new friends.

This time he created Bird. Bird was a bit shy, and always escaped to the corner of the screen when Nacho introduced it to the audience.

Annoyed by his escape, he drew a pin on the lower end of the screen, and another string to tie Bird's feet. Bird was so sad that it cried. Its big tears kept falling until it was drowning itself.

Nacho felt sorry for imposing his wants onto Bird and was so anxious that he jumped into the screen to help. The real person once again turned into an animated line drawing.

He finally freed Bird by drawing a scissors to cut the line and carried Bird in another drawn surfboard. Yet the danger had not ended. Coco, a cool crocodile in sunglasses, chased them in a surfboard, and even swallowed Bird.

Nacho was so angry and scolded Coco. The seemingly fierce crocodile turned out to be a kind little animal. He felt sorry for his deed, and finally threw up, and out came Bird again. He even shared his bread with the hungry bird. Finally, on seeing Bird burst into a pile of feathers, it cried in losing a friend.

In the popular children's storybook *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*, Judith Kerr told her little readers that the visiting tiger might not be as dangerous as we have always imagined, it could be kind. In *Like Cat and Dog*, the creator also suggests that friends could not be stereotyped, they may have their natural, not-so-desirable characters, at the same time they also have lovely traits. Only when you know them for a longer period, you get to know them and could become friends.

In facing death

The performance not only engaged the kids, the parents sitting next to them were equally amused; because apart from the ingenious imagination, the recurring theme of death and loss equally inspire.

After Cat and Dog became friends in the first scene, they left, walking away from the audience. Unexpectedly a very fast train passed, and they were run over by it, both were flattened. Shocked by the scene, Nacho jumped all around the stage, distressed and sad. The actor's truthful and affective expressions accentuated the scene, creating the heaviness of the loss. He told himself "everything will be alright".

After some time, finally, Cat and Dog came to life again. This episode of the train running over his animal friends happened several times in the work.

In the second scene, when Bird was burst into a pile of feathers, the music turned sentimental; Nacho, commemorate his lost friend, folded a white paper into the shape of a bird and picked one of the feathers falling from above to add onto the paper bird. He flew the paper bird in space slowly, and when he threw it into the screen, it returned to life once more.

Lluís, also performing as a hospital clown, has multiple experiences with death. In addition, at the time of the creation, a close friend died and saddened him. Both encounters inspired him of the death scenes, and he learned only time will heal.

Therefore, in all those scenes, the creator has allowed silence, freezing the scene for some time, to create space for the audience to think and feel for the situation.

Running over by train is brutal, yet similar accidents also happen in reality, and such drama has shown much effectiveness in switching the mood of the scenes.

The creator also like to spell out the positive message of "everything will be alright", with arrangements that all characters be reborn; although I am thinking if an alternative thought to their reborn life will be more realistic and inspiring, since the kids will someday face such cruelty in seeing someone's death in life, and they might be able to relate to the consolation this work will offer.

A blank white paper

Like Cat and Dog has been touring and performing for close to 200 performances since its premiere in 2014. It could well be understood why such seemingly simple performance could have such achievements - with its funny, creative, emotionally engaging and thought provoking details. All characters have finally left us at the end of the performance, but what they have not left us is a blank white paper to exercise our own imagination, to create the characters and stories that we desire. I am sure this work will continue to bring much fun, laughter, warmth in the hearts of the kids and adults, and in continuing in freeing their minds.

Like Cat and Dog

Arts group: Teatre Animal

Date & time: 1/3/2018, 7:30pm

Venue: Cultural Activities Hall, Tsuen Wan Town Hall

Biography of the author Catherine Yau is a freelance Dance Practitioner, focusing on dance education and dance writing. She graduated with her MFA degree in Dance at the New York University and MA in Literary and Cultural Studies at The University of Hong Kong. She is currently the Guest Lecturer in Dance at The Education University of Hong Kong. She also serves as the Examiner of Dance for The Hong Kong Arts Development Council.

Photo credit: Theatre Animal