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DANCE

Giving An Old College Try The Star Treatment

**MINIMALISM**

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker in "Fase," which she choreographed when she was 20. Now an international figure, she is back for five performances of the work at the Kitchen.

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By JENNIFER DUNNING

THE world of dance did not pause in its erratic spin when a young Belgian dancer named Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker presented what amounted to her first choreography in 1981 at a festival in Westchester County. A solo set to Steve Reich's "Violin Phase," the dance was uncompromisingly formal and repetitious. Though it was recognizably influenced by the post-modernist dance minimalism of the time, unexpected undercurrents of emotion set the solo apart. Ms. De Keersmaeker, then a student at New York University, added a duet to the solo and two more duets to the piece on her return to Belgium the next year. The four-part dance, called "Fase" and set to four pieces by Mr. Reich, established Ms. De Keersmaeker; she was to become a major international dance talent over the next four years. She will return to those roots on Tuesday at the Kitchen in five performances of "Fase," which will be accompanied by a symposium and film screenings on Thursday and a video installation. Who was that university student, already remarkably set on her life course? A confirmed East Village avant-gardist? A kind? A sponge soaking up the extraordinary variety of dance experiences available to a newcomer in the early 1980's? The question was put to Ms. De Keersmaeker in a telephone interview from Brussels. "Huh?" Ms. De Keersmaeker, a famously efficient interviewee, responded in her murmuring way. "Well, I was 20 years old," she said after a long silence. "It was the first time I was out of Europe. I was a student at N.Y.U., spending most of my time in the

**choreographer
from Belgium offers
an expanded version
of a work she
conceived in 1981
while at N.Y.U.**

evenings working in the studios. But I saw a lot of theater and dance performances. A lot of Broadway things, too. A little bit of everything. I had some good friends who took me everywhere. It was a year of explosion." One of five children, Ms. De Keersmaeker grew up in Mechelen, near Antwerp. Her earliest training in the arts was in music, specifically the flute. It was only in her last year in high school that she began to study dance, music and theater intensively, she said, choosing to concentrate on dance only after she was accepted into Maurice Béjart's Mudra school in Brussels.

There, she came into contact with the major influence of her career, a percussion and rhythm teacher named Fernand Schirren. "He connected everything," she said of Mr. Schirren, who still teaches at Mudra. "SenegalCubaHondurasIrelandRonnieRonnieElsaNelson," she reeled off helpfully. "He made links between the dancing and the music and the theater and . . . life, so to say. I have no masters besides him."

It was during her two years at Mudra that Ms. De Keersmaeker made her first project, "Asch," a multimedia, site-specific piece created for an old factory, with a solo for herself that "was maybe the seed for the solo of 'Violin Phase.'" That solo and the duet that followed came out of her desire, in her first American project, to "focus on pure dance and my movement." Already, however, she was well on her way in the pieces to the meticulous, hypnotic mix of minimalism and expressionism for which she soon became recognized.

The organizing principles of Mr. Reich's music helped her to develop the solo. Mr. Reich's musicians suggested the two pieces of music for the last parts of "Fase" that she created, the opening and closing dances. They completed the full-evening piece that Ms. De Keersmaeker knew she would need for the company she intended to form. The costumes were simply what she and her partner in the piece, Michèle Anne De Mey, were wearing during rehearsals.

The Kitchen performances of "Fase" will be danced with Ms. De Mey, a choreographer and former company member who was Ms. De Keersmaeker's original partner in the two duets created in Belgium. These will be the last performances of the piece.

"I want to close the circle somehow," she said. "'Fase' was really like the very first piece I really considered I'd made. Michèle Anne doesn't want to dance it anymore. And I sort of want to finish it in the city where it started. That one year in New York was a very intense period." □