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REVIEW

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*Rosas -  
Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker  
'Once'*

*19th October 2003  
London, The Place*

*by Ann Williams*



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Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker is full of surprises. The Belgian choreographer/dancer has received a bit of a pasting from the critics – at least those I've read – for her company 'Rosas' performance at The Place last week as part of the Dance Umbrella season. But on Sunday night her solo show 'Once' (at The Place again) was a revelation.

To begin with, I feared the worst. De Keersmaeker abruptly appeared on stage, kicked off her shoes, strode forth, and uttered the single word 'once' before standing motionless and wordless for a seemingly endless time, her unsmiling gaze fixed on the audience. Pretentiousness loomed worryingly. But after what was probably only a couple of minutes, she began a few tentative moves; a crouching, bouncing plie, a smooth high kick, an airy jump, a fast turn, and we were gripped;

this woman was a serious mover. - She has a nervy quality and a certain kind of tomboyish athleticism that kept reminding me of Sylvie Guillem. The two women have the same sort of body, though De Keersmaeker is

marginally sturdier than the stick-thin Guillem. She looked extremely elegant too, in Anke Loh's fluid dark blue two piece dress with sexily slashed skirt (how I lusted after that dress!).



Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's *Once*  
© Gerard Uferas

The greater part of 'Once' was performed to a recorded tape of a Joan Baez concert, the applause (thunderous) for Baez's concert slyly obviating the necessity for De Keersmaeker's audience to put their hands together (not that we didn't want to). Baez's words appeared on a screen behind the performer and from time to time she sang along with them in a thin but true soprano voice. Sometimes she added her own witty mime to the words or pulled a funny face to make us laugh, and we did laugh. At one point she said 'if you'll excuse me..', pulled her knickers off and kicked them neatly into touch (I really must remember this useful diversionary tactic next time I'm at one of my duller committee meetings..).

Towards the end, the mood got darker and more political, and it was difficult to know if De Keersmaeker was in earnest. Whatever, she suddenly appeared naked except for a pair of black knickers.. Nobody blinked an eye.

Boiled down, on this showing anyway, there's not much to De Keersmaeker's choreography it's hardly groundbreaking stuff. But her quality of movement is extraordinary ; quick, nervy, almost angry, yet at the same time wonderfully fluid and easy. Add to that her witty, intelligent

theatrical presence, and you'll understand why Sunday's packed out house gave her applause so prolonged that she had to come back three times to take her bows. And she even smiled.

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