

Claire Diez, **La Libre Belgique**, March 2nd, 1996

"After the Explosion, Expansion"

'Bereft of a Blissful Union', dynamic chaos according to Vandekeybus

"I've mocked the moving of the universe", said poet Dylan Thomas. "Play is a magic tool which serves to ward off the atavistic fear man has toward the hidden anarchy of the world, of the mystery of his origins, his nature and his destiny", says Mario Varga Llosa in his preface to a collection of short stories by the Argentinian Julio Cortazar. Best be prepared: 'Bereft of a Blissful Union', the new production by choreographer Wim Vandekeybus does not offer keys to its interpretation: it is filled with expanding chaos. Risky and dynamic.

He begins from the original catastrophe: what is left for mortals, orphans from a perfect unity? Energy, he seems to respond, on stage: movement serves to incorporate catastrophe into a new order. 'Bereft of a Blissful Union' sinks intentionally in the confused flood of this turbulence. One cannot approach it with reason. Its perception resists strict organization.

Darkness

Everything begins in darkness and with the feeling of a loss. A shrill cry resounds, which one has just bought as a sort of poor release. Later, the exclamations and songs rising from the rubble are sold. But before that, the five female dancers with beautiful nude backs, which the men have warmed up so delicately with their breath, were surprised by the sudden explosion of the pedestal on which they were perched. It is gripping as a metaphor for the Big Bang. From then, the bodies will be divided, the dance turbulent, the music raging. Men walk about with no head, or all with the same mustached face. The heads will be masks which one impales over electric bulbs like the beheaded, or candle-skulls of which a girl comes to blow out the wick. The dance whirls and rebounds on the floor in superb tangents. The bodies intercept and detach in astonishing holds, pairs join in acrobatic rock-and-roll tangos.

From Now on Divided

One has to see the dancers throw themselves into this molecular chaos. One has to imagine, behind them, a transparent red curtain which allows glimpses of the twelve musicians of X-Legged Sally and the Smith Quartet, perched on a breathtaking slope, attacking the winds and cords of their resonant whirlwind, or accompanying with melancholy sighs (very cinematic compositions by Peter Vermeersch and George van Dam). One must imagine, above them, a grill which showers the stage with rays of light, and, descended suddenly, this curtain which does not separate the beings less cruelly even if it is made of soft, cream-colored fur.

On this fur is projected the image of a floating Ophélie, and, under her, the drown are from then on survivors of the shifting ocean depths. On it, a filmed solitary never will join his lover, who is sitting on stage at his feet. Here, nothing is calm or beauty, but disorder and pleasure. A pallid, raging or joyful pleasure. Just before a little corner of paradise immerses into blackness, a stolen laugh from childhood, an innocent maraud.