

Festival d'automne: the *Infidèles* ballet of withered leaves

On the face of it, there is nothing original about the adulterous triangle formed by Marianne, Markus and David. The actress, who has been with her conductor husband for eleven years, falls in love – more out of compassion than passion – with her best friend, a theatre director, and begins a relationship with him. The plot is seemingly identical to those which have animated theatre stages for aeons and given structure to the most passionate intrigues in literature. But only 'seemingly'... because Marianne doesn't exist. She is an imaginary actress, a cathartic figure who Ingmar Bergman, himself present on the stage, calls into being to tell an old story about infidelity – real or invented.

This phantasmagorical opening of the scenario of *Infidèle* (Faithless) written by the versatile Swedish artist and adapted for the big screen by Liv Ullmann in the early 2000's, creates an ethereal atmosphere which tg STAN and de Roovers delight in cultivating. Like a distant echo of Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* – which the Belgian collective performed a couple of years ago (*Trahisons*) on the same stage at the Théâtre de la Bastille – Jolente De Keersmaecker, Robby Cleiren, Frank Vercruyssen and, for the first time, Ruth Becquart, adopt a subtly distant style of acting to represent Marianne's fragmented monologue and examine the wounds of past relationships. They have all understood that tears and cries are not necessary to probe hearts shrivelled by the end of an affair.

The script is king

In an airy and adaptable set, the four actors deliver to perfection Ingmar Bergman's script. With a crescendoing intensity, in which the skilfully maintained languor could prove destabilizing, they underscore the Swedish playwright's incisive dialogues, some of which are taken from his autobiography *Laterna Magica*. They reveal the bitter-sweet humour and the humanity concealed behind the façade of cruelty and irony.

What began like a Feydeau play under anaesthetic becomes an intimate drama which rekindles old wounds and makes the characters puppets of love, tossed to and fro between the moral straightjacket and the deceitful game of emotions. A ballet of withered leaves is slowly enacted to the sounds of Brahms and Mozart. The Festival d'automne could hardly have found a more appropriate play to open with.

Vincent Bouquet