

Original version by Danielle de Regt – De Standaard

Man as a doormat

After *Myth* and *Apocrifu*, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui has now closed the Sacred Books for a while. But *Origine* is once again the brainchild of an idealist.

Earth is a plaything in Shawn Mothupi's hands. He models an imaginary globe and smoothly lets it run over his shoulders, until he begins to groan under the heavy load. From an alchemist he changes into a titan in no time, but his insignificance forces him onto his knees. The creation of the world and the rise and fall of humanity are condensed in a nutshell, ideas that Cherkaoui tries to open as *Origine* takes its course, to finish with key topics in today's society like immigration, loneliness and solidarity.

Cherkaoui is a choreographer who does not cut back on his ambitions. No subject is too big for him. He deprives primitive myths from their patina so they gleam as never before. As for the form, no episode of our cultural heritage is too far-fetched to make it fit into his cosmic circle dance.

At first sight *Origine* is a cocktail of well-known ingredients. Whirling bodies bend into the most unthinkable directions and are skilfully laced up into an eclectic choreography that bursts with inventiveness. The dancers reveal themselves as each other's tools. Daisy Phillips pushes Kazutomi Kozuki back into the spiral of evolution, using him first as a feet washer, then as lipstick, and finally as a doormat. Civilisation is a varnish that glosses over many things. The result is mutual utilitarianism.

The concrescence of bodies and objects and their eventual interchangeability are frequent motives in Cherkaoui's movements. But in *Origine* they also get a conceptual sense. The rigidity that crawls over the stage like a shadow is accurately represented. The background is composed of four white screens, filled with paralysed shades that shrivel up under the torture of isolation behind the geraniums or the television.

But basically Cherkaoui radically refuses to be a worrywart. He is not a man of cold-blooded analyses. He always leaves room for consolation, a safety net that he never takes away. Gestures of compassion, like stroking the other one's cheek or caressing his hair, are like little lights that never stop shining.

Origine reconciles the frivolous and the alarming in a disarming way. The line between naïveté and simplicity is usually not very clear in Cherkaoui's work, but his austere, still approach is touching. The music is simply brilliant. The Sarband Ensemble plays and sings the stars out of the sky. Religious songs by female composers and choirs from days long gone, are woven together into a precious sirens' concert that subliminally sings about the decay of patriarchy.

After *Zero Degrees* this is Cherkaoui's best creation in the past three seasons.

Daniëlle de Regt

"Origine" by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (Toneelhuis and Muziekcentrum De Bijloke). Seen in Antwerp on 7/2. At Bourla (Antwerp) on 9/2 and 13-16/2, CC (Genk) on 11/4, Stadsschouwburg (Leuven) on 29-30/4, and Bijloke Muziekcentrum (Ghent) from 5 to 14/6. Information: 03-224 88 44 www.toneelhuis.be