

## ON STAGE



Cynthia Loemij and Frank Vercruyssen. Photos: Hermann Sargeloos



In 'Quartett,' she surpasses herself: Cynthia Loemij in Anne Teresa and Jolente de Keersmaeker's new production in Brussels

## The Sisters de Keersmaeker

## 'Quartett' for Rosas and STAN in Brussels

Emerging out of Heiner Müller's 'Dilettante Shore Medea-material Landscape with Argonauts,' Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker has already staged pure theatre once before. Now comes 'Quartett,' the Heiner Müller piece based on Choderlos de Laclos that was written immediately prior to 'Medea-material.' Her younger sister Jolente is directing, the actor Frank Vercruyssen plays Valmont, the dancer Cynthia Loemij plays Merteuil, one of Rosas' most outstanding figures in the past years. The constellation is similar to that of 'Medea-material,' with the actor Johan Leyse and the dancer Kitty Kortjes Lynch.

'Medea-material' worked from an unusual standpoint: a long tribune that was placed in front of a flat, stretched-out playing field, so that one could not at one glance get an overall view of the action, the fragmented text. With 'Quartett,' on the other hand, it's about the

centred gaze. The stage design consists of nothing more than an outstretched field of planks crossed over one another, five cables with spotlights dangle at a scant height above. In the course of the performance, the light moves from left to right, towards the end, it is dimmed out.

The decorations by Thomas Walgrave and Herman Sargeloos support, in a very simple, starkly pictorial way, the Salon of the 18th century, alias a bunker after World War Three: an arena, in which the battle for life and death is fought out with fencing foils. Techno music that threatens to overwhelm everything takes the audience in. Both actors wander back and forth, only fleetingly aware of the audience.

Their feud is a dispute about nothing. Power only plays a role, love is pure lust. There is only the mad desire to affect and oppose the other (even if it

means ruination). Anything goes, total perversion serves to stomp on the social code. Valmont is a master in the abuse of ethical discourse (Müller called the piece a "reflection on terrorism"). The perversion thereby rages most powerfully in the difference between man and woman, in the tension between destruction and unification. The staging avoids all linear textual interpretations. Instead, it attempts to mediate between the depraved relationships, to show subliminal "currents," and to deliver a scenic answer, its own rhythm and sound, to the unusually stark "plasticity." It is above all an examination of the possibilities possessed by both the disciplines of dance and acting to bring to light things that are, in sensu stricto, inexpressible.

The piece came into being in an appropriately exceptional way. Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker worked out a dance fragment with Cynthia Loemij that closely approached Rosas' newest choreographic material. Her sister Jo-

lente worked with Frank Vercruyssen on the interpretation and handling of the text. The two were brought together only at the last minute. This form of montage also implies the search for the way in which dancers and actors can reinforce one another. Both find themselves half on strange territory. In the second part of the piece, a theatre within the theatre occurs, in which the one person plays the other, or oneself. With an actor like Frank Vercruyssen, who fosters a recognisable style, to play oneself is also a kind of self-examination, a tuning-in into oneself. For Cynthia Loemij, it becomes complicates when she no longer dances and speaks, but rather only speaks. Precise in dancing, she appears to effortlessly manage the change-over into another field, where she must conquer the heavyweight of her partner. It is in the case of Vercruyssen that one sees, conversely, how this staging turns on movement and stasis. Whoever can dance like Loemij can let their feelings run free in

a far more direct, less perfidious way, without giving the opposing player a chance to capture them in words. For a start, Loemij is overwhelmed by a deadly calm. Almost imperceptibly, she creeps into herself, the shoulders are gathered in, the hands grope around as if in the dark. Then she opens herself up, lays herself down, swings her arms upward like a flag pole. She marks off the stage in continuously growing circles.

Then, exact and measured, she speaks her first monologue, in which she divulges her completely illusionless behaviour towards Valmont. He stands at the periphery of the stage, and when he steps out onto the stage, it is still Loemij who snares the rigid Valmont with her dance like a spider in its web. Loemij surpasses herself in an almost marvellous way. The chances are evened out only when Valmont begins with the role-play, recounts how he does in two other women - a religious one (Tourvel, played by Valmont) and

an innocent maiden (Volanges, played by Merteuil). In the end, Merteuil demands that the suicide of Tourvel is played out, with Valmont in her role. The last game is his downfall. Then, something remarkable happens - he dances. For the first time. Clumsily, hatingly, and the exact same movement sequence as the one Loemij danced in the beginning: "Death a whore. Now we are alone / Cancer my beloved," are her last words. Even if I can't entirely explain it, among the ever complicated associations that are to be understood strictly rationally, this image, in its simplicity, is one of the "most right" triggered off by these personages.

Pieter T'Jonck

Further performances: April 1-3 in Amsterdam, Nestheaters/Frascati, April 7 in Tongeren, Velinx, April 10/11 in Groningen, Grand Théâtre, April 14 in Haarlem, Toneelschuur, April 20/21 in Gent, Vooruit, and April 28/29 in Rotterdam, Lantaren/Venster

