

EW

Needcompany / Ballett Frankfurt

DeaDDogsDon'tDance

DJamesDjoyceDead

"Man's original genius lies in his scribblings.
The basis of his talent lies in his casual doings."
(James Joyce)

Directing : Jan Lauwers
Music : Dominique Pauwels

With:

Alan Barnes, Allison Brown, Francesca Caroti, Dana Caspersen, Timothy Couchman, Viviane De Muynck, Stephen Galloway, Crystal Pite, Antony Rizzi, Carlotta Sagna, Jone San Martin, Richard Siegal, Sjoerd Vreugdenhil

mupebe kusie

At William Forsythe's request, Lauwers took up the challenge of creating a piece in which the two companies confronted each other. For several weeks Jan Lauwers immersed himself and this group of exceptional performers in the exuberant world of the writer James Joyce.

Lauwers wrote the script for the play together with Viviane De Muynck; about a memory, a farewell, an artist and a woman.

Lauwers is using once more a universal language that crosses borders and leaves thought behind in the silence of images: border images.

"The puddles reflect random snippets that add to the void just enough, and no more, to make an image an image." (J.L.)

Death, which recurs as a rhythm in life, as a boundless process beyond beginnings and ends.

Structures that make their way through the chaos. The purity of a crystal-clear thought that shatters when spoken. The eroticism of silence, of a simple glance caught by another's eyes.

The world of an artist and his struggle with reality. A reflection on everyday beauty, a play in which an eternity lies enclosed.

"The fullness of life is just the mask through which death looks grinning into our lives." (Klaus Held)

Life as the starting point, as the slow preparation for death. Death not as an end but as a beginning, so that we can go back to the end and start all over again. Life as a never-ending repetition in which new layers are peeled away each time. The endless rerun, the rhythm of life and death. A circular occurrence without beginning or end.

Life exists only because of the naked presence of death.

Death exists because we have lived, because we can look it straight in the eye while we savour what is passing us by. We know that we exist because of the presence of death. Life is merely a preparation for the long process of dying. Perpetuity lies enclosed in the rhythm of life and death.

On dying and saying goodbye.

DeaDDogsDon'tDance / DJamesDjoyceDeaD

"The artist, like the God of the Creation, remains in, or behind, or beyond, or above his piece of work, filtered out of existence to invisibility, untouched, clipping his nails." (James Joyce)

James Joyce was born in Dublin in 1882.

A climate of extreme nationalism and Catholicism prevailed in the Ireland of James Joyce's youth and it was to leave an indelible mark on this writer's oeuvre. Joyce was educated at Jesuit schools which he loathed so much that later in life he renounced the Catholic faith. His experiences and memories of this sound schooling also had a marked influence on his work.

Another major influence on Joyce's road to freedom and independence was his discovery of the writer Henrik Ibsen (1828 – 1906). What struck James Joyce most about this Norwegian writer was his attitude to religion and artists. Ibsen rejected the Christian faith and was opposed to the sort of artist who missed out on life because of an illusory vocation. Despite Joyce's admiration of this view, he did not succeed in putting the theory into practice; indeed, his work was the only tangible reality. His 'artistry' was in fact the cause of many an inner conflict, for whilst he was prepared to sacrifice a tremendous amount for his artistic vocation, he was also very attached to the daily life which he immortalized with infinite affection in his books.

He wrote his first novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in 1904. That same year he left Dublin. And though he had turned his back on Ireland for good, Dublin was to occupy a very prominent place in his work.

He started work on *Ulysses* in 1914, but the book was only released for publication twenty years later after long legal battles because of its obscene and sexual use of language. He sweated blood for seventeen years over his last masterpiece *Finnegan's Wake*, a work in which rhythm and sound are taken to extreme limits and the musicality of what is written drowns the meaning and content of the language.

