

Overwhelming 'Blush' makes the audience blush

During his opening speech, the director of the Stadsschouwburg wants to tell a brief history of 13 years Julidans Festival when loud snoring shuts him up. The groan comes from a dancer sleeping on stage. The man doesn't even wake up when a woman unbuttons his pants and mounts him. She takes off her panties and gets her pleasure. From the side Wim Vandekeybus, the choreographer of this scene, looks at the audience. Does anyone in the public start to blush already? The light in the theatre stays on deliberately.

Blush is the name of the most recent performance by Wim Vandekeybus and his company Ultima Vez. The title refers to the cheeks of the audience and the flushed faces of the dancers, who have some hate and love battles to fight. The 'blushing' also refers to the last glow on a person's face before death makes it sallow. Actress Ina Geerts recites a text by Peter Verhelst about everything she will never live again now that she's wandering around in the underworld. 'L'amour et la mort' (Love and death), a naked man screams.

For two hours, ten dancers (amongst whom Wim Vandekeybus himself) and one actress hunt for extremes in love. They look for the lust and the devotion, but also for the pain and the violence. Even of death they are not afraid. And this with the energy that is characteristic of all Vandekeybus' performances: they pounce on each other, pound their heads against each others shoulders, throw their heads back, roar, whine, run, and exceed normal pain barriers.

Glasses, on which they balance at the beginning, are squeezed to pieces and some of the thousands of splinters disappear into bare feet and legs.

The man, who with his banjo provides all this with an ominous but also melancholic undertone, acts as the serving musician. Especially for the opening of Julidans, David Eugene Edwards, with some members of his band 16 Horsepower, performs his beautiful, exorcising rock music live on stage. This makes the intensity of this performance even more tangible. If one draws back for a second, the musicians pull you in again. In the mean time the dancers question the public, run into the audience and challenge them to give money for a sexy dance.

The trios full of friendship and venom, during which one dancer takes another by the neck and puts him against the shoulder of a third person, is magnificent. Also beautiful is the hunt for each other, during which they do not only intercept their prey while running, but also pin it to the floor by stepping on their heels and fingers.

Sometimes the risks are transparent. At these moments the mutual understandings shimmer through the dangerous game. One can just notice that the live frog which is brought on scene by a female dancer does not disappear into the blender in which Wim Vandekeybus is mixing his love- and death-drink.

From time to time the group also resembles a sect, when Vandekeybus as a veterinarian seems to be bringing his hand into the body of a female dancer. Another man massages her throat to absorb her pain and torrent of words. And the use of a split film screen, into which dancers jump to reappear on the screen as water nymphs, balances on the border of cliché-poetry.

Nevertheless, all these elements merge into a more than an overwhelming experience. 'Never again ride naked in a convertible through Paris,' the actress murmurs.

Sensations like that, yes.

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