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# What the Body Does Not Remember - review

Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide

☆☆☆☆☆

Jane Howard

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Echoing through the Dunstan Playhouse, a woman's fingers play across the top of a wooden table. As they scratch and slide, two men's bodies writhe against the floor. As she moves her fingers faster, banging her knuckles down on the table and then hovering her hand above it, the men move faster, smashing into the ground, then holding themselves in plank positions: orientation of their bodies played with by the orientation of her hands.

Belgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus's *What the Body Does Not Remember* rolls through scenes playing with his dancer's physicality. The company cross the space on plaster blocks, carefully positioning themselves one in front of another, reaching behind to take the last, avoiding the ground. They catch feathers on a blow of breath, softly elevating and following their lead.

While *What the Body Does Not Remember* is having its Australian Premiere at the 2013 Australian Festival, it was originally performed in 1987. What is so surprising, then, is how utterly contemporary it feels. Vandekeybus' work is alternatively frenetic, humorous and unnerving, the cast performing with a feverish energy and focus. It is easy to find yourself lost in one dancer's intensity, before realising the true scale of the work you are missing.

The work is at its most exciting when Vandekeybus frantically builds the energy of the piece. The nine dancers run around the perimeter of the stage, leaping over each other, grabbing arms and swinging out over the circumference of the stage. Plaster blocks are

thrown into the air, almost falling down on someone's head, before the dancer is tossed out of its path. Humour builds, as Vandekaybus creates a streetscape of dancers passing each other: stealing and swapping jackets, and then brightly coloured towels.

Then the work darkens: the streetscape changes to a climate of street harassment. This further escalates to a scenario of domestic violence: women forced to stand still, all agency given to the men in the partnership.

It's this loss of agency that *What the Body Does Not Remember* seeks to explore - bodies forced to react in situations where they have no choice – yet what excites is the precision of the dancers. They play with the balance of technical physical control while appearing to be purely reacting in the moment. Twenty-six years after it was first performed, *What the Body Does Not Remember* bursts with new energy.

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