

KAAI THEATER

Schwalbe **SCHWALBE PLAYS** **ALL**

21 > 26/03 – 23:59 – Kaaistudio's
theatre / performance



A House on Fire presentation; with the support of the Culture Programme of the European Union

SCHWALBE PLAYS ALL

PROGRAMME OF THE WEEK

Schwalbe is looking for crowds

Mon. 21/3 • 20:30

A small crowd of people, of all types and ages, are on stage. They walk in circles in an endless orbit around an invisible centre. After half an hour it appears we have not yet seen everyone.

Save them

Tue. 22/3 • 20:30

Individuals merge into one group as they dance to pumping beats.

Schwalbe performs on its own

Thu. 24/3 • 20:30

How do you deal with ecological doomsday scenarios? Schwalbe reduces the answer to one simple act: cycling.

Schwalbe cheats

Fri. 25/3 • 20:30

What begins as an innocent game soon degenerates into a fierce battle with a victorious winner.

Schwalbe performs a time

Sat. 26/3 • 23:59 !

Dive deep into the night, and exchange clock time for experience time!

THE GROUP IS A LIVING ORGANISM, WHICH IS ALWAYS IN TRANSFORMATION

An interview with Schwalbe members Christina Flick and Ariadna Rubio Lleo by Eva Decaesstecker, March 2016 at the Kaaitheater.

This week, the young seven-member company Schwalbe will be on stage for five days at the Kaaistudio's. The ideal moment to take a closer look at the company. I spoke with two members, Christina Flick and Ariadna Rubio Lleo, about time, compromises and a tribute to sets.

Schwalbe is very visual and physical theatre. The number of spoken words is quite limited. Are movements stronger than words?

Ariadna: 'When making a production, our starting point is always the body. Indeed, we always tend to use as few words as possible, but we don't therefore believe that words are necessarily less strong than movements. When creating a new production, words are not excluded. Rather, our wish is to allow the audience to look in a different way. And for the moment our strength lies especially in doing this using visual language; but who knows, maybe the text will one day get its turn?'

Christina: 'We all attended mime school and because of this, we also have things in common with the visual arts. We try with images to create a free space that allows the audience themselves to create the words or messages. You can find this free space in an image that you yourself can

associate with and about which you can reflect, without us feeling the need to necessarily add a verbal message.'

'The physical after all is more than just an image. We often choose an action to which a specific duration is assigned. Take for example *Schwalbe perform on its own*, in which we generate the stage lighting by cycling. Physically, we take it to the extreme, which means that the show stops when we truly cannot go on. The production's duration depends on our bodies. Thus in a certain way we materialise time with our bodies.'

The aspect of "time" is a regular feature of your productions. Are you trying to make the audience reflect on the experience of time, to make time tangible? And is *Schwalbe performs a time* the culmination of this?

C: 'About a year ago we first started deliberately working on a project around time, but we knew this in fact was always already present in our productions. It's true that we always choose to give the spectator a different kind of time-line: one without a storyline or dramaturgy, and perhaps with less of a context than in average productions. Afterwards we often hear from people that they found themselves in a kind of trip, so the audience indeed does experience time differently. Yet this different experience of time is rather a consequence of what we wish to create and the deeper layers we wish to examine, than a conscious choice.'

'The fact that the viewer looks for a long time at one action without any major changes taking place, changes your position as viewer. You fairly quickly come to know what will be happening during the coming hour: a group of people cycling or dancing to a techno beat. This gives you the room to see other things that you would miss if you had to spend all your time consuming new information. You are given the time and space to look, in order to make the zooming in movement yourself.'

A: 'And actually with *Schwalbe performs a time*, we first do the opposite. We for the first time are no longer making any repetitive actions. What we do for 6 hours takes on many different forms. Unlike the fixed viewing position of the audience in other productions, in *Schwalbe performs a time* we give the audience precisely the freedom to take up different positions. Spectators can walk in and out of the performance whenever they want, causing them to change perspective each time. At the same time, we allow it to take place at night: causing many people to lose their sense of time, to lose track of what time it is, to forget whether they have slept or not. Outside it remains dark, and in the theatre you have only artificial light.'

You often work in group and sometimes with groups. Until now, you've never been alone on stage. What according to you is the power of a group?

A: 'You can find the theme "group-in-relation-to" in all of our productions. In our first production, *Save them*, from 2008, it's about the individual versus the group. Who are you as a group and who you are when alone or with one other person? In *Schwalbe performs on its own*, we as one group chose a single action to perform and to investigate how a crowd of people coheres. In *Schwalbe cheats* we look at things just the opposite: how can we situate people and groups with respect to one another. We found the answer in the game, with two teams facing off against each other.'

C: 'The seed for the group phenomenon lies in the period when we were still at school. *Save them* was our graduation project, which we made together as a kind of statement. Not a graduation project in which everyone gets a solo. No, we preferred to do something together, to go for one thing together. And we have continued to work together since. In the meantime, however, we all continue to work and search on our own. Which is precisely what makes it exciting: every time we come together, it is as slightly different people with a bit of extra baggage, allowing us to further

develop and play out new confrontations. The group is a living organism, which is always in transformation. Which also makes it inspiring, and continually demands that we examine who we are at that moment.'

A: 'And our group changes too: we started with nine, we are now only seven. The group is not completely fixed. What is important is the way we work and the way we create: in conversation with one another in order to arrive at a chosen form. This demands much discussion during the creative process. But it is just these decisions and twists that can make your group, that make it so special. You'll never get there as director alone.'

