

“Long drawn-out ode to love,” Moos van den Broek, *Theaterkrant*, 06.10.2016.
<https://www.theaterkrant.nl/recensie/sweat-baby-sweat/jan-martens/>

Long drawn-out ode to love

by Moos van den Broek, seen 6 October 2012



Young Flemish choreographer Jan Martens is certainly not short of a bit of support. Over the next few years, he will further develop his work in coproduction with no less than three producers: ICK, Frascati Productions and the new dance development structure in the province of Brabant. His latest production, *Sweat Baby Sweat*, richly justifies the faith placed in him. Surrender to the long drawn-out poses of Martens' slow duet brings a poignant release overflowing with inexpressible emotion.

Sweat Baby Sweat is a production characterized by stunning simplicity. Not only are the movements of the two young dancers pared-down and sober, but so is the light that initially falls from high above the grid, which during the piece gradually creates a landscape of shadows. Following a lingering embrace, dancer Kimmy Ligtoet's upper body arches backwards until she is hanging upside down, her legs firmly locked around the hips of dancer Steven Michel. Incredibly slowly – you can almost hear the stomach muscles tensing – she lifts herself again, then hangs around her partner's neck for a while, all in ultra-gradual, controlled motion. This is how the pair move, from pose to pose, constantly stuck together, an hour long. Pure yoga.

Sweat Baby Sweat has a clear dynamic and no physical climax. But these acrobatic poses do take their toll. Sweating and at times also trembling, the couple hang together – letting go is simply not an option. This duet is also a mental tour de force. A text projected on the back wall illustrates their commitment to one another: *As long as you are here, I am too.*

Jaap van Keulen has composed a sophisticated, lovely soundscape, which at times builds but then ebbs away again, leaving silences. As the duo gradually and rhythmically drift apart, upper bodies first softly undulating, followed by the rest, Martens cleverly uses the song by American singer-songwriter Cat Power, the first line of which we already knew, to great effect as a commentary.

A sweet, repeated tune, Powers' song repeats the duet all over again. This story of love is one built up of clichés, familiar from the many song titles that are projected on the screen. The way text and music take over is a stroke of genius; the seriousness of the floor is traded for a sense of perspective and emotion. Martens has previously analysed love in *A small guide on how to treat your lifetime companion*, a duet in which he danced himself. In this second duet, he goes much further and is able through consistent choices to dexterously remould the clichés that lie in wait. *Sweat Baby Sweat* is a simple, poetic production brimming with emotion.

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