

Baring Chests And Emotions In an Eruption Of Energy

By ANNA KISSELGÖFF

Throughout "In Spite of Wishing and Wanting," a high-energy mixed-media production strong on primal screams and fierce physicality, the experimental

Belgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and the American art-rock composer David Byrne man-

DANCE

age to say something powerful about nonverbal expression.

Talk is a major component of the two-hour piece, presented by the choreographer's troupe, Última Vez, on Tuesday night as part of the opening of Lincoln Center Festival 2000. Yet what is not said is the subliminal theme of the evening. Mr. Vandekeybus wonders how our innermost desires and wishes can be communicated, and the entire production seems to embody this difficulty.

"In Spite" is not for those who do not care to see raw material left deliberately raw by a highly controlling director and choreographer. The piece does not breathe with the mind-boggling spontaneity that brought Mr. Vandekeybus triumphantly to New York in 1987 with his first work, "What the Body Does not Remember."

But anything he does is of compelling interest, and those who wish to see something original, if uneven, will be rewarded tonight and tomorrow at La Guardia High School, 100 Amsterdam Avenue, at 64th Street. On Tuesday "In Spite of

Wishing and Wanting" received a delirious reception from a young audience.

From his earlier preoccupation with the power of instinct in human behavior, Mr. Vandekeybus has moved on to the more familiar territory of the subconscious. As men gallop around the stage and paw like horses, as a pillow explodes and scatters its feathers in the air, as a blind performer (the remarkable Saïd Gharbi) is totally integrated into an all-male cast that leaps, rolls, butts heads and engages in an intricate series of hand thrusts and parries, the entire evening takes on the aura of a purposefully incoherent fantasy.

The atmosphere is not dreamlike, although the ruling conceit in many images holds that our innermost wishes are hidden in our dreams. In a stunning passage, occasionally reprised, the men, in sarilike skirts with torsos bare, strike sculptural poses as sleeping figures. They stand and sit, with a head resting on an arm or behind a neck, elbow bent.

At its deepest, the piece has a Goyaesque dimension. Like the choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker and Jan Fabre, who is more concerned with dance theater, Mr. Vandekeybus came out of a Flemish experimental scene, working with textless movement-theater.

It may be a stretch to remember that Spain once ruled Flanders. But within this highly structured piece, in which even roars and growls have clear parameters, there is a plunge into the irrational. Goya warned darkly of the flight of reason; Mr. Vandekeybus accepts it as a part of life, even as a dubious liberation.

Mr. Byrne's score, which includes the sound effects he calls ambient sound, offers a strong pulse, and its vocal fragments seem to lure the

listener into a wind tunnel. It serves its purpose.

The often complex choreography is the strongest part of the piece. In a work that wrestles with how to express desires, the dancing does so better than the text recited onstage by the performers or the dialogue in two badly made films, inspired by the short stories of the Argentine writer Julio Cortázar. The films, shown on a screen lowered onto the stage, focus on a man who sells homilies so people can convey their desires or their putative last words. The buyers are incapable of uttering them without his help.

But animals are unfettered in this respect, and the image of men pretending to be wild horses sets the tone of the piece. Mr. Vandekeybus spends a bit too much time snorting and throwing his head back, and excess is the word for the scene in which a wild boy, free but noisy, is tamed. By contrast socialization is brilliantly described when 10 men match two halves of oranges and pair off when the halves fit: two halves of a platonic ideal in an image that is less than erotic.

The narrative thread is carried by Benoît Gob, who speaks in French and English of childhood fantasies that were quelled because they were on too grand a scale. Dancers accuse one another of stealing their desires. Mr. Gharbi, a Moroccan living in Belgium, speaks in Arabic, and the multinational cast reflects the desires of those who migrate from southern climes to countries like Belgium. Yes, they desire a better life. Reality intrudes upon fantasy.

The admirable performers include Nordine Benchorf, Jordi Galí Melendez, German Jauregui Allue, Juha-Pekka Marsalo, Igor Paszkiewicz, Ali Salmi, Giovanni Scarcella, Piotr Torzawa Giro and Gavin Webber.