

Jan Lauwers & Needcompany

present

Morning Song

No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part two

Morning Song is dedicated to everyone who still believes in our civilisation and, especially, who sees the humour in it.

Morning Song is the title of Needcompany's next dance-theatre performance and is based on a new stage text by Jan Lauwers.

This performance is the second of the thematic two-part production entitled *No beauty for me there where human life is rare*.

Morning Song is a burlesque dance and voice exercise for eight people and their fates. Gonzalo Cunill, Viviane De Muynck, Misha Downey, Tijen Lawton, Carlotta Sagna, Mil Seghers, Eduardo Torroja and Simon Versnel will dance, act and sing. This exceptional cast of dancers and actors, with 7 nationalities between them, provides this production with an emphatically international character.

No beauty for me there, where human life is rare

Part one: Caligula

Part two: Morning Song

Morning Song is the second of the two-part stage production *No beauty for me there, where human life is rare*, the first part of which, *Caligula*, was created for Documenta X in Kassel in 1997. *Caligula* will be performed in museums of contemporary art this season, and, exceptionally, will also be presented in several cities as **Morning Song**'s twin.

The central topics in Jan Lauwers' interpretation of Albert Camus' *Caligula* are the reflection on contemporary art and the debate on art and beauty.

The subject of this second part is the quest for the meaning of fate and the accompanying human urge for survival.

We already know that the survivors of the disaster in Nicaragua will one day dance again. There is never enough pain to destroy the primal strength to survive.

This is the real beauty of people: their animal urge to survive.

In *No beauty for me there, where human life is rare*, Caligula says:

"People die and are unhappy."

But Helicon replies:

"This truth does not prevent people from enjoying a delicious meal."

In **Morning Song** this theme is explored in greater depth through the story of Liliane Grandiflora's life and family.

It is a tragi-comic account of people who keep on thinking they can change their lives then die.

Eight characters take up arms against their fate, in a burlesque style.

This leads to laughable situations involving what is glorious and exalted, and to a collective quest for the 'human condition', featuring man as the inveterate conjuror of life and artist of survival.

Zorba the Greek dances on the grave of the son who has only just died.

Buster Keaton falls from a moving train.

Here is an extract from the play:

Due to circumstances or by drinking bad wine, the bride choked during the ceremony and ended up in a sub-comatose state.

*Harry, who was afraid of nothing but who saw his fortune disappearing along with her, slapped her brutally in the face, to the great fury of the good-hearted Leonard. **A scuffle broke out, whereby it seemed that all the world's afflictions ended up in the kitchen.** But fortunately Liliane was there to sort things out, by saying that patience is a fine virtue and that, if they would all calm down, Lena would soon be her old self again, since this often happened to her at moments of great strain.*

Morning Song, a new stage text by Jan Lauwers.

Works of world literature, fragments of writing, a quotation, a universal topic... they have all often been a source of inspiration in the creation of Jan Lauwers and Needcompany's plays.

Georges Bataille's analysis of a cave painting in Lascaux led to the writing of his first play, called 'Leda', on which *Le Pouvoir* was based, the second part of *The Snakesong Trilogy*. 'Leda' was selected for the prestigious Bonnerbiennale for contemporary plays and was received with particular enthusiasm abroad. The Swedish critic Amelie Bjorck, for example, wrote: "Viviane De Muynck's monologue at her downfall is as stirring as Hamlet's 'To be or not to be...' This is great art."

For his new play, **Morning Song, a burlesque**, Lauwers drew inspiration from a quotation from a story by the Flemish writer Guido van Heulendonk.

In *Strontium*, van Heulendonk describes the wanderings of a radioactive particle which ultimately ends up, by chance, in the stomach of a certain Harry, whose death it then brings about, before continuing its wanderings.

Bizarre coincidence, fate and the forced frivolity of its victims are also the main themes of Jan Lauwers' play. The story reads like a rapidly written family chronicle and describes the life of Liliane Grandiflora. All the characters are briefly sketched and situated on the family tree and in the end assemble where the action is set, to celebrate a wedding. The tale finishes like a never-ending story.

A fragment:

"On New Year's Eve they had a party, were utterly stoned and drunk and went completely crazy, as people do on New Year's Eve. At midnight Carlos opened the window to look at the fireworks. Eddy told him not to open the window, because he knew the army had been actively searching for revolutionaries in that area. But Carlos was an anarchist and told Eddy it was not important and that he always watched the fireworks. Eddy asked him to shut the window and that if he wanted to watch the fireworks he would have to leave the penthouse.

Eddy was rather bitter about Carlos' opportunistic behaviour and because he had been looking at the young Eugenio too much. Carlos told him to 'go to hell!' and slammed the door behind him. Eddy wanted to shut the window, but deliberately waited, hoping to see Carlos walking across the square below. He saw his body with its elegant movements. Carlos turned, looking up at Eddy, gave him the middle finger sign and laughed loudly.

