

THE BODY IS BEAUTIFUL. GET USED TO IT.

2015
2016

Vortex Temporum

Gérard Grisey completed *Vortex Temporum* – his magnum opus for six musicians – in 1996. His meditation on sound and time served as a testament, as Grisey died two years later. Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker takes on Grisey's polyphony with a danced counterpoint for six dancers. How can you visualise polyphony by dancing it? And how can a dancer embody a counter voice to polyphonic music? Inevitably the choreographer probes the issue: what is time? Dancing the question is in itself a kind of answer.

As the early Christian philosopher Saint Augustine wrote, time is self-evident – until, that is, one attempts to put into words what it is exactly. Time, as perceived by human beings, can shrink, expand, stand still or jump forward, depending on what is unfolding upon its canvas. In *Vortex Temporum*, Grisey has turned time into something tangible by listening to how sound, as a physical phenomenon, behaves in space, much in the same way air may only be perceived when the wind chases leaves through it. A short motif of four notes – an arpeggio from Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* – snowballs from simplicity to complexity and back. Grisey makes the trembling of molecules – sound's matter – perceivable by examining it on three different scales: with human eyes, through a molecular microscope, and by zooming out on it through a telescope – something Grisey calls it the time of 'humans, insects and whales'.

De Keersmaeker laid out her choreography measure for measure, second by second against Grisey's complex score. As she explains: 'Grisey's *Vortex* is an astonishing achievement: at once raw and refined, rigorously structured and wildly organic, primitive even. Just like Grisey, I have submitted a very simple dance phrase to a series of transformations, closely following the music but with an autonomous logic proper to dance.'

De Keersmaeker has chosen to stage an intricate intertwining of sound and movement. Each dancer is linked to one of the six musicians, and colours his or her dancing with patterns of movement proper to every instrument. Both the dancers and musicians travel around the stage following a pattern – a vortex – of swirling circles.

The piece is De Keersmaeker's danced attempt at answering the unanswerable question, what is time?: 'Time can be thought of as both linear and cyclical. That which we call 'now' – the crack between the present and the future that we live in – is in fact a permanent tipping

point, a balancing act between memory and anticipation, leaning back and forth between the ghost image of the past and a desire towards the future.'