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SEX AND THE CITY OF BRUSSELS

EN Argentinean choreographer Ayelen Parolin's third piece, *SMS and Love*, claims to let us glimpse what happens at a girls' night out. But, the carving knife, the white sofa strewn with feathers, and the quantities of human flesh involved, hint that this soirée will not be your run-of-the-mill hen night. For a start, one of the four guests is a man.

"It's my theory that when women get together they turn into men because they allow themselves to drop the conventions of femininity. Conversations get very crude and even cruel but strong, shared affection and intimacy means no one ever really takes offence. The question of 'nurture and nature' interests me too. What defines our femininity or masculinity? Our genes or our upbringing and environment?"

Parolin first saw François Declercq, the lone male of the group, dancing at a party dressed as a woman. "I was totally amazed," she explains. "He's not a trained dancer but I found him magnificent and inspiring. I often look for personalities who are somewhat excessive and willing to go beyond their own limits so I asked him if he wanted to work with us."

SMS and Love begins as a dinner party in an apartment. "A bit like *Sex and the City* but in Brussels," says Parolin. The soirée soon slides into something more surreal. "During the creation processes I had a very memorable dream where my everyday activities were taking place in the wrong settings," says Parolin. "I found myself at a swimming pool trying to post my letters, for example. In this piece I'm not looking to create a particular aesthetic or narrative. A shifting of frame and a mix between reality and fiction is what we've been working to achieve. It's become totally hybrid with dance, text and metaphorical imagery." (Indeed a plucked

chicken, the unfortunate owner of the loose feathers, makes quite an appearance at the party!).

Confessing games

Parolin's first work was a solo entitled *25.06.76* - her date of birth. It marked the beginning of her ongoing fascination with identity, image, and sexuality. She drew on "memories from my own life of events and feelings that have contributed to who I am now." She already has a large stock. Her first contact with dance was as the age of five. She was trained at respected dance schools in Argentina and in 1998 her end-of-school choreography won first prize at the Biennale de Arte Joven de Mar del Plata. Never shy of new challenges, she temporarily abandoned contemporary dance to work with com-

mercial Argentinean TV, thus earning the means of subsidizing a year-long journey of discovery to Europe via the United States. She landed in Brussels in 2000. "It's such an easy city to feel at home in," she says. "It's human scale which means making friends and asking for help is simple."

The title *SMS and Love* refers to the explosion of the use of short text messaging and the slogan 'Peace and Love'. "Today we buy and sell intimacy like any other commodity. Part of our research for the piece was to undertake a sort of intensive immersion course in getting to know each other. We partied together and spent a lot of time sitting in a circle playing confessing games. We're now great friends, and exploring the ambiguity between work and friendship became part of the making of the piece."

The strong bond between the four individual performers, including Parolin herself, is tangible. Performer Viviana Moin, an Argentinean theatre and dance maker who was discovered by Parolin in France, says: "I find Ayelen's performances irresistible because they possess something so human and profoundly true and touching." Parolin says she hopes they make us laugh too!

NL *SMS and Love* stelt ons "een avondje uit onder meisjes" in het vooruitzicht. Maar het derde stuk van de Argentijnse choreografe Ayelen Parolin zou wel eens helemaal anders kunnen zijn dan wat je daar doorgaans onder verstaat.

FR *SMS and Love*, le troisième spectacle de la chorégraphe argentine Ayelen Parolin, nous invite à une nuit entre filles comme vous n'en avez sans doute jamais vécue.

