

Zoem! New Dutch Theater

The latest international children's festival from the New Victory Theater has been generating a lot of zoem.

In Dutch, "zoem" is the sound a bee makes. "It also means interesting and newsworthy, as in 'buzz,'" said Mary Rose Lloyd, the theater's director of programming. Add to that the New Victory's link to bees — its mascot, Victor Bee, derives from one of its earlier identities as the Belasco Theater and from the whimsical bees in its décor — and Zoem! seems the perfect name for a novel series of Dutch plays.

"Out of all the companies and countries, I have found that the Dutch work is at the forefront of risk taking," Ms. Lloyd said. "They're not afraid to take on subjects that are complex, like the idea of death."

The festival, all American premieres performed in English, began last weekend with a sold-out run of Stella Den Haag's revisionist "Rumpelstiltskin" and continues Friday through Sunday at the Duke on 42nd Street with "Miss Ophelia," an adaptation of Michael Ende's book "Ophelia's Shadow Theatre." The title character, an elderly theater prompter, collects something unusual: lost shadows she sees around her, unattached to people.

"Her theater closes, and she



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takes these shadows in her purse, and they all travel and perform the great works of theater until she ends up joining them," Ms. Lloyd said. "Because everyone dies."

But the play, presented by the troupe Het Filaal and recommended for those 6 and older, makes Miss Ophelia's demise rather charming. "She knows where she's going, and they continue the story," Ms. Lloyd said. Performed by two actors (Ramses Graus, above left, and Mirthe Klieverik), "Miss Ophelia" incorporates cutout figures, found objects, a doll-size set and, not surprisingly, shadow puppetry.

"Hands Up!," playing Wednesday through Jan. 22, features the puppeteer Leo Petersen, known as Lejo, who relies solely on his palms and 10 fingers, along with quirky little

props, like wooden eyeballs.

While his work will captivate the youngest New Victory patrons, the festival concludes with fare for its oldest: "Wuthering Heights, Restless Souls," an adaptation of the Emily Brontë novel from the Dutch company Theater Artemis and the Belgian group Theater Antigone. Running Jan. 27 to 29, it includes a stark set, wind machines, a little nudity and abundant adolescent angst.

Ms. Lloyd added that the festival had become particularly poignant in light of recent Dutch government cuts in arts financing. No one wants to see these companies go the way of Miss Ophelia.

(Zoem! information, theaters and schedules: 646-223-3010, newvictory.org; \$9 to \$38. Some performances are sold out.)

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