

Fúria

LIA RODRIGUES

Something beautiful, powerful and elevating out of the Brazilian mess



Oonagh Duckworth
Gezien op 24 mei 2019
Théâtre National, Brussel
Kunstenfestivaldesarts

Fúria is a journey, a trip, a throbbing, rhythmical, forever-rolling procession that captures our imagination and keeps hold of it until the lights go up.

25 MEI 2019

First we see a heap of fabric and flotsam on the floor. Then, like in a conjuring trick, a shred of sheet, a white ghost, rises higher and higher. We can sense things shifting. Bodies are moving under the wreckage. The sheet unravels and becomes a flag that seems to herald a departure: a land-bound raft made of bodies and debris begins to slide, slowly picking up the momentum of a tide. Then the music starts, pulsating sounds of traditional, New Caledonian Kanack: percussion, whistling, chants. It repeats and repeats, sweeping us along, keeping us riveted to the convoy.

A train of ingenious images, shaped only by the dancers' bodies and a few bits-and-bobs as props or headgear, spool by. Queens riding tigers, suspended, corps-like naked bodies, Amazonian warriors; whole mountains are created out of jumbles of flesh, rivers of detritus wind across the stage. The group metamorphoses before our eyes, often shifting in unison to create the textured, non-static tableaux.

Sometimes individuals, duos or trios break free from the group creating a sub plot, making us double-up our attention. We see a zealous, shaking dancer morph into a lion and the lion into a masked executioner or tyrant king. Scraps of costumes are donned or removed imperceptibly: flesh revealed in its muscular beauty or stripped and mortified — paint plays a part too. Each image, character, creature or action evokes a story whose narrative then dissolves, dream-like, into the next visual verse. They are epic, mythical or worldly but always resonant of human traits and truths: dominance, joyful sexuality, cruelty, resilience…Histories of violence and upheaval, exploitation and overthrowing are never far away.

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As always, Lia Rodrigues devised the work in collaboration with the dancers. There are nine on stage, all charismatic and completely compelling. More than

half live in the Maré favela in Rio de Janeiro where Rodrigues founded a school. The work of Afro-Brazilian poetesses, Conceição Evaristo, born in a favela in Belo Horizonte, was also fundamental to the development of Furia. The 72-year-old writer describes her own poems as *escrevivência*—a mixture of writing and life experience. Here Rodrigues' dancers' forceful bodies seem inhabited by first-hand realities too.

The last scene sends the most overtly political message: a tirade in an imagined language but where references to "Mister Leopold", "La Belgique" and heinous violence leave no mystery to the meaning. The dancer quits the stage through the auditorium and we hear him singing behind us something that sounds like "Somewhere Over the Rainbow'. The cast bow to a standing-ovation bearing banners daubed with "The State Killed Marielle" and "We Want a World without Prejudice". Fúria was created at the time of the last Brazilian elections. Rodrigues and her dancers' response has been to create something beautiful, powerful and elevating out of the mess.