


Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's Youthful Dances Get a Youthful Jolt

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By Siobhan Burke

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In her early 20s, the Belgian choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker created two dances that remain among her most distinguished: “Fase, Four Movements to the Music of Steve Reich” (1981), for two women; and “Rosas Danst Rosas” (1983), for four. The last time she brought these minimalist masterpieces to New York, as part of the Lincoln Center Festival in 2014, Ms. De Keersmaeker, then 54, was among the performers onstage, joining dancers in their 30s and 40s.

Age matters here, because what stands out about the latest revival of these works, presented in a two-week engagement at New York Live Arts, is the sense that Ms. De Keersmaeker has handed them off to an eager, energetic new generation. The dancers who have inherited them — Laura Bachman, Yuika Hashimoto, Laura Maria Poletti and Soa Ratsifandrihana — all joined her company, Rosas, in 2016. The youngest is 25; the oldest, 28.

As if having accepted a mission, or a gift, they instill both “Fase” (performed last week) and “Rosas Danst Rosas” (which opened on Tuesday) with youthful pride and attack. At their finest, they shed diligence for abandon, losing themselves in the material and making it their own.

Ms. De Keersmaeker, who is now busy choreographing the coming Broadway production of “West Side Story,” has said that with these early works, she was trying to find, quite simply, “movements that I liked.” That search led her deep into repetition, a defining feature of “Fase” and “Rosas.” In a video about the creation “Fase,” she recalls appreciating Steve Reich’s music for his use of “a minimum of material in a maximum way.”

She took a similar approach to movement: wringing possibilities from a narrow set of steps; building rigid structures from which, somehow, emotion could blossom, like flowers from cracks in the sidewalk. While calling to mind the work of Lucinda Childs, her style of repetition was less coolly austere, more sumptuous and brazen.

Image



Doubles: Soa Ratsifandrihana, left, and Laura Bachman and their shadows in “Fase.”CreditAndrea Mohin/The New York Times

On the opening night of “Fase,” Ms. Bachman and Ms. Ratsifandrihana (the first of two casts) seemed to relish the tension between restraint and release, as well as each other’s presence. Structured in four parts — two duets, a solo, another duet — the work requires an almost telepathic connection between partners, and these two had it. (Playing with images of doubling, the gorgeous lighting design, by Remon Fromont, at times casts four shadows on the wall behind them.)

In the first part, “Piano Phase,” the motion of pivoting with a swinging arm carries the dancers in and out of sync; echoing the music, one accelerates until they fall back into unison, a reliably satisfying moment, and perhaps the work’s signature move. Pulled along horizontal corridors of light, they occasionally slip into a perpendicular plane, advancing toward the audience. With each advance, their breathing grows more audible, sharp inhales and exhales matching the bladelike swipes of their arms: breath as a mode of expression and a means of keeping time.

Between the more ominous second duet (“Come Out”) and the buoyant finale (“Clapping Music”), Ms. Ratsifandrihana offered a ravishing rendition of “Violin Phase,” which traverses the circumference, radiuses and diameters of a circle, while also exploring circles and spirals in the body. Here the dancer partners with the music and space alone; Ms. Ratsifandrihana achieved a lush oneness with both.

Image

From left, Ms. Ratsifandrihana, Laura Maria Poletti, Ms. Bachman and Ms. Hashimoto in “Rosas Danst Rosas.” Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Created two years after “Fase,” “Rosas Danst Rosas,” to music by Thierry De Mey and Peter Vermeersch, expands on elements of the earlier work. “Come Out,” for instance, performed seated on stools with action concentrated in the torso, looks like a precursor to the second, mostly chair-bound section of “Rosas.”

Ms. De Keersmaeker sometimes translates “Rosas Danst Rosas” as “we dance ourselves,” a reflection of the work’s bold, conspiratorial spirit. On Tuesday, the dancers did not seem like themselves right away, more mechanical than assertive, as if beholden to an idea of what the dance should be.

But about halfway through, they came into their own both as a group and individuals, their personalities surfacing: Ms. Bachman’s sultriness, Ms. Hashimoto’s vigilance, Ms. Poletti’s playfulness, Ms. Ratsifandrihana’s defiance. The fourth and final section — in which pounding piano and horns thrust them into an exhausting, ecstatic cycle — settled any question of whose dance this was.