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*Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker in Once
Photo by Tina Ruisinger, courtesy Rosas*

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker
Joyce Theater, New York, NY
November 8-13, 2005
Reviewed by Susan Yung

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's 2002 solo, *Once*, revealed glimpses of the Belgian choreographer's sentimental, tender side. The dance hangs on the framework of the live album *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2*. The music began after 20 minutes of silence, during which De Keersmaeker performed phrases that reappeared in the piece's 80 minutes. It was a fascinating look at some of the basic components of her choreography—buckling joints, the lifting of a shoulder and hip to skew the body's foundation, a port de bras dissolving into a common gesture, energy shooting through the body.

The dancer/choreographer nonchalantly announced many of the song titles, giving the performance the feel of a jam session. At times she might have been a teenager with the stereo cranked, improvising with the door locked. Occasionally the movement described or reacted to the lyrics (projected on a backdrop)—fingers forming guns, a session of air guitar—but more often it kinetically traced the emotional bass line set by Baez's heartfelt songs.

Jan Joris Lamers designed the stunning lighting. Gradually dimming house lights and fluorescents yielded to a stage bathed in brilliant white light. This illumination then narrowed to shafts of light between which De Keersmaeker slipped, creating a progressively refined focus that reinforced dark as well as light. By the end, she had discarded her liquid jersey dress (by Anke Loh) and her nude torso became a screen for the controversial film *The Birth of a Nation*.

De Keersmaeker's demeanor shifted between a trancelike, inward focus and a vague awareness that she faced an audience, with whom she interacted on a minimal level. Likewise, her vocabulary shifted from specific exercises involving the action of one limb, to the simple act of skipping, which evoked innocence yet surprised with its dynamics.

During the two most charged songs, "We Shall Overcome" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," the volume dropped and De Keersmaeker could be heard singing, her tenuous voice adding poignancy. This mutedness, the choice of film, and our cognizance that even in the pitch-dark areas of the stage the dance continued, reminded us that struggles continue whether we pay them attention or not. See www.rosas.be.

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