

La Danse d'Amazon review

“Fascinating collage”

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A scene from La Danse d'Amazon at Cabuwazi Marzahn, Berlin. Photo: Luna Zscharnt

Fascinating, if occasionally rambling, fusion of circus and documentary about the inner workings of Amazon

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Launched in 2022 and due to conclude next June, the ambitious [Ulysses: European Odyssey](#) project is more than midway through its voyage. The Europe-wide response to James Joyce's novel reaches Berlin with a new work by renowned German collective [Rimini Protokoll](#) that explores the workings of e-commerce behemoth Amazon.

Created by Rimini Protokoll's Daniel Wetzel, who also appears as a kind of genial ringmaster, the show is a fusion of documentary and circus. Performed in a circus tent – a working circus school during the day – in Berlin's Marzahn neighbourhood, the show starts with an energetic skipping-rope routine from a group of young performers, their twirling ropes mirroring the Amazon smile logo, before Wetzel embarks on his expedition into the company that its founder Jeff Bezos initially wanted to call Relentless.

The show is a kind of collage, featuring onstage contributions from Amazon employees, including Monsur Babalola who works at Amazon Fresh, and people who work in Amazon-related fields, including a woman who runs a translation business designed to aid Amazon sellers. Each person gets to present their particular skill. We are given little metal clickers with which to show our appreciation.

The line-up also includes two young circus performers, Laleshka Salas Salazar and Basile Herrmann Philipe, who clamber over metal shelving units and perform aerial rope routines. The initial idea had been for them to both take jobs within Amazon and explore their experiences, but things did not quite pan out like that. Instead, Salazar and entrepreneur Sebastian Herz discuss the best way to source and sell an aerial rope on Amazon. This is woven together, by circus archivists Gisela and Dietmar Winkler, with a parallel narrative about East German polar bear trainer Ursula Böttcher.

Though Wetzel's show is crammed with research, it sometimes feels like we're just glimpsing the tip of it. We learn about Amazon Web Services, its cloud computing and storage arm, which generates the majority of its profits. We learn how Amazon actively recruits from the military. We learn about the groups campaigning for better working conditions, but we also learn how workers in some fulfilment centres – many of whom are refugees – consider it a kind of family. Wetzel's daughter even appears to critique his own Amazon buying habits.

While the show has been made in conjunction with a campaign by anti-consumerist Peng! Collective, allowing workers to pool their stories, Wetzel has not made an anti-Amazon show, but rather one designed to help its audience better understand this multi-tentacled entity, how it operates and how it influences the way we consume. With its rambling, patchwork structure, the show sends the audience down multiple fascinating rabbit holes before concluding in an endearingly whimsical manner (with costumes – of course – sourced from Amazon).

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