

DANCE

Proving the absurd

This is not a metaphor: at the Festival of Uzès, we uncovered a rare pearl, something inspiring a range of emotions, with an abrasive humour, a sense of the tragedy of existence, yet still extremely pure. David Wampach is a rising choreographer, one who does not take himself too seriously.

With his 2008 creation, *AUTO*, the artist does not intend to – as is so often the case – expound upon his own individual journey, rather he chooses to bring the audience together around a universal outlet, zany but deep, dealing with phobias, anxieties and paranoia. Two films punctuate the duel he has created with the pianist Aurélien Richard (a former singers' accompanist at the Opéra de Paris): inspired by and going beyond the absurdities of de Palma and John Waters. We are struck by the paradox that exists between musical oppression and comical liberation -- in the choreographer's dancing, performing in drag as a stalking victim, as well as by the character's lust for others, and his/her disappointment which veers toward bitterness.

Wampach's finely tuned blend of mood and physicality was fed by his own experiences in studying medicine, notably in neurophysiology and in the timing of reactions. To that end he analysed his own reaction, his irritation at being awakened abruptly on the train – first by a child, then by the crumpling sound of a woman's plastic bag, which made him say, "You are pissing me off." This was in fact the starting point for his piece *QUATORZE [FOURTEEN]* in 2007. Another experience which influenced this gifted artist, interested in puzzles -- was learning to decipher Greek. "I ask questions about existence in my pieces, without pretending to offer any solutions. I am treasure-hunting." Seemingly, Socrates said the same thing.

As a child he was not interested in football, instead preferring his modern jazz classes. He was admitted to the prestigious P.A.R.T.S. school (Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker's school in Brussels), he discovered classical ballet, at the age of 23. "It was horrible physical pain, as well as hearing the devaluation of music into mere accompaniment. In spite of the structure I got from ballet, I would just cry." At 30, Wampach still retains things from his youth: *Nirvana* "but before Kurt Cobain's infatuation with suicide." And what he tries to present in his work is not the external dangers bombarding us on television, rather the more insidious internal ones. Which explains his fascination with Artaud and Bataille. "I don't know where the control should be. In general people refuse to deal with this danger, but I dive into it." In 2005, in his work *BASCULE*, he does admit to having directed his dancers. But he considers collaboration an essential part of the creative process, in particular between the different art forms: music, costuming, theatre – which he does not consider to be radically different from dance. "In *AUTO*, we also have to deal with text. And then there is the vocal transcription of Berlioz in *QUATORZE*. We have 'grids with scores.' And during the creative process, things are constantly changing; for example in *BASCULE [ROCKING]* where I considered the wheezing symbolism of putting in an actual seesaw – up until the very last minute."

He has also retained some experiences from his career as a dancer: from working with Fiadeiro a certain liberty with propositions, from Odile Duboc a personal vocabulary, from Christian Rizzo an almost palpable but usefully structured rigor.

Wampach's next work will happen in two years. Not before then. There will be no cheating, plenty of time to take things in, to experience life. And art. Which will work out well for him as he is concerned about his relationships with his collaborators, wanting them "close, but not too close. The relationship is all about balancing offers and demands." This is reassuring, clearly his ascension through the ranks will not sway him – he is safe from the blandishments of false friends.

-- Bérengère Alfort