

Journalist: Olga Bibiloni

Review translated from French

WIM VANDEKEYBUS: SPEAK LOW IF YOU SPEAK LOVE ...

The voice of South African singer Tutu Puoane forms a backdrop for the story and the dancers. At times lyrical, at times bewitching, it is always enigmatic and hypnotic. She has the knack of pitching it in just the right place to bring magic, power or violence to scenes which are often charged with meaning, emotion and imagery, confusion almost. *Speak low if you speak of love*, the latest work by Belgian artist Wim Vandekeybus, which was aired at the Marseille Festival on Saturday evening, sets a scene of happiness and torment. Fleeting happiness and a never-ending torment that culminates in scenes of horrific violence which, we note, is often directed against the women. Accompanied by the charismatic Tutu Puoane, with her voluptuous figure and close-cropped hair, the dancers take to the stage: a backdrop of loosely-draped coloured voiles, bamboo plants swaying gently on one side and the discreet yet reassuring presence of a group of musicians - Mauro Pawlowski (composer, Evil Superstars dEUS), Elko Bijweert and Ieroen Stevens. And, we might add, the dancers are also actors given that this choreographed piece calls upon their acting skills to the extent that the narrative sometimes takes over when we would rather apply our own vision of love, be it poetic or fantastical, to Vandekeybus' images.

There is sensuality in the confrontations, at times gentle at others more forceful, nudity that is never gratuitous, and a modesty which is portrayed through the occasional addition of humour, also nudity-based. Strangely, it is the violence which dominates, which energises the bodies, and arouses our compassion. We feel their suffering when they refuse to submit to the persistent attacks. Vandekeybus' great strength lies in this choreographed syntax which is both physical and precise. It is played out by exceptional dancers who have been selected according to highly subjective criteria: they must be eclectic and animated by both presence and fragility. One of the dancers – Tomislav English – is a particularly good fit for the dancer profile he seeks out for his company Ultima Vez. This fiery Viking has a striking presence and plays out the full range of bodily expression. *Speak low if you speak love* is a personal vision of love. It is a show of passion and excess which we may, or may not, recognise in ourselves. Whatever the case, it poses some really interesting questions about art and human nature.

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