

Jan Decorte makes quite an impression with his very first dance production

An ode to the love that lasts in spite of everything

There was some scepticism here and there when it became known that Jan Decorte was venturing into a pure dance performance. How wrong they were! **Tanzung** turns out to be not only the most personal production he has ever made, but the amount of honest vulnerability displayed on stage is quite simply wonderful.

It's quite a career. Participating in the birth of a total renewal of the performing arts together with your wife, following a very irregular course, leading a very eventful life, and yet always bouncing back. And then, once you are past sixty, when the world thinks it knows what it can expect from you, suddenly doing a dance production, which also turns out to be both recognisable *and* surprising.

Decorte worked on this piece with his Sigrid Vinks, dancer Taka Shamoto and actor Tibo Vandendorre. It is extraordinary the way he is able to transpose the childlike nature of his writing into movement as if nothing could be more natural. The opening scene alone is already a little like coming home. Decorte sits on a small chair at the side, watching. The three others are standing ready. Sigrid in a red dress (she will always be a young girl), the two others in only leggings, as if they were toddlers playing on the beach in towelling shorts. And then Kate and Anna McGarrigle sing in delightful French while these three stride up and down as if they were each on their own catwalk. Dancing a little, infectiously cheerful, touchingly naïve, the way children would try to do it. Playful yet serious.

What follows is a succession of solos and duets: fresh, teasing, meticulous. Over and over again they demand complete attention for their reinvented movement. Sometimes there is music, for which they venture to choose classic pop songs: from Nirvana to Boy George, from Arno to The Troggs. Six love poems run through these changing scenes like a *leitmotiv*, written by Decorte in English and spoken by Taka Shamoto with a provocative French 'r'. She precedes and follows her words with an exact execution of precisely the same dance. A buoy to hold onto, a beacon in the dark.

And now and then Decorte does an improvised dance, assisted by Sigrid. With his hair flapping wildly he gives it everything he's got, until all the energy seems used up. His panting can be heard as far as the back row. This is no dancer, it is an aging man in a suit. And he dares to show it. It's great to watch, I find. Just as Sigrid's trembling leg is, when she carries out a movement with great effort. The strength of this performance lies not in virtuosity, but in its fragility, in the attempt, and in the self-deprecating touches of humour that occasionally accompany it.

The performance builds up nicely. All at once the four of them are standing on stage. They become living sculptures. People groping. Heads that touch. Icons of tenderness. And then Decorte launches into his final dance, and he throws himself into it completely. Sigrid watches. When he's in danger of losing his balance, she's there to support him. The scene ends in an embrace, nothing to do with theatre codes, but a real one. They stand there and they are themselves. Utterly exposed. They show us what things are like in their lives. Jan gives his all and staggers (some minds are just more difficult to live in), Sigrid catches him. *Tanzung* is a declaration of love from Jan to Sigrid, an ode to the love that lasts, in spite of everything.

All this honest warmth may not appeal to matter-of-fact people. Experienced watchers will notice the small pouch three-quarters of the way through the performance. All I can think of is this: what a gift, these four. And proof that Jan Decorte and his Sigrid will go down in history as great artists. Thank you for this art, thank you for these lives.

Griet Op de Beeck, De Morgen, 2010-09-25

What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts

When they met in a Brussels café, Dirk Pauwels – artistic director of Campo – asked Jan Decorte if he would like to make a pure dance performance. The idea ripened and the result is called *Tanzung*.

Pauwels' request probably arose out of the notion that Decorte had for years been looking for the marrow in the bone of a written play. What about if the marrow was not thrown away but respectfully put aside? What textual image would that give rise to?

Wittgenstein incorporated

For Jan Decorte, the solution, the answer to the question, had to be sought in a quote from the English philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, the man who, now that his fellow philosophers had explained everything over the last two thousand years or more, started to question language itself. It is the opening sentence from Wittgenstein's book of linguistic law, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: The world is everything that is the case. Decorte quoted this sentence in an interview with a journalist from Humo. The journalist handled it carelessly, because he forgot the comma. The most important element in the sentence, which by means of the comma brings together two separate ideas. The treatise owes its existence to this comma. After six explanatory sentences, Wittgenstein comes to the second main sentence (out of a total of seven). A sentence that forms the core of *Tanzung*. Yes, Jan Decorte is a cunning fellow. He hands you the glass, but how the wine tastes is a matter for the mouth, an all-embracing organ of taste that leads to gratification. The second main sentence is the title of this dissertation.

The case is the thought of a pure dance performance. The fact is the genesis of the production. The existence is the performance. The atomic facts are the bones. Because even if you have said goodbye to everything that refers to reality, which is what underlies Dirk Pauwels' request, a skeleton nevertheless continues to exist, because thinking is the skeleton of existence. And Jan Decorte is there. He lives, and with him lives his world, the playground of the theatre, into which he invites people to make a skeleton out of the bones.

Mating dance

His constant playmate in this playground is his wife, Sigrid Vinks. For *Tanzung* he has also invited two dancers, a man and a woman, Tibo Vandenborre and Taka Shamoto, on the one hand as guardian angels for the basic idea of responding to Dirk Pauwels' request and on the other as guides through the course of his oriental mating dance, which is what *Tanzung* essentially is. This is not initially noticeable. But the concept of the performance is a spiral.

The set is simple, a white backdrop with a rectangle cut out of it to make a window onto absolutely nothing, plus a couple of chairs and seats, and it is here that the evolution of true love between man and woman unfolds. The dancers depict the creation, starting from chaos and the bare initial acquaintance. Movement in the process of love should not be

underestimated. The beginning is the first encounter. One approaches the other. Which explains the walking tempo at the start. Paul van Ostaijen met his sweetheart Emmeke Clement in a 'glass tram shelter'. James Joyce came across Nora Barnacle when he was walking through town one day and he caught sight of a proud young woman with red hair. Both these encounters, starting with a walk, were the start of lifelong relationships. The same applies to Jan Decorte and Sigrid Vinks.

What follows this is the evolution of the eternal mating dance of the couple, a passion that slowly shifts from the physical to the mental. They grow towards each other. The movement(s) become stylistically more refined, although Decorte breaks into this refinement with a few wild dances, symbols of resistance. A man lets himself be tied, but never caged. This is finally followed by acceptance. The spiral reaches its peak, its ultimate point. Jan and Sigrid embrace each other. Their movement comes to a standstill on a square centimetre. Curtain. Applause.

Love poetry

As well as a few musical attractions, Decorte also wrote six poems in English. The word as the child of movement. These poems mark the transitions in the growth of love. They are recited by Taka Shamoto, in a matter-of-fact tone, but not cool. The first starts like this: 'You twinkling / winking / water / thing / ...' The last ends equally tenderly: '... the roaring / heart / filled / with a substance / called / life / and blood / the weary / one //.

Tanzung is Rodin's Thinker in imaginary movement. It is Rik Wouters in search of the umpteenth image in his love for the young woman, his model, lover and later wife Nel. It is a performance you have to have seen, to hear the love growing in the minds of two people.

Guido Lauwaert, Knack.be, 2010-09-24