Is that what you mean by "looking together for an uncompromising form"? It sounds very contradictory, but how do you do it?

C: 'The most exciting aspect is looking and continuing to look until we arrive at a solution as a group. Starting from a fairly broad topic and having the need to find out how we can create a consistent production as a group. This yields much more than compromising by placing one part after the other.'

A: 'And with *Schwalbe performs a time*, we also encounter the audience in a reasonably uncompromising way: the production lasts 6 hours and takes place at night! We in a closer relationship with the audience, and that seems to be working. We note that some people really prepare for the production: they've taken a nap at 6 PM, or they bring extra pillows. It's also a beautiful moment when the audience enters at one before midnight and nestles in the stands: both actors and audience look at each other. We both are prepared for something. Each in a different way, but we tackle it together, that moment, until the end of the night. We meet one another in the aisle, and at the end enjoy some beers and discuss. Thus it really is something that we experience and do together.'

You are presenting all your work for one week. How do you look back on your self-development? When you look at it this way, what is Schwalbe?

A: 'The one production flowed from the other. At Kaaitheater we will be starting with *Schwalbe is looking for crowds*, a production involving many people. So we'll be arriving in the city and already entering into a dialogue with the city from the beginning. And then we chronologically review what we've created until now.'

C: 'I must say that I'm looking forward very much to this week. This is the first time we are presenting everything in a single week, and I'm also very curious about your question: how will we experience that history in quick succession? What will the physical consequences be? What meaning will all of these projects have for us today? And how will we see the one flow again from the other?'

What keeps returning?

A: 'The group in its different forms is a constant.'

C: 'Also a fascination with looking. What movement the viewer makes with respect to the movements on the stage. We've often discussed perhaps bringing the audience with us on stage or giving it a different viewing position than the stands. But until now it has always remained the stands. For the time being we still wish to frame the position of the viewer and his or her field of vision.'

Are there any productions that you would now do differently?

C: 'Broadly speaking, we still stand behind each production. But if we were to make them again, I think other discussions would emerge. We present *Save them* every five years. Every five years we sit around the table and every five years the production changes slightly. In particular we also change, as do the times.'

A: 'We sometimes also make special editions of the production. We for example made an XL version of *Schwalbe is looking for crowds*. In this sense, the production can develop still further. There is also an idea to present certain productions in a museum, which would make for a different perspective. We are also showing a video installation by Fanny Hagmeier. She coached *Schwalbe is looking for crowds* and made a video work of this at her own initiative. Thus we also want to spotlight the sparks generated from the project that take on a different form.'

In your latest production, you appealed to technicians to come and see the performance. Is this production special for them?

A: 'Technicians, set designers and set builders. We wanted to invite people who work in the theatre, especially technicians. We are not technicians, but do their work all night long: we build and tear down sets.'

C: 'However, there is much wonderful visual and choreographic material that otherwise would remain unseen. And at the same time they are very practical actions, which makes it exciting. Our productions always concern pure action, and that is also the case now. They are simultaneously movements and scenes from which we can learn a lot. We therefore often had discussions with the technicians in different theatres. The good thing is that they see things differently, they see other possibilities. With technicians in the auditorium, we can continue to carry on that conversation.'

A: 'The production is a constant transformation from one set to the next. Each set is different in terms of the look, the time required to build them, and building methods. Some sets take a long time to build, others are quickly ready, and quickly disappear or were almost not even present. It was perhaps not consciously intended, but it is a tribute to all the invisible operations of the theatre that take place outside the view of the spectator.'

C: 'In *Schwalbe performs a time* we attach no more value to building than we do to tearing down. Also, the image of the finished set is not more important than all the preceding images while building and all the images that will come afterwards while tearing down. It's all one continuous movement. As viewer, of course, you live for the finished image. Nevertheless, we hope that you as viewer will feel like you've seen something unique, namely all those images that the viewer normally is not allowed to see.'

How did you obtain all of those sets?

C: 'We came up with the idea on the first day of rehearsal to build and tear down sets. We then started calling and e-mailing lots of groups and makers. We first had to identify which sets in fact still existed, since sets are often discarded. Only then could we start selecting sets. The selection was done on the basis of material types, the dynamics of each set, what approach they require. What hit us very hard throughout this process is that all these groups, set designers and builders, were generous enough to lend us their material. The fact that they still had the sets meant that they were valuable. Sets that were still there because the production might be revived, or because they were simply too precious to throw away. And we were allowed to work with them night after night, with all the risks this entails. Which is simply extraordinary! Therefore, it feels as if these groups and set builders are participating a bit in the performance.'

Are we as viewer allowed to hear/see from which productions the sets came?

A: 'Yes, there will be a list of titles and designers, structured chronologically by creation date. This list is also available on our website. But during the production itself, it doesn't matter from where the set came. It's more about the material, the images, the duration of each set.'

C: 'We also use sets from different periods. The oldest goes back to 1991. This makes it at the same time a tribute to the transience of the images: to material that normally is stored somewhere in a hangar; and to memories of the viewers that saw these sets earlier, but equally to the fantasies of the viewers who are seeing the sets for the first time.'

Do you also rehearse at night?

A: 'We opted to rehearse during the day in order to really master the building process while the mind is still fresh. We began to rehearse at night only very late in process because we first wanted to know very well what we were doing, before testing it at night. We were already familiar with working at night: last year we did a residency at Pact Zollverein in Essen, where we gave the night a central focus. So we could already experiment with how many successive nights we could play and when a break was needed. Because after working night after night, things don't always go as they should anymore!'

Translated by Dan Frett

Kaaitheater is supported by