

Dance production 'Oedipus/bêt noir' premieres in Amsterdam

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Vandekeybus' black beast

BRUSSELS • Wim Vandekeybus' latest dance production premiered at the City Theatre of Amsterdam on Tuesday. With *Oedipus/bêt noir* he tackles Jan Decorte's adaptation of Sophocles'.

BY HAN CEELEN

"A trip," Wim Vandekeybus calls his most recent production *Oedipus/bêt noir*. "You have to go through it and like a good film it fascinates you and you are swept away and captivated and moved, and you hate it and love it at the same time." The production's world premiere took place on Tuesday at the Julidans festival in Amsterdam.

Vandekeybus returns to familiar territory with *Oedipus/bêt noir*. After his youth production *Radical Wrong* he returned to Jan Decorte's adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus*, something he also did before for youth project *Bêt noir* (2006) and guest choreography *Black Biist* (2009) for the Göteborg Ballet. Vandekeybus was satisfied with these previous productions, but wanted to focus more on the words this time, so *Oedipus/bêt noir* had to become a more earthly, less spectacular production. This time there were to be no film clips or leather motorbike suits, but simple costumes and a set involving a minimum of fuss.

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Whether this affects the impact is uncertain, because Vandekeybus can achieve an awful lot with simple means. Very few special effects can match a shower of shoes falling from the sky or a living baby on the stage. Another great invention is a circle-shaped vertical wall used as a climbing wall and hiding place. People keep appearing from behind it unexpectedly. In the production Vandekeybus plays the role of Oedipus, the tragic anti-hero who unwittingly kills his father and marries his mother. He is supported by a cast of sixteen actors, dancers and musicians, including Carly Wijs (as his wife and mother), Willy Thomas and Guy Dermul opposite the male dancers from *Radical Wrong*.

The refined words by Decorte are thoroughly enjoyable in the spoken scenes. Take, for example, the opening words "Ik ebet altijd noch chezecht," which sum up the entire production nicely, or the way Oedipus describes himself: "Ik ben e zwart beest van schult". The English surtitles can't match that. This type of literary delight quickly alternates with the energetic, raw dance sequences for which Vandekeybus is famous.

WIM VANDEKEYBUS:

It fascinates you and you are swept away and captivated and moved

At one time the dancers trot around in circles across the stage. Then they freeze or lie on the floor gasping for air like fish out of water. Even the fighting and sex scenes have their funny moments. The audience can't help but snigger several times when another character bites the dust.

Three musicians led by Roland Van Campenhout play a considerable part in *Oedipus/bêt noir*. Their screaming guitars and thundering drums go to the audience's very core. Van Campenhout also plays the part of Laos, Oedipus' father. The character is not actually part of Decorte's adaptation, which only talks about him. "But if you talk about someone, he starts to resonate in your head no matter what," explains Vandekeybus. "So I felt that Laos had to be a musician."

The Amsterdam audience appreciated the production. "Did you notice the language?" a neighbouring spectator asked her friend. "Simply magnificent."