



L'Humanite

CORRESPONDANCES Review

La Rencontres Choregraphiques Internationales de Seine-Saint-Denis

Monday, May 7, 2007

At the Saint-Ouen *Espace 1789*, Kettly Noël (Mail) and Nelisiwe Xaba (South Africa) stage their pen-pal relationship in *Correspondances*.

The work focuses on reunions at Bamako of these two friends who wrote back and forth across the internet. In high heels and mini-skirts they sniff each other, kiss each other on the arms, the legs and bump their butts together before they start their conversation. From the grand salutations to the African specific imagery that starts the show, we are far from the traditional dances that are so often mentioned and just as often commandeered. After the introductions, in a funny, ironic almost virile way their dance takes up the dialogue. The linear narrative of these reunions is quickly blown away by an array of movements: one dancer grabs a microphone to vent her femininity, her delicateness, while forcing herself to belch; the other, in a poignant sequence with a menagerie of dolls attached to her back, traces movements straight out of classical dance. With a simple jeté, costume pieces are taken off and each exaggerated movement upsets the "litter of children" attached to her waist. It shows, without a doubt, that she rejects the heavy sexist and cultural constraints of classical ballet as well as those constraints brought on by the weight of perpetual maternity. In these simultaneous sections, the performers master their discipline and demand the emancipation of women in Africa today.



Les Inrockuptibles

Review:

Correspondances

Choreography by Kettly Noël and Nelisiwe Xaba, Donko Seko

Rencontres Chorégraphique Internationales du Seine-Saint-Denis

22 May 2007

A duo of kisses and slaps, powerfully sassy and rebellious, elaborate at a distance but oh what complicity

The title, *Correspondances*, is taken from the method that preceded the project. As Kettly Noël lives in Mali and Nelisiwe Xaba in South Africa, it was, above all, through their correspondence, electronic or postal, that they learned to know each other and composed this communal creation. After an initial meeting in 2005 in Johannesburg and some working meetings (“Twenty-one hours in Paris and in Johannesburg, nineteen hours in Bamako and thirteen hours in Port-au-Prince” as they count them.), it was the back-and-forth rhythm of the correspondences that brought about the choreographic form: an artistically Siamese female duo that mutually sketches the portrait.

Thin legs and spiked heels, silken dress and dark turbans, these splendid queens give as many kisses as slaps, moving from dance to battle and inventing games inspired by dance and seduction. From little gestures to grand movements, the girls enjoy insidious cruelty revealed little by little through their classical ballet technique, while perched on a table in skirts and tennis shoes. They sway their hips to the Eurythmics, with empty stares and robotic bodies.

Then we are treated to a lecture--intimate, honest-- an incision surgically cut into the course of the show. Planted in front of a microphone, Kettly announces: “Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, Madame director of *Rencontres*, dear brothers and sisters, Welcome. I will be brief. I am a woman, a grand woman”, and then she lists her qualities interspersed with booming belches, powerfully rebellious toward the horizon. And in a beautiful finish, they grab plastic udders and pour milk on themselves, which spills onto the floor where their bodies roll as the lights go down.

The letters and monologues of *Correspondances* crawl via projections over the curtain, faster and faster, larger and larger. There we find the names of the choreographers that Xaba and Noël evoke: Salia Sanou, Seydou Boro, Faustin Linyekula and Opiyo Okach. Or on the other hand, it is a final image done in watermark of a high-density contemporary African dance.

Correspondances review

May 15, 2007

Four Choreographic Creations: Catherine CONTOUR / Pierre DROULERS / Rémy HERITIER / KETTLY NOËL / Nelisiwe XABA

By Gérard Mayen

Ladies Unbound: Kettly Noël and Nelisiwe Xaba

It is a little retro to use the term ladies; it brings up the idea elegance a little wilted. But the idea of lady is just what Kettly Noël and Nelisiwe Xaba undo from the moment of their entrance on stage. They move through the painstaking poses and in the meticulous costumes of stylistic designer Joël Andrianomearisoa. The work is sexy and it has brilliance. For the whole voyeuristic fifty minutes of *Correspondances*, the audience member/observer has the feeling of violating the show's intimacy. We are peeping in on a story that only belongs to these two women.

They have so much to show each other. They have so much to communicate to each other. They have only known each other a few months. But in their staged encounter, they know themselves better. In their theatrical meeting, they are flawed reflections of each other which help illustrate who they actually are by their contrast and mismatched mimickings.

Kettly Noël's face installs fear; it is raw and almost contorted. Her body moves as if it were broken. Each gesture makes her writhe and contorts her as if she were in pain. Nelisiwe Xaba, though very similar to her partner in shape, is completely different in movement. She is more restrained and refined, each action is methodical and technically crafted.

Seduction and repulsion

Somehow these two magnetic poles – furry and intellect, for lack of better words – are brought together by circumstance. The encounter is proliferating and contagious. It pounds against the constraints of the stage. The magnetic energy pushes back and forth like the oxymorons of daring teases, unsuccessful communications, formless promises and free movement. The pushing and pulling magnetic energy of these two poles is manifested in the changes in the humorous costumes, the authoritative-lunatic rantings at the microphone, the fleeting interwoven movements, and the malicious story-telling. It is seductive and vulgar. It is two bodies interlocked ragging against the dying of a light in which these women come out having learned from the struggle and having been beaten up by the struggle. In this *pas de deux* for a short while, their white-hot struggle digs deeply into us. It a mix of French and English, a multicultural embroidery that tells a story, it is a story without many frills or over-thinking. And then in this struggle comes, out of the blue, pure classical dance. One dancer lies on the table and the other dangerously contorts over her and on they go. Seduction and repulsion on and on.

Africans, absolutely, but unbound

Everything slips away. Everything gets turned around. Whatever is destroyed is rebuilt and restarts. And so it is with this piece; there is an energetic turn upwards. It is an uncommon note, an abrasive sounding determination. Kettly Noël grows even bigger. Nelisiwe Xaba goes wild. It is the give and take of becoming, a transformation takes place in understanding someone else so directly. The duo, which was before two women, is now mistakably one in the same. And this "singular" duo will, happily, shatter the misconception that in the personality or in the work of an African artist, it's the adjective African that is most important. *Correspondances* is unbounded by territories. It is versatile, which is exemplified in that it consists two artists one of whom comes from Mali, the other from South Africa. It is enthusiastically and insolently unbounded. Unbounded but united they create a brilliant post-contemporized imaginary space-time.

Correspondances was created on May 10, 2007 [In France] at Espace 1789 in Saint-Ouen, during the Rencontres chorégraphiques internationales de Seine Saint-Denis festival.