

ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER

born at Mechelen (Belgium) in 1960;
studies at Mudra School in Brussels (1978-1980).

- . 1980: performances of "Asch" in Brussels.
- . 1981: studies at the 'School of the Arts', New York City.
- . 1982: "Fase, four movements on the music of Steve Reich".
Performances in Belgium, the Netherlands and Britain.
- . 1983: "Rosas danst Rosas" with music of Thierry de Mey and Peter Vermeersch.
Founding member of the dance company Rosas.
Performances of "Rosas danst Rosas" and "Fase" in Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, France and Spain.
- . 1984: "Elena's Aria".
Performances of "Elena's Aria", "Fase" and "Rosas danst Rosas" in Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Spain, Italy and Austria.
- . 1985: Performances of "Fase, four movements on the music of Steve Reich" with live music by the members of "Steve Reich and musicians" in Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy.
Performances of "Rosas danst Rosas" in France, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Israël, U.S.A, Canada, Italy.
Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker receives the "Zilveren CJP" - a Belgian-Dutch theatre- award.
- . 1986: "Bartok Aantekeningen" - music of Béla Bartók.
Performances of "Bartok/ Aantekeningen" and "Rosas danst Rosas" in Switzerland, Canada, Britain, Italy, Mexico, U.S.A.
Performances of "Elena's Aria" in the Netherlands, Italy and Switzerland.
- . 1987: Stage director of Heiner Müller's "Verkommenes Ufer Medeamaterial Landschaft mit Argonauten".
" Mikrokosmos - Monument/ Selbstporträt/ Bewegung Quatuor N°4" with live music by the members of the Mondriaan Quartet with Walter Hus and Stefan Poelmans.
- . 1988: Receives the "Bessie Award", the highest honour for dance in the United States for the performance "Rosas danst Rosas".
"Ottone, Ottone" - based on the opera 'L'incoronazione di Poppea' by Claudio Monteverdi.
- . 1989: Receives the "Eve du Spectacle" for dance, an award given by the French-speaking Belgian Society of Theatre Journalists.
Receives a "Dance Award" for the best foreign dance production of 1989 by the "21st Dance Society of Japan" for the performance of "Mikrokosmos".
Award for the video "Hoppla" by Wolfgang Kolb with the "Solo d'Oro" (december '89) - first prize at the fifth international "Riccione TTVV" video and television festival in Italy.
Winner of the "1989 Grand Prix Video Danse" and the prize for the "Best Studio Adaptation of a Stage Choreography", awarded by the Festival de Sète (France), in association with IMZ (Vienna).
- . 1990: "Stella" - a creation with music of György Ligeti in Haarlem, Zagreb, Vienna, Antwerp, Moscow, Rotterdam, Glasgow, Zürich, Paris, Rouen and Berlin.
"Achterland - november '90" - with music by György Ligeti and Eugène Ysaÿe, performed live by Volker Banfield, Rolf Hind, Irvine Arditti and János Négyesi.

"STELLA",
ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER'S STEP BEYOND.

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker is one of the most capable choreographers today when it comes to capturing, in the movements of human beings and the passions that animate them, the lines of tension and breakage which make a show reveal something living and essential beyond the "culture" in which it is contained. Who would forget the powerful and passionate, persistent and cyclical dance of the Amazone in black rubber boots and white clogs? "Phases", "Rosas dances Rosas", "Elena's Arias", "Bartok Annotations": variations of ironic femininity and proud sensuality, child-like and playful at once, in which the bodies are like perverse little clockwork mechanisms.

There is something in the dance of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker of an "art above the abyss", which the confrontation with dramaturgical materials has rendered even more acute. Of a dazzling beauty, her staging (never before seen in France) of "Medea Materials / Adrift by the shore / Landscape with Argonauts" (Heiner Müller) will have given us a preview of the higgeldy-piggeldy "Ottone, Ottone", an astonishing massacre of 16 dancers, choreographed from Monteverdi's last opera, "The Coronation of Poppea".

