DURHAM, N.C. — Rosas is the name of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker’s company which she started in Brussels in 1983. The title of its inaugural work, “Rosas Danst Rosas,” suggested a kind of manifesto: this is what we are; this is what we do.

That uncompromising sensibility is still clear, almost 30 years and a famous career later. The revival of “Rosas Danst Rosas,” which opened on Friday night at the Reynolds Industries Theater at Duke University, in Durham, N.C., as part of the American Dance Festival, reminds us why this work immediately established Ms. De Keersmaeker as a new force on the European contemporary dance scene. It hasn’t lost anything of its original power. Riveting and exhausting, fascinating and relentless, brilliant and tedious, it is a mesmerizing exploration of synchronicity, patterning and rhythm.

“Rosas,” in which Ms. De Keersmaeker uses blocks of repetitive movement phrases for four women over a minimalist-industrial score by Thierry De Mey and Peter Vermeersch, is a complex, haunting work, still difficult and unsettling in the way emotional resonance and tension accrues from its severe formalism.
versions of the earlier material begin.

The play between synchroniza-
tion and de-synchronization is Ms. De Keersmaeker’s funda-
mental organizing principle in “Rosas”; each of the remaining
three sections is similarly con-
structed. But it is never predict-
able. In the second section, set to a propulsive, ticking, machinelike
rhythm, the women sit on chairs
placed in a diagonal row. (The
transitions between the sections
are matter-of-fact; there is much
retaying of hair and adjusting of
clothes; here the dancers don
brown brogues.)

At first slumped, they suddenly
sit up alertly, twitching their
heads around in unison, or to-
ward one another with quick,
complicit nods, smoothing hands
through their hair, crossing their
legs and slumping chins into
palms, wrapping their arms
around their waists and folding
forward, pulling their tops on and
off shoulders. The contrast be-
tween the quotidien gestures
(I’m bored, I’m despairing, I’m
flirting, I’m cool, I’m angry) and
their relentless repetition is ex-
tremely compelling.

At one moment the women are
mean schoolgirls, establishing al-
iances and factions; then they
are an oppressed female commu-
nity expressing life’s frustra-
tions; or images of sexy feminini-
ty; or factory workers forced to
repeat the same tedious actions
over and over again. Yet the feat
of memory and discipline, the
driving repetition and algorithm-
ic evolution of sequences sug-
gest the pure expression of cho-
reographic form.

That tension is sustained
through the third and fourth sec-
tions, which utilize the upright,
swinging, half-turning steps that
characterize an earlier work,
“Fase.” Ms. De Keersmaeker jux-
aposes unison and dissidence
with brilliance here, weaving the
women in and out of kaleidoscop-
ic patterns as their movement
links up, metamorphoses into
canon structure, then subtly
changes again.

The fourth movement, with its
driving score that contains an
overlay of jazzy unpredictability,
feels like the natural end, and the
audience applauded wildly (per-
haps with relief, too) as the music
and dancers abruptly stopped.
But Ms. De Keersmaeker doesn’t
let us off there. There’s an epi-
logue in dim gray light, in which
the dancers, spread across the
stage, lie down, turn away, walk.
Ms. Youn, at the front, twitches
her jersey off her shoulders,
stares forward.

It’s not over yet. And then it is.