# Springback Annual 2023



advancing european dance

# Stories of conflict, conflict in stories

In the 1973 film *Theatre of Blood*, Vincent Price plays a hammy Shakespearean actor who, humiliated by damning reviews of his performances, murders his critics one by one, each in the manner of a particular Shakespeare play. For each death scene, he both quotes from the offending review and, as he exacts his grisly revenge, acts out the Shakespeare role – hammy to the last. In the end (spoiler!) he dies, not only a murderer but also a martyr to his own delusions.

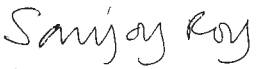
Fifty years later, German choreographer Marco Goecke publicly rubbed dogshit in the face of critic Wiebke Hüster – stung, he claimed, by what he felt were humiliating reviews of his work. Art, artist, critic, drama, emotion, power, punishment, spectacle – all the ingredients (I list them in merely alphabetical order) were there for a story that travelled beyond the confines of dance, and all around the world.

A month later, by chance, film-makers Jennifer Tiexiera and Camilla Hall released *Subject*, a documentary about the effects that documentaries have on their subjects: how stories not only portray but also affect real lives and events. It raises many questions. How is a story chosen? How is it told? Who tells it? Who listens? Who cares? What parts do we play? What are the consequences? Are they predictable? Attributable? It reminded me that reviews, interviews, profiles and other forms of non-fiction are also 'documentaries' of a kind.

How did the Goecke story play out? Like *Theatre of Blood*, basically. Goecke was suspended from his positions at Hanover State Opera and Nederlands Dans Theater (against some personal and institutional resistance). It reads like a classic narrative arc of conflict followed by resolution: a story about crime, perpetrator and due punishment, whether that be presented as just deserts, a deterrent to others, or a safeguard against re-offence.

The world, though, is many-storied. What and whose other stories, and story structures, might be in play? How might we mobilise them, guided by (perhaps conflicting) principles such as mediation, peace, progress, restorative justice, or the healing of wounds? For stories are not simply either fictional or non-fictional, drama or documentary; they are also a means by which we shape the world and live in it, and with others.

Conflict – of interest, of agenda, of position, of identity – is the very stuff of story. It is how stories grip us, and why we grip them. Loosening the ties between subject and story gives us leeway to respond to and maybe even change our stories, our selves, our world. The definitive Goecke–Hübster horror story has perhaps already been written, but I wonder what re-storying it might look like. Imagine.



Sanjoy Roy
Editor, Springback Magazine
April 2023

advancing european dance

OPENING WORDS
**Stories of conflict, conflict in stories** 1
Sanjoy Roy



**Schweigman& and DOX: Eros** 6
Jordi Ribot Thunnissen NETHERLANDS

**Windows on Brussels Dance** 7
Evgeny Borisenko, Anastasio Koukoutas, Anna Kozonina, Lena Megyeri, Lydia Wharf, Greta Pieropan BELGIUM

**Cherish Menzo: Darkmatter** 11
Jordi Ribot Thunnissen NETHERLANDS

**Noé Soulier, Thea Djordjadze, Karl Naegelen: First Memory** 12
Bas Blaasse BELGIUM

**Cecilia Bengolea: La Danse des Éléments** 13
Emily May LUXEMBOURG

**Alice Ripoll: Lavagem** 17
Yasen Vasilev BELGIUM

**Nadia Beugré: L'Homme rare** 18
Bas Blaasse BELGIUM

**Soa Ratsifandrihana: gr oo ve** 19
Hang Huang FRANCE

**What makes a performance contemporary?** 20
Yasen Vasilev BELGIUM

**Danse Élargie: almost ridding dance of its borders** 25
Sedera Ranaivoarinosy FRANCE

**Lugano Dance Project** 28
Lena Megyeri SWITZERLAND

**Dominio Pubblico: Senza Titolo** 32
Georgia Howlett ITALY

**Presente Futuro** 37
Ariadne Mikou ITALY

**Baltic Dance Platform: From intimate to social** 41
Anna Kozonina ESTONIA

**Kalamata International Dance Festival** 46
Stella Mastorosteriou GREECE



**The Non-Fungible Body** 52
Hang Huang AUSTRIA

**Ivo Dimchev: In Hell with Jesus** 56
Plamen Harmandjiev BULGARIA

**Elle Sofe Sara: Vástádus eana – The answer is land** 57
Sedera Ranaivoarinosy GERMANY

**Maija Hirvanen: Mesh** 58
Hang Huang GERMANY

**Ice Hot Nordic Dance: Time to credit dance and controversy?** 59
Anna Kozonina FINLAND

**Tanzwerkstatt Europa: Gestures from the zeitgeist** 66
Evgeny Borisenko GERMANY

**Ex Machina** 74
Georgia Howlett ON SCREEN





**Paths through ImPulsTanz** 76
Lena Megyeri AUSTRIA

**Place of freedom? B.Motion 2022** 84
Ariadne Mikou ITALY

**Edinburgh by numbers** 88
Róisín O'Brien UK

**Mei Chen, Yannis Brissot: Very Tiny Little Drop of Wax** 92
Hang Huang BELGIUM





**Oona through the ages** 93
Sedera Ranaivoarinosy FRANCE

**Eleonora Siarava: Blue Beyond** 96
Ariadne Mikou GREECE

**Georgia Tegou & Michalis Theophanous: Reverie** 97
Georgia Howlett UK

**Marianna Henriksson & Anna Mustonen: Eros** 98
Inês Carvalho FINLAND

**Adrienn Hód: Soft Spot** 99
Lena Megyeri HUNGARY

**I is for International: On programming dance from abroad** 100
Lydia Wharf UK

**CoisCéim Dance Theatre: Go to Blazes** 102
Karina Buckley IRELAND

advancing european dance


CODA 2022: Movement research for every body? 103
Yasen Vasilev NORWAY

CODA 2022: Staging diversities 108
Sanjoy Roy NORWAY

LEE\VAKULYA: Burnt [the eternal long now] 113
Jonas Schildermans TAIWAN





Slow motions through climates of change 114
Karina Buckley IRELAND

Springback at Oktoberdans 22 120
Springback contributors NORWAY

Nitsan Margaliot: Foresigns 121
Annette van Zwoll GERMANY

Don't Worry Darling 122
Lena Megyeri ON SCREEN

Mime time 124
Gerogia Howlett, Sanjoy Roy UK

Love, Death & Robots 130
Kosta Karakashyan ON SCREEN





Side Step Festival Helsinki 132
Anna Kozonina FINLAND

Léa Tirabasso: Starving Dingoes 139
Georgia Howlett UK

Richard Mascherin: Caer Caer Caer 140
Hang Huang FRANCE

'What are these peripheral practices?' 142
Betina Panagiotara IRELAND

Local in Limerick 146
Greta Pieropan IRELAND

Contributors 150

Springback is... 152



# Schweigman& and DOX
# Eros

**Jordi Ribot Thunnissen**
23 May 2022

## Will chocolate and floral flavours form the gateway to a sisterly rite of passage?

Utrecht, Netherlands

Concept: Boukje Schweigman, Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti / Performers: Lysanne van Berlo, Fiona Dekkers, Luana van Eekeren, Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti, Rosanna ter Steege, Goda Zukauskaite / Drums and percussion: Frank Rosaly, Katherina Bornefeld / Direction: Boukje Schweigman / Music composition: Frank Rosaly / Scenography: Theun Mosk / Costume design: Esmée Thomassen / Casting i.c.w.: Hildegard Draaijer / Direction assistant: Anemone Oostvriesland, Rachel Schuit / Production leader: Lise van den Hout, Vera Andeweg / Technicians: Bart van den Heuvel, Albert-Jan ten Napel, Jorn Kortooms, Jeroen de Goei / Dramaturgical Advice: Loes van der Pligt / Head technician: Jurr van Diggele / Head of production: Puck Mathot / Publicity and marketing: Lonneke Laurant / Education: Anemone Oostvriesland, Kir Robben / Business director: Rachel Feuchtwang

As we enter the space inside an industrial building in Utrecht, Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti, performer and co-creator of *Eros*, together with her five dancer-sisters, hand us all a small piece of chocolate mixed with dried hibiscus, rose and blue lotus – good, we hear, for opening the pelvic area, the heart and the mind. Regrettably, neither these properties nor the smell of burnt palosanto are enough to allow for an actual connection between audience, performers and piece in this self-proclaimed contemporary ritual.

On the ground, illuminated by an overhead circle of golden light, the women wear comfy, yellow-to-earthy costumes, a chromatic warmth replicated by the deep-yellow benches along three sides, where we sit. On the fourth 'wall', drummers Frank Rosaly and Katherina Bornefeld are already in action. On their score – its build-up the most interesting dimension of this performance – the women crawl on the floor, initiating movement from the pelvis and in connection with the ground. They open, stretch, fold and unfold, exploring a continuum of sinuous movement. They slowly come together, hold each other tight, form a line mid-stage. Images emerge, their bodies forming a network, a mass, a community. Passionately, they hint at sorority, birthing, care, love.

The length of their exploration puts the focus – as in other, very successful works by Schweigman such as *Wiek* – on the actuality of their experience. It seems to aim for a trance-like experience, but the reality of the event is too often combined with formal fragments of dramatised choreography, killing every possibility for a transcendental experience on either side of the floor. One of the dancers struggles, bouncing violently on the floor; later, she is freed thanks to the circular energy coming from her sisters. Then they all act happy, and they hug – a shallow representation of archetypal feminine energy and old magic.

There are ways to deploy shamanistic and other somatic practices to bring back the communal, Dionysiac energy of dance to western stages, but *Eros* failed in its emancipatory and transformative purpose – chocolate or not.

**The bottom line:** A contemporary ritual of sensory, somatic communion – that doesn't achieve transcendence



Photo © Karin Jonkers

# Windows on Brussels Dance

Evgeny Borisenko
Anastasio Koukoutas
Anna Kozonina
Lena Megyeri
Lydia Wharf
Greta Pieropan
26 May 2022

## A variety of views on the In Movement season at Les Brigittines

Brussels, Belgium

Belgium is a small country but a big hitter in the contemporary dance world, and has become a magnet for dance artists from around the world. Its capital hosts the annual Brussels Dance! festival, its seventh edition ('1 city, 2 months, 18 venues, 80+ talks & shows, 180 performances') stretching through March and April 2022. More a conglomerate of different seasons than a masterminded programme, it nevertheless offers windows onto the dance scene(s) in Brussels.

For a few days in late March 2022, a group of 10 Springback dance writers gathered in Brussels, partly for a Springback meeting but also to attend some performances – principally those from the In Movement season at Les Brigittines, a 'playhouse for movement' built around a former 17th-century chapel; but also from the LEGS season at La Raffinerie, a former 19th-century sugar refinery, now the Brussels branch of Charleroi Danse; and to watch classes and presentations of third-year students at the famous PARTS school.

At La Raffinerie, dance history was something of a theme. Louis Combeaud's 'Embodied Dance History' workshop used talk, video clips and (crucially) practical movement exercises to guide us through a story of western dance history – a canonical one, to be sure, that was offset by other histories in performance: Dominique Duszynski's autobiographical solo *Else*, a poetic re-membering of her years with



Image: Ikue Nakagawa with doll family in *Tamanegi*. Photo © Ikue Nakagawa

Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch; *Cabaret Welbeek*, an uproarious evening with Alexandre Paulikevitch, drawing upon the traditions of *baladi* as well as making them his own; and *L'opéra du villageois* by Cameroonian Zora Snake, deploying earth, salt, plastic and Snake's own body in a contemporary ritual that re-presented burial by colonialism.

Meanwhile at the Brigittines In Movement festival, we wrote immediate reviews of the performances, together with a response to seminars by sustainability expert David Irle, co-author of the recent book *Décarboner la culture*, on ecological transition in the performing arts sector.



Guilhem Chatir, Vertiges
Photo © Laurent Poma

Opposite: Shantala Pèpe, Carcan
Photo © Katarína Baranyai

**Ikue Nakagawa:** *Tamanegi*

There are six figures on the stage; a picture-perfect family. But only one – Ikue Nakagawa – is animated: she plays the role of mother, daughter and wife. The others are puppets, staring blank-faced, unmoved as Nakagawa dutifully positions them around the space. She creates tableaux by painstakingly directing; shaping and moving the others, cajoling and caring. Her emotional and physical labour is not rewarded. When she looks to her 'family' for response or support, the faces remain darkly blank and she is lost, horribly lonely. When her partner eventually turns his back completely and releases the hand she tightly held, hers flounders like a dying fish, flapping. She is lost, pain etched on her face and wrought into her body.

This careful portrait of a woman's role in a contemporary family quietly reveals the suffering and isolation that can lie beneath the smooth gloss of an ideal-looking surface.

*Lydia Wharf*

**Guilhem Chatir: Vertiges**

A man lies on his stomach in the back of Les Brigittines' chapel of intimidating dimensions. At first, only his hands move; then he slowly works his way up to a hunchbacked standing position. His head hangs so low that for a long time we only see the back of his skull that almost creates a second identity. Guilhem Chatir's movement is urgent, involuntary, as he finally reveals his face to us. What is the force driving him?

We can almost hear it before it cuts into the air: the harrowing Sarabande from Bach's second Partita for solo violin. Like an inflatable tube figure, Chatir collapses and recovers, abandons his body's will to the music. Later, the soulful dialogue continues to La Chaconne. But when finally the music fades, there's the inevitable sobering up – only a sense of disorientation is left for both performer and audience.

Purity and beauty that is rarely seen on the dance stage these days, but all the more needed.

*Lena Megyeri*



### Shantala Pèpe: Carcan

Slowly emerging from the darkness of the back of the stage, a dancer, dressed in a tight red dress, almost resembles a mirage. She sways to a measured rhythm of music, reminiscent of the mysterious atmosphere of the famous Twin Peaks restaurant located in a parallel reality. She swings her hips and crosses her knees, shifting from one foot to the other, gradually moving forward, closer to the audience. But she never becomes truly close, material, tangible, always shimmering between reality and illusion. She stretches one arm forward and strokes it with the other hand, then changes the arms, then changes again. She turns her wrists and palms in metronomic movement loops, demonstrating herself and at the same time totally taking control of our attention.

Eleven minutes long, Shantala Pèpe's *Carcan* is another dance performance on the power and vulnerability of femininity, pure and enchanting. The dancer appears powerful in her hypnotising undulations and defenceless in the trap of self-representation. Repetitive, consistent, and as short as a variety show number, *Carcan* manages to embody opposing meanings in a form as simple as it is compelling. She catches your gaze, allows you to scrutinise her to an extent that she herself defines, and disappears in the dark as if she didn't even exist.

*Anna Kozonina*

### Tumbleweed: Gyre

If you are familiar with the infinity symbol, then you probably know already what it represents – and if a dance duet brings it on stage as a pattern in space, well, you might expect a vortex of infinite movement. But infinity, explained here in dance terms, does not really count on diversity. On the contrary, to get things going you just need some basic composing elements: count a few steps and have two dancers crisscrossing each other *ad infinitum*.

In Gyre, by Angela Rabaglio and Micaël Florentz, the effect is mesmerising: once they start moving it feels like the main stage of Les Brigittines has turned into a dark hole. All matter is absorbed into nothingness and the beginning is very much like the end. But spot the endurance, discipline, sharpness and ghostly presence of the dancers, and you're convinced that this 'gyroscopic' duet is all about nuances that go unnoticed: a type of gestural impressionism that blurs the boundaries before and after each movement. After all, perspective is about examining things closely: a hunching torso, a beating foot, a disappearing face that comes back not to haunt you, but to strike you with the simplicity of things.

