

Drilling the point home

TWO OF today's most influential choreographers, mutually hostile, neither of whom has been to London since they got big, find themselves visiting the capital in the same week. Piquant indeed, considering the rivalry between the insouciant, folksy Mark Morris and the sombre, minimalist Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker (or de Tearjerker, as Morris calls her).

As Morris prepares the Coliseum for his enormous *L'Allegro*, created at Brussels's bountiful La Monnaie centre, De Keersmaecker, who succeeded him as La Monnaie's resident choreographer (the dream job of dance), showed up in The Place's Turning World festival with just herself, one other dancer and a tape of Steve Reich.

The impact made by her 1982 duet, *Fase* (*Phases*), when the Belgian was 22, isn't hard to imagine, even now. Europe was drama-biased; here was a youngster drilling away at abstract movement. Eighty minutes long, *Fase* must be the most exhausting pas de deux ever devised, sadistically repetitive and demanding non-stop precision from De Keersmaecker and Michele Anne de Mey.

It has four parts, each built on one short dance phrase and one musical phrase. The parallel motifs are repeated and multiplied with minute desynchronisations to provide drama. When the two dancers

Dance

Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker
The Place, WC1

become (deliberately) slightly out of step, you are torn between excitement and yawning.

At its best, the luminous opening *Piano Phase*, the work is extraordinarily fresh, simple and right. The two women in pale dresses spin and swing compulsively from side to side, seeming to merge with their four swinging shadows on the wall. They might be automatons, yet they're as pretty as paper dolls. I thought of Petipa's *Shades* in *La Bayadère*, an early example of minimalism, but he knew when to stop.

De Keersmaecker carries on making the point for another hour. I take it to be her proposition that once a pattern becomes predictable enough, its little variations accept a patina of imaginative or emotional suggestion. Fine, but what looks good on the page is quickly exhausted on stage.

The finale, *Clapping Music*, was unexpectedly amusing; they drill like soldiers, apparently on the spot but actually beating an imperceptible retreat. Well, I thought it was funny. De Keersmaecker looked so pained as she took her bows that I felt bad about enjoying it.

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