

DANCE VIEW/Alex Mallems

# From Belgium, Emotional and Physical Workouts

**T**HE 80'S SAW A CONSIDERABLE diversification of the Belgian dancescape. The very lack of a national dance tradition in Belgium has in a way given choreographers here unusual freedom. In addition, the use of terms like "dance theater," "theater of movement" and "physical theater" to describe experimental dance productions is a good indication of the ever-vaguer distinctions among the various performing arts in Belgium and elsewhere.

Two choreographers in the vanguard of an influential young generation of Belgian experimentalists are Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker (born 1960) and Wim Vandekeybus (born 1963), who are now touring North America separately. Ms. de Keersmaecker and her Rosas company will perform "Stella" at the Kitchen in lower Manhattan from Thursday through Sunday; Mr. Vandekeybus and his Ultima Vez company will follow, on Nov. 14-16, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, with "Always the Same Lies."

Both choreographers have won international acclaim for their emotional expressiveness and daring physicality, including Bessie awards in New York. Ms. de Keersmaecker and Rosas have been named to succeed Mark Morris's troupe in residence at the Opéra de la Monnaie in Brussels.

"I love well-made things," Ms. de Keersmaecker said in a recent conversation. "Like the 'Rashomon' by Kurosawa, a masterpiece of film history, which I have used for 'Stella': in its structural makeup, the way different approaches and angles of vision are integrated, the conscious fashion in which lies are juxtaposed with the truth, the way Kurosawa worked with the actors — it's brilliant."

Ms. de Keersmaecker's fundamental method is to absorb and transform a vast range of materials and modes of expression from other fields. This multidisciplinary approach gives her the freedom and space she needs to develop a highly nuanced language in her artistic discourse. "Stella" (1990) is a textbook example. The material used plays a significant role in determining the atmosphere of the performance. The set, a sort of backstage area, creates a studio feeling. The tone is one of searching for a means of expression, a means that is extreme rather than serene, often putting the dancers in direct confrontation with the audience.

The five female dancers show themselves to be powerful theatrical performers, and impressive use is made of texts inspired by Akira Kurosawa's cult film "Rashomon,"

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Herman Sorgeloos

Rosas company dancers in Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker's "Stella," to be performed this week at the Kitchen—a studio feeling amid the search for expression

## Revelatory gesture contrasts with explosive style in two visiting troupes.

Goethe's famous play "Stella" and Elia Kazan's film version of the Tennessee Williams play "A Streetcar Named Desire." The music is drawn from piano studies and the Symphonic Poem for 100 Metronomes by the Hungarian composer György Ligeti.

The dance passages of harmony and contact between the characters of "Stella" are further developed in Ms. de Keersmaecker's latest production, "Achterland" ("Hinterland"), of last year. Here, to music from solo violin sonatas by the Belgian composer Eugène Ysaÿe, the same five female dancers are confronted by three male dancers. As in

"Stella," the choice of score, its analysis and its impact on the live performance prove how essential the musical element remains in Ms. de Keersmaecker's work.

Ms. de Keersmaecker's choreographic output continues to evolve. Each new production offers surprises, confounds audience expectations, takes a different approach to the complexity of day-to-day reality. Even so, each of her 10 productions shows similarities and constants. The revelation of individual human emotions has become a characteristic feature of her choreography, perhaps revealed in small ordinary gestures: hands run through the hair, a readjustment of the blouse, a smile.

"I find it essential to have strong material as a starting point," Ms. de Keersmaecker said, "whether music or narrative elements, material that implies challenge. The kind of material I use is never one-dimensional. It inspires me to draw out different levels of joy, and that is very important to me."

Mr. Vandekeybus, too, takes a mixed-me-

dia approach in his powerful dance theater. He worked as an actor with the visual artist and director Jan Fabre before starting Ultima Vez. A self-taught dancer, Mr. Vandekeybus has developed an infectious and energetic physical language with his young international cast. The choice of performers seems basic to the quality of his work.

"I like to choose people with diverse backgrounds," he said recently, "people who have had dance or theater training alongside people who have no such experience at all, but who have a certain personal charisma. I am always looking for someone whose freshness captures my attention, even though I can't immediately categorize those people."

Early on, riding horses became a passion for Mr. Vandekeybus, he said. "It has taught me a lot about trusting one's instinct and one's body. When you do dangerous things — and dance can be dangerous — it's essential to trust your own body." More interested in

the intensity of the moment than in the significance of the piece, Mr. Vandekeybus treats movement and space very basically. This style, evoking movement patterns with the impact of an explosion, implies the presence of real danger in his performances, an aspect that adds to the intensity of his work.

"Always the Same Lies" (1991), based on a visual concept, is an attempt to extend the limits of the Ultima Vez performance style. Using projection, it integrates a fragmentary film portrait of Carlo Verano, an 88-year-old artist Mr. Vandekeybus met in Hamburg, and is inspired by his life, his mind, his movements, his world. The music was composed by Peter Vermeersch and is performed by his band, X-Legged Sally.

As in Mr. Vandekeybus's previous work, objects play an essential part. "Always the Same Lies" includes a game with eggs, the most fragile and breakable of objects. In the context of the crushing violence of Mr. Vandekeybus's dance style, this surely represents a new challenge. □