"Of all the arts", Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker confided to us, "music is for me the most important thing in life." After blazing a trail with the repetitive structures of Steve Reich, the rhythmic cadences of Thierry de Mey and Peter Vermeersch (Maximalist!), the malicious dissonances of Bela Bartok, and the dramatic truculence of Monteverdi, today, her musical heartline passes through Ligeti, Hungarian composer, born in 1923 in Roumanian Transylvania, educated at Budapest, where he went into exile after the crushing of the 1956 uprising, and who now lives in Hamburg, having acquired Austrian citizenship; György Ligeti clearly shares the heritage of Bartok, but also of Debussy, and of Stravinsky, his first masters. Since the end of the 1960's, when his first striking works appeared, "he created a new musical language, no longer based on melodic and harmonic order, but rather on a macroscopic perception of sonorous material.

The works of Ligeti chosen by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker for her new piece, "Stella", are the "Symphonic Poem for 100 metronomes" (a sort of rhythmic gag dreamed up in 1962: 100 metronomes, regulated at different speeds, are set going simultaneously) and eight studies for piano ("Disorder", "Living Strings", "Blocked Keys", "Fanfares", "Rainbow", "Autumn in Warsaw", "Fem", and "Galamb borong"), composed between 1985 and 1989 and originally played by the German pianist Volker Banfield.

The major concern of Ligeti in these studies for piano was to find "a new kind of rhythmic articulation"... I had always been fascinated by puzzle-drawings and paradoxes of perception and of ideas, as well as by certain aspects of the creation and organization of form, and by the separation of different levels of abstraction of thought and language... You won't find anything "scientific" or "mathematical" in my music, but rather a union between the poetic-emotional imagination and musical structure."

Just as Bartok confessed he "gave himself over without restriction" to the composition of his string quartets, Ligeti states: "I want to make a music without compromise ... Only a constantly renewed creative spirit can avoid and combat what is stiff and set, the new academism; it is not possible to rest or go backwards without succumbing to the illusion of a firm ground which does not exist."

Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker's new production is the living illustration of this precious precept of Ligeti: in fact, "Stella" marks at once the synthesis of all of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's preceding research, as well as a fabulous "step beyond" towards a new type of choreographic dramaturgy. Let us say, to do away with the useless mania for labels once and for all, that Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker is grinding a new mode of writing: as Roberto Juarroz evokes in his "Vertical Poetry": "The mechanism of writing / desarticulates at the last moment / And the words that one write do not make the leap to one's thought / We need signs which do not need to leap, written in another space, with the gesture which lets itself go before writing".

In "Stella", Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker renews first of all her relationship with the music. Where the complex structures and the dissonances of Bela Bartok determined the essential elements of the choreographic phrasing of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker in "Bartok Aantekeningen", in "Stella" the score of Ligeti's Studies for Piano is no longer the page on which the movements of the dancers are drawn. Ligeti's music, intensified by the large silent staging, is interposed more as a dramatic material of the work, just like other "materials."

The very pertinence of all these "materials" has been sharpened on the grain of the Rosas shows "Medea Material..." "Ottone, Ottone" have already permitted Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (in collaboration with Marianne Van Kerkhoven and, more recently, with Jean-Luc Ducourt, both of whom participated in the creative process) to drive into the very writing of the choreographic form an entire dramatical material (fragments of text, short films in "Bartok" etc.), like many wedges dispersing the meaning.

The texts included in "Stella" are fragments from "Stella" by Goethe, "A Streetcar Named Desire" by Tennessee Williams (from the film of Elia Kazan), and dialogue from the Kurosawa film 'Rashomon'. The meaning of these different texts is so closely associated with the characters who speak them that in "Stella" one could say that speech too is dance.