This more musical approach to his literature stemmed largely from the chronic eye disease and near blindness that plagued Joyce throughout his life. Though these experiences greatly influenced his conduct, one of the most fundamental changes came when he met Nora, who later became his wife. Nora Barnacle was a simple woman with a lascivious attitude to life. She displayed unbounded love for her husband, but she did not understand his literary profession, never mind the books he wrote. On June 16th 1904 Joyce had his first date with his beloved Nora. That day he came into contact with the world around him. "... You have made a man of me...", he told her later. His relationship with Nora was the first and last reality he knew. Civil life helped him maintain contact with the world around him, It was his way of escaping the solitude of being an artist. It was during that first meeting, later dubbed 'Bloomsday', that on Nora's initiative he ejaculated into her handkerchief. This sexual directness on the part of a woman, both fascinated and repelled him because he realized there would never be an

adequate substitute for this female passion. His fascination for women, and Nora in particular, is a theme that recurs in all shapes and forms in all his books. The letters the couple exchanged over the years are evidence of their almost absolute and unconditional love. But despite Nora's loving devotion, he feared his wife's betrayal and was plagued by jealousy and doubts about her fidelity throughout his life.

But this production has nothing more to do with the work of this "greatest writer of the century". After numerous requests, lawsuits and direct contact with the grandson and only heir Stephen James Joyce, the answer was unrelentingly negative. Stephen James Joyce had resolved that the work of his grandfather should not be tinkered with: "My answer with respect to Needcompany is simple, straightforward, unequivocal. It's NO, NON, NIET, NEIN. "

So ... no ode to this "master of modern literature", no homage to the man who sought the ordinary in the unusual, the exceptional in the banal. No quotes from *Ulysses* or *The Dead*, but a reminder of these masterpieces in which darkness is lit by commonplace beauty. A production about 'the bearable lightness of being' by means of bad behaviour, good sex, the wrong-time-right-place feeling and much humour so as to accept our powerlessness vis-à-vis life.

Though strictly forbidden to do so, we could not refrain from using one word from James Joyce's whole oeuvre: 'THE'

The last word of Joyce's last masterpiece: 'THE'

The only thing left of this writer in the production: 'THE'.

"...Happiness is good for the body, but strength of mind comes from suffering. A woman whom we desire and who makes us suffer stirs up much deeper and more vital feelings in us than a brilliant man." (Marcel Proust)

About a woman, Penelope. The pounding heart throughout the play. A vital, worldly woman who, unlike her male protagonist, accepts life and takes it as it comes. A woman, lively, earthy and ordinary, a history, a waterfall that flows through the play. Carrying her past with her, she strolls through life as it passes. Dreams, memories and lost loves are unpacked and packed away again. What remains is a little bit of nothingness, a brief passing moment. A woman who is more universal and greater in her ordinariness than the great artist with whom she shares her life.

About a 'great man', an artist and his tragic and obsessional pursuit of the ultimate work of art. About his relationship with the world around him, his attitude to reality and to the seemingly unattainable commonplace that exists outside the work of art. About the artist who idolizes his art and regards it as the highest form of life and so forgets to live, fails to savour the passing days.

About colours and forms, rhythm and sound. About the moment when words constitute a discussion and movement a dance.

About something Joyce once said: *"Man's original genius lies in his scribblings. The basis of his talent lies in his casual doings."*

"Behind every great man there's a woman,
behind every great woman there's a bunch of men."
(J.L.)

