

## danceviewtimes writers on dancing

### Grief — A Good Grief

“Kommer”

Kassys

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

San Francisco, CA

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by Rita Felciano

A friend had suggested that the Dutch theater company Kassys' “Kommer” (Sorrow) might be of interest to a dance person because so much of their work is based on movement, not on language. She was right even though this is a drama in the first half, a film in the second. But “Kommer” is choreographed at least as much as it is directed.



Photo by Kassys

Throughout language is kept to a minimum, and what there is abounds in the kind of clichés we use when words fail us. The play essentially shows the effect of shock when our nervous system basically shuts down, and we fall back into some primitive patternings that keep us functioning. Sometimes, however, the pressure builds to the point where some of us might explode into uncontrollable rages. The fact that “Kommer” shows this process as both sad and funny and frames it so intriguingly made this Bay Area premiere the rewarding theatrical experience it was.

“Kommer” looks at what happens to a sextet of people who hear of a friend's death. In the second half, we follow these actors, now on film, out of the theater into their private—depressingly sterile—lives. The premise is both simple and complex in the way it shifts between media and how the work manipulates illusion and reality and everything in between.

The play is in progress as the audience files in. Ordinary-looking people converse in small groups; the atmosphere suggests banter between casual acquaintances. They circulate, they laugh, they refill their glasses when the youngest of them, blond lanky Ton Heijligers, doubles over and drags himself to the flower boxes that outline the performance space. He ends up leaning against the back wall before exiting. To a brassy rendition of “Danny Boy,” one by one the actors peel themselves out of the now frozen party into a precise copy of Heijligers' patterns until everyone ends on a folding chair in a semi circle. The gestural detail throughout this “procession” is meticulous and formalized, pulling these so different people into a group which, however, no longer knows what to do with itself. So they sit, shift positions, exchange glances. And they wait.

In what I am tempted to call a desperate finger dance, they turn off each other's musical choices on the DC player, “Danny Boy”, having been deemed “inappropriate.” It's a wonderfully comic sequence, particularly if you recognized snippets of the tunes—as some in the audience did — which got stopped after only a few notes, “Purple Rain” being one of them.

At another point, the “mourners” stand around the flower boxes, periodically throwing about inconsequential bits of trying to talk about what happened. Mostly they are intently focused on tasks; they systematically dig up the planters, tearing the flowers to shreds, making a wreaths of them. The repetitive gestures are so carefully controlled and overlaid that they create a sense of a well-oiled machine in motion.

The film, mostly silent, suggests connections between the “actors” and the “real people.” From the performers close dressing room, the action spills into the night. Saskia Meulendijks, who recoiled at any attempt at physical proximity, does the same in a Hopperesque late night café. The sexual imagery of Heijligers' obsessively pushing a rod down a pipe in the flowering box is repeated in his obscenely stuffing his face with junk food. And then there are the two lonely men. Mischa van Dulleman is desperate to connect with anybody, even if it means sticking his tongue out. He ends up dancing by himself in a crowded disco and hugging a goat. The proper business man Lukas Dijkema drinks too much, crashes his racing car and throws up on a country road.

But the most intriguing figures were the two other women. Lisbeth Grither, (who also directed) had caused the play's explosion by smashing a table. The act had sent her into a quasi-catatonic stupor. She is chilling in a perfunctory visit with her hospitalized mother and walking her messy apartment's floor, a baby over her shoulder. Esther Snelder, who told the men to do “something manly,” like tearing down the theater's balcony and build it up again, had become a care-giver. She had organized the mourners into meaningless tasks to keep them occupied. Most hilariously, in the film she went to her second job as an airline attendant, taking care of passengers and, in “Kommer's” second fit of fury, demolishing one of the plane's bathrooms. That was choreography quite unlike any that I have ever seen.

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