*Anastasio Koukoutas*

### Florencia Demestri & Samuel Lefeuvre: Troisième Nature

An eerie and radiant sculpture, seemingly made of foil, marks the centre of the circular black stage. Soon, its surface starts throbbing and shuddering, moved from the inside by the two dancers. Its shape constantly changes, and soon it 'falls apart' as the performers break what first seemed a singular entity. What is the inner force that moves this mass? What is its agency? Does it have emotions? These questions kept buzzing in my head until the startling last minutes of the piece.

The final scenes of the show conspire to be both unexpected and firmly embedded in the work's overall dramaturgy. The dancers regain their verticality, slowly emerging from their other-worldly shells – but instead of greeting the audience, they swiftly engage in a series of sophisticated locks and tense holds that keep the foil surface fluttering. The veil of fiction is lifted, all tricks unravelled. The way in which Demestri and Lefeuvre lay bare their method and play between moving and being moved is disarmingly honest and refreshingly smart.

*Evgeny Borisenko*

## For an ecology of no guilt: shifting perspective, failing better

Listening to the lectures 'Spectacle vivant en transition' (Live performance arts in transition) and 'La sobrieté numérique: une nécessité environnementale' (Digital temperance: an environmental need) led by **David Irle** at Les Brigittines, in the frame of the In Movement festival, I gained a broader perspective about our responses to climate crises.

When confronted with climate change, the art world was one of the first to put responses in place: trying to improve energy sources, avoiding plastics, selling tote bags, asking artists to travel by train, planting trees... But how to be sure that we're doing the right thing? The answer might be unexpected: don't act out of guilt, act out of a sense of power and responsibility.

As dance professionals we deal with complexity every day, and yet we forget that the climate crisis is not at all simple. Looking at it closely, we come to realise that it is not possible to have an impact on all its aspects, but that it is possible to contribute towards solutions. We are invited by our planet to make choices and be co-responsible for its welfare. In short: we can act, so we should act.

If it is true that desperate times call for desperate measures, it is also true that live performing arts and especially dance have been mastering the art of the creative process while allowing space for failure. So let's treat our response to climate change as a creative process.




First, let's go back to basics: what is the complex bigger picture of climate crises? What are the responses put in place by the legislation of the country we live in? How can the values that guide us match concrete action? This first step is not risk-free: conservatism and avoidance are easier than action, pointing the finger at others seems to lessen our own burden, giving up is tempting and trying to be perfect is exhausting. So a second step would be to remind ourselves that dance can work on different levels at once: transforming the audience's imagination on the one hand, while simultaneously keeping track of our real, practical impacts (being aware, for example, that the carbon costs of artist travel are significantly less than the combined effect of audience travel). Are there public transport schemes or car-sharing platforms that you could tap, or encourage? Make this awareness, and decisions based upon it, part of your everyday way of thinking.

Background image: Florencia Demestri & Samuel Lefeuvre: Troisième Nature
Photo © Laetitia Bica

Having become aware of our impact, the third step is to rethink our approach, moving from the quick fix to long-lasting sustainability. 'If the organisation is not responsible,' says Irle, 'it cannot be sustainable.'

Regarding digital technologies in the arts, Irle shares the importance of a good balance: for example, since the fabrication of our devices is the most polluting part of its life cycle, we should make sure they have a long life and investigate how they can be reused.

But he also lists simple things that help create good habits: from keeping cloud storage and mailboxes in order to unsubscribing from unopened newsletters. If you have an audience that mostly uses phones, reduce print materials; if your audience loves print, choose recycled paper. A Zoom meeting is better than a car trip or a flight, but may be worse than a train ride. Playing videos emits much more carbon than listening to audio, so decide if you really need it, and at what resolution. It is cheap to share everything online, but it also takes space and energy to store and to use. Maybe rediscovering the art of simplicity could help communications and the environment, too!

All these small acts create a change of mind-set: sustainability is not simply an emergency response, but an organised plan of shared principles that guides projects and actions. Guilt should not be our guide; let us rather foster relationships with experts, scientists, artists and other organisations to build a sustainable dance ecology.

*Greta Pieropan*

# Cherish Menzo Darkmatter

**Jordi Ribot Thunnissen**
3 June 2022

## Dystopian poetry coming from other-worldly dark matter and black blood

Amsterdam, Netherlands

Photo © Bas de Brouwer

A Black, male persona, made anonymous by a mirror-like mask, checks upon his female equal, lying on the floor front stage. There seems to be a wound and blood, black blood, pouring out of it. In the semi-dark, he calmly pokes into the wound and smears the blood over her body.

The dystopian character of the scene becomes even sharper when the lights change, allowing us to see the back of the stage. A translucent curtain made of thick, wide plastic strips falls and piles up on the floor, partially covered with dirt – black dirt. Are we trapped in the back of an enormous fridge, where bodies are hung to be cut? Who are these people? When are they?

In this thriller-like set, after uncovering their faces, Cherish Menzo and Camilo Mejía Cortés move in slow motion, sing rap songs written by themselves and others, laugh at each other and show their bodies in full. The colour black is the thread uniting their skin, their actions, their words, their high leathered boots, their changing of the space. They pour black liquid onto the white floor, and pull up the translucent strips to let dirty, messy bits rise. The landscape changes.

'Can you hear the explosion / of voices from the ocean / songs full of emotion / from a time without a notion.' The words are bound and bundled in a booklet, given to us upon entry. They have been written and treated with care, they matter. 'I know it might feel as if I'm coming on too strong,' we hear Menzo utter at one point. Taking away the 'too', I'd say yes, with *Darkmatter* she beautifully does. Not as an accusatory slap to my white face, but by means of a powerful audiovisual poem telling of the depths of Black experience, stressing how it still takes place in the back, somewhere behind the curtains. There, where peoples have been gasping for air, light and lightness of being for too long.

**The bottom line:** A fragment of a sci-fi movie? Rather an Afrofuturist monument to a perspective that is all too real



Concept & choreography: Cherish Menzo / Creation & performance: Cherish Menzo, Camilo Mejía Cortés / Lighting design: Niels Runderkamp / Musical composition: Gagi Petrovic, Michael Nunes / Mastering: Gagi Petrovic / Scenography: Morgana Machado Marques / Costume design: Justtatty.Com / Dramaturgy: Renée Copraij, Benjamin Kahn / Text: Cherish Menzo, Camilo Mejía Cortés, BOИSU, Shari Kok-Sey-Tjong / Vocal & delivery coaching: BOИSU, Shari Kok-Sey-Tjong / Artistic advice: Christian Yav, Nicole Geertruida / Voices Distorted Rap Choir: via www.distortedrapchoir.com / Technicians: Niels Runderkamp, Amber Stallenberg/Nele Verreyken / Production: Grip, Frascati Producties / Coproduction: Kunstenfestivaldesarts (BE), CCN-Ballet national de Marseille dans le cadre de l'accueil studio / Ministère de la Culture (FR), actoral festival (Marseille, FR), STUK (BE), La Villette, Paris (FR), Beursschouwburg (BE), Festival d'Automne à Paris (FR), De Coproducers (NL), Perpodium (BE)

# Noé Soulier, Thea Djordjadze, Karl Naegelen First Memory

**Bas Blaasse**
7 June 2022

## An artistic alliance configures everyday movement and moveable panels – to what end?

La Raffinerie, Brussels, Belgium

Photo © Alexandre Guirkinger

Conception, choreography: Noé Soulier / With: Stéphanie Amurao, Lucas Bassereau, Julie Charbonnier, Adriano Coletta, Meleat Fredriksson, Yumiko Funaya, Nangaline Gomis / Music created and recorded by the ensemble Ictus: Tom de Cock (percussion), Pieter Lenaerts (double bass), Aisha Orazbayeva (violin), Tom Pauwels (guitar), Jean-Luc Plouvier (piano), Paolo Vignorelli (flute) / Stage design: Thea Djordjadze / Costumes: Chiara Valle Vallomini / Lights: Victor Burel / Production: CDCN – Angers / Coproduction: Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Montpellier Danse, Les Spectacles Vivants – Centre Pompidou, Festival d'Automne à Paris, La place de la danse CDCN Toulouse/Occitanie, Theater Freiburg / With the support of: Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels

In *First Memory*, seven dancers deconstruct everyday moves to a minimum until they appear oddly unfamiliar, like repeating the same word many times. The functionality of these gestures is dissolved by their repetitive, capoeira-like sequences of swift turns and kick steps. In this collaboration between choreographer Noé Soulier, visual artist Thea Djordjadze and musician Karl Naegelen, the scenery is as simple as the moving is familiar.

Three vertical panels divide the stage, ushering the performers between wall and sculpture. Mounted on turning plates, they allow the dancers to abruptly appear and disappear in new configurations. Attuned to each other, they oscillate between combat and friendship, or an exercise in give-and-take. A lot of back and forth of instigations and persuasions – sometimes disrupted by a curious witness who learns by imitation – bring out small instances of marvel about our moving bodies.

The performers are technically skilled, with many jumps, punches, rolls and stabs that sometimes coincide beautifully with each other, the music or the dancers' breathing. With little room for buildup, however, I wonder where this intersection of dance, visual arts and music is leading?

When touching occurs for the first time in an endearing duet, something human surfaces. But the duo's embrace is rudely disrupted by the remaining dancers bringing out what seem like aluminium plates. Is progression toward gestures that convey unmistakable emotion to be avoided at all costs? The human-size plates in various forms and shapes – some figurative, others not – offer intriguing possibilities in their own right, with the dancers folding themselves in and out of the thin material, leaving behind sculptures marked by their bodily absence. But such a clever visual finding feels like a dramaturgical compromise, underscoring an internal lack of connection and coherence. Although at times a unique alliance, this exploration eventually appears uncertain of what it wants.

**The bottom line:** Repetitive, skilled, with moments of marvel about our everyday moving bodies – but ultimately uncertain of what it wants



# Cecilia Bengolea
# La Danse des Éléments

**Emily May**
21 June 2022

## Awakening connections between dance, art, industrialism and personal history

Esch, Luxembourg

When I was invited to review *La Danse des Éléments*, a new dance work by Argentinian-born, Paris-based choreographer Cecilia Bengolea in the small, southwestern Luxembourgish city of Esch, I never expected the visit would make me reflect on my childhood home. Having never previously visited Luxembourg, the main associations I'd had with the country were wealth and finance, which have seemingly little connection to Droitwich Spa, the small countryside town southwest of Birmingham in the UK where I grew up.

While Droitwich itself is small, quiet and rural, its proximity to England's second city – which, along with the nearby Black Country, was credited as the birthplace of the industrial revolution – meant that my upbringing was filled with industrial narratives. These ranged from listening to stories from grandfather about his days as a toolmaker at the now closed Rover factory, to hearing my father speak about why he studied engineering over subjects he preferred. ('Well, what would you do with a history degree in the West Midlands?')

During my teenage years I resented and rejected where I'd come from. Instead, I dreamed of a life of 'art, culture and sophistication'. When I moved to London aged 18 to train as a contemporary dancer – something that I'm sure previous generations of my family could never have conceived – I became insufferably absorbed in my new artistic life. My mum and dad even jokingly likened me to Pip from Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* – who similarly moved to the city and grew embarrassed by his blacksmith brother-in-law – saying 'what larks, old Em, old chap' if I enthused too ebulliently about having escaped my home town for the big smoke.

Over time, however, themes of capitalism, industrialisation and mechanisation began to subconsciously surface in my work and interests. I created choreographic pieces inspired by Andy Warhol's desire to be a machine and Victorian polymath John Ruskin's criticisms of mass production. I wrote my dissertation exploring dance artists' relationships with 1920s Berlin as a 'mechanical metropolis', and created endless playlists populated by the likes of Pink Floyd's *Welcome to the Machine* and Heaven 17's *Crushed by the Wheels of Industry*. Seemingly, I couldn't escape my industrial past.

And I still can't, as manufacturing and mechanisation were the key topics I was confronted with when I arrived in Esch for Bengolea's performance. Part of the city's 2022 European Capital of Culture programme, *La Danse des Éléments* sought to respond to the industrial history of the Belval neighbourhood, interpreting it through the lens of *danse libre* (free dance), a movement that rejected classical styles of dance – as well as the increasingly industrial, rigid and mechanical context of



Photo © Eike Walkenhorst

the early twentieth century – in favour of a return to sensory experiences and nature. Think Isadora Duncan prancing pixie-like in the waves, or Rudolf Laban dancing naked by a lake in Monte Verità, Switzerland, with his troupe of devout followers.

Originally home to Luxembourg's economy-fuelling steel industry until its collapse in the late 1970s, Belval still boasts two out of three of its original imposing blast furnace structures, now impressively integrated into the new modern architecture of the town. Bengolea's performance took place on the foundations of the missing third – which was dismantled and shipped to China – where a circular performance space named 'Socle C' has been erected.

*La Danse des Éléments* opened with its cast performing a range of trios and duets on the top of the stone walls that surrounded the sunken performance space. Dressed in multicoloured, Cunninghamesque unitards, the groups joined hands to create ceremonial circles and floated their limbs through space in choreography that was floaty and unspecific.

Connected to each other by harnesses – presumably for safety as well as artistic reasons – the dancers also supported each other in a range of counterbalances and risky manoeuvres, such as holding each other back as they lent and swung their bodies close to the edge of the steep drop beside them. These seemingly perilous moments, aided by the visions of cranes and blast furnaces in the background, effectively made me think of the dangerous conditions Belval's former residents would have worked under, and the necessity for support and solidarity in industrial communities.

As the performance progressed, however, Bengolea's themes became increasingly unclear. Descending into the performance space on the same level as the audience, the dancers began to perform more set routines, fusing together styles including neoclassical ballet (many of the female performers wore pointe shoes), contemporary dance and hip hop, to a score of electronic and rap tracks.

It was a perplexing mixture, and for a while I wasn't sure how it all related to Bengolea's initial intentions. Retrospectively, I thought that considering the dancers were students from CNSMD Lyon, by encouraging them towards new styles Bengolea liberated them from the confines of their classical training in the spirit of *danse libre*. Alternatively, the medley of cross-cultural styles could have represented how globalisation now allows us to use elements from across the world to smelt together new 'products', rather than just those we have on our doorstep.

The day after the performance, I visited Bengolea's film installation *Deary Steel* at Mudam Luxembourg, the wider artistic project of which *La Danse des Éléments* is a part. There, one screen of a three-sided structure showed a pregnant cyborg – reflecting how Bengolea's own pregnancy impacted the creation process of the work, and reminiscent of the 'Maschinenmensch' in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) – dancing frantically in a factory environment. Leaping, tumbling, and throwing her limbs wildly, she balanced in handstands on the edge of a molten furnace, eventually diving into it and reemerging as an array of pots and pans. Created through a process of motion capture, the female robot raised questions about the historical links made between women and technological and industrial advancements.

Two other screens showed films combining the dancers from *La Danse des Éléments* with archival video clips from the heyday of Luxembourg's steel industry, as well as footage captured during Bengolea's research visit to an active steel plant, and quotes from the likes of Andy Warhol stating 'life hurts so much. If we could become more mechanical, we could be programmed to do our jobs happily and efficiently.' Bringing all of this material together gave greater context to Bengolea's live performance. It also made me wonder whether I'd have had a different perception of the work if I'd seen the version performed in the installation itself, which I missed due to having to catch a train to Paris. Yet that train ride gave me time to think. Seeing the dedication with which the Esch 2022 team had created a programme of events drawing attention to Luxembourg's industrial heritage – one that I was previously completely unaware of – made me reflect on my own.

I had envied those who grew up in capital cities, able to frequent major art and theatre institutions instead of Birmingham's preserved back-to-back houses (examples of houses built around shared courtyards for the increasing population of Britain's expanding industrial towns) or blacksmith's forges at living history museums. Now, witnessing a major cultural event in a former industrial hub that also paid homage to and was inspired by its context, made me consider that industrial concerns are not the antithesis of art and culture. Industrial narratives are a part of cultures all around the world – and we should highlight this.