Recently, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker came into contact with the video and film experience. In the finale of "Hoppla" (filmed from the "Mikrokosmos" and "Bartok Aantekeningen" pieces), Wolfgang Kolb narrowed his camera range to make face, legs, feet and fists burst out in a brilliant syncope of living planes. This work of film fragmentation of the body (the part as symbol of the whole) was once again accentuated with a short video by Walter Verdin taken from "Ottone, Ottone". A single fixed close-up of the face of the Japanese dancer Fumiyo Ikeda violently desecrating a text (or perhaps being outraged by the text) releases all the power of expression of a face which summons the tempest into the image. One plainly feels the influence of this double cinematographic experience on "Stella". On the one hand, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker plays on the different "planes of exposition" of her choreography for the first time, in particular by offering totally unsettling frontalities. On the other hand, the fragmentation of the "perverse little clockwork mechanisms" which are the bodies, gives an increased power of expression to the parts. A neck naked to the breast, a raging foot, a nimble hand, a mouth showing teeth or laughing, a rebellious hairstyle: in "Stella" everything is alive. Till the face, cenacle of silence or purgatory of speech.

Maintaining still more distance today from the "scandalous simulated space of gestures which do not exist" (Juarroz) : this simulated space which is only too obtrusive in the staging of contemporary gestures: Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker shows us the shadowy area that she left unresolved in "Elena's Arias". In "Stella", she invites us backstage behind the scenes of her work. The decor is made of large pannels of plywood, in fact the reverse side of the decor of "Bartok Aantekeningen", on which are hung the costumes of "Ottone, Ottone", shimmering skins betraying the exposed fragility of the bodies (Johanne Saunier becoming entangled in the fall of her dress, Carlotta Sagna's bust pushing out from the tight enclosure of her garment to be left exposed to the light, etc).

In "Stella", the dancers are the true artistic material: five women only distantly related to the characters of "Rosas Danst Rosas". Each of them moves in her own "bubble of neurosis". To the juvenile and bubbling vivacity of Marion Levy responds the theatrical, haughty cruelty of Fumiyo Ikeda. The first stays mainly withdrawn in the space of the stage; the second camps on the edge of the stage to harangue the public. The derisory and pathetically comical hysteria of Nathalie Million contrasts with the static false serenity of Carlotta Sagna. The first cannot remain in one spot, wriggling about in her uneasiness, while the second stretches out languorously the silent statuary of her white Italian body. And lastly there is the insolent malice of Johanne Saunier, engulfing the whole amorous text of Goethe in uncontrollable laughter. She, she who runs in the freshness of her immodesty.

As for "Ottone, Ottone" Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker said she had wanted to "strike out in the constellation of characters". She pursues the same path with "Stella", with the difference that here the "characters" are no longer borrowed from the libretto of an opera, but entirely from the open book of life. This "generosity" of the choreography and dancers is admirable. In posing the question that Joe Bousquet formulated in this way : "Will you have the courage to be the very end the poetry which concerns you" to the core of dance in each performer, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker creates a space which

puts truth in the theatre: this space, a space for sharing, a space for public intimacy reminds one of one another phrase of Robert Juarroz : "Between solitude and companionship, there is a gesture which begins in no one and ends in everyone." The proof lies in those moments where a movement emerges from one person like a spark, setting fire to the immobility of others and drawing them along in the whirlwind. The spectators are no longer passive, invited to meet the intelligence of their look. Suddenly, the performance becomes a living fragment of the mental stage of the spectator. To love (a person, a show) is to want to be what one loves. To the dancer who says, "I would like to kiss you tenderly, very tenderly, just once, go away quickly now" and who adds, cynically, "I have always found it difficult to find harmony with myself", one would simply like to answer : "the most beautiful place is when you are there".

Concerning harmony, on the stage there is an "abandoned landscape" with 100 metronomes. It is amazing that in the frenzy of the tick-tock the sputtering can make one hear silence. The silence of this "most beautiful place". The silence of time. Time which is, as Roberto Juarroz says, "eternity's way of looking after us."

Jean-Marc Adolphe
(Paris, Antwerp, Brussels, Granada, Paris, April-May 1990)