

# At the ICA, postmodern classic 'Fase' retains its power

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By Karen Campbell Globe Correspondent , September 20, 2019, 4:27 p.m.

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Minimalism in dance, as well as in music, can be an acquired taste. But for those willing and able to dive in, the pristine clarity and rigor of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's "Fase, Four Movements to the Music of Steve Reich" can be absolutely mesmerizing.

Premiered in 1982 when she was only 21, "Fase" is one of the famed Belgian choreographer's first works, yet it remains a classic of postmodern dance that still packs a punch.

Thursday night's ICA presentation by the choreographer's company Rosas marks its first Boston performances in more than three decades. Its current tour also marks the first time ever the creator herself is not performing, having decided to pass the privilege and challenge onto a new generation of dancers. And boy, are they up to the task. Soa Ratsifandrihana and Laura Bachman handled what amounted to a tour de force of concentration and stamina with breathtaking physical commitment and precision.

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Consisting of three duets and one solo, "Fase" is set to and titled after four propulsive compositions by iconic American composer Steve Reich. De Keersmaeker's movement phrases don't mimic the structures of Reich's music as much as amplify them, adding dimension, definition, sometimes counterpoint. As movement and musical phrases shift, layer, and recombine, the tension between motivic simplicity and deeply focused energy and execution generates cumulative power, asking us to look and hear in a different way.

"Piano Phase" unfurls as dancers turn side to side on their own axis, arms swinging like pendulums. From unison, the two dancers alter their speeds to go subtly out of sync, creating a dizzying array of ever changing shapes punctuated by periodic walks,

suspensions, slides, sudden pauses, and sharp dynamic inflections. Focus shifts with forceful intent, and often we hear the vigorous exhalation of breath. But it's those turns, miraculously easing in and out of unison, that amaze.

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In the beginning, the dancers' upstage placement creates three shadows against the backdrop, the darker middle shadow an overlap. But as the work progresses, the pair travels downstage into two cross-stage corridors of light, like ribbons of road, before moving back again to dance with their shadows. It's a reminder that the process is also a journey.

"Clapping Music" has a slightly more mechanical feel, as the pair bounce in profile, backward and forward kicks interspersed with balances on the toes into brief moments of suspended stillness. You can see metronomes in the swinging kicks and levers in the arms, yet those brief balances, arcing the body and limbs into soft curves, reveal the human flesh in the movement.

The solo "Violin Phase" has a loose, almost playful feel, as Ratsifandrihana sashays and twirls within a circle of light. Carefully calibrated swing turns gradually take on air and space, expanding to kicks and leaps and flourishes of her calf-length skirt.

The most powerful section is "Come Out," inspired by a Harlem Six member's claim to convince police that he'd been beaten in jail — "I had to, like, open the bruise up, and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them." Sitting, confined to stools in a small illuminated patch of light, the two dancers jab and thrust, arms oscillating, necks swiveling. At times the heads jerk sideways, as if recoiling from a slap, the gesture accompanied by a thwack of hand on thigh. And slowly they rotate — together, apart — different angles, same gestures, as if to suggest nothing really changes. And Reich's phase shifting loops morph the statement "come out to show them" into pulsing, indecipherable noise.

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### **Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker/Rosas**

At Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston Sept. 19. Repeats Sept. 20 and Sept. 21. Tickets \$25-\$35. 617-478-3103, [www.icaboston.org](http://www.icaboston.org)

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