

Review of *Weak Dance Strong Questions*

Elke Van Campenhout, De Standaard, Belgium, 30th October 2001

Two Men Failing

Weak Dance Strong Questions takes place in an open space with large windows on one side. The seating is in a semicircle. The dance area is unadorned: no lighting, no set.

Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema enter in comfortable trousers and T-shirts. Burrows welcomes the audience, tells them how long the performance will last and warns the people in the back row not to move their chairs too far back. The cushions are redistributed and more are handed out. An unusual start for an unusual performance.

Jan Ritsema is a stage director who first ventured onto the dance floor when fifty. Jonathan Burrows is a choreographer who is in perfect control of his body. They got to know each other as teachers at the PARTS dance school, and saw that their work was developing in parallel.

Onstage they stand next to each other without any apparent connection. Ritsema stands there in an uncomfortable body that shows repeated amazement at each new pose or movement. He appears to be torn between his body and the movement. He tries, for better or for worse, to attune the two to each other, but his body cannot surrender to the movement - it stammers and runs up against its own limitations. It is an ode to the non-virtuoso; to vulnerability. The nice thing is that the body refuses to carry out a particular movement, but at the same time still wants to feel good in so doing.

Next to him is Burrows, the dancer. He moves lightly and with precision, going against all expectations. He does not develop a single one of the things he starts, but replaces them by another, which he then also brings to a standstill.

The movements form an endless, unpredictable stream of consciousness. The audience has nothing to hold on to. In this situation, Burrows and Ritsema are nothing more than questioning bodies. At no point do they give an answer. They do not rest, but are in a constant state of change. Their discomfort is almost palpable. The tension between the two bodies is a constant source of conflict.

'You see two men failing,' says Burrows about the piece. Yet this is no experiment for its own sake. They are not cocking a snook at the audience, but are asking them, with an occasional smile, to help them in their search. They

refuse to compromise with each other or with the movement, nor do they wish to let themselves be led by what might be aesthetic or satisfying.

Weak Dance Strong Questions brings pertinent questions to the stage: questions about every aspect of the choreographic process, performance and the expectations of the creator and spectator; with no pretensions and with intense involvement.

Elke Van Campenhout