###### **Choreographer Lisbeth Gruwez equips ten children with a super-sized portion of paint; musician Maarten Van Cauwenberghe stirs them into a free-jazz frenzy. Dancers in line? It’s action painting time!**

When *Wasco!* is over, a man from Antwerp’s municipal cleaning service walks across Theaterplein, spraying it with a pressure washer. Little does he know what went on in hetpaleis just before that.

Nonetheless, the paint storm gets off to a gentle start: a boy trots onto the stage as a single key on the piano taps out a promising rhythm. Brass instruments join in one by one, and so do other children. We recognise Charles Mingus’ ‘Boogie Stop Shuffle’ and hear in the song what the kids running in all directions are showing us: lively hip wiggles, followed by a streamlined stab and a pause for rest, then hectic stamping with their feet.

Lisbeth Gruwez, once one of Jan Fabre’s ‘warriors of beauty’, and musician Maarten Van Cauwenberghe make up the dance company Voetvolk that constantly seeks beyond the well-trodden paths of contemporary dance. The duo doesn’t make choreographies, strictly speaking, so much as intuitive, free synergies of movement and sound.

In *Wasco!* their first production with children – in fact there are only children on stage – they play with art forms from post-war America: the irrational improvisation of free jazz and the instinctive colour splashes of the abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock are right up their street.

**Cute and exciting**

The children tackle the floor covering with wax crayons and then with big pots of paint. They attack it in waves, with wild abandon, and at times you catch a glimpse of precision as someone executes a pirouette. It’s not the kind of impressive dance that grabs you by the throat; children lack that level of poise. But it’s all about explosive energy: *Wasco!* blazes and bewitches. Sometimes it’s unbearably cute, such as when a girl in the wings needs to scratch her bottom or the very littlest child stumbles and bounces back up again like a rubber ball.

At other times there is tension, as one of the dancers walks elegantly in time to the erratic notes of jazz music, looking you straight in the eye. Above all, though, *Wasco!* makes your heart beat faster: the paint flies around in great gouts, buckets are emptied over people’s heads, brushes become machine guns firing in colourful patterns. It’s an absolute explosion of joy – and that’s all you can say about it. And it’s all you need to say, because *Wasco!* is exciting and bold enough to sweep you up in its compulsion to make a gigantic mess. You want to plunge head-first into a tub of paint, preferably in as many colours as possible at once. *Splashhhhhh!*

**Wasco! (6+)**

hetpaleis and Voetvolk

Further showings on 21 and 27/4 in Antwerp

**Floris Baeke**