

**‘Weak Dance Strong Questions’, Frankfurter Rundschau, Germany,
7th May 2001**

The Routine Breakers

Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema dance and raise questions

People like story lines, or at least interrelations. That fact was demonstrated by a scientific experiment whereby test subjects watched simple geometric shapes, such as a triangle or circle, as they flitted across a computer screen. These test subjects recognised actions where there were none – for example ‘the triangle chases the circle, the circle hides’.

The dancer and choreographer Jonathan Burrows, together with the Dutch theatre director Jan Ritsema, has now produced a dance duet which consistently denies all desires and expectations. First of all there is no music, secondly no lighting effects, thirdly the members of the audience, arranged in a horseshoe around the dance floor, sit in the light as if the performance were as kind of business meeting. Fourthly – and it is remarkable that this succeeds – the movements of both men are such that it is not possible to discern any story line in them, not even an emotional state. What Merce Cunningham strove for but never achieved one hundred per cent, Burrows and Ritsema are now succeeding with: a choreography where there is only movement. Pure. What is more, this is movement which goes quite visibly beyond the border of virtuosity, performed by two not quite so young men dressed in baggy trousers and T-shirts.

‘Weak Dance Strong Questions’ is the indeed ironic title of the 50-minute long piece, which had its first night at the Frankfurt Mousonturm. The dance was felt indeed to be weak by quite a number of members of the audience who left the theatre early. The first woman in fact after about ten minutes.

At the same time, what they both presented (and Jan Ritsema is not even a dancer) is quite difficult: i.e. movement combinations which are not normal, either in everyday life or in any dance style. You only have to try once at home in the living room to move in such a manner and style that you have never done before (or seen anywhere!) to discover how dreadfully difficult it is to escape the routine movements which enter the body and head during the course of a life. These routines are questioned and broken here in an unspectacular but effective manner.

It was very funny, incidentally, that on Saturday evening an elderly lady took out her pocket camera and made a photograph of the dancers: in this of all performances, which does not really call for this at all, to project an image of herself as a fan.

Jonathan Burrows, who was once, and one can hardly believe it, a soloist with the Royal Ballet which highly esteems the classical tradition, has with ‘Weak Dance Strong Questions’ reached the final point in his very consistent career, i.e. an extreme denial of all customary expectations of a dance piece. He can enhance this at best if, next time, he were to leave out the movement too.

Sylvia Staude