

AROUND TOWN

FRIDAY, JUNE 26, 2009

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Members of Belgian-based troupe Ultima Vez dance in *New Black*, which will be performed this weekend at the National Theater in Taipei. PHOTOS COURTESY OF ULTIMA VEZ

Creation through destruction

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Ultima Vez, *nieuwZwart* (New Black)

WHEN: Tonight and tomorrow at 7:30pm, Sunday at 2:30pm

WHERE: National Theater (國家戲劇院), 21-1 Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號)

ADMISSION: Tickets are NT\$800, NT\$1,200, NT\$1,500 and NT\$2,000, available through NTCH box office or www.artsticket.com.tw

Ultima Vez returns to Taipei with its latest multimedia production 'New Black'

BY DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTER

It's been four long years since the Belgian dance troupe Ultima Vez last visited Taipei, and Flemish founder and choreographer Wim Vandekeybus' thought-provoking multimedia productions have been missed.

But thank Terpsichore or whatever gods watch over Taiwan's dance world, because the company is not only back for a fifth visit, it is bringing over its latest production, *nieuwZwart* ("New Black"), which premiered last month in Barcelona.

Another miracle for these cash-strapped times is that the promoter, the Taipei Art International Association, has managed to keep the cheapest seats at NT\$500, only NT\$100 more than they were four years ago, while keeping the top ticket price the same, at NT\$2,000. Though the NT\$500 seats for all three shows quickly sold out, there are still tickets in the other price ranges.

As with other productions seen here — *Puur* in 2005, *Blush* in 2003, *Inasmuch as Life is Borrowed* in 2001 and *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* in 1999 — theatergoers can expect a seamless blending of very physical dance, film clips and text that will leave you both questioning your eyesight and your moral universe.

In addition to Vandekeybus, there are two familiar names or faces attached to *New Black*: Flemish author Peter Verhelst, who worked with Ultima Vez on *Inner Fields* (2001), *Blush* and *Sonic Boom* (2003), contributed the text, while dancer/actor Gavin Webber, who performed with the company here in 2001, rejoined the troupe for this piece. But they are the only ones.

Vandekeybus wanted new blood for *New Black*, so he overhauled his company, cutting the number of performers to just seven: four dancers, and three musicians led by Belgian rocker Mauro Pawlowski, who composed the score.

This will be the first time Ultima Vez has used live music in one of its Taipei shows; traveling costs and scheduling logistics have meant that productions that featured live musicians in Europe had to rely on recorded music here.

Vandekeybus, who turns 46 on Tuesday, has created 18 dance productions and 13 film shorts since launching his company 23 years ago. The films include clips used in the productions, shorts of his productions staged in cities or rural locations, and others. Since he doesn't come from a dance background (he was interested in psychology at university and then in photography and filmmaking), he calls his choreography simply "movements."

But there is usually nothing simple about them. "Trust exercises" might be a better term, for Ultima Vez performers run, jump and hurl themselves about with often frightening intensity, or hurl objects at one another. Though Vandekeybus considered his works more "performances" than "dances," what may look like improvisation is, of course, tightly scripted.

While Vandekeybus usually examines real-life dilemmas and conflicts — the mysteries of life, love, lies, betrayal, genocide — his pieces have also been influenced by real-life events or eerie coincidences. While he was working on *Inasmuch as Life is Borrowed*, which was about the human body and the mysteries that mark the beginning and end of the human experience, his father died. During creation of *New Black*, which is about rebirth and existence, his child was born.

In interviews, Vandekeybus describes this latest work as being about the idea of change and evolution through destruction and refusal.

From Taipei, Ultima Vez will return home to prepare for a five-city series of performances that launch the European tour of *New Black* and will keep the troupe traveling through early next year, aside from the standard European August holiday.

BY DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTER

The *Taipei Times* asked Ultima Vez founder Wim Vandekeybus a few questions about his new production, *nieuwZwart* ("New Black"), by telephone yesterday afternoon. He still had the rapid-fire delivery that made interviewing him such a challenge in 2001 and 2007, which was a bit surprising as he had just cleared immigration and customs at the Taiwan Taipei International Airport just minutes before.

TAIPEI TIMES: In previous interviews you have said that you first come up with the name or title of a piece and then you start creating it. Was that the process this time?

WIM VANDEKEYBUS: I must say that before I had long titles. Now the title came later, sometime in the middle. Before I started this piece I did *Black Blist* for the Goteborg Opera Ballet [in Stockholm, Sweden], which was about the Oedipus myth. It was a very concrete piece so I wanted to do something more abstract. *NieuwZwart* is about people building up something; it's very tribal, the music is very tribal with a primitive beat. The music of Mauro Pawlowski is very rhythmic, very tribal; he's a wonderful musician. Each time they build something it's a kid of restart, a rebirth, a new energy. The text by Peter Verhelst is also a kind of ball of energy. The text, the dancers, and the music together — we're trying for something new.

It's like being a painter who invents a new color. A pure black doesn't exist, a pure white doesn't exist. You have to mix two elements together. The atmosphere [of the piece] is quite dark, things aren't quite recognizable.

TT: Why did you downsize the company?

WV: I wanted to do a piece with people who had never created a show with me, to isolate people. I had worked with Ulrike [Reinbott] before, but on a revival [of one of my earlier works], which is not the same [as creating a new piece]. Gavin Webber had worked with me before but not for five years. Before he was a dancer but now he must carry the text.

Besides, the [older] company members are doing other things. They have also come to a point where they want to start new things, their own things. But we all support one another ... two of them are premiering a new work of their own soon.

If sometimes you know people, you have to explain less. With new people you have to find a new way of explaining, a new way of creating, a new way of looking. It's a very poetic process; you are creating a new creature. In this way the music is the heartbeat, the actors and dancers are the limbs and tendons.

TT: You have often incorporated filmmaking into your pieces and then made short films of the works. Now you're scheduled to start filming a full-length feature in Brazil in 2011. Is film going to replace dance theater for you?

WV: We [the company] just bought a new building so I will have to keep creating pieces. Films are an integral part of the process. I don't see a division but I also don't believe in repeating yourself.

I spent five years working on a [feature film] script and just delivered it. We will start filming in Brazil in 2011. It's called *Galloping Mind* and it's about twin orphans who are split up and grow up separate, with one raised in a very luxurious life. It's very adventurous, not a dance performance.

I'll also be doing a show with kids in Brazil next year as we get ready to move to Brazil to make the film. We have done three of these kinds of shows in Belgium before. We do workshops, train the kids how to [do] dialogue, how to move for a theater piece.

So I will try to keep both media [dance and film], but I'll disappear for a year from the stage when I make the film.