

Claire Croizé's new creation *Flowers (we are)* is a piece for three dancers and two musicians. As with *EVOL* (2016), Claire found inspiration in her favourite poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, but this time she traded the songs of David Bowie for the keyboard music of Johann Sebastian Bach, which in turn becomes source material for additional music by Matteo Fargion. It is Claire's first time working with a contemporary composer. Matteo, who is known for his genre-defying duets with choreographer Jonathan Burrows, also performs the music, together with his daughter Francesca.

Like Rilke, Bach is an old friend. "In my daily practice, I often use his music," says Claire, "especially keyboard works such as *The Well-Tempered Klavier* or *The Goldberg variations*. I find that the intimate relationship between the music and the instrument echoes that between the dancer and their body. This helps the dancer to develop a distinct, personal voice."

In *Flowers we are*, the music rarely strays too far from Bach. Using piano, synthesiser and their voices, Matteo and Francesca engage in a playful dialogue with Bach, creating a rich and unsettling sound world: At its purest, a selection of Preludes from Book I of the *Well Tempered Clavier*, chosen for their intimacy and simplicity. On the other end of the spectrum, Matteo's song settings of the dark and romantic poetry of Rilke, with perhaps just a few chords borrowed from the master. And in between are irreverent transcriptions, translations and deconstructions of Bach's Preludes and four-part Chorales.

Rilke's texts were used both as lyrics and as inspiration for three dancers – Emmi Väisänen, Claire Godsmark and Gorka Gurrutxaga – while they were working on the choreography. "There is just something about Rilke that triggers movement," says Claire. "He is truly a poet of the body: facial features, eyes and sight, hands and hand gestures, are all important symbols in his work. When I first read the *Duino Elegies*, it left a big impression on me. I was greatly moved by Rilke's message of love. However, reading it back later, I realized things were not as straightforward as I had thought, that Rilke's relation with love, beauty and religion is complex and fraught with questions and despair."

This struggle seems to find its way into the choreography. There are scenes full of urgency: the dancers run, jump and gyrate across the stage, making busy gestures at each other, accompanied by fast-paced keywork. These alternate with quiet and vulnerable moments that seem hardly choreographed: dancers stumbling across the stage, eyes closed, searching for something or someone to hold on to.

But *Flowers (we are)* is not so much about our relationship with the divine as it is about human relationships. Claire approaches this theme through the biblical tale of Tobias, which Rilke touches briefly at the beginning of the second elegy:

Gone are the days of Tobias,
when shining Raphael,
awful majesty disguised,
stood at a door, twin
to the youth who gazed
out, curious, upon him.

The broad interpretation of this single phrase from the second elegy is a departure from her usual way of working with text, where she asks the dancers to translate whole lines and stanzas into movement. This time, she deals with the material much like a theater maker would, giving them characters and situations to work with. The story has two parts: with the help of the archangel Raphael Tobias heals his fathers blindness, and he defeats the demon that haunts his future wife Sarah. These are turned into archetypes of filial and romantic love, that return like a chorus throughout the piece. The scenes between father and son, solid and sincere, contrast with the lovers' duets, which are more eager and more tentative. Tugging and pulling at each other,

crawling across each other, the dancers imagine perfectly the contradictions of romantic love, the impossible desire to slip into each other's skin.

The narrative element is translated into a strong sense of theatricality, without ever turning into mime. Here, Claire once again shows herself to be a poet of movement: by stripping away or scattering the frame of reference, she leaves us with the raw, concrete emotions behind the story. Something similar happens in Matteo's songs, which have a performative streak yet remain abstract, true to their poetic nature. The warm and fanciful light design by Hans Meijer, suggesting a sublime mountainscape with little more than color and shape, creates an otherworldly atmosphere that adds an extra dimension to their story.

What ties everything together is the minute attention each of the performers pays to the others' movements, the care with which they observe, guide and respond to each other. In the end, *Flowers (we are)* feels like a message of hope, an invitation into a magical universe, a warm hand to hold in a world where people seem further apart from each other than ever.