



DRAMATEN

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Franka's Monster

Carl Johan Karlson

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Frank is perfect, almost. No other child is like him. At least not according to Frank himself. And he's pretty tired of being a kid. His grandmother doesn't take care of him very well anyway, so he might as well get someone to take care of himself. Someone who is just as exquisite and unique as him. But the new creation – which is named Franka – does not do as he wants. Frank has created a monster!

Franka's Monster is play loosely based on Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. It is a maximalist, twisted and gothic play about loneliness, longing for a community - and about the desire to, like a god, be able to create life out of dead matter.

It is written by cartoonist Emelie Östergren, who in 2023 is nominated for the August prize in the category Swedish children's and youth book of the year for Presenten, together with Emma Virke.

Directing is Carl Johan Karlson, artistic director of Unga Dramaten, who most recently had great success at Dramaten with the adult performance The Inheritance.

Social sustainability and inclusion – the pledge to leave no one behind.

How Dramaten works with Relaxed performance, the case of Franka

Social sustainability through inclusion focuses on the need to "put people first" in development processes. It is people-centred, inclusive and sustainable development for all that promotes social inclusion by empowering people, building cohesive and resilient societies and making institutions accessible and accountable to citizens. Working with social sustainability through inclusion integrates work with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, youth, older people and families, ensuring that no one is left behind. Theatre can work with inclusion in several ways, one of which is through the concept of Relaxed performance. Relaxed performance is part of Dramatens work with accessibility and making the theatre more open and inclusive for people on the autism spectrum, with sensory or communication disabilities or learning difficulties, because every child, regardless of ability, should be able to experience the magic of theatre. Relaxed theatre performances have formats that are quieter and more responsive. It is not a 'one size fits all' format, but an adaptation to the needs of the play and the building. A building with physical connotations such as Dramaten presents different challenges than performing in a modern black box, for example, stairs, tight spaces, doors and thresholds complicate accessibility. Changes to the performance can be both large and small. Relaxed performance is an umbrella concept, and Dramaten started with adaptations in relation to physical accessibility to gradually broaden the scope. The process of implementation is mainly driven Young Dramaten (Unga Dramaten), whose mission is to work with children between the ages of three and sixteen. This should however not be limited to those who can come to the theatre themselves. Dramaten can be an inaccessible place, and Relaxed performance opens the stages to new groups of people, people who might not otherwise have experienced theatre. Without compromising on artistic quality, Relaxed performance creates responsive performances and a deeper contact between the stage and the audience.

The play Franka's Monster was chosen as the pilot for Dramaten. Loosely based on Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, it is a maximalist, twisted and gothic play about loneliness, the longing for community - and the desire to be able to create life from dead matter like a god. Before a Relaxed performance is created, the original performance will have premiered and run in the theatre for a period of time. The redesign process begins with a planning rehearsal to decide what adjustments need to be made. For example, it might involve decisions about less smoke, more light, and a discussion about how much of the theatre's magic should be revealed. It might be to de-dramatise a choke hold, to show what really happens when a sword looks like it's going into an actor on stage, or to show the loose arms used in the performance.

You might decide to show a staple gun that makes loud noises, or to have an actor lead the audience through what really happens when he suddenly appears in a hole on the other side of the stage. The director is usually not present during these relaxed rehearsals, instead an audience worker, Sara Berg, in dialogue with the cast suggests, questions and decides what changes need to be made. The director has the power over the artistic performance, but the Relaxed performance is not his/her responsibility. This is because the Relaxed performance should not depend on the director's interest, competence or prior knowledge. The same applies to the actors, everyone should be able to take part in this working process, not just the actor with the right training. This is characteristic of Dramatens Relaxed performance concept - accessibility goes both ways. What's more, it's a large institution, which means it has the capacity to hire staff and adapt the public areas.



The artistic director of Young Dramaten, Carl-Johan Karlsson, has developed the concept based on the theatre's audience, which is not as specific as an audience in other cities, such as London. To prepare the theatre audiences, information about the adapted material is distributed before the performance to supplement the teacher's guide already available. The theatre is also in dialogue with teachers who bring their classes to the Relaxed performance, describing different parts of the performance and what to expect, as well as informing about adaptations such as the foyer staying open extra-long. Apart from the changes to the performance itself, there is also greater flexibility in practical matters. For example, half of the lounge will be open, the audience will be able to change seats and go out and make noise. The audience is made aware of this before the performance starts and the actors introduce themselves beforehand and maybe some surprises are revealed. The Relaxed performance format allows for greater openness to unplanned changes, for example if transport is delayed. It also reassures educators who bring groups with disabilities to the theatre, as working with Relaxed performance communicates that the theatre is prepared for this group who may need certain adaptations (e.g. sound and movement). Communication about this format fulfils an information need and could reduce anxiety by showing that the theatre has adopted a flexible approach to people's needs. Just communicating about accessibility gives a certain 'you might think the theatre is for us' kind of spill-over effect. The theatre also gains an experience that can be used to raise awareness. Finally, Relaxed performance is a concept that is deeply rooted in young theatre, and the artistic director of Young Dramaten is committed to spreading it until it becomes part of the whole organisation, because 'everyone should have the opportunity to come and see theatre'.

Video recording: <https://play.quickchannel.com/play/ia4q9qr>

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