pzazz

Petty Bison

THOMAS VANTUYCOM

Boundless pleasure

Oonagh Duckworth

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Rosas Performance Space, Vorst (Brussel) in het kader van 164VANVOLXEMOPENING FESTIVAL

Four dancers amble in, costumed in what could be Casual Friday office wear — Petty Bison starts off as seemingly sober but soon whirls us into a world of movement so liberating that we can, even seated far back in the auditorium, feel the wind in our hair.

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The four begin poised: a formal group in one corner of the stage. Standing in silence, their long shadows accentuate their different heights, choreographer Thomas Vantuycom being the tallest by at least a head. The bright lights switch off momentarily and then flick back on, photo-style. The group has rearranged itself: a different shape on another part of the immense, white RPS stage. This happens a few times; the mood is serene but serious, and I'm already seeking out a code, a pattern, a structure that is bound to repeat. We are, after all, in the Rosas Performance Space during the 164VANVOLXEMOPENING FESTIVAL, and Vantuycom is not only a PARTS graduate but spent four years as a dancer with the company — and is also a self-confessed maths geek.

But suddenly, the music starts, vibrant and jazzy. Almost out of the blue, a unison springs to life. The nine-to-fivers shed restraint but none of their precision. We're watching sweeping arms, body ripples, knee twists. We don't know which darting dancer to follow, as each one — magnetically playful — stands out as someone you'd like to meet.

Ultra fine-tuned

The brochure explains that the minutiae of the movement have been gleaned from urban dance, but then seem to have been ultra-fine-tuned and appear here woven together in a totally new frequency, whose vibrations fill the theatre wall to wall. What remains, though — and is so deliciously tangible — is that the dance seems to have taken hold of the dancers: they cannot help but move to the music, and their pleasure beckons and becomes ours.

Despite its casual veneer, Petty Bison is scrupulously structured and paced, with Quentin Maes's studied lighting accenting both the work's sharpness and its soft

depth. At times, the movement and music stop altogether and the dancers' hands touch their own or each other's necks, chests or waists. Checking a heart rate? Relieving a pain? Simultaneously self-care and concern for the other? It's a pause that allows a breath to be drawn on stage and compels us to do the same.

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There are also moments when the choreography blurs into a game: Musical Statues (Standbeeldje or Un, deux, trois, soleil) with the sound score in stop-start mode, or one dancer 'shadowing' another. I even think I glimpsed a wink and a mimed golf-club swing — more office than urban, for sure.

By this stage, the outfits are crumpled and sweat-soaked: we feel we know the dancers through and through. And then — spoiler alert — we are treated to a lengthy blast of Dire Straits' Sultans of Swing. Nearly fifty years on, with Mark Knopfler's guitar, it remains an enduringly genius and engaging song, and dancers, Cassandre Cantillon, Louis Nam Le Van Ho, Sara Tan and Thomas Vantuycom himself, miraculously measure up.

In the newly renovated, just-opened Rosas PARTS palatial complex of studios, it was almost possible to forget the troubled outside world. Stepping back into it, Petty Bison offers a precious nugget of beauty, power and elation to hold on to.