Credits

Directing

Jan Lauwers

Music

Dominique Pauwels

Text

Jan Lauwers

Viviane De Muynck

Performers

Alan Barnes

Allison Brown

Francesca Caroti

Dana Caspersen

Timothy Couchman

Viviane De Muynck

Stephen Galloway

Crystal Pite

Antony Rizzi

Carlotta Sagna

Jone San Martin

Richard Siegal

Sjoerd Vreugdenhil

Costumes and set

Jan Lauwers

Lighting design

Dries Vercruysse, Jan Lauwers

Assistant to the director, Ballet Master

Glen Tuggle

Sound

Dré Schneider

Set assistant

Matthias Bringmann

Costume assistant

Stefanie Pertzansky

Production assistant

Martin Pfaff

Photography

Maarten Vanden Abeele

Needcompany staff

Dramaturgy, press and promotion

Vjera Somers

General assistance

An Van der Donckt

Technical director

Joris De Bolle

Business manager

Christel Simons

General manager

Carl Gydé

Ballett Frankfurt/Das TAT staff

Artistic director	William Forsythe
Personal assistant to the director, Press officer	Mechtild Rühl
Production manager	Regine Eckel
Dance Master	Glen Tuggle
Technical production manager	Martin Haindl
Head of stage departement	Thomas Runge
Stage manager	Andreas Kremer
Head of light departement	Frank Kraus
Light engineer	Matthias Paul
Sound engineers	Dietrich Krüger
	Bernhard Klein
	Florian Wildmeister
Props	Ursula Trella
Marketing	Christine Wetzol
General manager	Immanuel Schipper

Thanks to all TAT crew, people of the Städtische Bühnen Frankfurt, especially the costume departement.

Production: Jan Lauwers & Needcompany, Ballett Frankfurt & Das TAT
Presentation and co-production: South Bank Centre (Londen), TANZtheater
INTERNATIONAL/ EXPO 2000 (Hannover), Bruxelles/ Brussel 2000 and
Kaaithheater (Brussel), Festival Van Vlaanderen Brussel-Europa (Internationaal)
and Kunstencentrum Vooruit (Gent), Octobre en Normandie and Dieppe Scène
Nationale, Théâtre de la Ville (Parijs) and Festival d'Automne (Parijs),
Rotterdamse Schouwburg (Rotterdam).

Needcompany is supported by the Ministry of the Flemish Community and the National Lottery

Jan Lauwers & Needcompany

- 1987: *Need to Know*,
(première: 24 maart, Mickery, Amsterdam)
- 1989: *ça va*
(première: 18 maart, Theater Am Turm, Frankfurt)
- 1990: *Julius Caesar*
(première: 31 mei, Rotterdamse Schouwburg)
- 1991: *Invictos*
(première: 18 mei, Centro Andaluz de Teatro, Sevilla)
- 1992: *Antonius und Kleopatra*
(première: 14 februari, Teater Am Turm, Frankfurt)
- 1992: *SCHADE/Schade*
(première: 21 oktober, Theater Am Turm, Frankfurt)
- 1993: *Orfeo*, opera van Walter Hus
(première: 23 mei, Bourschouwburg, Antwerpen)
- 1994: *The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Voyeur*
(première: 24 maart, Theater Am Turm, Frankfurt)
- 1995: *The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Pouvoir (Leda)*
(première: 11 mei, Dance 95, München)
- 1996: *The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Désir*
(première: 6 november, Kanonhallen, Kopenhagen)
- 1996: *Needcompany's Macbeth*
(première: 26 maart, Lunatheater, Brussel)
- 1997: *Caligula, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part one*
(première : 5 september, Documenta X, Kassel)
- 1998: *The Snakesong Trilogy*, herwerkte versie met live muziek
(première: 16 april, Lunatheater, Brussel)
- 1999: *Morning Song, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part two*
(première : 13 januari, Lunatheater, Brussel)
- 2000: *Needcompany's King Lear*
(première : 11 januari, lunatheater, Brussel)
- 2000 : *DeaddogsDon'tdance/ DJamesdjoyceDead*
(première : 12 mei, Das TAT, Frankfurt)

Cast

Alan Barnes

Born in Brooklyn, New York. Studied at the School of American Ballet, Alvin Ailey American Dance Center and graduated from S.U.N.Y. at Purchase. Danced with the Dance Theater of Harlem before joining Ballett Frankfurt in 1989.

Allison Brown

Canadian. Trained at the School for American Ballet. Member of the New York City Ballet, Twyla Tharp and Dancers, Pretty Ugly Dancecompany and Saburo Teshigawara's company, Karas. Joined Ballet Frankfurt in 1996.

