

Thursday, August 30, 2012

A Spring (two) matter (performed 29 August)

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A Spring (two) matter
Photo: Val Adamson

By: Bronwyn Botha

An all-white stage. Three dark figures appear, their faces not visible. The sound of heartfelt pleas for the return of something gone draws you in as two female dancers start their contact work.

Igor Stravinsky's iconic music from *A Rite of Spring* is a driving force in Jens van Daele's refreshing collaboration with artists from Holland (Patricia van Deutekom), SA (Flatfoot Dance Company), France and Switzerland (musicians making up Ensemble Batida). This "love project" as Lliane Loots, artistic director of Flatfoot Dance Company called it, deals with the internal struggle of a human being attempting to allow positive and negative thoughts and actions to work harmoniously side-by-side. African drums, on which the dancers perch, surround the perimeter of the set, a reference perhaps to African custom and ritual, an event happening in a sacred space.

The live beat of the big drums belonging to the musicians sends the intense energy of this struggle of duality on stage into the audience, leaving us on the edge of our seats with anticipation.

The three female dancers, in dark blue costumes, embody aggression; they gasp and choke in the air while the dislocated movements of their bodies are in direct contrast to the three male performers, dressed in light grey, whose movements are more playful and uplifting in spirit.

Van Daele has chosen to fragment Stravinsky's music to suit the non-linear performance. Emotions spring back and forth with the constant building and breaking of the music which drives this internal struggle.

The dark female figures become more intoxicating, casting disturbing shadows on the bare wall while the movement of the light figures counter-balance the atmosphere. A sensation of suffocation is experienced as the audience holds their breath completely drawn into the ritualistic, repetitive movement of the performers; their chants overpowering the sound of the drums.

As the positive infiltrates the negative, and male and female dancers pair up for the first time, the movements change to become more trusting until the women break out into a series of repetitive phrases with very jarring movement. Two break away with a resolution, "Stop!", leaving one to continue with her eternal fight.

In the same sense that Stravinsky's *A Rite of Spring* was considered unorthodox in 1913, van Daele's *A Spring (two) matter* is unorthodox by its use of fragmentation. I welcome this disruption as the music approaches its 100-year anniversary, and enjoyed the refreshing and exciting collaborative work.



Patricia van Deutekom, Lerato Lipere and Julia Wilson in A Spring (two) matter

Photo: Val Adamson

Rites, Ritual and Re-imagining

By: Caitlin Perkins

Three women stand huddled together, writhing hypnotically, their painful movements magnified by the vast shadows cast up on the wall behind them. A feeling of dread fills the pit of my stomach, and the tension in the room becomes almost unbearable as a sense of inevitable darkness looms.

As the dancers' movements become more frenzied and build to a climax, two of the dancers exit – leaving the final dancer thrashing about violently on the floor. This disturbing image perhaps echoes the original narrative of Nijinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, upon which this production draws - that of the sacrificial virgin dancing to her death.

A Spring (two) matter is an exciting collaboration between artists from four different countries. Dutch choreographer Jens van Daele has worked with our local Flatfoot Dance Company and piano and percussion quartet, Ensemble BATIDA, whose members are from France and Switzerland. The work is characterised by Van Daele's distinctive physicality and technically-demanding dance vocabulary.

A Spring (two) matter looks at the idea of the struggle between the positive and the negative which exists within each one of us; the yin and the yang of our beings, and how these two aspects interact and co-exist. Van Daele also raises questions about gender stereotypes, by reversing the roles that we would usually expect to see played by men and women. Within the work, the female dancers' movements are floor-bound and violent, and they wear boots, which make harsh stamping sounds as they dance. This is sharply juxtaposed with the male dancers' bare feet and their athletic but graceful contact and aerial work.

The innovative deconstruction of Stravinsky's iconic discordant score works hand in hand with the choreography to create a ritualistic, and at times, overwhelming tenor within the piece. The musicians are present on stage throughout the work and are engaging performers in their own right. The audience is witness to the organic relationship between the musicians and the dancers, as their energies feed off each other during the performance, creating moments of thrill and angst for those watching.

A Spring (two) matter is a fascinating piece of dance theatre, which captivates the audience emotionally, by drawing them into Stravinsky's re-imagined legacy, and asking them to reflect upon the ever-shifting power dynamics which exist within, and between, each one of us.



Sifiso Khumalo, Sifiso Majola and Tshediso Kabulu in *A Spring (two) matter*
Photo: Val Adamson

The duality of one

By: Thobe Molefe

Musical instruments are neatly placed on the side, bright lights are dimmed, bodies walk onto the stage, music and a "love letter" commences. A love letter, spoken by Lerato Lipera, not to one's significant other but to oneself asking for the duality to co-exist.

A Spring (two) matter uses the iconic music from Stravinsky's *A Rite of Spring* as a springboard for new ideas such as the struggle between one's positive and negative selves is greater than we can imagine. *A Spring (two) matter* tries to articulate that a balance is what we are always trying to obtain. Three rhythmic, ritualistic female bodies dance out the beat with loud breathing and stamping of hands and feet. The men offer quieter movements, contrasting with the explosive sounds of the female bodies.

Three by three, mostly in two constant circles, the dancers danced, never meeting but always gazing at one another as if in an attempt to find the balance.

The dancers showed immense technical training and diversity of movement. There were acrobatic elements combined with contemporary catch and release elements with dancers springing from the floor and leaping into the arms of partners.

Whether they were dancing to the loud thud of the drums or the carefully caressed piano, the dancers showed immense awareness of the live music and the audience, likewise, seemed immersed in the performance, some softly verbalising their appreciation.

In the midst of all of the hard-hitting movements came a moment where the music made me want to move my body and tap my feet to the rhythm that was made with the bodies and mouths of the dancers.

There is a moment of cohesion between the men and women but it is interrupted. The positive self (Sifiso Majola) walks to the front of the stage, whistling is heard, he raises his arm and then lets it drop, the music ceases and there's a blackout.