

Press review

Les Gestes

VAN GRIMDE CORPS SECRETS

Direction artistique | Isabelle Van Grimde

LE DEVOIR, March 14, 2013

Dance – Superb communion of music and choreography

Frédérique Doyon | Dance

Les Gestes

Choreographer: Isabelle Van Grimde

Composers: Sean Ferguson, Marlon Schumacher

Created with and danced by: Sophie Breton, Soula Trougakos

Created with and performed by: Elinor Frey (cello), Marjolaine Lambert (violin)

At Agora de la danse until March 16.

This research and creation project is eminently well conceived. With *Les Gestes*, choreographer Isabelle Van Grimde has orchestrated a sensory experience that goes well beyond a simple dialogue between dance and music, between body and instrument, technology and art.

Stemming from a three-year collaboration with CIRMMT (Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Music Media and Technology), invented digital instruments are manipulated or attached to the bodies of the dancers. Ethereal harmonies, never too cold or cerebral, emanate from them according to the axis and curvature of the gestures and friction applied by the dancers and musicians. Intertwined with these sounds are contemporary scores for violin and cello.

On a stage open on four sides, which will serve as a screen for magnificent geometric projections, the invented instruments—sinuous spinal columns, rib-shaped arcs, visors—lie on the floor, luminous, glowing in the dark like precious stones. An almost nude dancer explores one of them with her fingertips, like an animal probing a foreign body, then coils it, brushes against it, or attaches it to her body, triggering strange harmonies with her danced movements.

The body and movements on the floor, slightly feline or equine, envelop the unfathomable sonorities, forging an intimate—even primal—relationship with these instruments of the future.

In the following scene, the musicians and dancers merge with the sounds they generate. When they return with their violin and cello, the title of the work takes on its meaning: there is a superb communion of gestures here—those of the bodies (dancers and musicians), and those of the sounds as well. For what we are seeing, in the final analysis, is a performance whose technological support is both intelligible and poetic, presenting music that can be seen and dance that can be heard. Although we briefly feel the choreographic limits imposed by the technical paraphernalia, we also quickly realize that the work's significance lies beyond the choreography, in the realm between dance and music.

LES GESTES @ AGORA

March 14, 2013 by *dirtydirtyfeet*



@ Michael Slobodian

As technology becomes more and more ingrained in our daily lives, questions about this relationship between humans and their machines appear at an ascending rate in the artistic process of many creators. This is especially true when it comes to a creator who gets the opportunity to spend some time with new technologies and how they can be applied to the performing arts. In literature, especially science-fiction, transhumanism is a term that comes back often, an ideal where humanity uses technological developments to enhance the disputably flawed nature of its existence. The use of technology in arts, much like the cyborgs in many science-fiction books, can become problematic in the ethical questions that can arise from the mix between organic and synthetic matter, things such as the possibility and desirability of eternal life, the loss of a primarily human identity, the existence of a soul and a higher power, and such. In performing arts though, one of the major questions I ask myself when I see works that do include the use of technology is whether it is used to enhance the work, or is it the only reason for the work to exist, a crutch almost.

In Isabelle Van Grimde's latest piece, *Les Gestes*, the members of the audience are bound to ask themselves this question, and that's a good thing. With the lack of funding for the arts, the restricted access to these new technologies for emerging artists and the way they can be used as gimmicks rather than bring forth valid questions. For *Les Gestes*, the choreographer has been collaborating with composers Sean Ferguson and Marlon Schumacher and the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Music Media and Technology, affiliated with McGill University's Schulich School of Music. The interplay between music and bodies is central to the work, connected thanks to the use of digital musical instruments that function through captors, body-mapping and programming to create a soundscape that evolves with the movement of the bodies in space.

