

**‘Weak Dance Strong Questions’, Web Review, Paris, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2001**

**Weak Dance Critic, Some Questions Pop PARTS Quiz from Burrows & Ritsema**

**By Paul Ben-Itzak Copyright 2001 The Dance Insider**

(Editor's Note: The following is the sixth of our month-long series of reports from around the world celebrating the 20th anniversary of Anne De Keersmaeker's company Rosas. To read more reports, please type "De Keersmaeker," "Rosas," or "P.A.R.T.S." into the search engine window on our Home page.)

PARIS -- "Weak Dance, Strong Questions" was the name of the work presented last night at the Theatre du Rond-Point, where the Champs Elysees meets the Avenue Franklin Roosevelt, as the latest installment of Parts a Paris, the month-long festival featuring work and performers, faculty and students, from Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's Brussels school. The performers and choreographers were PARTS faculty members Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema. I was not familiar with Ritsema's work, but Burrows I have never forgotten since an unforgettable performance at The Kitchen four years ago. As explorations of the mathematics of dance go, the former Royal Ballet dancer's work runs about as pure as you can get -- and consequently presents the most difficult type of dance for me to follow and understand, let alone presume to interpret. I am not, however, above clever presumptions as a rule, and fortunately, last night's title gives me an out. What follows is, a)The questions I have the nerve to presume the artists might have been asking, and b)some instant questions, mostly facile, that occurred to me while watching the dance. The latter are in parenthesis. Oh, and at the end, I'll offer a slightly more profound observation. The natural sounds of Paris traffic at night from what really is a Round Point where several boulevards meet, filtered through several open windows at the left of the rectangular stage, composed the soundscape. The lights were set at one bright (but not too bright) level. And Burrows wore a dark green t-shirt and grey slacks, with black tennies, while Ritsema, older and heavier, wore shiny black shoes, black slacks, and a white t-shirt with a chartreuse square design. And glasses. Both men sport thinning short hair, Ritsema's with a touch of grey. Some Questions from a Weak Dance Critic Jotted Down While Watching Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema Perform "Weak Dance Strong Questions": Why do we move? What are you seeing inside you when you dance? Where am I going? What does it feel like if I do this? What does it feel like when I rub my tummy? Where does this lead? What happens if I trip myself? How many different ways are there to trip myself? How much space can I frame if I spread my arms wide and take big steps? How does Doug Elkins do that wave thing? Where is the wind coming from? How high can I jump? How high should I jump? What's that? Should I...? Is there gold here? What's that under my shirt? How do I stand different if I grab my crotch? What if I...? Am I lighter if I grab my buttocks and help lift it? Are you there? Should I

jump? Where should I jump to? Will you have this dance? What does this look like? How heavy is this? How long can I hold my legs up? How low can I go? Can I touch my toes? (How do they know what time it is? Would an alien touching down in this space right now, with fifty people sitting in a semi-circle watching in silence as two men in street clothes contort themselves, wonder what strange church this is?) How big was it? Where's the wall? (Why did I have that cafe eclair right before the show? Does anyone hear my stomach grumbling?) Where am I? (Where am I?) Can you do the Twist? Can you twist like this? What's that over there? How does this feel? Where was I? How long can I hold this position? I -- oops, what's that? How did I get like this? (How can someone be so self-contained?) What did I just do to my back? How can I get out of this? Was that a police siren? Wonder if it's coming for me? How can I keep my balance with my tummy pressed to the floor and my head lifted? Can I hold it until the end of the show? What if I do this? Hello? (How would Ben react if he were seeing this? What does the woman next to me think? What if she can read English? Who can read your handwriting?) How long can I walk like this? (What would R. think of THIS process? Would she still be able to be diplomatic? OR would her foot be tapping relentlessly? Why is Jonathan smiling? Are they finally going to dance together? What would Deborah Jowitt write about this?) What does he want? Can I serve him? Can we have a time-out? Could I interrupt him Can I park here? (Will people get exasperated because I'm not really describing the actual movement? Will they think this approach is meant to be sarcastic?) Let's see if I can wiggle under here? (Why are they collaborating? How are they collaborating? Where are the pictures? Did I just inadvertently imitate the Danish guy, Ritsema? Is it more presumptuous to tell people what I'm thinking, or to presume what the performers are thinking? Oops, they just walked out the door while I was writing that -- is it over? They're clapping -- does that mean they liked it?) ....As I wandered out of the theater and back onto the Champs Elysees, the contrast was almost overwhelming -- after the simple excavations of Burrows and Ritsema, I wasn't quite ready yet to return to the over-the-top, almost grotesque extravagance of that boulevard, which has almost become a tourist-ridden parody of what it once must have been in simpler times. Passing the Louis Vuitton boutique, I spied a private party within. I knew at once that I much preferred the private party I was coming from; I also marvelled at how lucky we are to inhabit, in dance, a world which welcomes in one week, in just one of its capitals, both the extravagance and opulence of the Palais Garnier, Roland Petit's "Notre-Dame de Paris," and the finely turned out dancers of the Paris Opera Ballet and the skeletal sketches with bones of Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema.

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