

Peeping Tom triturates the secrets of the psyche

Flemish collective takes your traumas and turns them into an unmasked ball. It's "A louer"

A plunge into a fractured mindset or a visit to a haunted house? A hallucination, an anxiety attack or a fit of delirium? Somewhere between psychological thriller and wild therapy, *A louer* [For Rent], a new work choreographed and arranged for seven actors by the Flemish collective 'Peeping Tom' (Gabriela Carrizo and Franck Chartier), does not leave much choice. But that does not mean the formula is hard to digest, for this ensemble of spectacular magicians knows how to get the balance of ingredients just right. On Tuesday, 29 May at the Théâtre de la Ville, the production – which grabs you like a blockbuster fantasy film – brought goosebumps and a resounding success.

The set is a desolate bourgeois drawing room. A yellow sofa and red curtains. In velvet, of course. *A louer* starts out with a guided tour, but spreads like the slough of despond. A woman and her butler are set in roles that no longer suit them; an aging singer trips in her evening dress, on the train of which her husband and son are surfing. A dead man falls out of a painting, and staircases rotate on their own axis. Using the techniques of theatre and black box, *A louer*, a psychoanalytical piece – a register which Peeping Tom undoubtedly dominates and reigns – plays on the themes of rigidity, twins and doubles, and narcissism. And stages it all successfully: the apparitions of ghosts and woodlice, erotic dreams and paranoid nightmares. As is often the case with Peeping Tom, the worst (almost) never happens; it is happy to stop at the fantasy stage, and that's ... (almost) worse!

The disturbing force of *A louer* has much to do with its intelligent writing, unleashed in sharp bursts.

Mixing scenes with a cinematographic flair, it jostles the images, with flashbacks and leaps into the future, to the point where we soon lose all sense of time. Are the seven characters alive or dead, young or old, living in the present or immersed in their memories? Over a souped-up soundtrack, voices, songs and noises, often highly amplified, burst into your head like an accident or emotional shock.

The family, with its secret drawers and its traumas – those we can guess, as well as others – its open secrets and other mysteries, is the central theme of Peeping Tom. Since its foundation in 1999, the Flemish theatre company has never been more worthy of its name, with its voyeuristic curiosity, its eyes glued to the keyhole, busy trying to control things it ought not to be looking at in the first place. In line with their trilogy *Le Jardin - Le Salon - Le Sous Sol* [2001-2007], Gabriela Carrizo and Franck Chartier bring fears and wounds under the surgeon's knife with formidable efficiency.

Put more elegantly, Peeping Tom is also a family of artists. Uncomfortable memories of their production *Le Salon* (2004), a play in which the couple did not hesitate to appear on stage with their baby daughter. In *A louer*, we meet the singer Eurudike De Beul, who has worked with them since the very beginning, as well as the Flemish actor Simon Versnel. We also encounter Leo De Beul, 74 years old, Eurudike's father, in the role of the aging shadow of a young man.

In the twisted context of *A louer*, it is hard to treat as a "dance" the improbable contortions in which the four dancers of the group engage –Koreans SeolJin Kim and Hun-Mok Jung, Jos Baker and Marie Gyselbrecht. It is closer, instead, to a circus act, with their flexible and dangerous folly that has them bending and unbending themselves like rubber, spinning on the ground like insects and blending into the shadows. Their exploits, always at the service of Peeping Tom's ferocious message, elicit a mixture of wonder and dread. *A louer* scares you stiff: the tenants run around helter-skelter.

Rosita Boisseau, June 1st 2012



"A louer" takes place on a desolate set in the form of a bourgeois living-room with a piano.

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