

# Under the skin

Is it too early to offer a clear perspective on Corona and its impact on our everyday lives? Based solely on *Under the skin* by Anastasia Kostner, which premiered on 23 September at CC Amstel in Amsterdam, my answer would probably be “yes”.

The performance starts in the dark, where a soothing voice is welcoming me. It invites me to contemplate my surroundings; it asks me how I am, and, more importantly, how I have been. How have I experienced the past eighteen months of the Corona pandemic? Did I cling to old habits, or did I learn to let go? Did the experience make me feel more, or less, comfortable in my own skin?

It is a promising start, which could have been drawn out even more, into the now. Corona is still going on, its repercussions can still be physically felt. How does it feel to suddenly be here, in close proximity with other people?

Four female performers show us four different perspectives, or ‘coping mechanisms’. The opening solo is by Kostner herself. Multiple times she stands at the ready, assuming various academic ballet positions. But every time she starts, she also falters. Her ankles wobble, her spins overturn. It is not long before she ends up on the floor, trying, yet unable, to get back up. It is only when she stops struggling and starts to embrace the uncertainty, that she once again regains her footing.

Kostner’s narrative is the most clear-cut of the four, if also a bit broad. Her individual story could apply to any situation where the status quo has suddenly, irrevocably, changed.

Sanne Clifford’s solo, by comparison, is definitely rooted in the now. She performs a succession of gestures that are now all too familiar: putting her hands under an imaginary soap dispenser, washing them repeatedly, coughing into the crook of her arm. Her movements become more and more frantic and compulsive. Where Kostner is set free, Clifford’s world seems to be contracting.

If Clifford is fearful and skittish like a rabbit caught in a trap, Sandra Kramerova is a confident warrior. I get the feeling that the way she faces Corona is the way she would face any obstacle: with strong poses and huge strides. Francesca Ziviani is a woman possessed. Moving around like a dark apparition in an Asian horror movie, jerking and twitching, mouth opened wide in a silent scream; vainly trying to exorcise her inner demons through dance.

*Under the skin* offers some interesting queries, but in practice the four solos barely scratch the surface. Excepting one scene where Ziviani lurks in the shadows like a spectre, and is quickly banished by Kramerova, there is no real interplay, where one person’s space or experience bleeds into the next. By focusing solely on these four isolated cases, the social experience is lost. Because how to evoke the sense of isolation and disconnect that is an intrinsic part of the 1.5 meter distance rule, if you are the only person on the stage?

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