

More than just a passing phase

You knew you'd picked a good night by the quality of the audience. Half of London's modern dance establishment was at The Place on Saturday to pay tribute to one of the queens of European dance. If you didn't know them all by sight, you could identify them by the fact that they view the proceedings with their wise old heads on one side. Like deaf budgies.

Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker hadn't danced in London for over 10 years and no one had any intention of missing it. De Keersmaeker and Michèle Anne de Mey first performed *Fase* in 1982 and it set the Belgian choreographer's style: spare but flavoursome. The resemblance to Lucinda Childs's austere minimalist chains of repetitive movement is unmistakable but with one significant difference: you don't need a small rusty nail embedded into your palm in order to stay awake through it. The injection of an

DANCE

Fase The Place, London

intangible strain of drama into De Keersmaeker's mesmerising repetitions renders them a stimulant rather than a sedative.

"Piano Phase", the first of the four subtly interconnected sections danced to the insistent strains of Steve Reich, consists of the two women standing upstage against a white backdrop. They are dressed in simple shifts, nursely white shoes and ankle socks and their hair is bobbed and pinned with a chastening lack of nonsense. Their slithering feet make repeated 180-degree turns along an imaginary axis, one arm swinging free, eyes carefully "spotting" to prevent gid-

diness as they spin and spin and spin. Done with a completely deadpan expression, this could easily turn into a bit of a sheep audit but the slyly smiling pair execute each whirling half turn with a strangely melodramatic air as if forever turning back from the door to deliver a crushing exit line.

For the second section, "Come Out", they change into shiny black boots, shirts and chinos. The soundtrack, stuck in a groove of dialogue, creates a hand-jiving repeat for the two seated women whose flickering speed alternates with startling freeze-frame pauses. As the stuttering phrase of sound corrupts and decays with repetition, so the stock phrases of dance and gesture begin to break up and degenerate.

The third section, "Violin phase", is a solo for the 36-year-old De Keersmaeker which modifies the swivelling moves of the opening segment but enacts them around the

perimeter of a large pool of light. Her curious twisting step carries her to the centre of the circle then back to one of the little spots marked on the circumference as if she were playing a complicated game of clock patience. The half-turns continue as her flailing leg conducts a punishing sequence of *grands battements*.

The work concludes with "Clapping music" in which the women march on the spot in profile. They bounce through the speedy and exhausting routine with an elastic gait and an exuberance that causes them to spring on to the points of their sneakers every few beats, arms swinging forward to aid and prolong the manoeuvre. They end downstage in a white tank of light to an explosion of adoring applause having delivered an exhilarating reminder that "new" dance needn't have been born yesterday.

Louise Levene