

Dance-historical series 'The Middle Ages' raises questions about then and now.

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Despite the title, 'The Middle Ages' begins at MDT with courtly dancing to lute music from the Renaissance where the five performers wear costumes as a clever fragments rather than genuinely believable captures of history with its courtly ideals. So we actually don't know much about how dancing from the Middle Ages really looked like.

Furthermore the piece's choreographer, Andros Zins-Browne, is less interested in the term 'middle age' and more interested in the English title's second meaning, to be 'in between'. In the grey area between then, now and a possible future, which gives a pure scenic twist thanks to the dance taking place in the in-between area with the audience sitting across from one another.

The Brussels-based American Andros Zins-Browne visited MDT last spring with 'The lac of Signs', a rhapsodic everyday-life version in an exclusive hologram format (only 12 audience members per performance) which problematized the contrast between absence-presence. Extreme high-tech has now been replaced by dancing low-tech but the problem or question feels similar. Where – and what – is the 'now'?

Almost immediately 'The Middle Ages' presents itself as a compressed, rhapsodic series – the choreographer himself speaks of 'tweets' – everything from couple-dancing and waltzes to the past half-century's ego-centred and often shortlived dance hypes like 'Gangnam style'. The five performers have a wonderfully ironic precision and a fabulous sense of comedy, even if I don't understand why the three men always stand for the absurd jokes while the two women mostly have to dance on.

The program notes philosophical critique of a naive historical view is mind-boggling but not new, it's not that groundbreaking. Despite this, 'The Middle Ages' captures, entertains and sometimes really manages to interpret this elusive thought model. I'm looking forward to the next performance by Andros Zins-Browne. The fact that the dancing continues into the darkness while the lights are turned on the audience only further shows the blurry line between then and now. And the future I bring with me from Skeppsholmen.

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