

# A mover and a shaker

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## DANCE

**JONATHAN BURROWS**  
ICA THEATRE  
LONDON

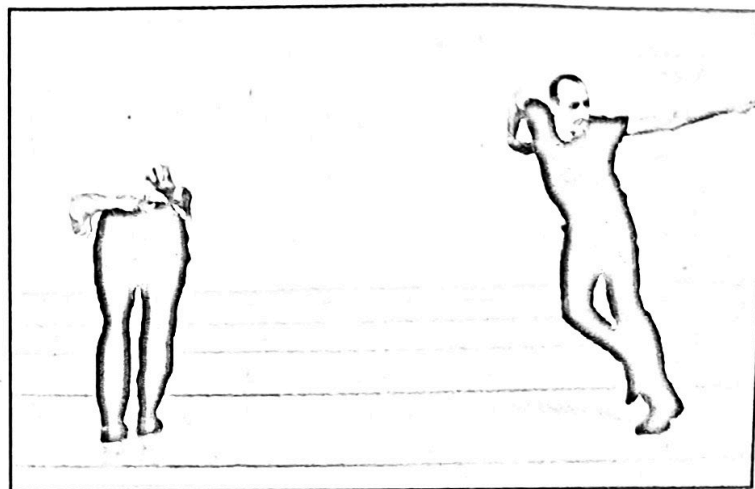
JUST WHAT do we see when looking at *Weak Dance, Strong Questions*? Well, there are two men already in the performance space, wearing casual clothes and exchanging a few quiet words, when the ICA (tardily as ever) admits us to the theatre. The men in question are patient while we shuffle in and find seats, as well they might be since we recognise one as Jonathan Burrows and guess the other must be his fellow performer Jan Ritsema. Burrows, English and in his early forties, is well known as a gifted dancer and choreographer; Ritsema, Dutch in his mid-fifties, is a drama director who lately has ventured into other activities.

There is no curtain, no decor, no music, no lowering of the house lights, so we only know the piece is to start when Burrows thanks us for coming and announces the title and duration. The pair of them take up places at the far end of the room, and start moving. At first Ritsema seems deliberately to block our view of Burrows but that doesn't last. In fact we shall

find that although they mostly stay near each other while moving around, any prepared spatial relationship there may be is hidden. So, mostly, is any relationship of movement.

Burrows uses his hands a lot, not only for gestures but touching his own arms, chest, face and less mentionable parts as if to assure himself they are still there. (Of course, there may be a more metaphorical purpose such as the exploration of selfhood.) Meanwhile his feet jiggle about, seemingly challenging his balance or mobility. Now and again he does some little jumps, even sometimes a ballet step.

Curiously, though, it is the older, bulkier Ritsema whose movement tends to look more balletic. It also seems that he often picks up movements Burrows has done earlier. Yet there is no simultaneity, and I doubt any actual copying. Nor do they



Burrows and Ritsema share a sense of purpose

apparently watch each other. In fact the only times eye movements seem purposeful are when Burrows looks up as if seeking inspiration.

So how, you may wonder, does such unpurposeful action manage to hold the interest for nearly an hour? I would wonder the same too if I hadn't experienced it, and found it left me with a feeling of time well spent, even a degree of exhilaration. The explanation must lie, I think, not so much in what

either Burrows or Ritsema actually does, nor in a joint pattern they make, but in the fact that their shared sense of purpose compels us to concentrate on the two bodies moving in space and time, and to seek our own reading of what happens and why. Which means, probably, that no two of us watching actually saw exactly the same thing – and that answers my opening sentence. Strong dance, weak questions.

JOHN PERCIVAL