

Fiery Shakespeare In Dance

Fragments from compiled works inspire child-like playfulness

By Marc Couwenburgh

preview performance seen in the Goudse Schouwburg, Gouda

Shakespeare's dramas and comedies are chock-full of love, intrigue, and betrayal. So *SHAKESPEARE SHUFFLE*, a dance performance for young audiences by MEEKERS Outspoken Dance, is fierce and furious.

In the numerous fight scenes, the power and agility of the four male and two female dancers make ones' blood curdle with realism.

That is, until one of them disarms the situation by calmly remarking, "We've fought enough now, don't you think?" And that makes it clear that this is, after all, just a play. A play, furthermore, that resembles a children's game.

Meekers Outspoken Dance, from Rotterdam, has over the years built a name with dance performances for young audiences about subjects from the world of grown-ups. And the dancers also use their mouths to express themselves, as the name of the company somewhat cryptically indicates. The texts usually serve only to introduce a situation. Dance and mimicry tell the real story.

As the title "Shakespeare Shuffle" implies, the American Dutch choreographer Arthur Rosenfeld has no pretensions about actually performing or explaining Shakespeare's plays. The whole is a collage of loose quotes and characters out of Shakespeare's works that inspire the dancers to play as children do. This child-like playfulness is time and again packed in a powerful choreography. The humor lies above all in the slapstick scenes.

Like the moment when two enamoured lovers treat each other to progressively nastier expressions of affection, from tapping to kicking, and from pinching to pulling each others' ears. One is reminded of famous scenes from the silent movies. And the audience's reaction is evidence that it never bores.

The visual power of the performance is amplified by the sophisticated set, consisting of a number of pieces that are turned and rotated to create many new possibilities for the dancers. They can disappear behind them, walk into and through them, or hide under them.

The performance is fast-paced, but there are also beautiful, hushed moments. Like the one in which the dancers are drawn to crowns hung high above them. They hesitate momentarily, but then set the crowns on their heads. The pleasure of wearing the crown is short-lived. Before long they wriggle to the ground under the weight of their crowns, captured by madness.

And that is pure Shakespeare, for once without saying a single word. This "Shakespeare Shuffle" is worthy of the Bard.