

**DANCE** | DANCE REVIEW

Workouts for the Mind, Dressed in Cheeky Humor

Jan Martens Brings Cheeky Dances to the Abrons Arts Center

By **BRIAN SEIBERT** SEPT. 28, 2014

The Dutch choreographer Jan Martens does not put on airs. At the Abrons Arts Center on Friday, he introduced himself to New York in shorts and sneakers, sitting onstage taking selfies with a laptop. The images were projected on the wall behind him, along with the words he typed: a list of 10 fairly simple things he was attempting in the solo he was performing.

This was “Ode to attempt,” the first of two works he brought to the Queer New York International Arts Festival. The piece was funny in a cute, mostly winning fashion. The frame cleverly lowered the stakes, but there was more to the work than its light humor.

Mr. Martens built a little dance out of an athletic vocabulary of lunges and windmilling arms. It changed character when he added speed-metal accompaniment. His “attempt to have an interlude” began as a joke but acquired a lovely sketched-in quality, free in rhythm. The “attempt to go minimal” worked by accumulation, culminating in a jig step, and the bouncing took on new emphasis when he repeated it with his shorts pulled down.

That was Mr. Martens’s “attempt to be provocative (in a fun way),” and the piece was fun, if also too easy. “Easy” would be harder to apply, though, to “The Dog Days Are Over.” This second piece did begin simply, with eight dancers in running clothes tying on running shoes. They stood in a line, as jiggling grew into bouncing and then into hopping. For the rest of the 70-minute work, the hopping barely ceased.

This endurance was emphasized comically with multiple false endings. The dancers stopped dead still, only to start up again in perverse leaping. The lights dimmed and rose, music came and went, but the hopping persisted, subsiding momentarily and rebounding as if it were some addiction or drug-resistant

malady.

It was durational dance as a killer workout, which Mr. Martens cheekily acknowledged halfway through by having the dancers pass around the role of instructor, shouting out counts and steps. Variations gradually broke in on the hopping in shifting formations, and though the vocabulary remained that of an aerobics class, the dance became complex, going in and out of unison, doubling and tripling tempo, altering accents and layering rhythms. The performers' workout was as mental as it was physical.

And yet boredom remained part of the point, a boredom I passed through on the way to incredulous admiration. The doggedness is provocative. Why do something like this? What does it mean? You could take it as an indictment of contemporary dance or audience complicity, but I preferred the reading given by the avuncular consul general of the Netherlands Consulate General in New York, who spoke between the pieces: “Stop walking your dog and do a little physical exercise.”

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