

New production by Wim Vandekeybus at the Kunstenfestival

A choreography of agony

AMSTERDAM – Violence, love, death and remembrance: that's what Sonic Boom, Wim Vandekeybus' new dance production with texts by Peter Verhelst, is about. These themes dominate the work of both. With one it results in a fragmented text full of sensual contemplations, with the other it is revealed in outburst of physical violence. The result is an intriguing encounter between body and word.

A woman and a man meet each other. She asks him for money to take the boat. He refuses, but intrigued by her story, follows her to the harbour. This simple point of departure returns continuously as the motif in Peter Verhelst's text.

In bits and pieces this first theme gives rise to a web of possible stories and encounters. During a warm night in the harbour area, men and women are lying lonely in filthy hotel rooms. Their bodies communicate without words. Are the two elder actors on stage lovers of olden times? Or has their encounter never taken place? Has the woman survived the encounter? Did he die in her arms? Constantly the inevitable death of every awakening love is shown.

Around this complex structure of death and remembrance Vandekeybus builds a disrupted choreography of dying. At the strongest moment of the performance dancers fall from chairs and tables and from the railing of the jetty in a raging tempo. An actor lies on the stage and is covered with ashes. Dancers fall constantly in each other's arms, as if they could not find any balance or consolation in their own bodies. One of them literally beats off a woman jumping on him.

Opposite to the distant sensuality of Verhelst, Vandekeybus places physical confrontations. In a subversive variation on the children's game *Simon says* Vandekeybus throws his dancers into a game of sadomasochist relations. A voice urges the couples to self-mutilation and maltreatment. *Simon says: cut the chest. Simon says: cut your veins. Simon says: Say I love you, Simon.* It is a strong effect that takes away the violence under the skin of the text and puts it on stage in a concrete way.

The entire performance is embedded in the structure of the night programme of Radio Sonic Boom. A deejay talks his way out of his own cynicism and the cynicism in the world around him at a raging pace. The lost souls on the phone get the door smashed in their face and his hollow falsehoods only make the loneliness larger. Through the radio music has an important role in the performance, especially the strong folk-rock by singer David Eugene Edwards, known from his group *16 Horsepower*.

What makes Sonic Boom so powerful, are above all the very strong interpretations by the actors of Toneelgroep Amsterdam. Vandekeybus chose three actors from the company who have won their spurs already. Kitty Coubois, Joop Admiraal and Titus Muizelaar bring the texts with a clarity and serenity that does justice to the shimmering energy of Verhelst.

Sonic Boom is an exceptionally strong performance. An excellent opening for an international festival full of unexpected talent.