Dana Caspersen

Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota and subsequently trained with a variety of people including Maggie Black and Erik Hawkins. Danced for three years with the North Carolina Dance Theater, joined Ballet Frankfurt in 1988.

Francesca Caroti

Born in Pisa, Italy. Educated at the Centro Studi di Firenze. Danced with Aterballetto in Reggio Emilia and Jan Fabre's company. Member of Ballet Frankfurt since 1994.

Timothy Couchman

Born in Gloucester, England. Trained at the Royal Ballet School, London and at Vaganova Academy in St Petersburg. Worked at Eifmann Co. in St. Petersburg and Zürich Ballet. Joined Ballett Frankfurt in 1997.

Viviane De Muynck

Viviane De Muynck acted for the Mannen van den Dam, The Witte Kraai Company, Maatschappij Discordia, Toneelgroep Amsterdam, The Wooster Group, ... and performs regularly on TV and in films. In recent years she worked for Needcompany and appeared in *The Snakesong Trilogy* (*Le Pouvoir*, *Le Désir* and the full version) *Needcompany's Macbeth* and *Morning Song*.

Stephen Galloway

American. Joined Ballett Frankfurt in 1985.

Crystal Pite

Canadian, educated in Victoria. Danced 8 years with Ballet British Columbia in Vancouver under Reid Anderson, Barry Ingham and John Alleyne. Member of Ballett Frankfurt since 1996.

Antony Rizzi

Born in Dedham, Massachusetts. Joined Ballett Frankfurt in 1985. Choreographed for various companies including Boston Ballet, Scapino Ballet and the Royal Ballet as well as Ballett Frankfurt. Has also worked as an actor with Jan Fabre in Belgium. Ballet Master since 1994.

Carlotta Sagna

She collaborated in several creations by Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker and Rosas, Meg Stuart and Caterina Sagna.

The first of Jan Lauwers' productions in which she appeared was *Orfeo*, and she then performed in the three parts of *The Snakesong Trilogy* (*Le Voyeur*, *Le Pouvoir* and *Le Désir*) and consequently also appears in the full version and *Morning Song*. She created her first choreography for *Caligula and Morning song*. Recently she made the choreography for *Needcompany's king Lear*.

Jone San Martin

Born in San Sabastian, Spain. Studied with Nentxu Nedel and was a member of Ballet Nacional de España, the Ulmer Theater and the Ballet Royal de Wallonie in Belgium, before joining Frankfurt Ballet in 1992.

Richard Siegal

Born and raised in the United States. Moved to New York City in 1986. Trained with Igal Perry, Jan Miller and Zvi Gotheiner. Danced with New York based companies including Doug Elkins, Zvi Gotheiner, Doug Varrone and Janis Brenner. Joined Ballett Frankfurt in 1997.

Sjoerd Vreugdenhil

Dutch. Trained at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague and at the Rotterdamse Dans Academie. Danced with Introdans in Arnhem, with Scapino in Rotterdam and with the Zurich Ballet before joining Ballet Frankfurt in 1996.

Tour list:

Das TAT, Frankfurt:	12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19 and 20 Mai 2000
South Bank Centre, London:	9 and 10 June 2000
Schauspielhaus Hannover:	9 and 10 September 2000
Lunatheater, Brussels:	22 and 23 September 2000
Vlaamse Opera, Ghent:	27, 28 and 29 September 2000
Dieppe Scène Nationale:	2 and 3 October 2000
Théâtre de la Ville, Paris:	2, 3 and 4 November 2000
Rotterdamse Schouwburg:	17 and 18 January 2001

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A pandemonium for Joyce

Last weekend saw the opening of 'DeadDogsDon'tDance', at Das TAT in Frankfurt, a piece made by Needcompany's Jan Lauwers for William Forsythe and his Ballett Frankfurt. It is not really a dance performance, rather a play about a worldly woman and an idealistic artist. When words, movement, sound and stage design merge, the intrigues soon make way for an all-round show about life and death coated in all the pleasure of creating images.

