

“Culturescapes”: Experimental Dance from Croatia

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“I have danced this solo only for myself,” explained the Croatian dancer Petra Hrašaneć after the first part of her solo performance “Love Will Tear Us Apart” to the perplexed audience in Birsfelden’s “Roxy”. “But the next one is for you all.” Later on, she invited a spectator to the stage as her assistant. The role of the audience in the theatre was here explicitly presented as an open issue. “Love Will Tear Us Apart” is one of the two very different dance performances from Zagreb, which Juriaan Cooman combined into a single evening in the framework of this year’s edition of “Culturescapes”, dedicated to the Balkans.

The dancer had developed the piece together with the Croatian theatre director Saša Božić, based on a series of pop songs, including “Love Will Tear Us Apart” by Joy Division at the very beginning. Pop culture was clearly the reference point of Hrašaneć’s performance, since she appeared as an androgynous art figure: in her black jeans and a gray (man’s) shirt with rolled-up sleeves, with her hair cropped short on the sides and a Mohawk quiff, with her occasionally tomboyish movements, she could have easily been a seventeen-year old would-be macho. She played with that image especially in her second piece, danced to a ballad of Rufus Wainwright. With her legs wide apart, her hands in her rear pockets, she stood there and moved only her elastic upper body, turning in the waist, bending it in all directions. It served as a counterpart to the first piece, an eruption of abruptly alternating movements, turns, leaps, falls. Between the songs, she told the audience about herself and the evolution of her dance performance.

“Paces”: A Different Calibre

It remained a rather trivial half hour, although performed by an excellent dancer with great charisma and an impish sort of humour. Quite a different calibre was Petra Zanki’s solo “Paces”, which followed after a short break in the rehearsal room, in the cellar of the theatre. The piece shows the slow alteration and evolution of a single movement, and its minimalism in terms of dance is a challenge both for the solo dancer and for the audience. Zanki took her place in the room and began to swing her body gradually, back and forth, until the movement focused on her left foot only, which began to rise together with her. The swinging of arms extended to form a gesture that seemed to grasp space. The left foot landed again behind the right one, apparently rotating the dancer around her axis. By that time, the constant rhythm had already got the audience under its spell. While Zanki’s dance evolved, a landscape slowly emerged on a video screen, at first misty, then clearer and more colourful. A sound could be heard, at first resembling a bagpipe bourdon, then machine noise. After some half an hour, the image faded out again, the noise subsided, the swinging movement lingered in one arm and then calmed down. “Paces” allows no distraction to the spectators and confronts them eventually far more radically with themselves than Hrašaneć has succeeded in doing.