

Wry Diptych By a Smart Fellow

Dialogue. Choreography: Jan Martens. Dance: Truus Bronkhorst and Jan Martens (*BIS*), and Joke Emmers (*La Bête*). 23/5, Theater Kikker, Utrecht. Tour dates: janmartens.com

'A screaming woman on a stool.' That's how one spectator saw the dance solo by Truus Bronkhorst. But *BIS* is infinitely more than that. It's an ardent love torch, parting grief, struggle with age, inexhaustible energy: it's Truus Bronkhorst (61). For decades, she was the standard-bearer of expressionist dance in the Netherlands, until her subsidy ended in 2005. Now she's back on the stage from time to time.

Bronkhorst is 'solo one' in *Dialogue*, the new double bill by young choreographer Jan Martens (28), who surprised us with a diptych of duets earlier this season.

Bronkhorst's solo *BIS* has a woman aggressively chalking words onto the backdrop from right to left, her marked face looking significantly older than her body. 'Come back' (3 x), 'Stay' (2 x), 'Leave' (1 x), 'Please' (1 x). You read from it the confusion that her relationship, her life in the theatre, has gone through.

Young Martens, who symbolizes Bronkhorst's past, drags her across the floor before leaving her on her own. In her black-lace body she hoists herself onto a stool, like a swimmer climbing the high board. And then, first with a tentative and incredulous 'oh', the great moaning and lamenting begins. The 'ah's chill you to the bone. Here's a bird that's lost the ability to fly.

BIS is crystal clear, devoid of embellishment, and it can do without the music (*Is That All There Is*) that is played at a certain moment. To put it bluntly: that turns it into kitsch. Martens gently lifts his dancer from the stool and lays out a pair of warm socks for her. This beautiful purity should have been enough.

Solo two, *La Bête*, could be characterised as a performance by a flabby girl wearing hot pants and a red bra who blasts Bette Midler's *The Rose* into the auditorium whilst moving awkwardly. It must be said that actress Joke Emmers, too, (23, familiar as the nurse-apprentice in the TV series *Charlie*) is much more than that. Not only is she the perfect complement to Bronkhorst with this famous song about hope and faith in love, but the way she sings it – slowed down, cut up, distorted, with the pumped-up volume in a predominantly masculine bass register – taken in combination with her appearance, which falls short of the standard beauty ideal, also comes together with Bronkhorst and her wry performance.

Martens is a smart fellow.

Spring Festival