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Oedipus Without Complexes

With the turbulent as well as excellent performance *Rent a Kid, No Bullshit*, choreographer Wim Vandekeybus showed that he can handle not only professional dancers, but also children and youths. With them he tackles Jan Decorte's *Bêt noir*.

In *Rent a Kid* there were 45 young people of different ages on stage in a super dynamic performance where almost all artistic disciplines, feelings and emotions were thrown together. During the preparation, in weekends and school vacations, Vandekeybus and his performers also went to a camp for a week, where they sometimes jammed and brainstormed into the night. This time something a bit calmer and smaller was the idea, but it didn't really work out that way.

'It was exciting,' admits Vandekeybus. 'Last time everything was possible and it didn't really matter if there were 36 or 45 people on stage. But this time we started from *Bêt noir*, Jan Decorte's Oedipus story. At the auditions we decided on a smaller cast with children from eight to fourteen. In the piece, seven roles are played by twelve actors. Because we play for the Festival of Flanders, the music is also very important. That's why I invited the Fanfakids from Molenbeek, and beside the ten drummers we put two guitars and a saxophone. Tiring sometimes, but very interesting.'

Lord of the Rings

Jan Decorte wrote *Bêt noir* in his 'childlike' language and it seems to touch the children too. Vandekeybus: 'I started to reread the work and above all I found the text very pure. It is so beautifully written that it sounds very direct from the mouths of the children, and can be really fresh. It just rolls out; you just have to say 'stop' in time. It is also a story that you can tell children. You do have the situation that the young teenagers play that they have committed a patricide and have gone to bed with their mother, but the character of Oedipus also works in a very simple way. It is interesting to see really young children play serious theatre. Sometimes it's too educational. You have to just ask them what they think about it and then you get a strong engagement from their side. Naturally, you also have to guide them. What kind of guy was this Oedipus, what was the father like, and what is that kingdom? At the beginning we made fantasies about it and they quickly came up with long white beards and other *Lord of the Rings*-like stuff, but we soon got rid of that. In our performance, the wise old blind man Tiresias is a girl of fourteen and her 'lover' is a ten-year-old black boy.

Between the rifles

Vandekeybus cherishes concrete plans to work with children on an international level. 'We should be able to set up small projects in a number of countries and then come together for a big theatre performance with two hundred people. From Germany, Barcelona and Brazil there is a demand, and recently in Macedonia I went to speak with the mayor of the Roma. We sat between the rifles, and at the entrance stood fat men with moustaches, but it was a very interesting talk. And with the KVS we have contacts in Kinshasa. If you want to do

something with a hundred children, you can find them there in a Capoeira school or in the majorettes. The energy coming out is unbelievable.'