

TP people, other delights from Mummenschanz

By Ellen Dunkel

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Mummenschanz is not a holiday show, but it's still a great family-friendly December treat, appropriate for any child who can sit still.

In fact, it was almost as fun to hear children's screams of delight on opening night Thursday at the Annenberg Center, as it was to watch the wacky magic happening on stage.

DANCE REVIEW

► Mummenschanz

2 and 8 p.m.
Saturday, 3 p.m.
Sunday at the Zellerbach Theater, Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.
Information: 215-898-3900, annenbergcenter.org.

In just under two hours, including an intermission, Mummenschanz presents a series of short, enchanting vignettes that turned tubes and bits of fabric into amusing and sympathetic characters.

The four performers behind the Swiss company's anthropomorphic creations are all but invisible — just legs sticking out of a pair of giant hands, or a body that must be in that giant triangle plunking across the stage or working the many limbs of the black-and-white-striped critter writhing and flinging its inhumanly long limbs across the stage and into the

audience.

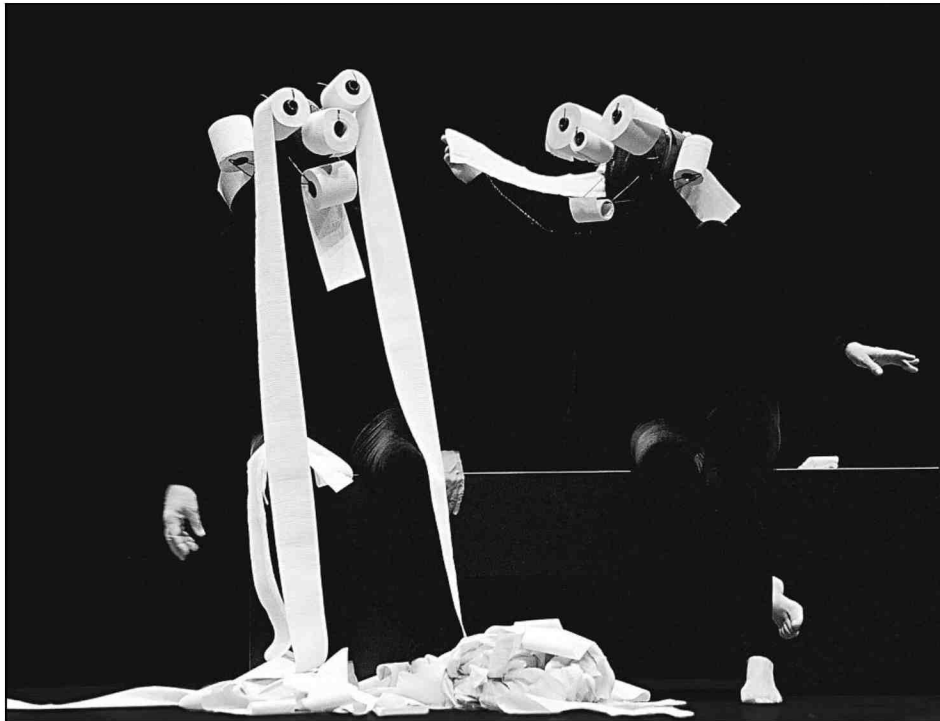
The cast — founding member Floriana Frassetto, along with Raffaella Mattioli, Pietro Montandon, and Philipp Egli — are dancers, tumblers, theater artists, and clowns.

Many of their scenes are by now classic Mummenschanz. There's the courtship between two characters whose faces are made of rolls of toilet paper; the giant Slinky that plays catch with members of the audience; the duo who quickly reshape their clay masks to look like a cat, dog, monkey, or elephant; the faces made out of glowing tubes.

Butterfly nets shaped like human faces are both enchanting and reversible as they blow inside and out. A box-headed being gives herself an outfit by tearing pieces off a roll of masking tape. She then goes into the audience and invites children to add facial features.

Mummenschanz has been performing for 42 years. It spent three years on Broadway in the 1970s, and also appeared on *The Muppet Show* and *Sesame Street*. Its weekend stop in Philadelphia, presented by Dance Celebration, is part of a months-long tour of the United States and Europe. There's no Christmas tree, not even any music, but the show still offers plenty of comfort and joy.





Visions of sugarplums, sort of: Mummenschanz is performing at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts. It's not a Christmas show, but it's a fabulous family treat.