

Wim Vandekeybus? Kiss my arse!

After five years, Wim Vandekeybus has again made a show for the young; sorry, I mean an 'anti-show', called *Radical Wrong*

Sarah Vankersschaever . De Standaard . 07.03.2011

It would be a pity to spoil the fun, but a well-meaning warning to audiences can't do any harm: anyone who goes to see the new show by Wim Vandekeybus should realise that not every seat in the house is equally safe. In the sense that they are a 'stairway to the stage'. So much is clear after only five minutes.

Radical Wrong starts with what could have been the end of the show: very unflattering fluorescent tube-lights flicker on, the quiet chatting of the audience is heard in the auditorium and a stagehand clears up the stage. Until a group of seven youngsters storm onto the stage like a herd with a purpose. One of them shouts that their director has abandoned them. And another that they just got on with it themselves. And that Vandekeybus can kiss their arses, they shout together. They exchange glances and as suddenly as they came they storm into the auditorium and pluck a youngster from the red plush seats and leave him standing bewildered in the middle of the stage. If you want to make it clear to an audience how you feel, the best way is to let them experience it themselves: so this is what it feels like when you are dropped onto a stage with task of entertaining the people of Hasselt. You would soon rush back to your seat blushing.

In *Radical Wrong*, Vandekeybus is targeting a young audience. In so doing he uses a vocabulary that is not unfamiliar to other companies such as Onroerend Goed: let the youngsters tell it for themselves, blasting off a dozen 'fuck you's' with their middle finger, use festival tents and beer bottles to refer to the world they move in, don't forget group feeling nor loneliness either and – quite importantly – use humour.

In short, *Radical Wrong* is not a radically innovative show for the young, but for Vandekeybus, rounding off the sharp edges of his own idiom for a young audience is a radical choice. The musician Mauro Pawlowski, the rock 'n roll fixture in Vandekeybus' shows *nieuwZwart* and *What's the Prediction?!*, was not invited this time. Instead we get the sensual voice of Nina Simone and, with striking frequency, the Beastie Boys. But the language of movement is less hard this time too: no colliding bodies, less sweat pouring off backs. It's more like jolly group dancing and playful brawls.

Theatrical

After the show you will undoubtedly be uncertain whether you have just been watching dance-theatre or theatre plain and simple. *Radical Wrong* is after all highly narrative and

theatrical – occasionally it even feels like a succession of sketches. After the dark Vandekeybus of *nieuwZwart* and the director-on-a-quest in *Monkey Sandwich*, in *Radical Wrong* it's the humorous Vandekeybus we get to see. The television recording team in the auditorium could easily use the sound tape for a sitcom.

The intention behind *Radical Wrong*, which was to show what happens when you let youngsters do their own thing, is well-suited to Vandekeybus. Lots of acting tough disguised as total freedom, but you can't hide the hand of the director as easily as that. The boys who lift each other up and fight two by two like ninjas – with the body as a weapon – all this seems familiar. Leaning against each other while dancing is another thing we have seen in past shows of his. So it may be 'Fuck you Vandekeybus', but it's 'Thanks Wim' too.

What is always astonishing is that Vandekeybus is always able to assemble a group of damned good performers. When it's all over, that may be the thing that has made the greatest impression on you: not what these seven have to say on stage, not the 'fuck you' and 'kiss my arse', but simply their stage presence. Like self-confident gurus of their own existence. And in this way the show undoubtedly appeals to every age-group: the desire to play a leading part with clenched fists rather than sinking into your seat with a blush on your cheeks.