**Industrial narratives are a part of cultures all around the world – and we should highlight this**



Cecilia Bengolea's film installation *Deary Steel* at Mudam Museum. Photo © Simon Verjus

Cecilia Bengolea, "La Danse des Éléments" at Socle C, Esch-Belval. As part of 'Deary Steel', Esch2022 – European Capital of Culture and Mudam Luxembourg. Commissioning curators: Vincent Crapon and Joel Valabrega. With the Jeune Ballet du CNSMD de Lyon. Supported by LG OLED and ArcelorMittal Luxembourg. Performed by: Jeune Ballet du CNSMD Lyon / Artistic direction Jeune Ballet du CNSMD Lyon: Kylie Walters / Dancers: Clara Chastagnac, Lucie-Mei Chuzel, Marie-Lou Durand, Eléonore Ghyssaert, Caroline Maquignon, Vincent Mazerot, Mathis Nour, Circé Persoud, Magdalen Wood / Balletmistress: Gaëlle Communal Van Sleen / Rehearsal assistant: Franck Laizet / Costumes: Maïté Chantrel / Supported by: AXA Luxembourg, TROIS C-L – Centre de Création Chorégraphique Luxembourgeois

Of course, staging cultural events and performances in former industrial sites can sometimes feel slightly appropriative, especially when the key motivation is to exploit their grungy aesthetics and achieve Instagrammable press imagery rather than to highlight their cultural and social significance. However, when done right and enough background information is given (the Esch 2022 programme also included various informative exhibitions about the history of the area that greatly aided my interpretation of Bengolea's work, and reportedly were very meaningful for former steelworkers and their families who came to see them), repurposing them can help tell untold stories and attract new audiences who may feel more comfortable in a former factory than on a velvet theatre seat. Note, too, that recycling industrial structures for cultural means is more environmentally conscious than establishing new ones.

That I, an English person from the Midlands, felt so connected to a project in the middle of Luxembourg, showed more common ground and shared histories between countries than we are aware of. In short, neither I, nor Esch, nor Luxembourg would be in the positions we are today without those who worked in engineering and industry before us and laid the foundations for us to take new and different directions. Works like Cecilia Bengolea's and projects like Esch 2022 help to remind us of that. •

# Alice Ripoll Lavagem

In *Lavagem* Alice Ripoll creates a ritual of joyous resistance using, in a transgressive way, the working tools of house cleaners. The act of cleaning, both literal and metaphorical, is performed by a group of Afro-Brazilians addressing political questions related to both race and class, and questioning unseen exploitative labour, post-colonial realities and the failed promises of capitalism.

The movements and gestures are both surreal (a reference to Magritte's *The Lovers* passes as a glimpse) and (dys)functional. The cleaning tools are used against their logic – the dancers literally eat the soap and put the buckets on their heads – in an attempt to destabilise the rigid social structure keeping people in dead-end streets. They use the buckets, cleaning rags, soap and water to transgress prescribed functions and create a cathartic space of intimacy, touch and connection. Half-naked, covered in foam, sliding on the polyester floor, the dancers switch between being subjects and objects for each other. The touch is somehow desexualised while the manipulation is done with utmost care – with the positions and shapes of their bodies they form holes, tunnels and slides, then push each other through them, landing softly on the slippery floor and following the inertia of the movement. In this process a collective body emerges that breathes, moves and cleans itself – while hiding and crawling under the polyester floor or tying the cleaning rags around the heads.



Human bodies become slow-motion extra-terrestrial creatures, with massive noses spitting out foam and bubbles. Their actions are playful, innocent, and tender, while at the same time deeply political. Thus, literally, the stage becomes a testing ground for other possible ways of being together.

In mid-2021, American Affairs journal published an article titled *The Brazilianization of the World* which argued that the social structure and extreme inequality of Brazil is becoming the model for the rest of the world, replacing social-democratic Eurocentric models. Alice Rippoll shows us how community can be formed in the face of adversity, and that Brazilian doesn't only mean unequal.

**The bottom line:** cleaners transform from labourers into a collective body of politicised pleasure

Yasen Vasilev
23 June 2022

## Buckets, cleaning cloths, soap and water become implements of joyous resistance

Brussels, Belgium

Photo © Renato Mangolin

Director: Alice Ripoll / Original idea: Alan Ferreira / Performers: Alan Ferreira, Hiltinho Fantástico, Katiany Correia, Rômulo Galvão, Tony Hewerton, Tuany Nascimento / Production director: Natasha Corbelino/ Corbelino Cultural / Production & set assistant: Thais Peixoto / Artistic assistant: Laura Samy / Musical assistant: Rodrigo Maré, Helena Bittencourt / Set design: Raquel Theo / Costume design: Paula Ströher / Light design: Tomas Ribas / Photos & teaser: Renato Mangolin / Tour planning: ART HAPPENS / Support: Rafael Machado Fisioterapia, Centro Coreográfico do Rio de Janeiro / Coprodution: Kunsten-fetivaldesarts, PACT Zollverein, Kaserne Basel, Wiener Festwochen, Julidans, Festival de la Cité Lausanne, Passages Transfestival Metz, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Romaeuropa Festival & Teatro di Roma – Teatro Nazionale

# Nadia Beugré L'Homme rare

Bas Blaasse
30 June 2022

## Masculinities and spectatorships questioned up front and behind the back

Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels, Belgium



Photo © Ruben Pioline

Creation, choreography: Nadia Beugré / Performers: Lucas Nicot, Daouda Keita, Nadim Bahsoun, Tahi Vadel Guei, Marius Moguiba / Technical direction, light: Anthony Merlaud / Lighting control: Beatriz Kaysel Velasco / External eye: Faustin Linyekula / Executive Production: Libr'Arts / Virginie Dupray / Production: Studios Kabako & Latitudes Contemporaines / Coproduction: Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Théâtre de la Ville, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Montpellier Danse 2019/2020

On an otherwise empty stage lies a stack of large white cloths, and two pairs of bright red heels stand next to some sort of mini synthesiser or loop pedal. A show awaits us. Five male dancers enter the room, descending frenetically from the structures through the stands to the swinging, uplifting tunes of Serge Gainsbourg's *Daisy Temple*. As rambunctious kids, wrestlers or showgirls, they embrace us, sometimes literally, with their infectious enthusiasm.

After the frenzied opening, their colourful garments are soon taken, sometimes bitten off. In *L'Homme rare*, five hip-swaying naked bodies literally turn their backs on us and disappear into an anonymous, sensual exploration of masculinity and femininity for the remaining show.

Nadia Beugré has given the stage to 'a group of men in heels' after several pieces 'dedicated to free, resistant and struggling women'. It's the outcome of her research 'on our understanding of the body, notably black and male' (three dancers are of colour). Using the square white cloths, they costume themselves through scenes of predators devouring one another, of graciously reticent priests, apparitions of beggars, and erotic flirting.

The dancers are muscular to the point of hypermasculine. We are offered a playful probing into stereotypical 'performances of gender'. But the true gist for me lies in the more general spectator–performer relation. Admittedly, their nudity, impressive physiques and their exclusive showing of their backs create a voyeuristic experience that easily slides into objectification, which is undoubtedly part of our customary understanding of male and female bodies. But I'm not sure whether swaying hips and supple pelvises are necessarily perceived as either feminine or masculine.

The performance is far from spectacularly provocative. Instead, it moves intelligently through the ranks of broad back potential, resulting in beautiful, funny and gripping images, rigged with the slightly uncomfortable acknowledgement that our gaze will not be returned. And that deliberate construction is winning.

**The bottom line:** Men and masculinities turned front-to-back, while audiences face forward

# Soa Ratsifandrihana *gr oo ve*

**Hang Huang**
4 July 2022

## A choreographic debut tunes music, movement and personal history

CN D Pantin, France

Photo © Lara Gasparotto

June in Centre National de la Danse Pantin, I enter an empty stage with the audience murmuring on four sides. The intimate ambience bonds us like a family, longing for a blackout moment to travel into *gr oo ve*, the first creation by Soa Ratsifandrihana. When the light comes back, she debuts in one dim corner. Full silence. Her slow and delicate movements hold our breath even longer.

Her futuristic manga-like dress portrays her like a warrior, and my imagination paints a dark background of midnight forest. She starts practising a few postures, later becoming recurrent, such as 'sword' holding, and a double-D backbend. Are these her fighting skills? Gradually, we hear her breath, then radio interference sounds, followed by the music. From then on, beats continue and evolve, every change synchronising with her walk or groove. Side after side she occupies the square, and our heartbeats speed up along with her accelerating moves.

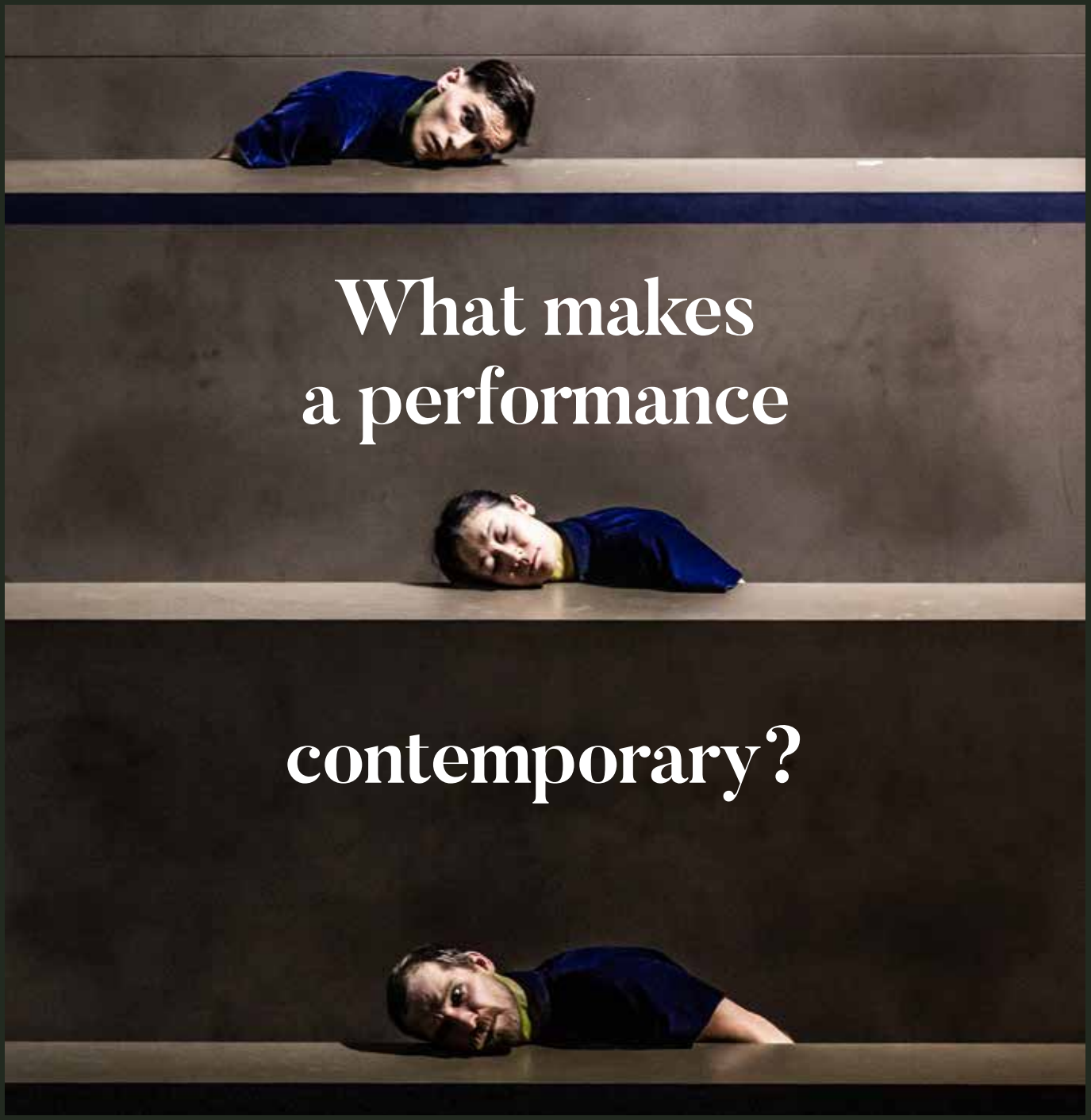
When she removes her black jacket and hands it over to someone in the first row, the audience is tuned into the same wavelength as her bright-coloured T-shirt. Ratsifandrihana invites us to feel the movement with her sincere eye contact, and my heart starts rhyming. Music keeps going up and the audience cannot only hear the vibes but also literally feel the shaking floor when she hits it. And her final spinning reminds us of De Keersmaeker, for whom she currently dances.

*gr oo ve* is contagiously enchanting: a travel tunnel co-created by the choreographer and the two composers, Alban Murenzi and Sylvain Darrifourcq. As we move further into the tunnel, the music becomes closer and the space larger. In this first creation, the intimate ambience and her variety of grooves travels us back to her family's living room where she initiated her love for dance: jazz, disco, funk, to name a few. I discovered Ratsifandrihana's spotless technique in the recent revival of De Keersmaeker's 40-year-old *Fase*, and in *gr oo ve* I discover her energy and soul. It feels like just the start for this talented choreographer.

**The bottom line:** A groovy tuning around the double helix of music and movement



Choreography & interpretation: Soa Ratsifandrihana / Musical creation: Alban Murenzi, Sylvain Darrifourcq / Light design: Marie-Christine Soma / Costume: Coco Petitpierre / Costume assistant: Anne Tesson / Archives and outside eye: Valérianne Poidevin / Outside eye: Thi-Mai Nguyen / Copresented with les Rencontres choréographiques internationales de Seine-Saint-Denis / Co-produced by: Arts Management Agency, Charleroi danse, La Place de la Danse – CDCN Toulouse/Occitanie, Mars – Mons arts de la scène, Workspacebrussels, Atelier 210, T2G – Théâtre de Gennevilliers, la Soufflerie – scène conventionnée de Rezé


What makes
a performance
contemporary?

For some years now I have been interested in how artistic form responds to the complex realities we're living in – how can it outwit them, and expose them with critical distance. Naturally, this was a lens through which I watched the dance programming of Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels. I was following how artists intervene in the form, how they twist and turn it, how they challenge assumptions and stereotypes, how they continue traditions with both respect and subversion.

Often a formal approach includes a recontextualisation and reconsideration of styles and techniques from different times and places, their appropriation or emancipation, the reclaiming of practices and identities in a rich and often confusing mix of cultures and influences that the city of Brussels so well represents. During the intensive days of the festival, I found myself asking the same question repeatedly: what makes a work of live art contemporary?

Here I focus on three major works from the festival, exploring how their approach to form responds to current pressing global issues, political, social and ecological.

## Three works at Kunstenfestivaldesarts articulate some of the complexities of the world today

**Yasen Vasilev**
7 July 2022

Kunstenfestivaldesarts
Brussels, Belgium

### ***Mal – Embriaguez Divina*** Marlene Monteiro Freitas

In *Mal* (literally 'evil'), Marlene Monteiro Freitas creates a philosophical movement fable that addresses the structures of power and how humans are shaped by them. The soldier, the judge and the king – the figures where state power concentrates – keep reappearing in different parts of the performance. Employing the vocabulary of dance, visual and object theatre, and rehearsed to perfection, with strong contributions from dancers, and little space to leave the carnivalesque form, the world Mal creates is a dark (and fun) wonderland. It unfolds as a nightmare which cannot be interrupted.

The work may be physically tiring but the characters on stage aren't really fleshy. They function like categories, like the cards from *Alice in Wonderland*, like chessboard figures, like dolls and puppets, and the grimaces on their faces often resemble masks. Carnival literally means 'goodbye to meat' (it was a moment before fasting), and it was a 'time outside of time', a medieval dream-like festivity where social norms were temporarily suspended, and the prince and pauper could switch places. Through the political forms of the march, the manifestation and the testimony, Mal explores how reality can turn into a grotesque nightmare, a whirlpool of rearranging power dynamics and positions.

