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Stage Where the Blood Is Real and Freshly Drawn

By GIA KOURLAS

On Friday night a recording of Ivo Dimchev's voice preceded his appearance in "Som Faves" with some words about the performance to follow: "My body will lose energy"; "We are all going to lose time"; and "Somebody will even lose his own blood."

The last part wasn't so shocking for those who had witnessed his strange, potent solo "Lili Handel" in March at the Perforations Festival at La MaMa. In that work Mr. Dimchev, a Bulgarian artist who lives in Brussels, transformed himself into an aging transsexual, both ethereal and streetwise, to explore sexual and cultural consumption. By the end of the night he drew his own blood into a vial and auctioned it off to the highest bidder. It was fantastic.

This time around he was appearing courtesy of the Performance Mix Festival at Dixon Place in a shared program, "Balkan Express," that also included Iskra Sukarova's "It," a rather slight solo for Ursula Eagly, and Viktorija Ilioska's lamentable "I Am Always Watching You" (of which the only enjoyable part came when the audience, bored at being stared at and whispered about, turned surly).

Mr. Dimchev bases "Som Faves" on some of his favorite topics; they're chosen from a list of 100. The selections and order of the subjects, objects and people from the list change for each show, and in Mr. Dimchev's mind the topics are related. Connecting the dots is hardly the point in this slippery portrait that uses repetition in a fresh, free way and that has the choreographer, with a sly doggedness, searching for the balance between form and content.

At the start Mr. Dimchev walked across the white stage, which featured a flea-market painting of a woman in a blue dress as well as a keyboard on a black table, a chair and a porcelain cat. He began a heated two-way conversation with himself: "You have blood on your face! I don't think I have that! You do have it because I see it!"

Wearing a light-blue button-down shirt, black jeans and a scruffy blond wig, he wavered between feral and friendly, easing from one identity or subject to the next. Likewise, his voice purred with slurry insouciance or shifted to a guttural roar that transformed his body into a

quivering mass.

In “Som Faves” the worth of art is an overriding topic as Mr. Dimchev mixed monologues with songs. In a beguiling sing-speaking manner — he sounded like a chanter in a Greek Orthodox service — he discussed the painting that hung on the wall: “It’s not about liking it or not. It’s about getting used to it.” Then, without ceremony, he tossed it into the wings.

He calmly recited the lyrics of Kenny Rogers’s “Gambler” (clearly, a guilty pleasure) before repeating the exercise with more fervor, hopping from side to side and clapping his hands manically. Finally Mr. Dimchev, glistening with sweat, sat down with a mirror and made tiny incisions near his eyebrows. “Relax!” he commanded, to both himself and the audience.

Soon enough blood, like tears, streamed down this face. As it was with “Lili Handel” the effect of the blood was more touching than frightening. Standing before us with blood staining his chiseled cheeks, Mr. Dimchev brought to mind the words of Merce Cunningham, who once said about dancing, “It gives you nothing back, no manuscripts to store away, no paintings to show on walls and maybe hang in museums, no poems to be printed and sold, nothing but that single fleeting moment when you feel alive.” Clearly, it’s time to give Mr. Dimchev a run that lasts longer than one night.