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Funny, creepy and ridiculously perfect: 'AH/HA' by Lisbeth Gruwez/Voetvolk



Stop! Now!, I was thinking. And surprisingly enough the lights went out that very moment. Artists often tend to want to prove too much and end up putting too many things in a performance. So it felt almost as a relief to see someone sticking to a couple of essential ideas and think them through. *AH/HA* by [Lisbeth Gruwez](#) and her company [Voetvolk](#). Gruwez is the Belgian choreographer who has toured the world with her solo *It's going to get worse and worse and worse, my friend* – more than 100 shows, and counting: Canada in January, Paris in March. *AH/HA* is her first group choreography, and it's a gem.

A dance performance about laughter? Focusing on an exploration of the laughing body? I wasn't all too sure I wanted to see this, and maybe at first you will have some doubts too, when you'll read about *AH/HA*. Forget about that. Because the moment *AH/HA* starts, any reservations you might have had about the subject matter of this dance performance will be gone. Five odd-looking dancers on a green stage, perfectly lit, looking like [Duane Hanson](#) sculptures. You wonder if they're real or not. A fascinating opening image. And then the squeaking starts. *Iepe-iepe-iepe*. Hesitantly. And slowly their knees start moving. And their bodies too.



It is as far as I will go in my description of this performance, as I don't want to spoil the fun. Let me just try to sum up what I liked about *AH/HA*. Sure, you could say that in fact, it's made up of just a few scenes, and that relying on repetition, on a technique of constructing tableaux in slow motion, with mainly just shaking and jumping and funny looking facial expressions, is a bit easy.

I prefer to see *AH/HA* as a clever, meticulously crafted performance, with a lot of attention paid to details. Everything just looks right. Those five dancers on stage, to begin with: the perfect team (it took them a year to find the group they were looking for). Hair and costumes: great as well. A simple, but effective soundscape, by [Maarten Van Cauwenberghe](#), Gruwez's partner in crime, who is manipulating lots of layers of sound from his mixing desk during the performance. Sound and image working really great together.

And then that song at the end. Absolutely ridiculous but ridiculously perfect. (At first they wanted a credible song to end this performance with: *Smile*, by post-punk pioneers [The Fall](#), but Van Cauwenberghe wisely dropped it, because it was too credible, too easy.) And of course: knowing when to stop.

AH/HA is a performance you should see in a relatively small theatre, so you can watch it from rather up close and see the expressions on those faces. (They spent hours working on the gazes of the dancers; studying faces by watching YouTube-clips with muted sound, realizing that it's difficult to tell if people are laughing, panicking or...



having an orgasm.) It also means you can see how these characters and these tableaux almost look like paintings sometimes. (Yes: they drew their inspiration from works of art by Edward Munch and Grünewald, even the Mona Lisa.) Notice how what looks funny suddenly becomes scary or grim, in this weird gathering or club that seems to be taken from a David Lynch-movie. And realize how laughter is used as a means to talk about group dynamics. Another reason why you need to be relatively close to the people on stage: to feel a certain 'nearness' to this odd, sometimes scary group of people.

Apart from all that, watching AH/HA just made me feel good. If it hadn't been sold out the day after, I would have booked a ticket again. That kind of happy.

Do click [here](#) for a teaser clip. Tour schedule [here](#).

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