Following its premiere at Théâtre Varia, a social media post compared the piece to *The Green Table* by Kurt Jooss – a work similarly mixing its contemporary political reality (the inter-war period) with the medieval imagery of *danse macabre*.

Marlene Monteiro Freitas:
*Mal – Embriaguez Divina*
Photo © Peter Hönnemann



Trajell Harell's The House of Bernarda Alba.
Photo © Anna Van Waeg

*Mal* is long and overwhelming, insisting on its aesthetic decisions, and in a way it looks like it wants to be a totalising work that captures *l'esprit de l'époque*. However, I wonder: do universalising narratives work today in a time of fragmented social and political realities? Though it's true we are all under the power of conservative politics and global capital, their effects in different contexts differ widely.

Yet the political turbulences reverberating throughout the globe, driven by the irrational impulses of power struggle, are captured brilliantly in a sequence where the nine performers are sitting amphitheatrically on desks three by three, making paper cities rise and fall in a frenetic trance. The sequence resonates strongly, as our geopolitical architecture is simultaneously unravelling.

### *The House of Bernarda Alba*
Trajal Harrell

Trajal Harrell continues his flirtation with vogueing – a house dance practice invented by the trans community at the Harlem ballroom scene in the late 80s, made mainstream by Madonna's 1990 single *Vogue*. It was a practice of liberation, emancipation, empowerment and self-expression, of claiming space in an unapologetic way, inspired by catwalks, fashion magazines and the power poses of superstars. It has today spread internationally and is taught, performed and enjoyed as a style, somehow stripped of its political and emancipatory potential.

Once again Harrell makes a collage, creating unexpected links between times, geographies, and practices. Using Lorca's Spanish play *The House of Bernarda Alba* as his starting point – referencing 'house' both as a collective in the vogue scene and the Schauspielhaus Zürich, where he is currently in-house artist – he then mixes vogueing with Japanese butoh. Born in the aftermath of the second world war, butoh is 'a dance of darkness', aestheticising the ugly and the repulsive. Why this combination?

In Harrell's choreographic reading of Lorca, the characters of the play pass one by one along the catwalk of the lavishly designed stage – a simple but effective dramaturgical structure – but the sexy is replaced by the grotesque, and self-expression by oppression. Looking at the sickly faces, trembling hands, shaking torsos, drooling mouths and empty stares, one cannot help but ask – does this form mirror our contemporary political and economic reality? We are pushed to perform identities and to be constantly sharing our lives publicly, but we are exhausted 'sad bodies' (in the words of Nina Power), barely coping with the pressures of late-stage cut-throat capitalism. An online meme sums it up: 'if you work hard enough you can replace depression with exhaustion'.

In Harrell's culminating scene all the performers (including Harrell for the first time) go on stage for a slow-motion sequence with a palpable physical tension. But this new contemporary tension is not the sexual repression that both Lorca and the vogueing scene had to deal with in the twentieth century, it is a new form of oppression we're currently subjected to, as our bodies have become territory for extraction.

> **Our bodies have become territory for extraction**

### *Out of the Blue*
Silke Huysmans & Hannes Dereere

Though not formally credited as 'dance', *Out of the Blue* by Silke Huysmans and Hannes Dereere, the last of a trilogy around mining, can be seen as a carefully crafted choreography alert to spacing, placing and pacing of its stage elements and effects.

The two artists sit in front of their laptops on the stage of Beursschouwburg, backs to the audience during the whole show. The laptops are connected to two screens. Throughout the piece we go down the rabbit hole of folders and files, holding a mass of collected data comprising video, audio, pictures, and various cross-references, all related to the phenomenon of 'deep-sea mining' and its ecological, economic, social, political and poetic implications. The blue of the title refers both to the deep and unexplored seabed that holds metals the industry desires and life forms we don't know enough about,



*Out of the Blue* by Silke Huysmans & Hannes Dereere.
Photo © Loes Geuens

and to 'feeling blue', the sense of sadness and helplessness in the face of man-made climate catastrophe.

This extensive research, we find out, was done online throughout the pandemic from the artists' flat in Brussels, where they interviewed subjects on three ships: a Belgian dredger searching the sea bed for resources; a ship of scientists exploring and documenting marine life; and a Greenpeace boat protesting against deep-sea mining. While the artists remain completely detached from us, delivering the material in a cold-blooded documentary manner, the intimacy and honesty of the interviews, their approach, structure and arrangement, evoke emotional reactions, pushing us from surprise, through anger to despair, while giving enough time, credit and trust to each of the subjects, without taking sides or making easy claims.

The overwhelming and paralysing complexity of our current economies and their potentially destructive influence on the environment is experienced as a series of deep dives into powerful countercurrents – scientific, activist and commercial – intercepted by collected artistic artifacts such as poems or songs. The brilliant form the artists have found educates and moves us, illuminating unknown territories both in the ocean and in ourselves, and exposing a complexity that forces us to think and makes it very difficult to act.

Through and beyond its dance programming, KFDA presented a series of performances that, apart from creating their own artistic worlds, also served as a thought-through line of questioning, allowing festival goers to reconsider their own blind spots – about contemporary dance and about the contemporary world. •

# Danse Élargie
## Almost ridding dance of its borders



Leïla Ka *Bouffées*
Photo © Nora Houguenade

Every two years, Danse Élargie ('dance expanded') sends out its call for submissions. The premise is very alluring: the contest hopes to open up the borders of dance. It describes itself as 'a call to artists from all over the world, from every field, without age limits, to introduce utterly original projects to be staged.' The only criteria to submit a piece: it has to be a maximum of 10 minutes long and showcase at least three people on stage. The application form invites artists 'To dare anything that dances, in the broadest sense of the term. To invent future movements.'

What's not to love?

For this seventh edition of the competition, companies were called in to dance in real life once again in Thêatre de la Ville's temporary home, the Espace Cardin in Paris (the previous edition had taken place online because of Covid). On the weekend of the 25–26 June 2022, 18 projects hailing from France to India to Australia were selected out of over 450 applicants to present their work for a jury of artists: Marion Barbeau, a dancer at the Opéra de Paris as well as an actress; songwriter, writer and actress Jehnny Beth; writer and director Mohamed El Khatib; visual artist and performer Kubra Khademi; dancer and choreographer Calixto Neto; choreographer (and Aerowaves artist) Christos Papadopoulos; and Tiago Rodrigues, a dramaturg, theatre director and incoming director of France's prestigious Festival d'Avignon. Two special prizes were also given by different observers: one awarded by a group of young students training pre-professionally in dance, and the other chosen by the event's technicians, who had been witnessing these new works for the whole week of preparation.

And so, did Danse Élargie fulfil its promise? Did it challenge and enlarge our view of what dance is and who performs it? To a certain degree, though not all of the prizes reflected that.

### The stand-outs

On Day 1 of the competition, all 18 projects performed their 10-minute piece. Four stood out immediately for their topicality and the depth they managed to explore in such short windows of time.

**Sedera Ranaivoarinosy**
11 July 2022

**Who were the hits, also-rans and could-haves/should-haves at the international Danse Élargie competition for new choreography?**

Paris, France

www.danse-elargie.com



Leïla Ka's *Bouffées* was a gem of simplicity, sorority and emotion. Five women embark on an exploration of pain, struggle and mental load where the only music is the sound of their breath. Their individualities come through but the universality of their stories shoots straight for your heart.

Yoko Omori's *Help* delves into the meanderings of the mind and its emotions. The piece is delicately humorous, Omori's choreography as complex and precise as it is unique. As she tries to navigate the complex flux of thoughts in her head, symbolised by grey dancers swooshing around her and ignoring her, our empathy for her is immediate.

Tidiani N'Diaye's *Mer Plastique* explores the ecological disaster we're living in. The joyful pastel colours and the gentle twirls of the dancers almost make us forget the gravity of the situation. But the dancers are giant heaps of plastic. Their moves make them shuffle around an even more giant heap of plastic that spills from the stage onto the audience as the performance goes on. There's no escaping our self-inflicted doom.

Finally, Josué Mugisha's *La Première Danse Politique* questions the weight of history from the standpoint of a former colony. What happens when the traumas you carry in your mind and down to your cells are not recognised, but you need to voice them anyway? Mixing theatre and dance, it was striking for its raw energy and the dancers' powerful and inhabited performances.

### Those I missed in the final

On Day 2 of the competition, only twelve projects were left to compete for the coveted prizes but there are a couple I wish had made the cut.

Collectif ES's *Mireille* delighted by its joyful approach to a controversial text: France's national anthem La Marseillaise, as sung by one of France's Frenchest of singers, Mireille Mathieu. It was exciting to be part of this game where each individual dance amplified the myriad of meanings of a single phrase.

Claire Durand-Drouhin's *Une Famille Singulière* answered the competition's initial premise in more ways than one: by inviting people with physical constraints and 'behavioural disorders' – which some might even call handicaps – she questioned the rules of who gets to be on a stage. Her exploration of this seemingly dysfunctional yet united family of misfits made for refreshing yet deep piece.

## So who won?

Without much surprise, if the applause on the day was any indication, Leïla Ka's *Bouffées* received the first prize, while Yoko Omori's *Help* won the second. **Jerson Diasonama**'s *Core* got the third prize, a piece the jury lauded for its punk spirit and immersive use of space (dancers came in from all areas of the theatre), but which I found lacking in terms of storytelling. The winners receive prize money and access to residencies in France with the competition partners, the CCN-Ballet national de Marseille – direction (LA)HORDE and the Collectif FAIR-E / CCN de Rennes et de Bretagne. While these pieces are very worthy of recognition and further support, I'm not sure that – going back to Danse Élargie's earlier premise – they're the projects that most broaden the borders of dance out of the 18 propositions.

The Youth jury made a bolder choice in giving their award to **Ionna Paraskevopoulou**'s *Coconut Effect*, a playful exploration of the way sound can shape movement and create choreography. The young Greek choreographer will now be invited to plunge these trainee dancers into her universe to create original work with them next year. The technicians gave out two prizes: another to Omori's *Help* and the second to *What Did You Do Behind The Curtain?* by the Palestinian **Stereo48 Dance Company**, a piece exploring the intricacies of communication.

Left: *Help* by Yoko Omori
Photo © Nora Houguenade

Below: Core by Jerson Diasonama
Photo © Nora Houguenade



## My honourable mentions

A few pieces deserve a special shout-out for the ways in which they did push the boundaries of what we call dance. **Louise Buléon Kayser**'s *Roi Musclée* hilariously unpacked notions of gender expression and identity while pointing to the wall humanity is rushing towards when it comes to social interactions and even environmental awareness. Her dancers' eerie, barely human body language, a subtle mix of dancing and acting, was a wonder to witness.

**Bruce Chiefare**'s *Break* could have been sharper in terms of dramaturgy, but the simple act of giving a breakdance session the rhythm of a tea ritual gave the opportunity to look at this style not just for its physical prowess but to linger over its beauty and artistic complexity.

In including these pieces in its selection, Danse Élargie does the first part of the job it sets for itself: showing audiences emerging trends of exploration in dance. Maybe for the next edition in two years' time, more out-of-the-box contenders will access the podium. •

# Lugano Dance Project

Lena Megyeri
13 July 2022

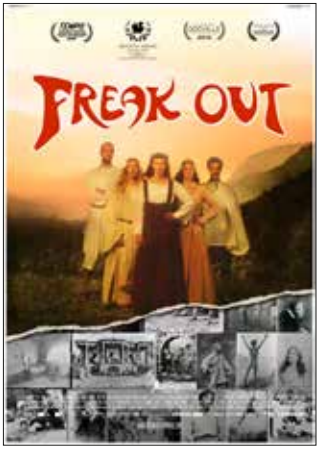
## A new dance festival with a utopian setting – and a utopian vision

25 –29 May 2022
Lugano, Switzerland

*Lena Megyeri's trip was provided by Lugano Dance Project*

Below:
Poster for Carl Javér's film *Freak Out*

Background images:
Marcus Ganahl (this spread)
So Wts (overlead)
both at Unsplash




I have long envied film journalists for having one of their trade's most important festivals on the French riviera. But dance professionals – and fans – need not be jealous of Cannes any more, because now there's Lugano Dance Project, a new international dance festival in Switzerland at a location that easily rivals the Côte d'Azur for scenery and atmosphere. Of course, there's more to this ambitious initiative than just beautiful views – although Monte San Salvatore almost stole the show at some of the site-specific performances – and I went to find out what that 'more' is really about.

Lugano Dance Project is the newest venture of LAC Lugano Arte e Cultura, a magnificent cultural centre built seven years ago as a home and a hub for national and international art in Lugano. It now hosts top-quality theatre and dance performances as well as classical and pop concerts from around the world, besides having its own museum and artist residency spaces.

According to general director Michel Gagnon, Lugano Dance Project marks LAC's coming of age and tries to position Lugano as an important place of contemporary art on the map of Europe. Canadian by birth, Gagnon sees the festival as a chance to lay the foundation for exchanges between Europe and North America, and accordingly, the programme features artists from both continents. The selection of the festival, curated by LAC artistic director Carmelo Rifici and dance advisor Lorenzo Conti aims at diversity in terms of dance styles, ethnic backgrounds and abilities, but not so much in terms of gender: except for one, all the chosen choreographers are women, and that has a reason too. According to Rifici, the programme was shaped 'to remind us that in a world that has relapsed into madness, women's bodies and voices remain the only antidotes to savagery'. A nice, if somewhat utopian thought.

As a matter of fact, the region has a history with utopias: Monte Verità, a colony of free thinkers where Rudolf Laban started a school and Mary Wigman spent her time, was founded nearby at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Lugano Dance Project devoted a photo exhibition to this idealistic community, and screened Carl Javér's documentary *Freak Out! Monte Verità. Der Traum vom alternativen Leben*. The movie tells the story of the colony's foundation and the lives of its central figures, mentioning only briefly its dancer members but introducing many lesser-known characters of the era. They preached and practised free love and other radical ideas, followed a vegan diet, experimented with drugs – to sum up, they chose an 'alternative life', and that long before the hippies.

Although Javér's movie at times almost makes fun of its protagonists' eccentric ideas and behaviour, the way it draws a parallel between the beginning of the last century and our current age (technical revolution, new media, the acceleration of life, increase in consumption etc.) made me think about









Megumi Eda in Cristina Kristal Rizzo's *Monumentum*
Photos © LAC 2022 - Studio Pagi

where and what today's idealistic communities and utopian visions might be. Besides being a good topic for post-screening conversations, Lugano Dance Project tried to give its own answers to these questions, not only evoking Monte Verità but also commissioning three new works that all claim the colony's ideals as their inspirations in one way or another. Canadian choreographer Virginie Brunelle aims to examine feminism and contemporary female archetypes in *Fables*. Her 'series of disturbing tableaux' for twelve performers blurs gender roles in dramatic, ironic or weirdly eroticised scenes that contain nudity, wrestling, people on leashes, live piano, an absurd wedding scenario and many other things. It all looks like a surreal dream that could do with a little more restraint to be enjoyable.

Anglo-American Annie Hanauer created *A space for all our tomorrows* for three disabled dancers: one with an arm prosthesis (Hanauer herself), one on crutches and one visually impaired. They are joined by singer Deborah Lennie, who not only sings live on stage but becomes part of the symbiotic community of the performers. At first, her song lyrics about a perfect world and a hopeful tomorrow seem almost too naïve and idealistic – but then what would be a utopia without all those? Naivety and idealism were two main characteristics of the Monte Verità community as well, and although their way of life failed to work in the long term, their vision has had a lasting impact, and a desire to live according to their ideals is ever-present in our society. In Hanauer's piece, difficulties become possibilities, judgement is replaced by support and hopelessness by optimism and joy. A space for all our tomorrows makes us believe – at least for the time of the show – that nothing is impossible if we stick together, no matter what difficulties we are faced with in life.

