

*Review of Oneiron in Teatteri & Tanssi (Theatre & Dance magazine), Helsinki, Finland, January 2018*

## **Oneiron is a breathtaking requiem**

My first reaction to **Valtteri Raekallio's** work *Oneiron* was terror. How can **Laura Lindstedt's** novel, about the meeting of seven women in post-death limbo, be translated into a dance piece? The thick novel submerges the reader into a verbal avalanche of the stories of the women from different cultures, even to the point of exhaustion. Likewise, the two-and-a-half-hour duration of Raekallio's piece felt megalomaniacal, since even the familiar one-hour format of contemporary dance requires so much material and skill to pull off successfully.

I was completely wrong. The dance work *Oneiron* is, in a word, breathtaking, with neither too much nor too little of anything. It is a contemporary dance work crafted with exceptional skill, a requiem for six dancers. In Raekallio's *Oneiron*, words become flesh, and the women's stories are transformed into explosive dances that transgress the expected limits of mind and movement.

What is death? What happens to us when we face it? What do we want to remember of time before we cease to exist? All of this sounds very abstract, but the three-part dramaturgical structure of *Oneiron* is so secure that in the end, when we leave our shared encounter with death, everything is crystal clear, both life and death.

*Oneiron* succeeds in illuminating the dark spots from which we want to turn our gaze. Even though the piece contains very brutal scenes, it does not aim to shock. The work's message of life and death is, in the end, gentle. The stage is stripped to its essence, **Jukka Huitila's** light design guides us from mood to mood, and the polyphonic soundscape finds its climax in **Schubert's** intense piano sonata. Laura Lindstedt's text weaves itself naturally into the interlocking patterns of this theatre of the mind.

Raekallio's work fulfils the basic requirement of art - that of being multi-layered. In addition to death, this is a piece about life. Towards the end, Shlomith, the performance artist of the novel, says:

"I make performances, it is my job to go to limits that are uncomfortable, even dangerous. But I never hurt anyone else, possibly just myself." At the end of the

book, she asks: "Why does art demand everything that it takes from those that make it, and what does it give back? Death?"

Raekallio's work demands all from its dancers. Virtuosity is a pale word to describe the level of this ensemble. The present-in-the-moment, partly improvisatory choreography demands superpowers of muscles, joints, bones, nerves and the mind. **Jonna Aaltonen, Krista-Julia Arppo, Annamari Keskinen, Mirva Mäkinen, Eero Vesterinen** and **Valtteri Raekallio** demonstrate what movement is capable of. They dance as if in free fall, ever deeper, towards the revelation of the core of existence. Exhausted over two hours, they run for their lives, until they collapse – all is fulfilled.

Death is the most inexplicable thing in life. This is the mystery that Valtteri Raekallio's *Oneiron* succeeded in illuminating, in a way that is simultaneously fragile and secure. At the same time, this work raises the bar of Finnish contemporary dance, for others to follow.

-Raisa Rauhamaa