



REVIEW: LISBETH GRUWEZ/VEOTOLK AH/HA - THE PLACE

PERFORMANCE: 23 & 24 OCTOBER 2015
 REVIEWED BY PHILIPPA NEWIS - MONDAY 26 OCTOBER 2015



Five eclectically-dressed dancers are caught in a pulsating beat. The rhythm – like a ticking clock – pushes its way into their bodies, interrupting their solitude. With little warning, laughter rips through the performers' bodies. It splutters and vomits out of their limbs, climaxing in a mosh pit of throbbing arms and torsos. They cackle, bark and squawk, fragments of laughter are tossed between the dancers and hurled at the audience.

Belgian choreographer **Lisbeth Gruwez's** forensic examination of laughter is a deliciously unsettling experience. Gruwez dissects and manipulates this most fundamental of human expressions, disrupting its social and cultural meanings. **AH/HA** is the first group performance of **Voetolk**, the company she founded in 2006 with composer **Maarten Van Cauwenberghe**.

Gruwez's choreography is both playful and sinister. She skilfully disfigures the familiar, freezing the dancers' facial expressions in contortions of mirth. Without the sound of laughter, their features are grotesque and clown-like. Their merriment distorted into silent screams. Gruwez teeters on the edge of hysteria, but resists the temptation of wholesale indulgence. She weaves threads of absurdity with human intimacy. Clustering together, the dancers meld into a singular, sensual creature. Their hands tenderly caress each other's thighs, chests and faces.

AH/HA is a highly textured work. Explosive pockets of frenzied activity morph into sequences of treacle-coated movement stretched over the restless, accumulating rhythms. Gruwez's choreography and Van Cauwenberghe's sound score seems to bend time. The hour long piece dips and swerves; it is an intense, almost other-worldly experience. **AH/HA** worms its way into your head and lingers there, but it won't be everyone's cup of tea.

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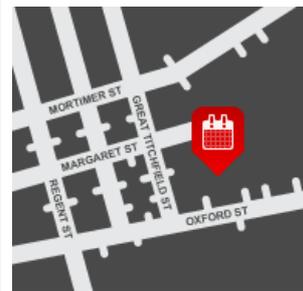
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Philippa Newis took part in this year's **Resolution! Review**, the programme in which emerging and professional writers together review every work in **The Place's** annual platform for new choreography. Find her on Twitter:

[@PhilippaNewis](https://twitter.com/PhilippaNewis)

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