At the beginning of the piece, there are some blue lights shining in the space, coming from plastic forms lying on the floor. Sophie Breton makes her way to one of them, picks it up, creating a flurry of sounds. The contraption looks like a synthetic spine. She plays with it in a way reminiscent of the apes at the beginning of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, trying to understand its function and all the life-affirming questions that lay within. Her movement is close to the ground and connected to this new interface, a sort of technosimian. She is joined by Soula Trougakos as both strap the different contraptions to their bodies. There are also curved bands reminiscent of ribs which also produce sound elements. They are later joined on the stage by two musicians, a violinist and a cellist, who play their string instruments and, at times, play the dancers as new cyborg-like instruments. The dancers use on repeat a somewhat limited number of movement sequences that they perform with great virtuosity, so much so that it does make you question what's left of their humanity. Through this physical excellence, is the machine taking over?

I rarely pay much attention to lighting, but in the case of *Les Gestes*, I found that Bruno Raffie's choices, although there's nothing here that's never been done before, do add a lot to the mood created on stage, allowing the lights coming out of the contraptions to play an integral role while sometimes lighting the floor much more openly so that the dancers' movement can be seen with ease. At one point in particular, through the use of gobos, he creates a pattern on the floor, a grid reminiscent of a microchip, which he later crossfades with a different pattern that looks more like tree branches. This tension between synthetic and organic is really what's at the core of the work for me, much more than the relationship between dancing bodies and music. There is something that is sad, watching *Les Gestes*, something cold about the disappearing humanity of those seen on stage, but it functions incredibly well in our modern context where machines and technology are taking over interpersonal relationships, a barrier that is perceived to be a more fruitful conductor, yet only detaches us from one another. In *Les Gestes*, technology is not something that is a gimmick to be used for our entertainment; it has already taken over.

- J.D. Papillon

-

Isabelle Van Grimde presents *Les Gestes* at Agora de la Danse, 840 rue Cherrier in Montreal. The show is being presented from March 13th to March 15th at 8pm and March 16th at 4pm. Tickets are 20\$ for students and RQD members, 22\$ for seniors and 28\$ at regular price.

You can listen to the Dirty Feet podcast on the No More Radio network by clicking [here](#).

Category : Dance, J.D.

Tags : agora de la danse, Isabelle Van Grimde, Les Gestes, Marlon Schumacher, Sean Ferguson, Van Grimde Corps Secrets

Blog at WordPress.com. Theme: Customized Triton Lite by Towfiq I.

La Presse, March 15, 2013

Les Gestes: Technologically Organic

Aline Apostolska, Special collaboration

With her latest work, choreographer Isabelle Van Grimde is cultivating a new patch of the territory that she has long been exploring: the fusion of body and music. She succeeds here in creating a spellbinding union, in which the danced gesture becomes an instrument and the music a bodily mass. *Les Gestes* is an inspired piece, technologically organic and organically riveting.

The audience is seated by a four-sided stage whose perimeter is lined with low-angled spotlights (lighting designed by Bruno Rafie). The space of Agora de la danse is deconstructed, devoid of any familiar spatio-temporal references.

Slipping into this space are two statuesque female forms, dancers Soula Trougakos and Sophie Breton. With surgical precision, they perform the recognizable gestures of Isabelle Van Grimde: the amplitude of limbs, the geometric lines fuelled by rapid-fire, impulsive energy.

Joining them on stage are two musicians, cellist Elinor Frey and violinist Marjolaine Lambert. An elegant quartet is thus formed, which performs variations on the themes of the female mystique and cutting-edge technology.

While the musicians play age-old instruments, the dancers use totally new instruments: very beautiful objects, sleek, transparent, illuminated from within by blue-tinted light. On the bodies of the dancers, they become a curving spinal column, the wings of a bird, the fins of a killer whale or horns of a unicorn.

In fact, these are technological beasts, created for the occasion by Montreal's Input Devices and Music Interaction Laboratory (IDMIL), for a composition by Sean Ferguson and Marlon Schumacher. Through their choice of gestures, the dancers trigger a range of intriguing and variable sounds, in a veritable hand-to-hand combat with the sounds of the violin and cello. Thus igniting the combined powers of music and dance.

In seeing them, listening to them, we feel as if we are slipping into some unexplored galaxy. Or into a ladies' chamber from some mysterious mediaeval epic. Unless, that is, we sense what is unchangingly human. The only certitude: this union of body and digital technology is totally enthralling.

Les Gestes, by Isabelle Van Grimde, until March 16 at Agora de la danse.