The third of the commissioned works – that I was not able to see live – is by Swiss choreographer Lea Moro, who in *Another Breath* puts breathing in the centre of her choreographic work, describing the piece as 'an acoustic-performative meditation'.

In a smart move to involve new audiences and integrate the festival into the life of Lugano, Lugano Dance Project took some of its projects out into the city and included more popular dance styles in its programme. In front of the participating venues, billboards informed passers-by about the festival and the respective performances that took place there. On the façade of the festival

**Where and what might today's idealistic communities and utopian visions be?**





Cindy Van Acker's *Shadowpieces*
Photo © LAC 2022 – Studio Pagi

headquarters, a video projection was shown every night: Caroline Laurin-Beaucage's *Rebo(u)nd* takes dance out of the theatre and into the open, where it is more accessible to everyone. The 7-minute piece (played on loop) shows its performers floating between movements, strangely suspended not just in space, but in time. The square where the screening took place, Piazza Luini, was also turned into a party space at the closing night of the festival by the cheerful ensemble of *Ta Fête. A Cypher ritual.* Any remaining Lugano citizens who hadn't heard about the festival were definitely made aware by Turkish-born, Basel-based Muhammed Kaltuk (the festival programme's only male choreographer) with his contagiously joyful hip-hop piece, accompanied by a live DJ set, and, of course, a magnificent night view of Lake Lugano.

The lake, together with Monte San Salvatore, served as the background for another piece: Cristina Kristal Rizzo's short performance *Monumentum the second sleep*, specially conceived for the spaces of LAC's in-house museum MASI (Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana), whose glass walls look out to Lugano's landscape. Any performer would have a hard time keeping our attention in such a postcard setting, and I often found my gaze wandering from dancer Megumi Eda's strange mix of moving meditation and object animation to nature's more unpretentious beauty.

Unlike Rizzo's work, Cindy Van Acker's *Shadowpieces* were not specifically made for Lugano location, but simply adapted there: into the shipyard of the city. The series of ten short solos, of which four were presented at the festival, were all conceived in close collaboration with their respective performers, reflecting on the dancers' current concerns and personal styles. They are also accordingly intimate, and would require a similar atmosphere and our focused attention. The two performance spots in the shipyard: an iron plateau and a grassy field are doubtless spectacular, but they don't go well with the contemplative, meticulous nature of the solos. It is Anna Massoni's *Verso* that comes out best. Smartly playing with the structure of Arnold Schönberg's Drei Klavierstücke, embodying almost every single sound, she managed to keep me enchanted even among the threatening signals of an imminent storm.

Not very differently from Massoni, Simona Bertozzi's *Suite Zero* also examines the relationship between choreography and score. She is accompanied by Claudio Pasceri on the cello as they create a study of sound versus movement, music versus silence, live music versus recording. Unlike for *Shadowpieces*, *Suite Zero*'s location couldn't be more perfect, not only because LAC's inner courtyard (called Agorà) looks really impressive, but also because of the birds that flew over the audience, their singing and vibrating wings blending magically into the fabric of the performance. Still, my favourite moment came during curtain call, when the two performers took their bows to an excerpt from Mahler's first symphony: I don't know whether Pasceri's expressive walk was choreographed or it was only his instinctive response to the music, but it told me more about the inseparability of music and dance then any two-act ballet could.

Apart from Muhammed Kaltuk, Brazilian dancer Anna Pi also brings lesser-known dance styles and traditions







Simona Bertozza & Claudio Paceri in *Suite Zero*
Photo © LAC 2022 – Studio Pagi

into the programme with two shows. *Le tour du monde des danses urbaines en dix villes* is a performative educational project on urban dances. Through a subjective journey between ten major world cities, she introduces styles like krump, vogueing, dancehall or pantsula while constantly changing costumes that suit the respective genre. Her spoken explanations are mostly lost on me (she speaks French, I don't), but Pi's incredible transformations from style to style – both in terms of movement vocabulary and performative attitude – still speak volumes. While she seems profoundly authentic in every genre, she never fails to emphasise that she's only paying tribute to the native performers of these dances.

For her other creation, *The Divine Cypher*, Pi studied Haitian ancestral cultures and got in dialogue with Maya Deren, a pioneering American filmmaker born in 1917 in Ukraine. Like Pi, Deren was fascinated by Haitian heritage, studied its culture, dances and voodoo traditions, and chronicled her experiences in a book and a documentary movie. Pi's stage is dominated by white: it is covered by tons of sugar (once a major produce of Haiti), framed by white sheets, and her dress is white too. For a while, she carries a plastic bottle on her head, wearing a plexiglass shield, while other bottles, filled with even more sugar, are placed on the stage. This – together with a small altar of Haitian objects collected by Pi and an old TV that sometimes shows Deren's movie – adds up to a strange but organic stage setting that combines ancient and modern. The choreographer's many inspirations are also reflected in the many layers of sound that she uses, including excerpts from interviews with Deren, while she evokes the sacred dances and gestures of the Haitian. It is evident – from both performances as well as from the post-show discussion after *The Divine Cypher* – that Pi always considers herself a medium of the people of whose traditions she represents on stage. And while she easily associates with any style or character, at the same time her inherent unique, graceful and curious personality always shines through – revealing a remarkable performer. After the shows, she doesn't let us leave empty-handed: for *Le tour du monde*, we get a small booklet with the descriptions of the ten dance styles, while at *The Divine Cypher* we receive a small pocket mirror. When asked about the meaning of the gift, she just cryptically hints at the general function of mirrors. An artist who takes the task of giving quite seriously – both figuratively and literally.

The region of Ticino, where Lugano is located, seems – rightly – to be proud of its historical and cultural heritage. But they don't just dwell on the past: they also look into the future. Lugano Dance Project is the newest example, serving the double purpose of attracting foreigners to the city with a high-quality performing arts festival, and supporting and highlighting the local community of artists. Both are quite successfully reached by the carefully selected programme, the commission of new work and the thought-provoking special programmes (workshops, round tables and discussions). Most festivals are still in the process of self-identification at their first editions, but for Lugano Dance Project it is already clear that its organisers have a very clear vision. Is it also a utopia? Maybe. But it is just the kind of utopia that our (dance) world needs right now. •

# Dominio Pubblico
# **Senza Titolo**



Georgia Howlett
19 July 2022

# Rome's 'untitled' youth arts festival strikes chords with young people's complex experiences of unentitlement

Rome, Italy

Image: Erica Bravini and Sonia Ziccardi in *Onomatopea*. Photo © Giacomo de Angelis

Being young is like being untitled. Infinite possibilities lie waiting, but so much choice is also a double-edged sword. Lack of clarity plagues young artists, unsure of what it is they truly want to do, make happen, and sustain. What would that look like in a title anyway? Because it's more nuanced than the term 'dance artist'.

Based in Rome, Dominio Pubblico is a multi-disciplinary project built to engage with the younger community. It describes itself as a dynamic networking strategy. Or more poetically, like Kandinsky's 'First Abstract Watercolour', initially considered the first abstract painting due to its renunciation of reference to traditional forms. Since its launch in 2013, over 800 under-25s have been involved in the project. Its roots spread beyond the arts; for example, 2020's Stati d'animo project alongside Bepop! human rights association brought workshops to migrant children and asylum seekers in Rome, led by a street artist, a sociologist and a philosopher.

Senza Titolo (Untitled) – 2 weekends of live dance, music, theatre and visual art (24 June to 3 July 2022) – is the ninth edition of Dominio Pubblico's annual festival. Youth forms the bookends, and everything in between: producing, promoting and performing. The behind-the-scenes, which is given equal value to the results, becomes an active space for skill development. This formative structure asserts the importance of transparency and equal opportunity for all.

Senza Titolo found most of its content through #NOPRESENT, an open call targeted at under-25s. The selected pieces form the UNDER-25 band of the performance, between which are scattered a few specially invited works with performers not strictly within that age range. #NOPRESENT is an expression of Generation Z, devoured and discouraged by climate change, capitalism and the pandemic. Feeling not only that the future evades them, but that they are deprived of the present moment too, trapped in a motionless void of uncertainty – in Dominio Pubblico's creatively graphic term, 'sottovuoto' (under vacuum).

Giulia Macrì, dancer (and more) and a member of the under-25 direction, a team formed in September 2021, tells me that Senza Titolo represents a collective blurriness. Faced with so many options, it's difficult to know where and how to act, in terms of both activism and integrating oneself in the industry. The keen will of young artists only leaves them thwarted if they don't know how to channel it. 'Untitled' doesn't mean they aren't able to give themselves a name, nor are they entitling themselves to do whatever the hell they want. It is just an honest statement, a reflection of friction in the unyielding conditions of a young artist wanting to be recognised and remembered. 'We don't know how to exist,' says Macrì. 'It sounds pessimistic, but our message is not a negative one.' The festival is a desire for renewal, a way to reject preconceptions, making space for more effective art. It is youth after all, as the forefront of an urgent appeal, that can articulate best what needs to change, and therefore youth who will seek and create art that demands honest answers to difficult questions.



Marco Pergallini and Maria Stella Pitarresi in *Sinopia*. Photo © Giacomo de Angelis

The festival's dance performances took place at Teatro India, located in a large industrial settlement on the banks of the river Tiber, formerly the Mira Lanza factory. The Gazometro, a colossal iron structure that once stored the city's gas supply, dominates the other side of the river.

*Onomatopea* by Erica Bravini (Under-25/ #NOPRESENT) unfolds in open air as twilight falls. Brick ruins border Sonia Ziccardi and her microphone and fresh-faced, jean-clad Bravini. Ziccardi tunes the scales of her voice, the instrument that gradually conjures a landscape for movement. Bravini's body is not strictly dictated by Ziccardi's vocals, but plays with its long, sonorous projections. Bravini tests the waters of her space, compresses and releases it, bends around before side-stepping through it, swipes notes from the air with her hands or ducks beneath their trajectory – mouth agape in fascination. Ziccardi clicks to Bravini's flirting feet as they plunge into riskier transfers of weight, Bravini working with curves and soft rebounds, pliable and available. Movement seems to overcome her unexpectedly, but she is never swept away, balance remains retrievable. This encounter is the first performative result of their union, but the refined Bravini leaves such a clean trail it appears planned. By the end, she withdraws her focus, becomes almost static. As vocals reached their guttural climax, body fades out, just as the last rays of sun escape us. Only when surfacing into applause, do we realise the meditative state we have collectively entered.

*Onomatopea* is an exercise of awareness for all; without it, the nuances of Bravini and Ziccardi's interactions are lost on us, and they are merely practising their crafts beside, and not with, each other. To witness, and witness well, is to pay closer attention to the small effects we have on others. For me as a dancer, it prompts reflection on the delicacy we must practise when working with other creatives; the unstable and often ruthless landscape for artists needs sensitivity and solidarity in its community. *Onomatopea* seeks a common language between two voices, a desire not far from one felt in society today. For progression we need cohesion, and to find a common ground on which to move forward, we must only listen.

*Sinopia* by Marco Pergallini and Maria Stella Pitarresi (extra band, not strictly Under-25) is performed in a traditional theatre setting. The word 'sinopia' refers to the preparatory layer of a drawing in which a red earth is used. In biblical terms, Adam and Eve are the sinopia of human life. The base layer

of *Sinopia* comprises two spotlights: man and woman, half-undressed, and very alone. In one spotlight, Pergallini writhes, back turned, muscles awkwardly fragmenting themselves under skin. Nearby, Pitarresi ripples rather than twitches, though is confined all the same. The juxtaposition between their enclosure and surrounding sounds of birds and breeze is an uneasy suggestion that utopia is not what it seems.

They magnetise through a series of counterbalances, approached hesitantly but then repeated and accelerated. Pitarresi soon airplanes over Pergallini's shoulders, and they use each other as pillars to swing, spring and lean from. Synchronised floorwork of extreme virtuosity is a whirlwind physical feat that unfolds too fast to comprehend. They collapse into the ground only to be propelled upwards again.

They are no longer slaves to their spotlights, but rather to the force compelling them to exhaust themselves, a confinement of more sinister implications. This is their expulsion from paradise. Facing each other, and not only in the physical sense, feels foreign but necessary, even if they don't know why. Stripped nude and collapsed atop of one another, they have nothing left to give to us. Yet it is very clear this is only the beginning.

The exhaustion goes beyond the physical kind, so is relatable despite spectators being seated, unmoving themselves. Piarresi and Pergallini pushed on and on, but by the end, had they actually gone anywhere? Their progression didn't feel like a forward one, rather a cyclical, enclosed suffering, reminding me of how futile the climate fight can feel, how persistent outcry renders only small increments in social change, and of



Alessandra & Roberta Indolfi in *Io. Tu. Io e te. Tu ed io. Noi. Loro. Noi e loro.*
Photo © Giacomo de Angelis

> **Fear for the future is not suppressed, but rather harnessed into new forms of energy**

the stubborn inevitability of losses along the way. If anything, their two bodies coming together was a passionate reminder that our humanity mustn't be forgotten within the unforgiving, often backwards patterns in contemporary society.

*Tu. Io e te. Tu ed io. Noi. Loro. Noi e loro* (Under-25/#NOPRESENT) is another outdoor duet, created site-specifically elsewhere and adapted for Senza Titolo. Alessandra and Roberta Indolfi play to our fascination with identical twins as they morph between two individuals and one. Facing the audience directly, one conceals herself behind the other, before clambering onto her shoulders. They run incessantly up and down stage, sliding on their knees, disturbing the ground into small clouds of dust and gravel. Fighting in the brick archway, they move side to side like crabs, in and out of view as they claw and shout. Beyond this, interaction with the space is unmemorable. But their confrontational expressions, daring us to be there – I couldn't seem to forget them. If there is a piece demanding to be heard, just as youth do, in their furious, enlivened activism, it is this one.

Rome is vibrant and spontaneous, its street life raucous and its antiquity prestigious. The city thinks with an Italian mentality, but as the capital, it swells with worldwide visitors, a thriving potential for unusual connections. But it is also a dysfunctional, metropolitan jungle. Dance exists here, but much of it is isolated and niche. Truly knowing Rome isn't straightforward, even for natives. Luckily, Dominio Pubblico catalyses access. The festival's support from Teatro di Roma, for example, introduces dancers to performance spaces like Teatro India and Spazio Rossellini, which can be difficult structures to navigate alone. Furthermore, for Rome-based Macrì, multidisciplinary sharings feel ripe with wider opportunity and stabler circumstances in an underfunded industry. By presenting heterogenous works, the festival pools together a wild mix of tools and outlooks. If curious enough, dancers can find enrichment in unexpected places. Unfortunately, dance has a proclivity for elitism, but the freer structures of the independent scene are less suited to closed circles, and dance integrated with other forms supports this necessary position.

Yet to be titled (or rather yet to be corrupted) by systems, the motives of youth are genuine: to make a better world to inherit. They are resilient, technologically wise and impatient. But also, still learning, and their voices must be mobilised sensitively. Dominio Pubblico is built from and inspired by this unpredictable, stimulating age range. Here, they are supported but also taken seriously. And perhaps more important than its platform is Dominio Pubblico's teaching of how to forge opportunity yourself. Wearing smiles brighter than their yellow t-shirts, the team seek bravery to rely on self-innovation and an ability to change the cards, even if an unclear future can look bleak for younger artists.

