

Infinite Recombinations

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by Nicole Loeffler-Gladstone

Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker

Six Brandenburg Concertos

PARK AVENUE ARMORY | OCTOBER 1 – OCTOBER 7, 2018

 **BROOKLYN RAIL**
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



The Six Brandenburg Concertos at Park Avenue Armory. Choreographed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker and performed by Rosas. Photo: Stephanie Berger.

The massive, blazingly white stage, erected at the Park Avenue Armory for Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker's North American premiere of *Six Brandenburg Concertos*, creates an atmosphere of heightened expectation. It looks like a giant frozen pond, or the head of a drum, and it feels like something big is bound to happen. But when the music swells and her company, Rosas, moves downstage in a rough line, they . . . walk.

Of course, nothing in De Keersmaecker's work is simple, and a walk is never just a walk. In this case, sixteen dancers (the most she's worked with at a time) trace the bass line of the music, or a melody part, depending on their cluster within the group. They face forward or back, walking the pattern many times over. The eye takes everything in, picking up musical nuances in conversation with the movement, and vice versa. Personal nuances are revealed too—no two walks are the same. Some dancers smile, some look quite serious, some brace themselves with the opposite foot as the music slows, while others completely

transfer their weight. Their individuality further illuminates the focus and deep musicality necessary for this work. It would have been a pleasure to watch the dancers of Rosas do nothing more than walk.

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As soon as viewers settle into a rhythm, a dancer breaks free from the crowd. A similar pattern is established within the other concertos, featuring groups (large and small) set against soloists. Indeed, a concerto is, by definition, a piece of music featuring a solo player within an

ensemble. The program notes mention that De Keersmaecker developed the choreography of *Brandenburg Concertos* by closely following the music and establishing strict formal and geometric rules. Like Bach, she introduces a known vocabulary including skips, pivots, leaps, gallops, and catch-steps—variations of the body falling through space—but then pushes those simple rules to elaborate extremes of interplay. As the dance progresses, some performers weave and dart, following an invisible line, while others orbit the entire stage. Individuals turn on a dime, the group sweeps in unison, and no one falters or collides. All the while, the music and movement seem spontaneously derived from one another. In seeing movement, the audience hears greater complexity within the music, and the music lends certain movement extra sparkle.



An extended solo moment in “Concerto No. 5 in D major BWV 1050” features the obligato harpsichord, usually meant to back up the other instruments. A corresponding solo dancer floats across the stage in what is the most emotionally charged choreographic arrangement. He’s watched by a few other performers who stand or move in unison, but stay far away from him as he rushes forward and back. Suddenly the stage, which is so comfortably occupied by the whole company, feels abandoned and the dancer untethered. The beautifully delicate notes of the harpsichord keep him anchored to the space until the section is over.

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It’s tempting to describe this work as cosmic, considering how the dancers spiral in and out. Their patterns evoke constellations, or waves, or atoms—their basic rising and falling recombines toward infinite variation. But if *Brandenburg Concertos* is grand in its formal structure and presentation, it’s rooted to the earth, to gravity, in its execution. The movement is,



again, merely variations on falling. The dancers don't pretend to be weightless. Instead they revel in momentum and acceleration. Their footfalls are delightfully tied to the ground. There are tongue-in-cheek moments (a dog joins the dancers at the end of the first concerto), slightly awkward gestures within the choreography and, best of all, many smiles among the performers. They show joy in something so obviously taxing, and their onstage relationships light up the space brighter than the whitest set and stage ever could.

Contributor

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Nicole Loeffler-Gladstone is a performer, choreographer, writer, and curator living in Brooklyn. She's a graduate of Hampshire College and is interested in dismantling capitalism.