

DANCE

Hans van Manen Live

Muziektheater, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

★★★★☆

Gerald Dowler

At the age of 83 and with a creative corpus of more than 125 ballets, Hans van Manen is a world-class choreographer little known outside his native Netherlands. In a quartet of his works, Dutch National Ballet demonstrates the breadth of his artistry and invention.

Metaforen, from 1965, remains a classy ballet, impossibly chic with its dark stage and striking black-and-white costumes. Van Manen's movement style here is austere neoclassicism, reminiscent of Balanchine, the dancers exploring the stage in lines of cool geometry, snapping into statuesque poses, and is a sophisticated reaction to Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur's experimental musical variations. At its heart, two couples breach convention by dancing in same-sex pairings. This is not, however, an exercise in homo-eroticism, but an experiment in where ballet could go in

the 1960s. Here, it was performed with exemplary dancing from the company.

Van Manen's preoccupation with the duet continues in two lesser pieces: *Twilight* (1972), now dated in look, remains a work of shifting moods, with John Cage's spiky prepared piano composition *The Perilous Night* underpinning the changing interplay between two dancers. In *Two Gold Variations* (1999) the choreographer is in Mark Morris mode: six couples, men in metallic



High-octane: 'Two Gold Variations'

swimsuits, women in intensely coloured short dresses, people the stage in increasingly frenzied movement to Jacob ter Veldhuis' riotous percussion *Goldrush Concerto*. There is exciting, high-octane dance with multiple entrances and exits, before focus and calm descend with Igone de Jongh and Jozef Varga in a slow duet suffused with anguish and distress. It makes a strong contrast.

Live (1979) begins as a duo between a dancer (de Jongh) and a cameraman (Henk van Dijk) to Liszt piano pieces. On a screen, we see his live black-and-white footage of her, sometimes just a hand or a foot. It fascinates and intrigues; it is documentary in real time. They leave the auditorium and she dances with a man, the admirable Marijn Rademaker, in the foyer; we watch onscreen what we cannot see directly. Further layers are added with footage of a pre-recorded heated encounter – we witness their past – until de Jongh dons a coat and leaves the theatre to walk off into the Amsterdam night.

Live spawned a whole genre, but it remains the most powerful evidence of van Manen's mastery.

To September 26, operaballet.nl