

Wild palms

Cold Blood

Written by Thomas Gunzig
Directed by Jaco Van Dormael
and Michèle Anne de Mey
At Canadian Stage in Toronto
and Usine C in Montreal
★★★★½

REVIEWED BY
KELLY NESTRUCK

You may never look at your hands the same way after a show by the Belgian artists Jaco Van Dormael and Michèle Anne de Mey.

Indeed, standing to clap after *Cold Blood*, I experienced an oddly disembodied feeling, as if my hands were acting of their own accord – smacking together over and over in epileptic celebration of a show that was created for them by other hands.

Even now, I'm looking down at my laptop and wondering if those 10 fingers are the ones writing this review, not me. No, that's crazy. Let me try to explain: *Cold Blood* is a dance show starring hands. Three dancers let their fingers do the walking through a variety of miniature sets on rolling tables – into a small forest, through the streets of a tiny town, up and down the poles of a little strip



In *Cold Blood*, three dancers let their fingers do the walking through a variety of miniature sets on rolling tables. JULIEN LAMBERT

club stage.

Meanwhile, Steadicam operators scramble around on the stage filming these phalanges getting funky, and the live feed of the small scenes is blown up and projected on a giant screen above them.

As an audience member, you can sit watching the film (starring hands!) or cast your eyes down to see how the images are being made (by whole humans).

Likely, you'll go back and forth. The images Van Dormael, a filmmaker, and de Mey, a choreographer, create are often extraordinarily magical.

In one sequence, two hands with thumbs on their index and middle fingers execute a frenetic tap dance on what looks like a tiny, old-timey film set. This appears on the big screen in black and white to the soundtrack of an old dance movie. You

see hands; you imagine Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The pleasure is in what performance scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte calls “perceptual multistability.” Then there's a shift in perspective that was such a surprise that it led the opening audience (or their hands) to break into spontaneous applause. I won't spoil it.

Not that describing *Cold Blood* could entirely do it justice. This “nano-dance” is the kind of thing you really have to see. Unless, perhaps, you saw *Kiss & Cry*, Van Dormael and de Mey's last, similar show to visit Canadian Stage. *Kiss & Cry* was about a woman looking back on five loves. *Cold Blood* is a dream about seven deaths. Whose deaths? Your own.

“You are sleeping,” an unnamed, unseen narrator (Toby Regbo) says as the lights go down. “You are already a bit of a different person.”

The script for *Cold Blood* was written by Belgian author and screenwriter Thomas Gunzig. It's the weakest part of the show. The narrator – there's only the narrator – mainly speaks in lists. He enumerates ways you could die, places you might die, smells you could smell as you die. Each death – a car crash, a plane crash, a suicide – ends with the

final image you remember before you die.

In Gunzig's repetitive scenario, this image is almost always a woman you were in love with. The perspective shifts to female for just one death – and then you are a man-eater. Literally. There's a very strange monologue – a list again – about the way different men taste to a cannibal.

Kiss & Cry was polished and groundbreaking. *Cold Blood* is ambitious, but not always pulled off with the same aplomb. If you haven't seen either, I'd rush to see *Cold Blood* at Canadian Stage or Usine C.

If you've already seen *Kiss & Cry*, however, especially recently, you might GO ANYWAY. Sorry, I meant to type RUN DON'T WALK. No, I mean you could BUY TICKETS FOR WHOLE FAMILY. Wait, what are you doing, hands? No, Hands! No! HANNNDSSRSKRSKJSDJFDJDFSE. GO SEE SHOW BEST SHOW EVER GO.

Cold Blood continues in Toronto to Feb. 14 (canadianstage.com) and will be performed in Montreal from Feb. 18 to 21 (usine-c.com).

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A merger through movement

DANCE REVIEW

MARTHA SCHAPOS

The fourth instalment of the Toronto Dance Theatre's international series brings two exciting New York-based choreographers to Winchester Street: Joanna Kotze and Jeanine Durn-

ing. Artistic director Christopher House calls them two singular artistic voices that, together, can go some way toward capturing the essence of what's happening in New York's dance scene.

Both choreographers come from postmodern traditions in

dance. While the pieces are entirely self-contained, they possess almost startling similarities in terms of structure, quality of movement, use of silence, costume and mood.

Kotze, who won the 2013 New York Dance and Performance

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Bessie Award for Outstanding Emerging Choreographer has created a work for five dancers that makes a jubilant use of space and (literally) imposes on the audience – at one point, dancer Valerie Calam sits on the lap of someone in the front row. *Un Petit Peur Plus* begins with dancer Jarrett Siddall interrupting his own understated solo to leap onto the first auditorium riser and watch us. He exits abruptly, and an offstage eruption of yelling is followed by the ensemble bursting onstage in a barrage of colour (they're wearing bright crop tops, patterned pants, jumpsuits).

Structurally, the work makes use of scattered formations and sudden exits. The movement, which is aerobic, recursive and playful, is tinged with a feeling of parody – our inability to determine what exactly is being parodied is intriguing, if not entirely satisfyingly resolved. There are beautiful sequences, like Calam's solo against the upstage wall, in which she shifts in and out of Grecian, statuesque shapes.

Kotze is so skilled at drawing the parameters of her off-kilter world, that we come to recognize what can be uniquely funny inside of it. At one point, dancer Megumi Kokuba is escorted across the stage in a bouncing arabesque. Freed of context, there's nothing particularly funny about that. But Kokuba is gleeful as she watches us watch her, and the moment comes to epitomize Kotze's self-conscious investigation of what it means to watch and perform.

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