Although Ballett Frankfurt is one of the most renowned dance companies in the world, Forsythe does not in any way protect his 'elite' group. He regularly invites outside choreographers to work with his group, an honour also granted to Jani Fabre a few years ago. It is to be hoped that this way of working will one day find its way to Flanders, where it could present exceptional challenges to groups such as Rosas. Jan Lauwers, the director, originally wanted to do a piece using the writings of James Joyce, but after a lot of palaver the writer's grandson Stephen James Joyce put a stop to that: 'My answer with respect to Needcompany is simple, straightforward, unequivocal. It's no, non, niet, nein.' So all that remains of Joyce's words is the close of 'Finnegan's Wake', the last word he committed to paper: 'the'.

Which Joyce is dead? The man himself, of course, and his pen, captured in that one word: 'the'. It is with this final death that the piece begins, and also a new life. In the face of death man creates images, to mask death or to prepare for it. Modernity is informed by the realisation that we live in images through death. Like Joyce, in 'DeadDogsDon'tDance', Lauwers also opts to deal with death like this. For that matter, it is not hard to find references to Joyce in this play. Joyce connoisseurs may be able to unravel the dramaturgy in detail in the themes and writing style of Lauwers and Viviane De Muynck. As for example in the dialogues between the artist JJ (played very phlegmatically by Carlotta Sagna) and the voluptuous Penelope (a brilliant Viviane De Muynck), which are also the only parts played by members of Needcompany. JJ lives for art and opts first and last for images, in search of the ultimate work of art. By contrast, Penelope has both feet on the ground and takes advantage of the pleasures of life. Add the two views together and you get the thing for which 'DeadDogsDon'tDance' stands, at every level: a constant swing between life and death in which words and images start to live, becoming incarnate at the expense of death.

Beautiful words

The text lacks any linearity and even transparency, and when someone tells a gripping story it is after a short time drowned in a tangle of nonsense, bustle and feeble humour. And that's how it should be. JJ muses on the fact that the words are beautiful, the way they are written, their course or movement. It is no longer the words' references to what precedes them that is important, but the stroke of the pen that creates life. Lauwers subtly removes the intrigues, and the drama is transferred to the colourful staging. Details appear everywhere, making it hard to interpret and misleading the audience. The performance, lost in the little things, rolls over you and you are engulfed

by a sparkling whole - with a tempo and freshness in keeping with the short working process of barely two months.

This is why the visual aspects of 'DeadDogsDon'tDance' clearly come to the fore. The eleven brilliant performers Lauwers selected from the Ballett Frankfurt do surprising little numbers which are all effortlessly absorbed into the whole: Stephen Galloway acts the crooner, Dana Caspersen rummages drunkenly across the stage, Alan Barnes dances in drag. But images of death crop up, sometimes literally, in the midst of this enjoyable shambles, either trivialised to the advantage of the acting or with a stubborn countenance. The fisherman (Richard Siegal) laid out on his deathbed does not really behave as a dead man should, leaping up with a roar of laughter. The set makes this scene completely psychedelic: there is a gigantic orange projection of moving fluids above the flowers on display, while just about everything roundabout is knocked over, including several towers made of plastic bottles.

Nevertheless, Lauwers' keen eye and the performers' control keep these neo-baroque excesses in balance. Lauwers' wealth of contrasts works best in the orgy scene. In the middle of the forestage Allison Brown sensually declaims a virtually endless series of words. The rhythm is backed up by a soundscape on tape made by Dominique Pauwels, while JJ herself starts lashing out on a drum kit. All around a garden of delights unfolds comprising duets resembling sculpture. One couple extend their stretched limbs into the air in refined movements in what is an almost cerebral stylisation. By contrast, the most obscene positions are being tried out in the half-darkness on the fringes. It is an astonishing exchange of energy that emerges from these confrontations. The oscillations almost unnoticeably connect the dance and the set and thereby make tangible certain themes from the dialogues. In the end, all the questions about dance and theatre, about JJ and Penelope, and about life and death, are once again erased during the performance. Lauwers is able to conjure whole lumps of quivering scenic flesh from the last word 'the'.

