‘I am the Baron’

By ZACK DeLUCA, Staff Writer
Published: 8/8/2019

Double Edge Theatre’s production of its original play “I am the Baron” takes audiences to strange worlds, into the deep trenches of the ocean and to the moon and back in search of incredible, new possibilities.

“I am the Baron” is a celebration of the power of stories; an homage to the ability storytelling wields to transform the world.

The sold-out play, written by the Ashfield-based theater troupe, features its own fantastical adventures and mythic visions. It is partly inspired by the book “Baron Munchausen’s Narrative of his Marvelous Travels and Campaigns in Russia,” says Matthew Glassman, one of the directors.

The book, written in 1785 by German author Rudolf Eric Raspe, is loosely inspired by the stories of a real man Hieronymous Karl Friedrich Freinerr von Munchaussen, who was known for recounting embellished tales of his endeavors.

Many versions of the fictional Baron have appeared in print, on stage and on screen. In the book, the Baron travels to the moon and rides a cannon-ball.
In the play, the “true” Baron launches himself out of a cannon from the island of cheese, and multiple characters who take up the mantle of Baron travel to the moon together. The play is intentionally comedic, embracing the absurdity and surreality of the Baron’s claims.

“Different trips and scenes are taken from the book,” Glassman said, “but much of it, like the concept of creating multiple Barons, was an original concept.”

The vaudeville troupe of main characters follow the lavish Baron’s lead as he takes through various mystical worlds to push back against “the great forgetting.”

“We knew early on that there was an antagonistic force that wasn’t personified, an oppressive force,” Glassman said. “It felt like something in our current moment that wasn’t necessarily a villain, but an entity.”

Each character gets a moment to shine, showcasing their depth and emotional resonance to the audience. As the play carries on, they each learn to tell their own story on the way to the “Garden of Remembering.”

“There are a lot of possibilities for what people can draw from in regards to the question of forgetting and their connection to the vaudevillian protagonists,” Glassman said.

Double Edge has members from multiple countries, including England, Bulgaria and Argentina. The actors are conjuring these heroic personalities in their characters and Glassman said he found it important they draw from personal experiences.

When the characters arrive at the “Garden of Remembering” a crew of emersion artists recite various self-chosen texts that have meaning to them, and recite them in their native language as the play continues to unfold.

Actors undergo months of training and rehearsal to prepare for the Summer Spectacle, allowing them to safely perform the variety of acrobatics in the show or commit to the physical comedy that comes with vaudevillian inspired performances. Glassman compared the acting performances to jazz, somethings stay specific and other things can change as you go.

“The performances constantly develop and change,” Glassman said.

Since acquiring the expansive property in Ashfield decades ago, the company, which was started in Boston in 1982, has made great use of its 100-acre farm. The performance is an indoor, outdoor event with the audience traveling between performance locations. The Summer Spectacle often features sprawling and enchanting sets, as audiences travel from location to location on the property with the changing scenes.
For “I am the Baron” alone, actors and actresses, some in elaborate costume, wade through a stream or fly on wires and bungees overhead. Other sets expand deep into fields and allow for the directors to play with illusion of characters’ size and distance from the audience. A final set piece involves bridges and bookshelves built between trees more than 20 feet off the ground.

“I am the Baron” by Double Edge Theatre, which is celebrating its 25 year in Ashfield. Contributed photo

According to Glassman, this is the first time a Summer Spectacle performance was not directed by Double Edge Theatre’s founder Stacy Klein. Glassman served as the co-artistic director and co-wrote the play.

Jeremy Louise Eaton served as the design and associate director, as well as designed the performance, creating the “visual” elements of the story said Glassman.

This year’s Summer Spectacle marks the 25th anniversary of Double Edge Theatre’s arrival to the farm in Ashfield. The company began with audiences of 45 people throughout the whole summer in 2002, and grew to perform for more than 3,000 in 2018.

“It's become a bottle of artistic engagement with the community,” Glassman said.

The Double Edge theater facilities include two performance and training spaces, five outdoor performance areas, office space, a music room and more. The company also owns property for housing resident artists as well as Double Edge’s Artist studio focusing on underserved artists.

Upcoming events for Double Edge include “Leonora’s World,” Oct. 11 to 13. The “living art spectacle” invites the audience to journey into the mysterious and magical paintings of Leonora Carrington. Their paintings are brought to life in the fields, gardens and stream and pond at the farm.

“SUGA,” Nov. 14 to 16, 21 to 24 is a one man performance conceived, created, and performed by Travis Coe. “SUGA” will be directed by Klein. “As a caretaker of a museum of memory, Coe touches on, reveals, and remixes all the aspects of himself as queer, black, Latino and American, in an investigation of freedom and the bonds one must break through to achieve that freedom.”