

THE BODY IS BEAUTIFUL. GET USED TO IT.

2015
2016

Rosas danst Rosas

By Marianne Van Kerkhoven

1983 saw Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's international breakthrough with the piece called *Rosas danst Rosas*. This production opened at the Kaaitheater Festival in Brussels and at the same time signalled the official inauguration of the Rosas company. The four female dancers who originally formed Rosas were all ex-students of Mudra: Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Michèle Anne De Mey were joined by Fumiyo Ikeda and Adriana Borriello. The music for *Rosas danst Rosas*, composed by Thierry De Mey and Peter Vermeersch, came into being in parallel with the choreography. The performance is composed of five parts, and both the dance and the music are based on repetitive, minimalist principles.

In *Rosas danst Rosas*, which has in the meantime been filmed under the same title, two sorts of movement are interwoven with each other. On the one hand there are abstract movements that are hard to label, and on the other, more concrete, recognisable gestures are also used: running the hand through the hair, pulling a blouse straight, a sudden turn of the head, etc. These gestures have a direct significance because they refer to everyday movements. It seems as if minor occurrences during the working process have crept into the performance as literal quotations. But it is not only by way of the movements that the performance's illusory closeness ('it's only dance') is constantly broken open towards a more mundane reality. For instance, in the intermezzo between the first and second parts, the dancers themselves put out chairs and shoes, iron their clothes, and clearly take the time to get their breath back. And again, at the end of the fourth, physically very demanding part, the dancers openly show their fatigue: they stand there audibly panting and visibly sweating on stage.

These short moments show, as it were, the physical 'reverse side' of dancing as an art of the body. One will not see this in classical ballet performances; even performances of modern choreographies usually involve the concealment of effort and fatigue. By contrast, in De Keersmaeker's work, also after *Rosas danst Rosas*, there is often a denial of the illusion that a dance performance shows a reality totally different from that of everyday physical life. It can be seen, for example, that De Keersmaeker never aspires towards supremely perfect performances of her choreographic works: she allows her dancers to carry out simultaneous

movements with less than absolute perfection. For this reason performances by Rosas always have a particular expressiveness and 'humanity'.

The first part of *Rosas danst Rosas* is set on the floor and in silence. In rolling movements, and with intermediate steps, the four dancers lying on the stage build up one great diagonal movement from upstage right to downstage left, accompanied by the purely 'human' music of panting, of arms tapping against the floor, the sound of rolling, etc. The second movement takes place in small rows of diagonally positioned chairs (compare to *Come Out in Fase*). The movements consist of quick, hard, energetic gestures responding to the percussive music with its metallic-sounding beats. The third part is, like the first, a play between straight lines and diagonals which is accentuated by the corridors of light in which they move. The chance or deliberate barring of one shoulder (the ritual of seduction?) is one of the most striking concrete gestures in this section. The fourth section is a group dance and moves with a marked crescendo to the limits of physical exhaustion; diagonals, straight lines and circles alternate. The closing section is a very short coda consisting only of genuine, concrete gestures linked to the dancers' exhaustion. There is still a great deal of dancing by the four women in unison throughout the piece, but even so all possible variations on the number four are tried out. For example, three dancers make the same movement, while the fourth goes counter to it; or they follow a course two by two, or one plus one plus two, or one plus two plus one, and so on.

In *Rosas danst Rosas* several areas of tension also arose for the first time which were to become characteristic of the whole of De Keersmaecker's later work. In particular there is the contrast between rational ('premeditated') structures and meaningful emotions, the dialectic between aggression and tenderness, or the interaction between uniformity (of clothing or movements) and individuality (the separate accentuation of their identical clothing by means of the dancer's varying physiques, or the individual accents in the execution of movements in unison).