De Financieel Economische Tijd, 20/5/2000. Jeroen Peeters

The best remedy against life-weariness

An encounter between Jan Lauwers and Ballett Frankfurt makes sparks fly

The Needcompany from Brussels has good contacts with Frankfurt. In the past, four productions by Jan Lauwers have opened at Theater am Turm there. Friday it was the turn of 'DeadDogsDon'tDance', a coproduction with Ballett Frankfurt, which is headed by the master choreographer William Forsythe. Lauwers originally wanted to do a play on the life and work of James Joyce. The fact that Joyce's heirs put a stop to this can be seen in the result. But the encounter between Lauwers and Forsythe's dancers makes sparks fly.

When he saw 'The Snakesong Trilogy' Forsythe was so enthusiastic that he asked Jan Lauwers to set up a project with his company of dancers. A clever move in many ways. Forsythe clearly knows better than anyone else what a treasure trove of talent he has in his company. The members of Ballett Frankfurt are more than just superb dancers: they are all-round performers, a quality which Forsythe sometimes makes eager use of in his own work, although he remains in the first place a choreographer. In Lauwers he found the perfect man to open up the partially hidden theatrical aspect of their talent. This Antwerp director and stage designer has after all proven on many occasions that he can create clever theatre performances with a mixed group of actors and dancers. In order to intensify the dialogues Lauwers brought with him two of his own best players, Viviane De Muynck and Carlotta Sagna. The result is theatre, though there is some dancing.

Lauwers' original idea was to do a play based on the life and work of James Joyce (1882-1941), under the title 'DjamesDjoyceDead'. However, Stephen James Joyce, the grandson and sole heir of the Irish writer refused to release the rights to his grandfather's works: 'It's no, non, niet, nein', is what he told Needcompany over the phone. At that point Lauwers decided to change the title of the piece to 'DeadDogsDon'tDance'. The play begins with 'the', the closing word from 'Finnegan's Wake', but apart from that all quotations from Joyce have been avoided. But the spirit of the writer still wafts through the play. The dialogues between JJ (Carlotta Sagna) and Penelope (Viviane De Muynck), for example, refer to the relationship between Joyce and his wife Nora Barnacle: the artist in constant conflict with his work and the level-headed woman who points out to him that there are other things in life than art. Sex and humour, for example.

Lauwers is not always able to digest Stephen James Joyce's decision equally well. Viviane De Muynck's closing monologue, which she herself wrote together with Lauwers, is imbued with the evocative style Joyce employed in such stories as 'The Dead'. The description of a funeral meal and an early morning walk through a small Irish port savours of mystery but all in all remains rather anecdotal. The projection of such titles as 'Vinegar's Cake' and 'Thin as a Rake', which must be intended to make jest of the question of inheritances, is no more than feeble.

So on several occasions Lauwers has allowed himself to be distracted by the situation. This was not at all necessary, because the production is at its best when Lauwers' own themes meet Joyce's and when the chemistry starts between Lauwers

the director, the Needcompany actors and Ballett Frankfurt. As in 'Morning Song' last season, Lauwers puts pain and suffering into perspective. This attitude to life is personified by Penelope, in whom both Molly Bloom (from 'Ulysses') and Joyce's wife can be identified. In this production death and decay are part of life. There are numerous references to queasiness, disease and death. This does not stop the fisherman, laid out on his deathbed, from sitting up briefly and enjoying a good laugh. The set, which is cheerfully decorated with funerary flowers, is also very expressive. Without moralising, Lauwers shows us how to deal with the destructive forces in life.