Fear for the future is not suppressed, but rather harnessed into new forms of energy with which dancers like Macrì give themselves reason to hope: 'In all this mess, we are waiting to feel out of breath, not with uncertainty, but with love and with art.' Post-festival, I reflected on what words I might use to name such a precious sharing. I arrived at excitement, autonomy and anticipation. And then thought: perhaps we shouldn't be trying to seek a title at all. •

# Presente Futuro

Ariadne Mikou
21 July 2022

## A performing arts festival in Sicily that nurtures and rewards young artists – but is it enough?

Palermo, Italy

From 25 to 28 May 2022, Teatro Libero – the 'free' theatre of Palermo, Sicily – opened its doors to the 16th edition of Presente Futuro, an international performing arts festival dedicated to emerging artists under 35 from Europe. Contributing to the cultural life of one of the most vibrant and multicultural cities in southern Italy, Presente Futuro operates within an international and growing network of performing arts. This year's festival combined 13 performances of experimental theatre, dance, contemporary circus and everything in between.

This hybrid programme usually includes uncompleted works up to 20 minutes long, whether short works-in-progress, excerpts or longer pieces adapted to this length. These creations 'compete' with each other for different awards that will enable the selected artists to develop their ideas and eventually complete their works within a year's time frame. Although the 20-minute time limit creates a common axis for their evaluation by the jury, the spatio-technical adaptation, which is limited to the possibilities of the hosting institution and the conventions of the festival-taster, may alter a work or a concept and render the selection process unfair for the 'competing' artists.

In this frame, one selected artist may receive financial support equivalent to €1500, a one-week residency and the presentation of the completed work at Teatro Libero (Presente Futuro award). The rest of the selected artists are granted residencies to the partner studios and theatres: Between the Seas cultural organisation in Greece, Teatro Comunale La Fenice di Arsoli in Rome and Teatro San Materno Ascona in Switzerland.

The winner of this year's Presente Futuro award was Sara Lupoli with *Rosarosaerosae – The Skin of Images*, who also received a residency award at Teatro San Materno Ascona. It is an eerie work that combines movement and videos projected on two constructed screens – one covered with white folded fabric, perhaps a wedding dress turned into a projection screen – and suggests a topography of the inner world of a woman. It begins with a startling superimposition of the performer's



Sara Lupoli, *Rosarosaerosae – The Skin of Images*.
Art Garage Choreographic Center and Körper International Dance Contemporary Art Center (Naples, Italy) / Theatre des Calanques and PianoBe (Marseille, France)

image projected onto her own body, clothed in a transparent blouse with red brushstrokes symbolising violence upon the female body. Short delays between the projected images of the self further distort Lupoli's physical body, affirming the impression of a battered woman – as if Rosa, Rosa and Rosa (the three names of the long title) were looking for internal peace and reconciliation with each other.

The overlapping projections on Lupoli's body also create outstanding optical illusions reminiscent of multi-perspective cubist paintings. Wim Wenders' desert images from *Paris, Texas* paired with Ry Cooder's original soundtrack of the movie, and the projection of the lake of indifference taken from *La carte de Tender* (inspired by Madeleine de Scudéry's novel *Clélie, Histoire Romaine*), are suggestive of trauma, loss, loneliness and ignorance, and the quest for true and mutual love. The beginning is undoubtedly ingenious and promising but the rest of the work left me looking for more originality and cohesion – which, since it is an unfinished project to be developed further during the year, is perhaps a positive aspect.

If *Rosarosaerosae* manages to draw a performative cartography of the female soul, *Wake Up!* by Marcella Meloni reflects further on femininity. It is a physical and amusing work based on circus, puppetry and clowning that creatively uses props and object animation through the body to portray the obsessions of another female character (by coincidence also called Rosa) who is isolated in her home and gradually rebels against the conventions and stereotypes of femininity imposed by western society. Its light, humorous tone certainly makes it accessible even for a non-expert audience, but I was perplexed that it received both the Between the Seas award and the award by Teatro Comunale di Arsoli (Rome). Since the latter prize is named Per un Teatro Necessario (For a Necessary Theatre), my expectation was that another piece, *Pornodrama2*, would have been a more 'necessary' recipient of this award.

**How a performance space made for the sighted can embrace people who 'see' differently**









Above: *Sovraccarico* by Damiano Scavo. Ocram Dance Movement (Catania/Sicily, Italy). Photo © Aurora Pica

Above right: Jessica De Masi's *In.Contrastabile*, produced by Twain_Centro di Produzione Danza (Lazio, Italy)

Opposite left: Marcella Meloni, *Wake Up!* Maimè Circus-theatre (Sardinia, Italy)

Opposite right: *Pornodrama2* by Camilla Guarino and Giuseppe Comuniello. Fuori Equilibrio APS / Versiliadanza (Firenze, Italy)

Camilla Guarino and Giuseppe Comuniello's *Pornodrama2* is an intimate dance trio fused with text. Very far from physical theatre or dance theatre, the work begins with a duet between Simone Chiacchiararelli and Guarino, who describe their sensations as they touch each other's aura. The dancers move delicately and gently as if attempting to hold a feather, and their voices, amplified by tiny microphones attached close to their lips, are accompanied by melodic music. Everything seems excessively sweet even when the third dancer (Comuniello) enters to move effortlessly and with admirable confidence.

Initially, I felt like watching a somatics session – given the sensorial vocabulary of text and movement – until I began to question the reason for Comuniello's unusually wide-open eyes and tensed gaze. I wondered if he was visually impaired – a guess that proved true after the end of the evening, when I saw his partner helping him down the auditorium stairs. The words in the performance – actually the audio description – that had until then seemed redundant, suddenly took on a different value. Witnessing how a performance space made for the sighted can embrace people who 'see' differently made me reflect on the transformative role of art, and its role towards an inclusive society. For this reason, I thought this choreographic exploration of the complementary use of words and movement really deserved a special mention.

Another work that received no attention at all from the jury but stood out for me was *Sovraccarico* (*Overloaded*), a participatory piece by Damiano Scavo, produced by Ocram Dance Movement. Its effectiveness lies in its repetitive and clear structure. After effortlessly executing a dance phrase, Scavo approaches the audience and asks them to pin one or more magnets onto a body diagram on a small whiteboard. He affixes small sandbags to hooks on his clothing, according to where the magnets

**A production model in increasing crisis due to climate change and economic inflation**

were placed. He repeats the initial phrase, now with a different quality because of the sandbags, more heavily and with less equilibrium. Thus begins a cycle in a potentially infinite evolution with the audience indicating the weight distribution on the dancer's body and the dancer obeying each instruction. Even though the structure remains constant and is to a certain degree predictable, it is enjoyable – and the obedient Scavo responds with sincerity in the shift of movement quality at each repetition.

The choreographic structure, performance and audience agency combine into a formal analogy of a social situation that brings the responsibility and the power of deciding for others into play. What situations might it remind us of? Political governance and representation, parenthood, the right to euthanasia – or any other kind of power dynamics where decisions are made that others must follow. In Presente Futuro, only the spectators in the front row were able to engage directly with the performer, but I imagine that a different arrangement of seating and proximity could make this a very meaningful experience for a participatory audience.

Jessica De Masi's *In.Contrastabile*, produced by Twain_Centro di Produzione Danza, is a work of minimal means: the dancer is herself the primary instrument on an empty stage, accompanied only by Salvatore Belviso's sound landscape. Exploring the primordial conflict between instinct and spirit, De Masi spends a large portion of her performance with her head wrapped in dark, semi-transparent tulle, as if it were possible to isolate the mind from the body and deprive it of the primary sensations that are located in the head – sight, sound, smell, taste; as if it were possible to forget where she is, or where she has been. Jerky and undecided movements intensify the internal fight between feeling and thinking, sensing and remembering. Momentarily, her upper body, with arms raised, becomes lost inside her garment in a shape that recalls a standing version of Xavier Le Roy's famous all-fours appearance in *Self Unfinished*; but she soon wears the cloth on her head with her face disappearing again as if behind long dark hair.

Downstage right is a small lake of dark paint that she meticulously spreads onto her body. As the paint gradually covers every inch of her skin, shining and reflecting the stage light, she becomes transformed, almost petrified, into a bronze statue frozen in time. This work, rich in poetic imagery, received the Presente Futuro award in last year's festival, so my expectations were high. De Masi's case made me wonder to what degree a week-long theatre residency and €1500 in financial support can influence the artistic outcome. Is this enough to promote artistic research and development, or does it only permit artists to do the bare minimum?

I am curious to follow the evolution of the works presented at this festival and to see how those that received residency awards will unfold within a production model based on mobility that is in increasing crisis due to climate change and economic inflation. For since the end of the festival, a question keeps buzzing in my head: how significant are awards in developing and meaningfully contributing to artists' growth? •

# Baltic Dance Platform
## From intimate to social

**Anna Kozonina**
25 July 2022

### Taking the temperature of Baltic Dance Platform 2022

Tallinn, Estonia

*Anna Kozonina's trip was provided by Baltic Dance Platform*

When thinking of contemporary dance in the former eastern bloc, it's hard to ignore the fact that for many decades body movement was an important biopolitical target. Modern and contemporary dance were too 'free', too 'individualistic', and so artificially restrained. This doesn't mean that dance was out of such control in the capitalist part of the world; rather that its 'choreopolicing' strategies were quite different.

If by the end of the twentieth century, dance initially associated with freedom in the market economy became an emblem of neoliberal precarity that was criticised both in theory and on stage, in post-socialist countries, dance, somatics and critical choreographic practices became a means to rescue individual bodies from totalitarian collectivity, to perform self-expression and learn self-care, speak of historical and social issues and invent new forms of togetherness.

Indeed, at the second Baltic Dance Platform (19–21 May 2022, Tallinn, Estonia) I sensed a common trait: dance as an area of social responsibility, its critical and social potential taken seriously and deeply explored, though the range of topics and aesthetics was as broad as the concept of contemporary dance itself.

The platform presented nine performances, sixteen pitches and three workshops from Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia – countries with much in common, though with different perspectives in dance education, creative approaches and aesthetics. Many of the artists from Estonia and Lithuania had studied or currently work in western Europe, while most of the Latvians are graduates of the dance programme at the Academy of Culture, which clearly leaves a mark on their aesthetics and working methods, although does not fully determine them.

If you crave simplified generalisations from the platform, here we go. The Estonians worked in a more 'brainy' way, juggling cutting-edge visual trends, somatic awareness and cultural theories. The Latvians were more 'confessional', focusing on personal topics and vulnerability of stage presence, and trying to reach out to a broader audience. The Lithuanians were more furious and politically charged, dealing with rebels, outcasts and gestures of resistance; even when working in a seemingly formalist approach, they would try to analyse and deconstruct embodied ideologies.

In short – I loved the showcase. And to back up my observations with examples, I made a selection of performances and pitches that help me analyse how new Baltic dance deals with aesthetic problems, socially and politically charged topics, intimacies and embodied social choreographies.

Anna-Marija Adomaitytė, *Workpiece*



#### Repeat to embody, remember, transform

Dance techniques sink into the body, becoming a skill through repetition (just

**The body becomes a surface of repetition, like a serving machine that keeps working even when the restaurant is closed**

like any movement habit that shapes our self-perception and identity). Political and economic ideologies always impose 'proper' ways of moving: be it the rationalised movements of an industrial worker or the smooth scrolling of news feeds on smartphones. Contemporary dance, as a laboratory of thinking, can expose these unseen processes, shedding light on deeper political and economic conditions that invisibly manage our behaviour. As a method, repetition is always twofold: it starts with fixing something familiar and leads us towards a transformation. So it helps us see the obvious as strange, and the natural as constructed.

This is how a 'formalist' approach to dance-making can at the same time explore social conditions. That's exactly what happens in *workpiece* by Lithuanian-born, Swiss-based Anna-Marija Adomaitytė. Visually simple and choreographically precise, this performance deals with the embodiment of industrialised contemporary service labour. Dressed as a fast-food restaurant worker, Adomaitytė performs on a treadmill, a moving object that combines references to two different labour cultures. On the one hand, it is reminiscent of production lines, an invention of the industrial era; on the other, it's a machine that allows a contemporary subject 'to go on' towards the better version of the self, which nowadays has become our main asset. Small and hectic gestures of service expose anxiety, trauma and traces of violence. Adomaitytė's choreography is minimalistic, consisting only of sharp turns of the head and torso, with fixed bent arms that seem to indicate an imaginary encounter (with a client? a fellow robot? a ghost of the authoritarian regime?). The body becomes a surface of repetition, like a serving machine that keeps working even when the restaurant is closed. That's how our flesh stores kinetic memories and embeds emotions.

Another Lithuanian devoted to formalism, Dovydas Strimaitis, who works between France and Belgium, takes repetition into a more playful domain in *Hairy*, pitched in Tallinn before its June premiere in Paris. The general approach is similar: something seemingly innate to the life of the body becomes exposed in its social functioning through repetitive movements with minimal changes. Embodied labour may be a familiar topic in dance – but think about the tangled issue of hair. Strimaitis smartly notices that our hair is a nest of tensions between agency and control. It's a body part that can't move on its own, but at the same time can indirectly influence our self-perception and identity. Combing the cultural and political contexts of the life of hair, tapping into its role in free movement, as well as heavy metal rock and other subcultures, Strimaitis creates a strict repetitive score, 'choreographing involuntary movement, controlling the uncontrollable'. Also... it's hilarious! This kid will go far.

Other pitched works exploring movement patterns stored in the body include Latvian Agate Bankava's *Where are you when I am sleeping* and Estonian Sveta Grigorjeva's *FAKERZ*. Here, repetition works in a different, non-formalist way: as a means of recollection and establishing a distance from movement patterns. Both pieces spin around similar issues: relationships between the body and a dance technique. Bankava's

is an emotional dialogue with her own body that went through numerous dance training programmes. She pitches it in what I would call a 'Latvian' way: performing part of the piece in an open conversation with the audience, vulnerably present in her movement and recollection. Thus, live commenting, irony and speech itself become means of creating distance from her experience.

Grigorjeva deals with an almost theoretical question: how to separate a technique from the performer and fake it, thus exploring it as something unfamiliar, even uncanny? Using somatics in a preparatory process to unlearn mastered techniques, she presents her performance in a conceptually packed theoretical lecture. These are two almost polar opposite ways of dealing with similar issues.

### From intimate to social, or Meet the family!

Towards the end of the festival, one of my colleagues wittily remarked: 'Don't you notice how many artists deal with family issues or refer to family members?' True, I thought: half the festival was packed with shows ruminating on mothers, fathers, brothers, romantic partners and relationships with children. Some were explicitly personal pieces, others used intimate problems to speak of social contracts, or used family issues to reach out to other communities, underlining the social function of dance.

Examples of the first tendency were three pitches from Latvia: *Installation in Dance and Photo* by Olga Žitluhina (head of the above-mentioned educational programme), and two by her colleagues – Vilnis Bīriņš' *Brother*, and Gundega Rēdere's debut solo *One*. Though representing the earliest and the latest generations of new Latvian dance, there were similarities. All three works are personal, dealing with romantic love and intimacy (*Installation*), relationships with a family member (*Brother*) or the performer's own soul (*One*). All have little distance from their own methods of production, work in a confessional way, and treat dance as a means of direct emotional expression. Though it's interesting that the piece by Rēdere, the youngest participant, deals more with 'spiritual' and somatic connections to her own body and attempts to reach 'direct' contact with the audience simply by being present in front of them. That risks placing too much pressure on the performer's skills – but if someone is eager to give it a new spin, especially with recent turns towards 'spiritualism' and 'authenticity' in society, why not see how it could develop?

