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SELF PORTRAIT, WITH DANCERS

Dance. *Spiegel*, the new choreography by Wim Vandekeybus, is actually very old.

By Geert Sels (translated by Heidi Ehrhart)

Some theatres are concerned with the historical consciousness of their public. They program the 'better' pieces of contemporary repertory - the works that began it all or the important stepping stones in an oeuvre.

Often you become painfully aware of how time has passed and how quickly some developments have gotten old. Deep sighs can be heard in the audience when watching the mathematical precision of Merce Cunningham. Pina Bausch's dance theatre seems amazingly slow, with the scenes put together in a stereotypical way.

But still, we shouldn't forget them. They are geniuses who set the direction for the discipline and determined the way history would go.

Wim Vandekeybus' impact will not be so radical. Watching *Spiegel*, the repertory evening celebrating the twenty years of *Ultima Vez*, it's clear what he stands for. He's obviously in a class of his own. Rarely cloned, perhaps impossible to imitate, the work is testimony to a distinct personality. His signature is unique. He didn't exactly create a new wave, but didn't come from another one either. Wim Vandekeybus is Wim Vandekeybus. And it's a very high level.

In *Spiegel*, scenes from seven older choreographies are danced by the present company. When watching the stream of energy, you can once again imagine how liberating they were twenty years ago. Apart from these nostalgic considerations, the work still stands on its own feet. This dance language goes immediately for the throat from the first scene, which is the famous stamping number from *What the Body Does Not Remember* wherein dancers on the ground twist to the side to avoid their pacing colleagues.

In this 'portrait of the artist', the choreographer has put aside his more recent and more narrative work, along with his film material. For his first twenty years he wants to be known as a man of action, and his group as a tribal horde. The dancers have duels, provoke each other, stick with their shoulders together like male goats in heat would with their horns. One flings himself into the group and like a cannon blows them apart. These are movements as if driven by testosterone.

The scenes are taken from their original packaging and performed in new contexts. Where we originally heard music by Charo Calvo or David Byrne, one now hears Arno. The stamping scene from 1987 moves organically into the pushing scene from *Inasmuch as Life is borrowed...* of thirteen years later. Elsewhere the music by Marc Ribot, Peter Vermeersch or Thierry De Mey is still used for the original dance.

Here a new performance has come into being, one in which Vandekeybus is at his strongest in the play situations. The risky stone scene (A throws a stone in the air, B pulls him away, C catches the stone), the orange scene (matching orange halves bring dancers together), and the air acrobatics on hanging chairs or hangers work surprisingly but effectively. They come across more strongly than the pure group choreographies, which because of the limited vocabulary resemble each other or seem long.

Spiegel is a compact piece that remains sharp through the passion of the performers. It's the ideal entry for newcomers, a nice reminder for veterans and an energy bomb for dance lovers.