

That Obscure Object of Desire

- For his fifteenth creation, Wim Vandekeybus remains faithful to his style, but renews his dance and succeeds with a staggering mix of elements. Hot, very hot.

A snore, a real one, the kind that wakes the whole house and leaves the guilty one in a state of unconscious bliss. A cause for divorce, some would say. For this young, cheeky dancer of 'Blush', the new creation by Wim Vandekeybus, it's the moment to get up quietly, straddle her partner and offer herself a moment of ecstasy, of which the cries of pleasure only receive some deeper snores for answer. *I love it when he's sleeping*, concludes the satisfied young woman. Desire has reasons that reason ignores. And desire is at the center of the new creation by Wim Vandekeybus, entitled 'Blush'.

Desire, and its two sides, love and death, lead the characters by the nose: the women, strong and hysterical at the same time, maneuver the men, who pretend to be macho but don't really make it.

A dive into the image

Thus one is constantly in-between confrontation and seduction, a duel and a lover's walk. With death nearby reminding us not to wait to live one's life. In this respect, one of the strongest elements of the performance is without a doubt the litany of a young woman counting all the things that she will never be able to do again, first while standing in front of a microphone, later while being carried on the back of one of the men during a slow ceremony which seems like a marriage... or a funeral.

But beyond words, what makes 'Blush' a success is the perfect connection between dance, music, film, scenography and light. Nothing here is superfluous, everything comes together to create an avalanche of images, the one stronger than the precedent. Amongst them, one will not forget the girls, perched at 10 meters above the ground on metal pillars; the construction of an immense wall of bags, then its brutal collapse onto two dancers; the appearances and disappearances of a frog or the 'hot' scenes which justify the title.

All the same, the strongest image comes from the perfect interaction between the stage and the screen. For the first time, film and dance are in total osmosis and not simply next to each other such as in the past. This gives splendid images of young women diving from the stage into the screen and reappearing on it as elusive water-nymphs, or mermaids, bewitching the men who do not know how to catch them. Filmed at the Bruges dolphin aquarium, the water sequences are marvelous and the alternation of the dancers between the stage and the screen possesses a magic that leaves the viewer stupefied. A similar moment comes a bit later, with dozens of bodies intertwining on the screen as if they arise from the ocean of bags that occupy the stage.

Perfect music, dazzling dancers

The music of David Eugene Edwards (leader and singer of 16 Horsepower), composed for the performance, does more than support the dance. It is a pillar of 'Blush', with its percussive hammering, cutting and ethereal guitars, heavy ambiences, nervous, dreamy. Sometimes Latin, sometimes close to voodoo, it doesn't lose anything of its rock essence or its personality, as shown by the great version of the splendid 'Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone' by Bill Withers.

But all that wouldn't be able to hold up without the performers, who give their bodies and energy wholly. This is especially true on the female side, where one is at the same time actress, acrobat and expert swimmer. It's a lot for one woman. Vandekeybus found five like that, who, besides, are amazing dancers: Laura Aris Alvarez, Elena Fokina, Ina Geerts, Linda Kapetanea and Thi-Mai Nguyen.

For the boys (Jozef Fruček, Robert M. Hayden, German Jauregui Allue, Thomas Steyaert and Vandekeybus himself), they are very much present, leaping in all directions, throwing themselves to the ground or into the arms of their partners in the purist Vandekeybus style, but also delivering graceful and ephemeral things, leaving the ground to better explode in the air and combining duos and trios, inspired by contact dance. A bit like a mixture between Trisha Brown and John Woo. Lively and strong, sensual and explosive, wild and elegant.

Jean-Marie Wynants, Le Soir, 26/09/02