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Dance: An Exaggerated "Rave" Within a Serious Comedy

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Rave, by Karole Armitage, which has just been presented at the Theatre de Chaillot in Paris, along with *Je voudrais tant...* de Malou Airaudo, is a work capable of gratifying any artistic director, in this case Didier Deschamps, who has been director of the Ballet de Lorraine since 1999. *Rave* is a gift, a rare pearl, offering as much delight to an audience that is familiar with the choreographer's work as to one that discovers it. A delirium that shows to what extent Karole Armitage would be equally at home in a musical comedy idiom. It is purely brilliant, even given that this creation takes as its point of departure the events of September 11th, 2001. Not with sentimentality, though, but rather with the idea, taken to its extreme, of an extravagant carnival in honor of the dead. The music, by David Shea, and the very structure of the piece embrace the relentless rhythms of the bateria parades in Rio de Janeiro and in Bahia, though with the elegance of a Venetian festival of the Dead, one that could at any moment turn to orgy.

The American choreographer began with a study of Vogue dancing, playing with comic seriousness as it copies the poses of top models. It is one form of exaggeration, used by Karole Armitage as a foundation upon which she builds an elaborate construction where bodies are painted in orange, blue, yellow, green, pink. No normal skin here. All is artifice, a game of mirrors. Each dancer is individualized by a wildly eccentric costume: wigs from lesser marquis, blond wisps à la Warhol, tattered animal skins with clouds of chiffon. It is the 1980s seen through a Technicolor time machine. A time of tribes, congregations of eccentrics who, in their desire to stand out, end up looking all alike.

In this end of the world view, extremely invigorating, the choreographer pulls out all the stops in waves of nine, eight, or ten dancers. Ridiculous runway walks from fashion style shows, whose moribund inanity she underlines by interjecting a sudden *entrechat*, or the strength of a forearm crawl found in some African dances. There is no message other than a convulsive beauty which consoles, making one glad to be alive. The spectator remains dazzled by so much received pleasure. Karole Armitage is at the term of her three-year contract as associated choreographer with the Ballet de Lorraine: one can hardly imagine a more beautiful farewell present. It is not yet clear whether her contract will be renewed.

In the second half of the evening, a new piece by Malou Airaudo was presented. Ms. Airaudo is remembered as one of Pina Bausch's remarkable dancers, one with a dramatic temperament that is unequalled. Now a teacher at the famous Essen school, she is trying her hand at choreography as well. *Je voudrais tant...*, the title of the piece, is stated in a conditional tense thus summing up the situation: I would so much like not to be compared with Pina; to be appreciated for myself.

Let her be reassured: this work is sufficiently original that it quickly cuts short any attempt at comparison. It begins with a surprising and lovely use of space. The dancers, who are assembled on a sort of gallery overlooking rows of bleachers, each descend along their own individual path. The ensemble work and lines of escape opening up the space give muscle to a piece that loses some of its vigor in the last ten minutes. It is unfortunate that the program gives insufficient references for the music, especially the desperate and sublime singing.

With these two works the dancers of the Ballet de Lorraine find in it the beneficial and hardy influence of Karole Armitage demonstrate that they are capable of assimilating thoughts that are quite distanced from their classical training. Inasmuch as, two years ago, we found them burdened by their efforts to dance the works of Robyn Orlin or Jean-Francois Duroure, we now see them capable of putting all their intelligence toward taming a diversity of styles.