

# The crime of the century

 By Johann Smith

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Despite the rain, the majority of the audience stood outside smoking and drinking, trying hard to figure out what to make of Dansmettieduiwels. But for us here tonight, there are several opposing views that will never meet. God only knows. Or rather: only God knows.

This is what happens when an interpretive dance piece gets tangled with Christianity, a subject often depending on individual interpretation. Choreographed dance can't always explain complicated ideas. And with this, one's interpretation jumps from religious reference to an acid trip.

## Powerful, elegant and seemingly bitter



The overall experience is powerful, elegant and seemingly bitter. Creators Alfred Hinkel and John Linden makes good use of opposing contrasts. Duiwels opens up on words from the Agnus Dei (an invocation to the Lamb of God sung during Mass in the Roman Catholic Church) displayed on an enormous screen: "Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world, grant us peace." With Janis Joplin screeching through the speakers: "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes-Benz."

The piece is divided into four separate parts with no interval and, apart from the start, the overall vibe is heavy, staunch Catholic drama. The score is made up of epic orchestral sections with monks' chants and features a dance production created and performed by Garage, who also recently took centre stage at the Fleur Du Cap awards. The group features stalwarts Grant van Ster, Christopher Samuels and Illse Samuels, together with Byron Klaasen and Farroll Coetzee.

Throughout, the screen displays religious imagery from the likes of 15th-century painter Caravaggio (specifically Amor Vincit Omnia), the Pope and, weirdly, screenshots from the movie The Passion Of The Christ. The costumes and projection design were done by fashion designer Marsten Carsten and lighting design, by Bennie Arendse.

## An inappropriate interest in minors



Five dancers tell, through suggestive movements, of the scandalous encounters between boys and men in the Roman Catholic Church. Albeit a bit cliché, Duiwels was inspired from a certain Emmanuel Begun, born in Matjieskloof near Springbok in the Northern Cape. While training to become a priest, he requested to work with children. But he was refused, as the abbot believed that he displayed an inappropriate interest in minors. This fact the piece never reveals and, arguably, could have (a brief video of a township might have been an attempt).

Distasteful erotic dances between young boy and a Christ-like figure might not be enough to convince a world amused to death to see this, and will perhaps only get dirty looks from Christians as a reward. However, when one witnesses a grown man removing a young boy's shorts on stage, while fondling his pubescent body and the words from the Agnus Dei are once more displayed white on black. You do more than just cringe.

The entire affair is an unholy oddball, and often appears to be a critique of organised Christianity - something the makers don't seem to be against. No doubt it's open to suggestion and its biggest accomplishment is how it manages to dig up a

weary topic that's been swept under the carpet and used to amuse an unscrupulous public, and creates new arguments that get people talking again.

## A social conundrum

Duiwels beckons and benefits from further reflexion. But it's somewhat a social conundrum. Besides containing many subtle Biblical nuances, the only people interested in Christianity are Christians, who won't exactly be delighted to buy a ticket. And, really, no one has the right to argue someone else's beliefs (regardless of scandal, unless you're a social worker). This only leaves theologians and academics.

Interestingly, some of the dancers who are Christian are questioning their consciences because of their involvement and the ideas of Duiwels. One specific male dancer (I won't mention his name here) was nervous as to what his Christian family would think of his involvement - they apparently attended this last weekend. Where and how all of this might end up only your God knows.

Please note that Dansmettieduiwels has reached the end of its schedule and is no longer running.

## ABOUT JOHANN SMITH

Johann MSmith is a music journalist turned content hacker. Known as the IDMMAG launch designer, Johann specialises in entertainment, travel and social commentary. Or as he puts it: "I speak as and for companies through social and design."

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