



REvolutions 2349

ARCO RENZ & DANIELLE ALLOUMA

Spinning away



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In 'REvolutions 2349,' choreographer Arco Renz and dancer Danielle Allouma aim to explore the radical potential of rotation, of a body circling at a hallucinating pace. The title relates to the frequency 2349, which corresponds to the French musical note 'ré' (D in English). This lingering note (which, as all notes could equally be imagined as a vibrating, circular revolution) combined with the circular dance method of Allouma, form the guiding elements of the piece, transforming dance into a language of relentless spins.

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There's something more than a little bit daunting about attending a performance when the programme proudly announces that the dancer will 'pull off the feat of spinning on herself for what seems like an infinite amount of time'. There's something more than a little bit daunting about entering a hot dark room, sitting down in the typical plush but never actually comfortable seats of a theatre auditorium, surrounded by the claustrophobic presence of the bodies that together amount to a public, and wait to be subject to this ordeal for a full hour. Yet time is a funny thing. Maybe it is not as linear as we tend to assume. In any case, this hour did not go on infinitely and it certainly did not repeat itself for all its circular revolutions.

In any case, the performance does seem to follow a trend of this year's Les Brigittines' 'International Festival'. It begins in complete darkness, placing the audience in a state of apprehensive anticipation (or at least, so I imagine). The (RÉ)petitive score, which subtly starts pulsating in the background, lulls us into a hypnotic state. As blue lights gradually reveal the shadowy figure of Allouma spinning in the darkness within a small white square, the simple organic naturalness of her first rotations almost feels like a relief. A single figure in a skin-coloured bodysuit and half a blouse (initially) covering her breast, hands at her sides, revolving on herself, a step forward, a step back: everything is minimalist,

as if the real revolution lies in doing the same actions over and over.

As the performance builds with admirable patience, I imagine I'm not the only one questioning why I volunteered to sit through an hour of these ungodly revolutions. While being in the presence of someone performing such a physical feat does inspire a sense of sporting awe, I can't help but suspect the dancer is enjoying an altogether more intense experience. Her ankle joints striking the floor at acute angles several times a second, the muscles in her legs and arms constantly contracting and releasing, her neck straining, her breath holding the rhythm while her eyes stare wildly at specific points for milliseconds at a time to keep balance and retain consciousness. For her, the one hour must certainly feel like an eternity. 60 minutes which is 60 seconds amounting to innumerable powerful strikes and painful blows.

To her credit, Allouma introduces enough variations in her self-imposed ordeal to keep our attention going. Her hands rise, her elbows bend, her head tilts back, the music intensifies, she stops, screams, returns our gaze...—and our attention is over and over (and over) (and over) again pulled back in. The atmosphere, both eerie and serene, is heightened by the shadows falling on the side walls multiplying the swirling movements around her, and the dust that floats around the stage from the incessant strikes and steps on the sand-filled floor. Lighting plays an important role, shifting from soft strobes to what one might describe as lightning bolts. The play on perception is quite remarkable. In the changing light, my attention shifts between Allouma's feet and hands, or the swirling body in the central axis, never quite capturing her whole body or form. The continuous movement makes it impossible to capture the entire movement or get a complete picture. This sense of fragmentation, combined with the aural developments from sounds resembling a broken TV to the tingling of bells and a polyphonic chorus of 'ré', creates a captivating dynamism that shakes things up just enough to keep us from drifting away.

It's certainly an experience that leaves a lasting, if slightly bewildering, impression.

At one point, Allouma breaks free of her square, spinning wildly across the stage, her long, dishevelled hair now unpinned and flowing freely. For a moment, it reminds me of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's famous 'Violin Solo' from *Fase*. After all, Arco Renz, the choreographer of this piece, was part of the first generation at PARTS. Yet, the strict geometric precision of Keersmaeker's flowery figures dissolves here into raw, untamed organic energy. This burst of energy, a stark contrast to the earlier subdued movements, feels like a release—not just for her, but for the audience as well. She shouts, almost attacking our senses, a moment of freed intensity that seems to finally convey something, though what exactly remains unclear. I wonder to what extent the performance succeeds to go beyond the mere display of extraordinary skill and endurance. Somehow it seems that the revelation remains always marginally beyond my grasp, always one more dizzying revolution away.

Finally, just as the repetitions get repetitive and I realize with alarm that a circle—per definition—is without an end, she slows down to pick up a gold-flickering metallic-looking grid hanging from the wall. She drapes the grid over her body like a cape or like wings, and with the shimmering reflections of the fabric only visible from a particular angle as she rotates, it feels like a 21st-century nod to Loïe Fuller. Yet, by now, Allouma's simple prop does not recapture my

imagination. Fortunately, soon the performance concludes in the same darkness it began, leaving the audience to imagine Allouma spinning away into the void. When the lights return, she has vanished, only to return for well-deserved resounding applause.

The questions keep coming, and returning—why revolution, and what revolution? Maybe a dancer rotating in a circle of herself for a full hour is merely stating the obvious: time as we perceive it is circular as the clock and the calendar. The fulfilment of one revolution portends the start of a second one. Seemingly equal, but all the same a new beginning, a new start carries with it the momentum from the past and can therefore never return, never be quite the same. Alas, time is a circular dimension, but how interesting can it be to be sitting stagnant witnessing the circular revolutions of time in a dancer?

Whether it amounts to a profound meditation or merely a very long pirouette with a question mark, it's certainly an experience that leaves a lasting, if slightly bewildering, impression. As the day ends, and a new one begins, same but different, and we keep furiously moving, yet numbingly stagnant, that might be the most fitting end after all.