

# David Wampach

## Auto

May 30 – June 1, 2008

Saint-Denis. Théâtre Gérard Philipe

A work as enigmatic as it is critical, *Auto* plays with the expectations of the audience as well as with its disappointment. This is a strange piece, demanding, unsettling, certainly without precedent.

The programme of the Rencontres chorégraphiques internationales de Seine-Saint-Denis spoke of a work whose subject would be “the relationship between dance and music, too often left on automatic pilot,” thus giving it its title, *Auto*, the prefix signifying that the element in question works all by itself. Later, when leaving the theatre, you ask yourself what you just saw, wondering. When the usher gives us the flyer for the performance, you see these words:

disillusionsdisillusionsdisillusionsdisillusions

Tearing down, deconstructing all signs of linkage between dance and music, David Wampach also plays with the connections between his piece and the text, preceding or even following the performance. And if it is difficult to write about dance, approaching this man’s work creates entirely new sets of problems.

Onstage, the evening begins with the movements of Aurélien Richard, performer and composer of the score for *Auto*. He taps repeatedly the same key on the piano which he is sliding all over the stage. His face is covered with shaving foam, looking rather like those plaster busts of famous composers; he is clad all in black, like his piano, lost in the shadows of the stage.

These apparitions alternate with Wampach’s. He appears in drag, wearing spike heels, a low-backed dress and a long blonde wig -- walking slowly, enigmatically, then beginning a languid dance. This is in fact the only dance sequence *per se*. Accompanied by pounding, frenetic chords on the piano, more rhythmic than melodic, David Wampach seems to be dancing to electronic music rewritten for the piano. He executes with an entomological precision the choreography, sexy, mannered, flirty and slightly trashy – of young women out clubbing.

At first the work is rather comic, but it takes on a more tragic weight as the musical intervals grow further apart. Taken out of context, the dance loses its justification, becoming significantly more sexual. The double “travesty” helps to build a certain tension, creating a definite malaise for those

watching the sensual movements. Two projected videos go with the dance, remakes shot in the style of the *Body Double* films of Brice Dellesperger, accompanied on the piano for the *Carrie* segment, and with a live voiceover improvised by Wampach on the *Desperate Living* remake.

By choosing to use these two extreme examples of femininity, the destructive wallflower-dom of *Carrie* and the equally destructive lesbian road trip of *Desperate Living* -- *Auto* presents a critical, hysterical vision of the banalities of femininity. In addition, the deconstruction of the concepts of *off*, *in* and *live* performance also creates doubt when looking at the identification and assignment of sources.

So when Aurélien Richard reappears behind his piano, pushing it all the way downstage, we immediately imagine it's going to be another trick: he abruptly lifts his hands off the keyboard -- but the music continues! Oh, but it isn't really a piano, it's really a magician's trick box into which David Wampach, disguised as the magician's assistant, climbs -- before being sawed into pieces. The trick is so well done you wonder if it was indeed a trick, making the audience quite uncomfortable. And this is how the evening ends, asking for our complicity in this illusion and all the others, some of which convince no one but continue nonetheless.

**Sophie Grappin Schmitt**

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