

Choreomania

METTE INGVARTSEN + P.A.R.T.S. STUDENTS

The Frenzy of P.A.R.T.S. Generation XIV



Marina Srnka
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‘Choreomania’, a performance choreographed by Mette Ingvartsen with Manon Santkin and Thomas Bîrzan, is the culmination of the three-year bachelor programme of forty-odd members of the XIVth Generation of P.A.R.T.S. students. As such, ‘Choreomania’ is an undeniably ambitious, fully student-driven performance exploring the contagious affinities of emotions in their slow swell from laughter to pain to ecstasy to a final triumphant eruption.

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A sunny Sunday in late June may seem a perilous time to stage a complex, at times subtly quiet and lyrical dance performance in the middle of Ostend beach. Yet, neither the drowsily curious beachgoers passing by nor the dubstep-loving DJ blasting the doors of the nearby hippodrome could break the concentration of this generation of P.A.R.T.S. students in their graduation piece.

For a performance called ‘Choreomania’, the slow-paced opening is unexpected and intriguing. Ultimately, the gradually evolving tableaux of forty black-clad performers dressed in garments ranging from urban queer pieces to dark mystical coats, long dresses, and hoodies is a very aesthetically pleasing contrast to the white sand and blue skies at Ostend’s Sports beach. Our chairs sink into the sand as the audience forms a large, two-row square. The dancers move with deliberate slowness to an equally soothing score: four taps repeating in a loop. Bodies touch, briefly, or climb the black speakers scattered across the sand. Some stand. Some crawl. At times they cluster in the centre, poker-faced: Berlin collides with the desert (think Villeneuve’s Dune). Hands rise to shield their eyes from a sun that is both here and elsewhere, as if searching, as if bracing. Mouths open slowly. A hum begins. The renaissance-chanson ‘Je Prends Congie’ by Nicolas Gombert is brilliantly rendered by the students with a backing track that catches the wind, until voices join in a fragile, impressive chorus, sometimes isolating a single voice in the collective. It is emotionally charged, enigmatic and obscure. Yet, it is a long accumulation of tension, as a repressed ecstasy presses

against its own containment. After a while I start feeling disheartened every time I hear the loop repeat itself as the drawn-out tableaux stretches through most of the performance, moving forward and backward between clearly defined emotions.

As they continue, the dramaturgical forward motion is carried through bodies and gazes, where each gesture becomes conscious of the next nearby body, creating nuances of mass interactions: sometimes they will mirror each other, sometimes a simple hug or brush emerges from a passerby, slow and controlled. The focus gradually shifts to expressions and emotions: joy, pain and anger are embodied on dancers' faces, attentively pushing towards an outburst. Some of them are clutched in despair, heads bent, stomachs gripped, hands grasping for each other. A collective mass suffering and trembling. A sexual energy crawling in between, lurking. In an emblematic imagery, they all point hands to the girl standing on one of the black boxes, evoking a baroque panorama. It makes me think of Géricault's 'The Raft of the Medusa'.

Their faces make grimaces, in successive scenes that go between excessive sadness and rage, disturbance and enlightenment as if they possess a certain knowledge accessible only to them, through their corporeality. This, sometimes, unfortunately comes too close to the limits of ridiculous. It's hard to perform excessive emotions, it's hard to escape the obvious realm of performativity. (For instance, performances that manage to choreograph and perform laughter in a convincing manner are few and far between). Thematically, the excessive performativity of some gestures is not problematic. After all the paradoxical relationship between fake and real, authenticity and ruse, is at the heart of both choreomania - the historical phenomenon of a sudden, largely shared urge to dance until exhaustion that often occurred in the late Middle Ages - and of hysteria, which might be considered as its younger sibling.

Bodies tipping into dance craze, the collective hunger to twitch and dissolve.

After the long build-up, the sudden transformation into rapid movement is highly effective as the music turns faster. The trembling affect coursing through the bodies increases. One by one, they drop, they begin to dance: manic, feverish. Screams split the air, dog-like whines thread through adolescent fury and bursts of joy. Headbanging. Jumping. Running. Fists clenched like fighters. Given the theme, it's no surprise that the work culminates in a 'mad dance' scene. This is predictable, but precise in its staging of the contemporary rave: everything you would expect, bodies tipping into dance craze, the collective hunger to twitch and dissolve.

The longing for communal experiences has turned almost into an imperative within contemporary dance. When one crisis collapses into another, emergency becomes habit, war bleeds into the everyday background noise and Instagram scrolls, the beats grow louder, louder still; they want dance, the wilder, the more unhinged, the better. A need for noise, for sweat, for the promise of forgetting our worries at least for a moment. Yet, this imperative leaves behind a particular problem: how can one produce this shared feverish frenzy within the controlled environment of the performance space without turning it into just another product to consume? Although Ingvartsen's recent work, '*Delirious Night',* tackled a similar theme of dancing mania, it never truly erupted into collective, chaotic liberation. It staged a social body supposedly resisting the conformity of late capitalism yet ended up mimicking its machinery: each dancer allotted their

square of space to perform their 'unique individuality'. *'Choreomania'* escapes this trap, though maybe only accidently. There are simply too many students for such neat separations, making the idea of highlighting individuals impossible. However, this constraint becomes its strength. The excess of bodies, the refusal of tidy spacing, allows '*Choreomania'* to slip, if only for a moment, into a more sincere, uncontrolled communal expression that '*Delirious Night'* could only timidly imitate.