

Death wanders around in Sonic Boom

Theatre

Sonic Boom by Toneelgroep Amsterdam and Ultima Vez.

Direction and choreography Wim Vandekeybus. Text Peter Verhelst. Schouwburg Amsterdam, April 18 until April 26. Tour until May 31.

Jumping and falling, the theatre of Wim Vandekeybus consists of extremes. His performances are earthly and elevated, his dancers seem to have springs instead of legs. As if they tear themselves from the earthly and actually want to fly and dream. Falling is not accidentally slipping, no, they throw themselves to the floor at full speed.

In Sonic Boom, the performance that the Belgian choreographer made with his own dancers and three actors of Toneelgroep Amsterdam, these extremes are also audible. The poetic text by Peter Verhelst is about the opposites this earthly life is about: life and death, despair and desire, aggression and cherishment, encounter and farewell.

It is night, we see a quay suggesting, in one way or the other, the nearness of water. It is dead silent, a man lies on the floor, another man walks up the stage, a woman's voice coming from the theatre thinks it recognizes the man. Is it he who she is looking for? Whom she hasn't seen for thirty years. Then suddenly the radio sounds.

From a glass cabin the dj slowly appears, having listeners call in.

After this silent start, in which you can almost hear the breathing of the actors, it seems to become a real dance performance for a while. Suddenly dancers appear from all sides, and unexpectedly they lose themselves in a splendid group dance. Later they start to fall.

Initially they are still lovingly caught by their partner. Until they fall down irretrievably at the end: with a chair or from at least two meters high from the quay.

On this quay a woman is staring in the yellow, night vista. Returning repeatedly, as if she is changing her mind, and finally falling down into the deep. Into the sea, one would think, hearing the sound. There is death. Inevitable. Death was already there before. When Joop Admiraal, fragile in his light sweater, after having danced as a young guy, lies down and a boy strews ashes over him.

Titus Muizelaar is the man who gives a woman money, but who nevertheless doesn't follow her. An encounter that doesn't want to become a real encounter.

Or does he meet her? And is the recollection of their time together unforgettable?

The text points to different possibilities. Maybe his memory of her is pure fantasy, like many love adventures based on nothing more than illusion.

Before he too is dusted with ashes, he is thumped in the stomach and, on demand, one of the dancers jumps on his belly. The cruel demands come from a certain Simon and are willingly obeyed. Simon is the dj in his radio cabin, presenting the callers hard American retorts. He represents the violence, while Kitty Courbois, tenderness itself, moves in between everything as a comforting angel.

Is this a portrait of man? Man constantly looking for love, but finally doesn't do more in life than being born and die? Man who also shows his other side here, the cruelty that is present in all of us? A dancer cuts his chest with a piece of glass, until it bleeds. Two people spit in each others face. These moments make us think of the theatre of Jan Fabre, with whom Vandekeybus made his debut.

The title refers to the Big Bang. This explosiveness is part of his performances and is a symbol for an uncontrolled emotion, rage, but also the way one can be touched like magic by another person. That this person leaves again, and that in the end we all head for the final fall, remains tangible. Because of that all action has an irrevocably melancholic undertone.

It is a touching performance that reduces to silence and that gives you the feeling of walking out of a dream. In such an hallucinating way Vandekeybus fills the stage. Not only with beautiful dancers whose body control verges on the incredible, but this time also with actors. That they are actors who have already lost their beauty of youth, makes the circle of life inevitable.

Marian Buijs