Energy

The best remedy when one is tired of life is the infectious energy of the eleven people from Ballett Frankfurt. Where it is still necessary, Lauwers, in his characteristic way, draws them out of themselves by, among other things, having them address the audience directly through microphones. The interaction, reminiscent of a jam session, and the succeeding solo sections make it clear that a lot was done on the basis of improvisation. The opening scene is a prelude to the later funeral meal and includes conversations whose sharpness and irony remind one of Oscar Wilde. By cleverly taking advantage of the various nationalities in Needcompany and Ballett Frankfurt, Lauwers mocks the clichés that arise in this sort of social occasion: the Italian woman who whines on and on about 'la mamma', the American who only succeeds in recognising Janis Joplin in the initials JJ, and not James Joyce. Lauwers gives three actor-dancers from the dance company extra opportunity to display their versatile talents (though Carlotta Sagna matches them well too): Dana Caspersen, perhaps the most complete personality in the production at any level, the amusing Tony Rizzi, here a Groucho Marx figure in sixties costume, and Stephen Galloway, a perfect example of intelligent showmanship. However, the most powerful scene is for Allison Brown: while she imperturbably declaims richly sounding incomprehensible words, the whole stage comes to life behind her, although the music consists only of the swelling tapping of drums (in an otherwise inconspicuous score by the Ghent composer Dominique Pauwels). William Forsythe watched from the fourth row and saw that it was good.

De Morgen, 15/5/2000. Peter Anthonissen.

DANCE THEATRE

*Dead Dogs Don't Dance/
DjamesDJoyceDead*
Queen Elizabeth Hall
Donald Hinters

THE ingredients are intriguing. Take 11 members of William Forsythe's envelope-pushing Ballet Frankfurt. Blend with two actors from Belgian director Jan Lauwers's avant-garde theatre group, Nele Company. Slew all of the above in the life and work of James Joyce.

A recipe for disaster? Not at all. Still, this funny (peculiar and ha-ha), unexpectedly moving collaboration lacks the makings of a universally popular dish. Advance word suggested it was

some sort of cock-eyed tribute to Joyce. For all that, his grandson and sole heir wanted nothing to do with it. Permission to quote from the great man's oeuvre was unequivocally denied.

Moreover, those keen to see a fully fledged dance performance on the South Bank were most likely left dissatisfied. The piece is littered with movement — stationary sashays and self-jostling, and a scene of down-and-dirty simulated erotica. The bodies involved are obviously highly trained. But sustained passages of technically accomplished steps were not on the agenda.

Forsythe, an old hand at toying with theatrical conventions, only instigated the project. Lauwers directed it, from a script by himself and actress Yvonne De Muynck. Reckoning biography, the

performance attempts to be true to Joyce's spirit.

A cast of loosely defined characters wanders in and out of a spacious room decorated with artificial flowers, a mirror-ball and a trampoline. There's talk of dead mothers and Auschwitz, women's body images and sexuality. A couple argues intermittently. An ingratiating black man sends up soul-style vocals. Some graphic, rampant randomness is accompanied by words and phrases recited for sensuality rather than meaning.

Surely all this games-playing belongs in the rehearsal studio, where performers may safely indulge wayward creative impulses? But there's more going on here. Once we grow accustomed to the piece's initially aimless-seeming rhythms, its dissociated

pretensions and absurdities begin to make sense.

A Joyce figure (Carlotta Sagwa in bed wig, dark glasses and a rusty orange suit) dispenses dollops of dead-pan wisdom. But our through-line is the emotionally alert De Muynck, a heavy-set woman of remarkable presence and a certain age. She narrates & wale illustrated by the others as a scene of controlled chaos. This segues into a girlhood memory — or imaginary journey — that has a mysterious power, capping it with a gaze in our direction that speaks volumes about life's uncertainty, frailty and fragility.

The performance in toto has a throwback, Sixties-happening feel. Disorienting it may be. But boring? Never.

TMS

19 JUNE

2000