



Bulletin

Review

Dance

Wim Vandekeybus/ Ultima Vez Menske KVS Brussels

Surging dance-theatre premiere marks the 20th anniversary of a daring troupe.

Ultima Vez dancers are said to have the highest injury rate of any company anywhere. Even if this is just hearsay, it isn't hard to believe. Yet the rumour doesn't stop the most talented dancers and actors from competing to join this influential Belgian company, 20 years old this year and in great demand all over the world.

In *Menske* (Flemish diminutive of *mens*, person or individual), a new production which premiered last week, the cast of 10 come from eight countries (none are from Belgium) and all but two are in their 30s or older. It's shocking to see them collide and leap at each other, drag one another around by one limb and lift dancers heavier than themselves. It's also thrilling.

Each plays a distinct character in this return to dance-theatre for choreographer Wim Vandekeybus, who last year presented *Spiegel*, a retrospective medley of pure dance extracts. Elena Fokina plays a cheeky tease in a pretty dress and rubber gloves. She taunts an anguished man in a suit (Valéry Volf) who wanders the 'city' spraying graffiti and collecting trash bags.

Kylie Walters is a punky city developer with a taste for skyscrapers and well-hung men. Bossing workmen by day, at night she is tormented by insomnia and the demons lurking beneath her tough-talking shell. The fragments of dialogue, many of them snatches of inner monologue, were all written by members of the cast. In French or English (surtitled in French and Dutch), they convey humour and



MARTIN FIRKET

Menske: 10 characters in search of themselves during violent, fast-changing times

empathy for the damaged and slightly deranged creatures that we are.

Metaphorical and physical conflict are recurrent in Vandekeybus' work. The characters in *Menske* inhabit a community in flux and are forced to confront the major changes taking place around them.

The main set is dominated by a towering telegraph pole draped with a mass of cables. In one disturbing sequence a dancer is trapped in a cat's cradle of horizontal wires, each pulled taut by another dancer and slicing, terrifyingly, in many directions at once. In another scene dancers carry their partners like weapons, with the upper body wrapped around the carrier's waist and legs stretched out and wielded like machine-gun barrels.

Incessant tension is created by strobe lighting and a soundtrack by Belgian pop musician Daan, whose electronic beats sweep the house in waves of emotion, accelerating the pace and provoking a collective rush and tumble in all directions. Although the frenetic dance has every appearance of being spontaneous and impulsive, what makes it especially impressive is that it

is so minutely calculated.

Katharine Mill
Menske, KVS, 146 Rue de Laeken/Laekenstraat, Brussels, November 22, 23, 20.00, tel 02.210.11.12, www.kvs.be

Carte blanche

Vandekeybus' 20 years at the helm of Ultima Vez is being celebrated this weekend in the venue where his debut production, *What The Body Does Not Remember*, had its Belgian premiere in 1988. Curated by Vandekeybus, the major concert event brings together musicians with whom he has worked over the years: David Eugene Edwards and his band Woven Hand, Eavesdropper, Marc Ribot, Daan Stuyven, Flat Earth Society, Walter Verdin and other guests, including Arno. *Ancienne Belgique*, 110 Boulevard Anspach/laan, November 24 and 25, tel 02.548.24.24, www.abconcerts.be