

Tears of Shame Wiped Away with Onions

11th March 2009

The company's new choreography, **100 Wounded Tears**, is a sequence of fourteen images of lost desperation.

It is an elemental collage of dynamic dance and striking physical theatre, pulsing with wild energy. The performers give their all to the public, right down to the last bead of sweat, and lay bare the most deeply concealed weaknesses of the human soul. The themes, which pierce the skin like sharp nails, freeze, cringe with irony, and seduce with passion. Such are the performances of the company DOT504, which has assuredly taken to the top of our dance scene.

The new piece, **100 Wounded Tears**, created for the company by the Greek-Slovak creative duo Linda Kapetanea and Jozef Fruček, is choreographed and performed in the same spirit. This is the second time the dancers of DOT have worked with this couple, and their first collaborative work - **Holdin' Fast** - got as far as the prestigious Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2008.

The performance, **100 Wounded Tears**, is a sequence of fourteen images of lost desperation. One gives way to the next like the stories in a book of dark fairytales, and they work stronger as independent stories than pieced together into a whole. The essence of the piece is a combination of the magical powers and dust of legends, which nevertheless carry the air earthiness, crudeness and brutality typical of Eastern Slovak culture, rather than a dreamlike, fairytale atmosphere. The costumes and some of the situations on stage may evoke a village setting or a strange castle, of the kind in which many fairytales are also set. In the same way as in legends, the struggle between good and evil – inside the human soul itself than anywhere else, however – plays a principal role in this piece.

What dark things do we conceal?

The performance opens with a female character (Helena Arenbergerová) entering the stage space dressed in a stylized costume resembling traditional dress - a knee-length, silk skirt and waistcoat. She patiently carries in cupfuls of earth, and heaps up a mound of brown soil on the stage, as though preparing a grave for someone. "Do you want to kill me? Tell me, go on, tell me," a man screams at her (Csongor Kassai). In the next scene, the girl dances a half-mad, autistic solo, but reveals nothing.

What dark things do we conceal and when does poisonous, demonic tongue snake its way out, from beneath our lips? Fruček and Kapetanea decided to draw this devil out from our innards by the tail, parading him in his sophisticated best. Two lovers (Lenka Vágnerová and Pavel Mašek) tenderly and eagerly taste of one another as though no other world exists. Yet something breaks. With an evil expression, the girl picks up a wooden stick. With the accumulation of rage, her body rears up towards the heights. She swaggers for a moment on her insteps like a wild centaur preparing for a battle. Then she slashes the air sharply with the stick right in the astonished faces of another

pair of lovers, and strikes again and again. A few seconds later, two men „deal with“ her, besieging and attacking her with cooking pans. Her previous partner is also now being taken care of in the enticing snare of another woman (Michaela Ottová). Meanness, envy, jealousy, selfishness and human depravation are topics which enthral the choreographers of this performance.

Conflicts and struggles

The choreography of **100 Wounded Tears** is a series of struggles. First and foremost, it deals with human - physical - conflicts. For instance, a sequence inspired by martial arts, judo in this case, is an extremely original, highly charged movement passage. Yet the characters fight only with themselves. When a woman, stripped naked (Lenka Vágnerová) crouches on her bare knees and has her humiliated tears wiped away with stinging pieces of onion by a man whose laughter rings with irony, she does not utter a sound, suffering abjectly instead.

On yet another level, there is an artistic battle going on between the self-conscious, electronic, alternative music of Michal Kaščák and the events onstage themselves. The ferocious flow of music shapes the dynamics of the piece as much as the movement does. Sometimes we even feel that it draws our attention away from the dancers. In other parts, though, it connects with the dance to create an intense atmosphere.

That is how it is, for example, in one very imaginative scene where all three female performers appear in heavy skirts sewn from what look like old scraps of suede textile for upholstery or curtains. Like huge mushrooms, they spiral to the floor and get up again, spinning around, while clouds of dust emanate from them as though from pillows which have lain unwashed for years. The music, radical and verging on terrifying, completes the picture of some forgotten castle, where a ball for the spirit of dead countesses is taking place.

DOT504' s new production is charged with dance and visual ideas and with physical and dramatic energy. Lenka Vágnerová, out of all the dancers, excels most in her dramatic expression, and of course the Slovak actor Csongor Kassai too, who revs up his natural exhibitionism to 150 per cent. All the dancers, as always, present technically excellent performance onstage. Pavel Mašek, for example, has significantly matured in dance expression, and Helena Arenbergerová is, once again, fascinating. At first glance, everything appears perfect, but what is unfortunately missing, is any kind of inner strength and connectivity to grab us by the collar at the start of the performance, and not let us go until an hour after the applause at the end. So images flow away from us like water streaming down window panes during a heavy downpour. Yet even to look through a window can sometimes be a great experience...

RATING LN ***** DOT504: 100 Wounded Tears

Choreography and direction: Jozef Fruček and Linda Kapetanea Performers: Michaela Ottová, Lenka Vágnerová, Pavel Mašek, Helena Arenbergerová, Tomáš Nepšinský, Jaroslav Ondruš and Csongor Kassai Premiere: 22nd Feb at Ponec Theatre

MARKÉTA FAUSTOVÁ

