

LE DEVOIR

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DANCE REVIEW

Metamorphosing to survive

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Photo Sylvie-Ann Paré

Dance

Les Choses Dernières

By Lucie Grégoire. With Isabelle Poirier. Music: Robert M. Lepage. March 9-12, Agora de la danse, Montreal

To celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of her company, choreographer *emerita* Lucie Grégoire has remounted *Les Choses dernières*, a watershed work in her career which she presented and performed for the first time at l'Agora de la danse in 1994. It is, moreover, in this same venue that the solo is brought back to life with a scenography and composition that remain faithful to the original.

Noted for having danced alongside Marie Chouinard for almost eight years, Isabelle Poirier moves smoothly into Lucie Grégoire's footsteps in this revival. It is not the first time the

performer has faced this particular challenge: she was outstanding last year in the re-creation of *Cartes postales de Chimère* on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Louise Bédard Danse.

There is a Kafkaesque aspect to *Les Choses dernières*, a creation born from the strong impact that reading Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* had on Lucie Grégoire. What the choreographer wanted to recapture from the novel was this solitary female figure in a landscape of ruins and the atmosphere emanating from a disintegrating world. In her solo reflecting the state of the world with its themes – even more current today – of flight and refuge, the spectre of Anna Blume must undergo metamorphosis to survive.

Running, solitary, through the ruined city

On stage, the choreographer's silhouette, draped in black velvet, appears, unexpected by the audience, in a square of light. Her meaningful gaze and strong stage presence provide a prelude to the performance. She vanishes off-stage, making way for her double in the solo, Isabelle Poirier, whose gown is of silver-grey lamé, cut low in the back.

Upon a large canvas with a grid pattern, the starting signal for a frantic race is given. Moving incessantly forwards and backwards, keeping within a straight line, the dancer beats a rhythm on the floor with her bare feet. A feeling of urgency progressively sets in during this race, sustained by the strings in the obsessive music of Robert M. Lepage.

Her face stoic and her torso straight, her long arms cut through space in an impromptu manner. Stepping confidently and martially when she advances, but fleeing and vulnerable when she retreats, the dancer succeeds in reconciling two states of mind and body within her.

A sensual mutation

Between two accelerations, we let out our breath when the performer shifts into solitary waltzes. Arms stretched out, her hands trace undulating figures in space. From its initial stiffness, the dance suddenly becomes sinuous and sensual, engaging the hips, and from that point forward, continually oscillates between these two movement qualities.

In her race for life, flinching before the obstacles will not save her from the inevitable fall. The body is thrown onto the ground, marking the beginning of a mutation in which the dancer, crawling and spinning at high speed to cover ground, adopts animal-like positions. Her back arched, her legs quivering like an insect's, she struggles for purchase to be able to stand up on two legs and fully regain her humanity.

Troubling for these contrasting movement qualities and the changes in rhythm made by those pounding footsteps, *Les Choses dernières* succeeds anew in creating a strong impression in the viewers' minds. Isabelle Poirier is riveting in these corporeal states, where, in her feverish trembling, dance can be read on her skin, right down to the small of her back. A striking work that prodigiously reconciles with contraries, and in which a strength lying at the heart of vulnerability – resilience – shines through.

This presentation demonstrates the importance of revisiting, reactualizing, and transmitting valuable works that have significantly marked and enriched the Quebec dance scene.