

A Jaunty Walk with Bach

hyperallergic.com/464339/the-six-brandenburg-concertos-park-avenue-armory

October 5, 2018



The Six Brandenburg Concertos, choreography by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, with the company Rosas, performing at the Park Avenue Armory on September 30, 2018 with the B'Rock Orchestra (all photos by Stephanie Berger)

As I sit and watch the performance of *The Six Brandenburg Concertos* unfold at the Park Avenue Armory, the word that occurs to me to describe it is “jaunty” — and indeed the majority of the production plays out along the valences of that word. It’s lighthearted and buoyant, the way all the performers form a small arc as they walk downstage in time with Bach’s music, sometimes with stately strides, then speeding up with perky steps as the violins and trumpets describe a little trill. It is happy-go-lucky, as when the dancers bring a small speckled dog on a leash onstage to perform their promenade with them. It’s playful when the tempo changes and they trade in those strides for quick jigs and then again for long sashays from the hips, their arms describing a pendulum’s slow procession as they walk back upstage.



The Six Brandenburg Concertos, choreography by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, with the company Rosas, performing at the Park Avenue Armory on September 30, 2018 with the B'Rock Orchestra

Yet, the piece didn't rely on that one emotional register. The founder and choreographer of the Brussels-based Rosas group, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, clearly appreciates the chromatic variations among the six concertos and mirrored the melancholic elements in the music in the performance's staging. The dancers are all dressed at the outset in black suits with sheer tops under their jackets. During the first concerto, two take off their jackets and shoes and lay them at the front of the stage. At the end of the piece, as the performers exit, one dancer stays behind, while members of the orchestra in the pit trade chairs, and gently picks up the clothing and shoes and takes them away. It is a gesture both humble and noble at the same time.

These moments de Keersmaeker injects in the interstices of the music are intensely poignant, as when a woman soloist keeps dancing even after all her compatriots have left and the new orchestra members begin to tune up, as if the dance in her has overflowed its banks. And then the choreography goes back to being ebullient when, at the start of the fourth concerto, the dancers begin to move before the lights are up and thus the piece finds them in handstands as it begins. The movement keeps playing between sadness and nonchalance, much of it reminding me of children playing in a park, hopping and skipping until one falls down.



The Six Brandenburg Concertos, choreography by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, with the company Rosas, performing at the Park Avenue Armory on September 30, 2018 with the B'Rock Orchestra

The Six Brandenburg Concertos is a gorgeously lyrical piece that kept those concertos in my head humming and cheerfully tumbling days after I had seen the work. It is more than just beautiful; it is restorative.

The Six Brandenburg Concertos continues at the *Park Avenue Armory* (643 Park Avenue, Upper East Side, Manhattan) through October 7.