The second tendency comprised pieces that use personal issues to speak of the social and the political. In *M(Other)* Raimonda Gudavičiūtė performs with her 8-year-old son, playfully ruminating over their connection, intimacy, power relations and gender roles, and sharing her experience of being both an artist and a parent. The piece successfully balances personal attitude to the topic with a critical distance towards mother-son relations, shedding light on the changing hierarchies between child and parent. The two performers take turns in being movement experts, learning from each other and managing to walk the fine line between being 'professionals' and being a family. Deep emotional involvement comes

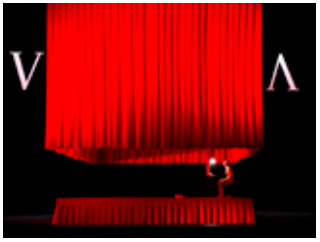




Top:
Raimonda Gudavičiūtė and son in *M(Other)*

Below:
Jana Jacuka, *Routine of Fear*
Photo © Evija Sedola






Top:
*Eden Detail*, by Jette Loona Hermanis & Johhan Rosenberg.
Photo © Matiss Rucko

Below:
Elīna Gediņa & Rūdolfs Gediņš, *A Few Good Minutes*
Photo © A Zeltina

from their breathtaking kinetic experience, embodying lots of care and fun. I would also pay tribute to the dramaturgical craft: the hour-long show flies by, and will work for both professional adult viewers and general audiences with kids.

*Dance for an object and child*, by Vilnius-based Arts and Science LAB, takes a more critical look at parenting and related social expectations, but also openly states: it's okay to stay child-free. Less a dance performance than a well-crafted multimedia theatre piece, with reality-show inserts and talented actors, it nevertheless has beautiful movement sections in which the motion of rocking a baby builds into furious exhaustive and repetitive dance.

Jana Jacuka's solo *Routine of Fear* is based on personal experience of child abuse and social expectations around womanhood. Though femininity in dance has lately been presented as both a stereotypical limitation and a means of empowerment, this show can seem more ambiguous about its position. Does it cherish an image of a victimised woman and her surrender to societal expectations, or does it underline the performer's power in telling her story in public? I think that any feminist statement should be considered inseparable from the local context it's produced in, and so leave that for discussion in the Latvian community. In any case, the show certainly has strong moments that resonate with the current wartime situation that of course became the main political background of the whole showcase. One scene recounts the sexual abuse of Jacuka's grandmother during the second world war, deliberately not specifying whether it was committed by the enemy or by the liberating army – thus underlining the banality of sexual violence, always used as a weapon but very rarely getting the same attention as other war crimes.

Finally, the third tendency, mostly presented during pitching sessions, is to reach out to spectators outside the close professional circle, and think of the social function of dance. Examples include Kristīne Brīniņa's project *Trajectories of Childhood*, which invites five parents from the Latvian town of Liepāja to embody their children's styles of movement; or Siim Tõniste and Üüve-Lydia Toompere's *supersocial*, a performance that tests participants' views in situations of social pressure; Vilma Pitrinaitė's research project *RBL*, exploring the figure of the rebel in a group of teenagers; Agnietė Lisičkinaitė's *HANDS UP*, reflecting on the ambiguities of protest culture and opposing viewpoints on pressing social issues; and *Theo* by Lukas Karvelis, on the experience of addiction performed in urban spaces, usually at bus stops.

## Good old dance theatre gone bad and new

I bet most of the audience who came to the famous Kanuti Gildi Saal on the first day of the showcase will remember it for a particular scene: a female performer, dressed in eco-rags and probably in her late 40s, joyfully throwing up a mysterious aquamarine fluid, again and again.

How could so much liquid fit in a human stomach? Her mastery borders on circus trickery. The moment happens towards the end of the show – after a series of fake endings, in fact, which had spectators wondering how many more scenes would arrive to test their patience. *Eden Detail*, a

performance by two Estonian-born SNDO graduates Jette Loona Hermanis and Johhan Rosenberg, was certainly the culmination of the festival's first day.

The piece, which has little to do with dance apart from a couple of synchronised movement scenes, can be called a manifesto of new theatricality in choreography – yet stands far from the tradition of good old too-human dance theatre. Rather, *Eden Detail* has more in common with fashion shows, epic movies, TV series and post-dramatic theatre, with an emphasis on visuals, costumes and scenography. The show flirts with contemporary folk and medieval narratives, bringing on mysterious characters such as a mermaid in shining mesh, or a woman (Hermanis) tattooing something on a piece of animal skin.

Rosenberg appears with different body extensions: a dildo, high heels, or a long nose like a witch's or the fairy-tale character Baba Yaga. And just like a moving body that is always becoming and never complete, outfits and props show an endless potential for transformation. Instead of solely emphasising the sensuality of a human body, the piece incorporates performers into a nature-object environment in which human and non-human materials morph and extend like unruly natural phenomena. Of course, it's non-linear, fragmentary and based on breathtaking *images* – more designed than choreographed.

*Eden Detail* is a piece of contemporary baroque aesthetics, visually abundant, highlighting the mythological background of our highly digitised and technologised present. To be honest, it's sometimes unnecessarily excessive (a sign of poorly crafted dramaturgy); but it certainly shows where new theatrical trends in dance are heading. Excessive imagery that resonates with contemporary visual abundance, multilayered references, an approach of working with strong affects through the logics of mass culture and sensual dimension of natural and artificial materials rather than just bodies and movements – that's what the new dance theatre is.

Compare that with the opening show of the programme, *Very Good Minutes*, choreographed and performed by Latvian couple Elīna Gediņa and Rūdolfs Gediņš, working with visual artists Krista and Reinis Dzudzilo. It is performed on a traditional theatre stage with a refined but much more conventional visual design, the space of action fenced by a bright red folded curtain that makes it look lush and solemn. The choreography, illustrating tangled relationships within the makers' own coupledom, looks like a solid example of 'proper' dance theatre: a personal topic, polished, familiar, with well-performed dance material combined with sometimes illustrative everyday movements, sincerity mixed with light self-irony. That might sound old-school, and the piece is certainly not seeking deep aesthetic self-reflection: metaphorically speaking, it doesn't go beyond the border of its own red curtain. Yet it can be more accessible for broader audiences and a reminder of human and emotional dimensions of the art of dance. Curious to have them both in the same programme, isn't it? Aesthetic diversity? Mission complete. •

**Reach out to spectators outside the professional circle, and think of the social function of dance**

**Notes**

The main purpose of dance platforms is to strengthen professional connections between participants, help artists present their ideas and communicate needs, and meet potential producers and programmers – but my angle in this article instead takes a critical look at the artistic content presented.

Many thoughts from this piece were inspired by my talks with other participants of the platform: Marie Pullerits, Marie Proffit, Anastasija Kaminskė, Annika Üprus, Inta Balode, Agate Bankava, Bek Berger and others. Thanks!

# Kalamata International Dance Festival

Kalamata International Dance Festival, one of the longer lived and most prestigious dance festivals in Greece, has taken place every summer since 1995, placing the small seaside city of Kalamata into the heart of Greek dance events and transforming it into what the festival's motto calls 'A land for dance'.

Under the artistic direction of Linda Kapetanea since 2018, the 28th edition of the festival took place from 15 to 24 July 2022, gathering local dance audiences as well as visitors from all over Greece and abroad. The previous two summers, KDF had managed to adapt to the pandemic, becoming one of the few cultural events in Greece that was not cancelled. This year the festival came back in full gear, under the thematic title 'An ode to beauty', inviting audiences 'to realise that Beauty is our only means of resisting everything that we encounter as its polar opposite on a daily basis: all forms of violence, all the actions and declarations that lead to pain and frustration, as well as to the dissolution of our connection with the world around us.'

There was definitely a lot of beauty to be found in the rich programme, presenting 26 performances from 10 different countries, ranging from bigger productions and well-established companies to shorter pieces by emerging artists, while also showcasing recent works by Greek artists of different generations alongside the international works.



**Stella Mastorosteriou**
9 August 2022

# Beauties and realities mix and separate at the long-standing Greek dance festival

Kalamata, Greece

*Stella Mastorosteriou's trip was provided by Kalamata International Dance Festival*

All photos © Albert Vidal/ Vèrtex Comunicació unless otherwise credited



Ioannis Mandafounis in *Scarbo*

## Dance in the city

Since 2018, the festival has made consistent efforts to reach wider audiences through inclusive educational workshops and by presenting performances in Kalamata's public space and in various locations throughout the region of Peloponnese.

Every evening, a diverse audience of local families and passers-by mixed with festival participants to watch short dance pieces and a dance battle on the stage set in the city's main square. The 14 works by emerging and more established choreographers were fun and vibrant – some might need a more concentrated setting to be fully appreciated, but others managed to get the attention even of the strictest viewers: kids! To mention a few, **Elelei** company's *Blindly*, a game of guessing and acrobatics, set to cheerful music, **Fenia Chatzakou & Csenger K. Szabo**'s balloon fights and air-somersaults in *Still Love*, **Arias Fernandez** play with fire in *Us*, and **Barbara Bardaka**'s playful cylinder-headed character in *The Falling Object* were all definite hits for the tiny dance-lovers. The magnetic duet that Kapetanea and Edivaldo Ernesto spontaneously presented was also enthusiastically received by festival fans.

## Cinematographic choreography

Sometimes, a choreographic work can bring to mind specific movies, movie genres or even episode series, employing respective narrative and visual elements: realistic scenography, props and costumes, embodiment of specific character roles by the performers, recognisable songs and melodies, and a cinematographic sense of time and narration.

Recalling the mountaineering movies of the 90s, **Piergiorgio Milano**'s *WHITE OUT: The Conquest of the Useless* kicked off KDF's main programme with a snowed-in landscape. Simple scenographic material and props, including a full-size tent, ropes, backpacks and torches, create images of a mountain expedition. The mountaineers' narrated journal informs us about the timeline, as the risky expedition develops in flashbacks, alternating images of the high-spirited preparation and the harsh conditions of the ascent.

The title refers to conditions of poor visibility, due to a heavy snow blizzard or fog, a phenomenon beautifully depicted in the opening scene. The trio enters the snowed stage in full climber's attire in a soundscape of whirlwind buzzing, cold light and fog. Only one of them is actually moving, strenuously carrying and dragging his seemingly lifeless comrades, in a state of physical frozen agony. As the piece evolves in flashbacks, we get to know more details about the three men, their relations conveyed by their theatrical interactions, the sounds of hits by Whitney Houston and Dire Straits giving off 90s vibes. *WHITE OUT* translates mountain images and conditions into a physical mix of dance, theatricality and acrobatics, creating gravity games, sliding dances, horizontal and vertical climbing – at times humorous, at times intense.

Later that evening, the official premiere of the festival hosted *Triptych* by masters of the genre, **Peeping Tom**. In three 'episodes', they build three distinct but interrelated spaces, three elaborate sets that are constructed and deconstructed








Above (left to right):
Elelei company *Blindly*. Fenia Chatzakou & Csenger K. Szabo *Still Love*. Piergiorgio Milano *WHITE OUT*.

Opposite (left to right):
Peeping Tom *Triptych*. Lali Ayguadé *Hidden*. Penelope Morout *THE BOX*.

in plain view by dancers and technicians between each part. In their recognisable aesthetic and movement language, they create a dark, claustrophobic world, imbued with all the stuff nightmares are made of: gloomy rooms, dirty floors and haunted doors that lead nowhere, loud storms, dysfunctional relationships, distorted bodies and misplaced heads. Stereotypical representations of gender roles in heterosexual relationships and parenthood fit the ominous ambience. *Triptych* has the appeal of a good thriller, simultaneously gripping and dreadful, leaving no room for a final catharsis. In the stupendous two-hour marathon, the cast delivered outstanding performances of physical and mental resilience, and deservingly received a standing ovation.

After the fourth bow, an important moment: Cypriot company dancer Panos Malactos came on stage with a banner protesting the recent release from prison of former National Theatre director Dimitris Lignadis, who had been convicted for rape. His initiative was instantly embraced by the audience, and became the first of a series of similar protests at cultural events around Greece. (Malactos' action renders the dancer as a political being, despite the political authorities' decision to abstain from the premiere after being informed about the intervention.)

Two more works fell for me into this category of cinematographic references. Lali Ayguadé's *Hidden* is an endearing story of childhood memories and familial bonds. Under a huge plastic protection sheet, a set of 1970s home furniture and its inhabitants are gradually revealed. Their stories and relations begin to unravel as the dancers, dressed in neutral colours and soft fabrics, build on their characters physically with humour and tenderness. The movement sequences of fluid floorwork and partnering compositions convey intimate relationships, affection and disagreements. The south Italian vibes are underlined by Joanna Gomila's echoey singing and Enric Ases' acting and narration in Italian – there are no subtitles, but the melancholic reminiscence is delivered.

*THE BOX // that dead space between us* by Penelope Morout is an eerie game of spatial illusions. A huge white wooden box is deconstructed by the two performers into numerous heterogenous spaces, some abstract, some more realistic, all rather peculiar. More spaces are brought on stage virtually, through video mapping projections of paradoxical associative images. The dancers create miscellaneous movement scenes that animate each space, and the whole composition has the feeling of a stream of fragmented images, much like in a dream, or a David Lynch movie. The mechanics of the spatial choreography are captivating and skilfully executed, sometimes overriding the performative action.

## Roots, traditions, history

A second strand of works bore influences of and questions on dance traditions and historical representations, suggesting a search for a sense of collectivity and belonging, a study on roots.

*Neighbours* marks the first international co-production of KDF with London's Sadler's Wells Theatre, a collaboration of three artists with very different cultural and artistic backgrounds, dancers **Brigel Gjoka** and **Rauf Yasit** with musician **Rusan Filiztek**, initiated by William Forsythe during the making of *A Quiet Evening of Dance*. Due to Yasit's injury, a modified solo version was presented.

In silence, Gjoka enters the stage dressed in dark colours, and delves into a stream of fluid, incessant movement. As he is backlit, his shadowy presence drifts into a hypnotising flow, changing levels and traversing the stage. He introduces sounds through his movement, by his breathing, tongue clicking, finger snapping and hitting his arms on his body. The music comes to meet him, at first as scattered sounds on mics, turning gradually into rhythms and melodies. In its original duet form, the two dancers from different origin and dance trainings attempt to coexist and find a common physical language.

If some of this conceptual frame is lost due to Yasit's absence, it is re-established in the connection between the remaining dancer and the musician. Filiztek creates the music live on stage by recording loops of his singing and playing various traditional middle-eastern instruments and layering them in a fascinating accumulative composition of Balkan and middle-eastern influences. Gjoka follows the musical accumulation by progressing the musicality and complexity of his dancing, accelerating into rhythmical footwork referring to traditional dances, an open drift of intricate dancing full of micro-details. As the dancer himself mentioned in the post-show discussion, movement can recreate music. He explained that the whole endeavour was about rethinking what a dancer's vocabulary is and how the collaboration between the three heterogeneous artists could bring them back to their roots.

A similar search of roots is at the core of **Edivaldo Ernesto**'s *Brace*, an intense solo piece, inspired by African warriors. The piece opens in darkness, with loud beat music and smoke, as a beam of red laser light rays dances around the stage. Ernesto appears in red pants and bare torso, exploding in a vigorous, staccato dance. His body is expansive, travelling the stage in large motion – a figure that exudes power, underlined by exaggerated facial expressions. Later, he hits his fist on his chest until he exhausts himself to the floor, revealing a more vulnerable, human nature. In dim lighting and smoke, he rises in slow motion to incarnate a row of tribal masks, reclaiming his power. Everything in the piece is intense – the masks, the red colour, the music and the performing. Every now and then, the intensity is interrupted by blackouts where the beam of red laser rays allows time for cosmic contemplation. The esoteric and ancestral ambience peaks into a cathartic dance for the finale.







