

Ballet Flanders take on epic contemporary works by Khan, Naharin and Cherkaoui

By Jasmine Norton, Mon 22 April, 2017

Three internationally acclaimed choreographers, three reworked masterpieces, and one common theme - 'East'. Last week saw the Antwerp premiere of a promising 3 piece extravaganza performed by Ballet Flanders at The Opera Theatre Flanders. Eastern heritage and influences brought English-Bengali Akram Khan, the Israeli Ohad Naharin and the Belgian-Moroccan Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui together for an night of impressive physicality. It was a clear celebration of arguably three of the most successful contemporary choreographers of the 21st century; however, was it about the choreographers names more than the works themselves?

The evening started with Akram Khan's work, a narrative-less 15 minute re-make of his well known piece 'Kaash' which has toured internationally since 2002. This was a piece which, due to its shortened length, evoked less inspiration than its original counterpart. The choreography was made originally for more athletic contemporary dancers, but the Flanders gave it an applaudable go; an impressively convincing performance to the



less educated dance eye. The dancers were well dressed in Khan's usual choice of black skirt/trouser attire for all, with no tops for the men and small black tops for the women. Whilst the dancers had an impressive contemporary technique, the choreography seemed to lack the 'je ne se quoi' of Khan's other more recent works like 'Into The Lions', where a strong contemporary narrative takes you into a mythical world. There were many clean, even classical lines at times; the dancers were able to show off their technicality and virtuosity, very impressively might I add, but as a group, and as a piece, it lacked purpose. This is always the danger of remaking a classic.



Secus - Ohad Naharin's piece on the other hand, was funny, evocative and physically impressive. The piece had lots of textures, changes of lighting, and the dancers were able to show off their personalities. There were lots of bodies on stage dressed colourfully and the piece had pace, which teased you with moments you would've liked to last longer. Such as the spectacular picture of all 30 dancers sitting down spread out on stage, and changing position quicker than you could blink and in perfect unison. The piece

wasn't trying to tell a story, but it had purpose, you could follow the logic of the dancers as if they were deciding what to do spontaneously on stage. And although the high leg kicks did appear a few too many times to be choreographically interesting, it was impressive none the less. This was the piece that most convincingly suited the bodies and training of the dancers as Naharin's company and style characteristically demands high flexibility and long limbs!

Larbi's choreography topped off the whole evening beautifully. The piece 'Requiem' was a spectacle to behold. Accompanied by the live orchestra 'HERMES Ensemble' and the 'Chorus and Children's Chorus of Opera Vlaanderen', the dancers portrayed a beautiful almost melancholic piece, featuring many duets. Their movements beautiful and original. As a great admirer of Larbi's work I can say that these dancers didn't quite live up to the individuality and talent of his hand picked contemporary dancers, but nevertheless they danced beautifully and fearlessly through the challenging material. The programme said, 'This Requiem is all about blending, with great respect for the various traditions. The Requiem as a serene and contemplative plea for the emancipation of humankind.' And it did just that.



This evening really showcased the talent and artistry within ballet dancers of Flanders at the moment. Throughout all three pieces they danced with admirable integrity and passion which oozed from the stage in bucket loads. Khan, Naharin, and Larbi continue to inspire and move with their choreography, but as ambassadors for excellence in contemporary dance, they need to stay conscious of their endeavours to keep contemporary dance moving forwards.