And then there was that fire rocket that did not go up in the air but flew horizontally, straight into Carlos' mouth. His head turned all colours. He stood on one leg as if he were dancing and fell down on the pavement. 'Carlos', screamed Eddy, but the fireworks made a noise like a bombardment and everyone was having such fun watching this man with a face like a fountain of colours. Eddy could not believe that one fire rocket could last so long."

Morning Song, dance theatre.

Morning Song will be a piece with plenty of dance and music.

Lauwers is assisted by Carlotta Sagna for the choreography.

The music is drawn from the work of Can, Pluramon, Fred Frith, Brise Glace, Calexico, Atahualpa Yupanki *et al.*

The substantial dance element means we can expect a very visual show.

In this respect we would like to refer to Steven Heene's definition of 'visual theatre' as he formulated it at the Thersites Prize award ceremony in 1998:

'Visual' may, conversely, be understood as equal to the force of a successful piece of music, capable of giving an imaginary shape to well-nigh intangible feelings; as the surprise of compelling literature, where there is as much to read between the lines as in them; as the invisible spatiality of a choreography, the equilibrium of refined architecture, the poignancy of soft light at an unexpected moment.

Morning Song will be a play with an emphatically international tone. Not only because of its visual nature but also as a result of the seven different nationalities on stage. This means the language spoken will mostly be English. But as always at Needcompany, verbal fireworks are an inextricable part of the *mise en scène*.

Lauwers builds up his plays round the tensions between word and image, text and gesture, story and movement. In so doing the use of language is played as a trumped card.

Morning Song, what comes after The Snakesong Trilogy?

We brought last season to a close with the full version of *The Snakesong Trilogy*, which may be called Jan Lauwers' *magnum opus*.

Which paths will Lauwers be taking now?

Jurgen Pieters (FWO/University of Ghent):

"It *seems* we have come full circle, but this is by no means true. In autumn 1997 Lauwers took yet another step in his career, when *No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part one* opened at Documenta in Kassel. This production, a radical adaptation of Camus' *Caligula*, certainly made one look forward to the future. Knowing Lauwers, it will be more of the same, but completely different."

In her discussion of *Caligula*, Eva-Elisabeth Fisher (Süddeutsche Zeitung) makes a thematic link:

"In the case of Lauwers' drama, the words spoken by a violinist about the composer B.A. Zimmermann just before interpreting a piece of his music would apply: that he wanted to convey emotions despite all serial technique. Lauwers is able to do that. (...) What was intended as a lecture becomes a captivating, repeatedly interrupted role play. Caligula's cynical attitude to art and life shed light on the killing freedom of being allowed to do anything and actually doing it. In so doing it reveals the very essence of unconstrained abuse of power: Caligula needs to play the lord of the manor, is a fiend to every man, tied to an absurd truth."

And lastly, Jan Lauwers himself has the following to say about **Morning Song**:

"In recent years so many negative matters have come to light, both in my own country (corruption, political incompetence, murdered children, etc.) and all over the world (fascism, genocide) that the belief in the power of beauty sometimes becomes very shaky. But the title of this two-parter is inexorable: if there are no people there is no beauty. It is human things that make life worth living. I hate the beauty of a sunset, I love people's pain. We have dealt at length with that pain and the beauty of scars in *The Snakesong Trilogy*. Now, just like Caligula and the Americans and the Russians, we are going to look for the moon. It will be a burlesque, open quest with a group of exceptional actors and dancers, in which nothing will be certain and everything will be a risk. In spite of that we shall take great pleasure in pushing the rock back up the hill again and take our time going to fetch it when it has thundered back down again devastating everything once more..."

Morning Song, Credits

text & direction:	Jan Lauwers	
choreography:	Carlotta Sagna, Jan Lauwers	
music:	Can, Pluramon, Fred Frith, Brise Glace, Calexico, A. Yupanki	
play:	Liliane Grandiflora Leopold Grandiflora Lena Leonardo Tchi Harry Ushi Delmore Eddy	Viviane De Muynck Mil Seghers Tijen Lawton Simon Versnel Misha Downey Gonzalo Cunill Carlotta Sagna Eduardo Torroja
dance material:	Misha Downey, Tijen Lawton, Eduardo Torroja, Carlotta Sagna	
set:	Jan Lauwers en Carl Gydé	
light concept:	Dries Vercruysse	
sound concept:	André Schneider	
costumes:	Lot Lemm	
production manager:	Carl Gydé	
general assistance:	An Van der Donckt	
technical assistance:	Piet Goosen	
production assistance:	Els Soetaert	
administrator:	Christel Simons	
production:	Needcompany	
co-production:	Théâtre de la Ville (Paris)	
in collaboration with:	Hebbel-Theater (Berlin)	