

Hope and laughter from a cat's bum

With the production 'Retro cat', Carte Blanche and Tori Wrånes have created a little gem of solace, laughter and hope for the world.



6 out of 6 Theatre
'Retro Cat'

Studio Bergen, Bergen International Festival
23 May–2 June 2024

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I dare say that the dance performance 'Retro Cat' is one of the highlights of Bergen International Festival this year, although I was only there for a couple of days and so didn't get to see everything.

Still, there's something about this performance that makes it stand out.

'Retro Cat' has qualities that give you a sense of pure happiness.

It's perhaps because the performance is honest, warm and open, and doesn't come across as alien or difficult to understand.



FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHT: Exploring the world in 'Retro Cat'. This is how it can unfold.

PHOTO: ØYSTEIN HAARA

Troll, be yourself

The whole performance revolves around the rear end of a cat.

At first, the cat is just this huge heap on stage that you don't recognise until you suddenly hear barking. Only then does the soundscape make

sense – the sound we heard at the beginning of the performance was the sound of a cat purring. But the bark scared him away.

One thing is already abundantly clear: this is going to be fun, we're in for a laugh in the safe space they've created.



THROUGH THE BACK PASSAGE: Bums are fun. Here's a troll that's about to enter one.

PHOTO: ØYSTEIN HAARA

From the rear end of the huge cat, small troll-like creatures emerge. They have thinning tousled hair, they carry something resembling a backpack, and they have oversized shoes with split toes.

The masked trolls are the performers of Carte Blanche, and as they crawl around, bounce and leap out of the cat's body, they seem entirely new to the world. With their big eyes, they grope their way around, find each other, try to play and try to understand each other.

There surely can't be anything bad about a creature that's completely new to the world.



WELCOMING TROLLS: They emerge from the cat as new to the world, but they quickly grow. There's something disarming in the design of the masks and costumes that makes it easy to connect with the dancing trolls in 'Retro Cat'.

PHOTO: ØYSTEIN HAARA

Where the sun don't shine

[Tori Wrånes](#) is responsible for the choreography, scenography, costume design, mask design and some of the music in 'Retro Cat'.

Wrånes is perhaps best known as the artist who [laid the cornerstone of the new National Museum in 2016](#) – hanging from a crane, singing, with the stone in her backpack.



PROMINENT: Tori Wrånes is one of Norway's greatest performance artists.

PHOTO: ØYSTEIN HAARA

In recent years, she has developed these strange trolls that are also featured in 'Retro Cat'. The trolls wear half-masks that are designed to make their eyes very prominent.

Each troll has its own personality and no two are the same, meaning that the dancers must control everything down to the smallest detail in order to create and develop the troll *they* embody.

It's precisely in this interaction and in this character development that they create a world of beings that seem familiar, as if you've met them before. That's how Wrånes depicts humans and the world seen through the perspective of trolls.



FROM THE CAT'S BODY: 'Retro Cat' is a clever performance about the human condition – and what it is still possible to achieve.

PHOTO: ØYSTEIN HAARA

While the trolls explore the world, the music builds up slowly and intensely. When the weird, peculiar interaction on stage is disturbed by threatening barks, they know just what to do: they push away the cat's tail and a giant back passage appears.

The orifice is like an eye or a mouth – or a portal. The cat's body can conceal and protect them all.

It's reminiscent of the 1988 Japanese animated film ['My Neighbor Totoro'](#), not only in terms of the cat bus in the film, but also and most prominently through the feeling that the Totoro character is a safe haven – just as the cat is in 'Retro Cat'. The main difference is you have to enter the cat through the back passage.



DIVERSE: Each troll has its own personality. This makes ‘Retro Cat’ an intriguing performance.

PHOTO: ØYSTEIN HAARA

Everything is connected

The movements of the dancers are very much about finding a common rhythm, a kind of common dance language. The choreography is reminiscent of the performance [‘Birget’](#), in which Carte Blanche used similar techniques to arrive at a common dance language and a common understanding.

In ‘Retro Cat’, they go back to basics, to the movements we used when we were children: jumping, rocking, swaying, carrying, waving. These movements, combined with the new and blank expression the masks give the performers, brings forth a kind of parallel reality where anything is possible.

The movements and interaction are precise, and each character has its own traits, its own language and its own way of evolving – right down to the smallest detail. That said, ‘Retro Cat’ has an air of improvisation and spontaneity.



TOTORO VIBES: The big cat is reminiscent of the Japanese animated film 'My Neighbor Totoro'.

PHOTO: ØYSTEIN HAARA

Everything is interconnected, and the performance leaves ample room for humour.

'Retro Cat' gives us a sense of hope, as it shows how the willingness to do good is still inherent in these trolls. The performance therefore provides us a sense of solace: community is the first thing the trolls explore. Not for personal gain, but because they need to feel a sense of belonging.

It's playful, clever and deeply human at a very high artistic level.

NRK reviews

PHOTO: SJUR POLLEN

- **Title:** 'Retro Cat'
- **By:** Carte Blanche and Tori Wrånes
- **Stage:** Studio Bergen (during Bergen International Festival)
- **When:** 23 May–2 June Will also be playing in Bodø, Stavanger, Haugesund, Oslo, Bergen and Hammerfest in autumn.
- **Choreographer:** Tori Wrånes

- **Scenography:** Tori Wrånes
- **Costume design:** Tori Wrånes
- **Mask design:** Tori Wrånes
- **Lighting design:** Robert Roespel
- **Sound production:** Gunnar Innvær
- **Composition:** Tori Wrånes and Joar Renolen
- **Costume coordinator:** Indrani Balgobin
- **Dancers:** Caroline Eckly, Nadege Kubwayo, Dawid Lorenc, Adrian Bartczak, Aslak Aune Nygård, Ole Martin Meland, Brecht Bovijn, Gaspard Schmitt, Naomi Schouten, Trine Lise Moe, Ihsaan de Banya, Mai Lisa Guinoo, Manon Campion, Irene Vesterhus Theisen