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Teatret OM Production Creates Primal Story of Exploration

Written by [Megan Kamerick](#) // January 28, 2013 // [Theater](#) // [No comments](#)



Teatret OM's play "79Fjord" explores a 1907 voyage to map Greenland.

Count on Tricklock Company to find unusual fare for the Revolutions International Theatre Festival. I can definitely say this was the first time I sat in an igloo to watch a play. Teatret OM, an international troupe based in Denmark, created the structure in the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque for the its play "79 Fjord" and it was quite impressive.

I see the most interesting, creative output each year at Revolutions. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. This one definitely did. As we entered the igloo or ice cave one of the company members, dressed in a sort of arctic outfit and sporting an odd red mask, enthusiastically welcomed us and helped us find seats along the walls or floors. The play is based on three explorers in 1907, setting out, in that over-confident, brash manner of so many explorers at the time, to complete a map of Greenland.

After a burst of enthusiasm and lots of successful hunting, things go badly for our intrepid trio. In fact, the three apparently finished their map, but never made it home.

But before that, there are wonderful moments of humor. I particularly liked it when the explorers treat the audience like walruses or seals assembled on a beach, counting us and

noting down our gender and color variations.

The igloo walls double as screens for shadow puppetry. It's a little like returning to the caves of our ancestors to hear stories and watch firelight flicker on walls. We watch a ship, as well as whales, moving through the sea. The unfinished map is on the ceiling at various times. Although the igloo grew quite warm, it was easy to imagine the desperation and exhaustion of the explorers as they plod through imaginary ice, limping on feet rendered useless by frostbite.

Driven to "make the unknown known," the characters fail to turn back when they should, and are instead swallowed by the vast wilderness, becoming unknown corpses in the barren frozen landscape. Despite that harsh narrative, however, the production offers beautiful images as three other characters emerge, representing larger forces of nature and primal spirits. One is a ghostly figure in white, the embodiment of winter perhaps, playing with small human figurines on her arm and dropping snow on them, almost like a god.

Another is the spirit of a seal, seeking revenge for her pup shot by one of the explorers desperate for food. And a third is at times a whale, making haunting Humpback-like sounds, and at times a sort of death figure clacking stones in a menacing way as one explorer dies.

They occasionally disappeared behind the igloo walls to sing melodies that reminded me of Finnish or Ukrainian folk songs with slightly dissonant harmonies. The overall effect was quite haunting.

The ensemble will perform one more piece on Sunday and Monday at Revolutions. "I Maltagliati" is a sung solo performance about an old woman relating her life story while cooking pasta. If "Fjord" was representative of what OM does, I can't wait. Revolutions continues through Feb. 2 at venues around Albuquerque with companies from Australia, Poland, Italy and Switzerland. A [complete schedule](#) is online.

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