In Marianna Kavallieratos's *Ever After*, four dancers enter the stage in a row, holding hands, stepping on the monotonous beat, as in a traditional circle dance. Their deadpan faces contrast with their bright coloured hoodies. The dance starts off simple, but soon becomes complex in steps and in space patterns. Composing intricate variations of the basic steps, the quartet pulses together, yet not in perfect sync, as often happens in traditional dances. *Ever After* reflects on representations of death in the history of art and dance and draws from various sources: the iconography of *danse macabre*, Bruegel's paintings, ballet. A succession of blackouts reveals a series of static compositions in slowly fading motion, giving off a sense of tenderness. As the piece develops, the loosely connected images move in space, in brief partnering duets and raving solo dances that traverse and exit the stage, and the group composes and decomposes images of collectiveness and decline. *Ever After* does not come to any answers or conclusions on the subject of death – as the choreographer notes, it becomes 'a metaphor for what never becomes known after the end of (a piece's) life'.

Marcos Morau's *Sonoma* is a virtuosic masterpiece on female collective identities, evoking images of religion, tradition and history. A chorus of nine women in stylised folkloric dresses create powerful images of female archetypes: lamenters of the crucifixion, stoic widows and catholic nuns, fair ladies and maidens in rites of passage, fierce witches and dauntless instigators of revolution.

In every scene, intricate choreographies of absolute precision create kaleidoscopic ensembles of intertwined gesticulations and convulsive dances, embodiments of invocation, disaster and repentance. They sing as a polyphonic choir of enchanting voices and recite eclectic texts of dense references and meanings. The costumes by Silvia Delagneau reflect the layering of symbolisms of the piece – in every scene a layer is removed to reveal a new feminine identity, until they are left in their twirly white undergowns, frantically beating their dreams in a final liberating scene.

## Softness and coolness

Anastasia Valsamaki's *W rest l ing* is a study on the action and embodiment of wrestling. Everything in the piece gives off a sense of teasing coolness: the bare stage, the coloured fluorescent lights, the loud techno beats and the five dancers in sunglasses and colourful clubbing attire, slight smirks on their faces. A group dance of rhythmical aerobic steps, leg kicks and arm waves counterpointing the music beat, unwinds into a series of abstract fighting games. As in a competitive game, periods of briskness and high energy alternate with pauses of tension or fatigue. The movement language combines loose martial art references and stylised steps for children's games, imbuing the physical alertness of the wrestler with a childlike playfulness. The rules of the game are not always clear, but the match is fun to watch.













Above (left to right):
Marcos Morau *Sonoma*. Anastasia Valsamaki *W rest l ing*. Alexandra Waierstall *VENUS un/seen*.

Opposite (left to right):
Brigel Gjoka in *Neighbours*. Edivaldo Ernesto *Brace*. Marianna Kavallieratos *Ever After*.

In Alexandra Waierstall's *VENUS un/seen*, dancer Karolina Szymura undergoes a series of transformations. She enters the stage in silence, a quicksilver creature dressed in a shapeless sparkling silver costume that covers her whole body and face. She moves in a soft, controlled way that soon becomes expansive. She sheds the costume, like a serpent shedding skin, to reveal her body in a silver leotard. Moving slowly, she sculpts herself into asymmetrical forms, building up tension and dropping it, to start again. As the music changes from ambient to minimalistic repetitive rhythms, she engages in a dance of modern references and changing dynamics, with high relevés and plié turns, formed arms and high legs. Another transformation: she wears another formless costume that covers her face, this time black, and goes on dancing similar movement patterns. She moves in and out of her performative presence between each transformation – there is a bare immediacy in the way she changes into a plain tank and shorts, sips from a bottle and comes to gaze at the audience.

In a similar way, Manon Parent enters cheerfully for Ioannis Mandafounis' *Scarbo* and gazes at the audience, smiling. She has a soft, girlish presence, in her short metallic skirt, sneakers and braided hair bun. The stage is bare, open, and the rolls of white vinyl on the floor are unruly, not taped down. She turns on music on a laptop and traverses the space to Ravel and Debussy in an outburst of large movement, also entering among the audience. Her effortless movement seems raw and unmediated with balletic hints: curved arms and soft fingers, *en dehors* steps and sequences in diagonal, the balletic qualities highlighted by her dramatic facial expressiveness. Her body is in a constant shift between giving up and restarting. Out of the blue, the dance is over and she engages in different kinds of actions: she spits in a bucket, washes her face, blows her nose and wipes her sweat, drinks water and eats rice crackers. The dancing body is rendered a human body with needs. With the need to connect. Also, with feelings and memories, as she narrates a childhood story of a tragic loss – and sings. The emotional tension is discharged in an outburst of destruction, turning over the floor rolls and forcefully throwing the plastic chairs, while she dances again in beautiful plasticity.

*Scarbo* marked the finale of the festival, a work of unmediated presence and beauty, to bid farewell to ten days overloaded with dance works of a vast variety, each offering their own 'ode to the beauty' of dance. At the biggest summer event for contemporary dance in Greece, the small talk between performances ranges from favourite shows, to Malactos' political intervention and its impact, to the news of the massive reduction in state funding for dance productions and events – beauty coming hand in hand with current realities. •

# THE NON-FUNGIBLE BODY

Hang Huang
11 August 2022

**A new performance festival moving between the 'non-fungible' body and its digital simulations**

Linz, Austria



Yun-Chen Chang
*Still Changing Skyline*
Photo © Robert Maybach

Paris. In my tiny apartment, I am visiting DFC Francisco Carolinum, a four-storey museum located at 17 Clarion Alley on San Francisco Island. I will not keep you in suspense: located in the Metaverse **Voxels**, this virtual venue – one of the first in the world – is part of the Linz-based Francisco Carolinum art museum. The current exhibition documents the first edition of 'The Non-Fungible Body?' performance festival that I had recently visited on site in Linz, Austria, which, with a selection of 14 performance artists, questions relations between performing bodies and digital media.

Friday 17 June. Linz. After a short touristic walk in the city, I arrive at OK Linz, the main venue of the festival. The building has nothing contemporary from the outside (it was first opened in 1895) but the extended roof is a magnificent space of metal and concrete providing a 360-degree view of the city and its surroundings. **Xie Rong**'s *Chinese Knot* opens the festival. The multiple pieces of Chinese red silk fabric in the sunlight create an unforgettable image and dramatic contrast with Xie's white-painted body – but the performance is not as brisk as the stage setting. A tedious voice recording in English details the story of a chained Chinese woman, while Xie's live performance is mostly motionless, with just a few fabric knotting gestures.

**Yun-Chen Chang** manages to better capture the audience's attention with *Still Changing: Skyline*. With her body, she moves a disorganised pile of white plastic chairs, the landscape of the pile following this delicate adventure of bodyweight and balance. Spectators change positions,

> **Boundaries between artists disappear and interactions appear**

capturing the changing volume of landscape, which also dialogues with the mountainous Austrian landscape. Chang excels at involving the audience in this white landscape by mimicking their postures, inviting them to sit, exchanging chairs with them, and finally encouraging them to co-construct another new pile.

We move to the biggest section of the roof for *Collective Happening*. On the sea-blue floor are some plants and a few seating platforms. Six artists are split over the space individually performing along with fluid electronic music. On one round platform, Sarah Trouche uses her body to melt big ice bricks. In the centre, Sajan Mani unfolds a metre-wide paper roll with his head and draws on it, as Beatrice Didier, in a diving suit, inflates a balloon. Next to the roof edge, Marita Bullmann dances with a tree branch, and an older man (Boris Nieslony) shakes his head covered with a dark red satin cloth. Meanwhile, Chang walks into the scene holding a very long horizontal paper roll on her back. Spectators either circulate among artists or stick to a spot observing the evolving space.

Gradually, boundaries between artists disappear and interactions appear: Bullmann places the branch on Nieslony's head and Didier pricks the balloon behind Mani… Chang finds a place where she can unfold the giant paper on the floor and invites three spectators to make an origami with her. When the sun goes down further with softening light, Xie joins the space with her full body painted red, standing in a pillory in the form of Chinese knot. This silent apparition is finally more theatrical than her initial performance.



*Collective Happening* with Marita Bullmann (above) and Sajan Mani (opposite) Photos © Robert Maybach

'The *Collective Happening* is a signature conceived for the festival,' said River Lin, the co-curator of the festival, when we later met in a Parisian café on the left bank. Surprisingly, this well-conceived performance is mainly based on improvisation. In the space Lin designed, each artist was assigned an area and required to perform in their own way. Prior to the performance, artists also checked if they could use others' materials. All interactions happened spontaneously and Lin kept observing the performance and adapted the sound ambiance with the help of Alexandre Bouvier. It was also Lin who gave the ending sign that spectators could not discern.

Indeed, the *Collective Happening* once again proves Lin's capacity to contextualise performers of different backgrounds in a defined space (I had previously seen his *Art History on Escalators* and *My Body is a Queer History Museum* in Paris). It confirms that the body is indeed non-fungible as a non-exchangeable entity – but would mixing with unfamiliar digital performers or issuing a special collective non-fungible token (NFT) add another virtual context? Did my own Instagram story publication contribute to the digitalisation of this happening? At least, when I watch the videos and photos now, I cannot imagine the exact experience I had without having been there. Maybe the question is: how might this type of performance one day have its own online system? Virtual reality?

Day 2. After a quick lunch, I find the Landestheater for *Gone by Now*, the first of a series of three performances developed by Jiannan Qu (and the only one I could attend). Around 20 dancers are dispatched in the foyer, standing up. They start bending their knees repeatedly, exchanging positions from time to time. One dancer waves her hand and everyone repeats. Step by step, more movements emerge and we start understanding the situation: their movements come from daily life (listen to music, look at watch, greet friends, run...). And yet, these movements do not seem natural. In the festival brochure, it is said that they are virtual reality simulations of human ones. That makes sense.

When I asked Lin how he selected artists with co-curator Freda Fiala, he said that in addition to their respective networks, they also identified digital performance artists such as Jan Hakon Erichsen, who had so far performed exclusively on Instagram (where he has over 810,000 followers). Lin and Fiala invited Erichsen to select seven short pieces to perform live in Linz. The whole performance lasted barely two minutes but it was exhilarating. Erichsen destructs daily objects like balloons and spaghetti in a sharp and dramatic way, and the number of his Instagram followers confirms his popularity. When I watch his videos on Instagram, the effect is not the same as the non-fungible edition: online you have only the most spectacular cut, and probably the best one after multiple trials; offline we witness his physical presence, his preparation for each piece, the interval between pieces, the eventual imperfection (leftover uncut spaghetti for example) and the applause (with audience in the same space). This experimentation shows the complementarity of both universes and could inspire offline artists to perform digitally. (In this respect, the day 3 interview-performance live-

streamed from New York with David Henry Nobody Jr looks inspiring too, though I missed it due to travelling).

In performance art history, Viennese Actionism of the 1960s was a remarkable if short-lived movement. With this new performance festival, OK Linz director Alfred Weidinger initiates a new chapter for the Austrian performance art scene. Bringing together a diversity of artists (from performance pioneers in the 70s to the latest online ones) makes for a meaningful debut connecting to performance art history. Similar to other performing arts, performance art faces the challenges and opportunities of digitalisation, accelerated by Covid-19. The non-fungible nature of online NFTs is what makes their value unique. How about the body, the irreplaceable medium of performance? Lin and Fiala choose an up-to-date angle investigating the economic future of body and performance; in future editions of the festival, I hope we could see even more new possibilities experimenting with the body/performance interchange, between fungible and non-fungible.

Lin mentioned to me Nieslony's Day 3 performance: the 76-year-old man moving a few extremely heavy stones in a corridor. Meanwhile, back at DFC Francisco Carolinum, there are NFTs available for sale. These two images may enlighten our reflection on performance and digitalisation... •



# Ivo Dimchev
# In Hell with Jesus



Gay bar. Illegal birthday party during lock-down. Homophobic ex with a loaded gun. Six bodies. One slutty Jesus. A musical… sort of. Choreographer, performance artist, songwriter and musician Ivo Dimchev is back at ImPulsTanz with the premiere of *In Hell with Jesus*.

In extravagant sunglasses, Dimchev sings until dramatically killed by prerecorded gunshots. What follows is an acted-out, entertaining audition for six candidates (Maria Tepavicharova, Lora Nedialkova, Yordanka Popova, Teodor Koychinov, Steven Achikor, Roburt Iliev) in a forthcoming musical, still awaiting subsidy, its dramaturgy unset, and the promise of a famous choreographer joining later. The contenders must prove their voices in Dimchev's songs and answer the provocative questions by him, which would magically appear on the wall of the bar after their brutal death.

Funny, absurd, vulgar at first, the questions and songs gradually reach into places of shared hurt. War, rape as a weapon, the body as a commodity, 'Sex with Putin or the Dalai Lama?', homophobia, Covid emergency units, 'Being in Hell with Jesus or in Heaven with Trump?' are examples of the work's ever-changing rhythm between the grave and the ridiculous. Once the performers go backstage, Dimchev turns to the audience, and we laughingly answer them collectively.

The piece acts as a quasi substitute for the imagined musical and as a comment on contemporary performance, parodying its financing, contents and genres. The choreography is kept simple: jumping around the white leather couch, rousing the audience like at a cheap party, a pole dance without the pole, Jesus dancing the lusty *kyuchek* (a signature Balkan Roma dance) in his underwear. It is a gesture towards intentionally 'bad' choreography which wilfully refuses to fulfil the brand expectations of ImPulsTanz and Ivo Dimchev. Its deliberate mediocrity is refreshing and welcomed by genuine and warm-hearted laughter.

I once again felt that the clichéd act of involving the audience has gained new value after the isolated and online performances of the past two years; just a pity that the closing group choreography with audience members was obviously staged.

**The bottom line:** An entertaining event which is not ashamed of itself

**Plamen Harmandjiev**
17 August 2022

**An entertainingly provocative song, dance and quiz-show sees six characters in search of a musical. Meta, much?**

Vienna, Austria

Photo © Krasimir Stoichkov

ImPulsTanz, Vienna, Austria

Text, music, choreography: Ivo Dimchev / Performers: Maria Tepavicharova, Lora Nedialkova, Yordanka Popova, Teodor Koychinov, Steven Achikor, Roburt Iliev, Ivo Dimchev

# Elle Sofe Sara
## Vástádus eana – The answer is land

A hot, sunny day in Berlin. Seven women with red bonnets, black tank tops, full skirts and hi-top walking shoes emerge into the foyer of Hebbel am Ufer 1 theatre, megaphones in hand and walking single file through the crowd to lead us outside.

As they sing, their arms reach out in circular motions reminiscent of the Earth's rotations, voices ringing to the binary stomps of their feet on the warm tar. Gradually, their unison transforms into a more unsettling yet tremblingly beautiful polyphony, prompting the crew to open the back of the theatre. We are led to our seats through the stage, where we discover a sparse forest of hanging fabrics. The light is dark and yellowy: midnight sun or the break of dawn? No matter, we've left Berlin. We've instantly travelled to Sápmi (formerly known as Lapland), whence these songs and performers hail.



Norway, Finland and Sweden have all been called out for their long-standing discriminatory practices against the Sámi, and choreographer Elle Sofe Sara focuses her work on the social, political and cultural identities of her people and the challenges they face. *Vástádus eana – The answer is land* is an anthem of indigenous pride, reminding us through traditional *yoik* singing (translations usefully provided) about the importance of our roots, our land.

The performers aren't all dancers, so the choreographic composition remains fairly simple: emphatically laying down their megaphones, they move steadily in circles around the cloth forest, or in straight lines to address the audience. The few near-silent contemporary dance trios and solos clue us into the difficulties of being perceived as different. Yet what shines through most is how vital it is for these women to keep their traditions alive. In one of the most dynamic moments, their repetitive squatting movements show us they're ready for battle. The others watch over the dancers, like a Greek chorus, adding to the drama and urgency of their plea. Their heritage must be preserved and they won't be ignored.

**The bottom line:** A moving chronicle of a culture and land under threat

**Sedera Ranaivoarinosy**
19 August 2022

**An audience gently transported from Berlin to Sápmi, to witness a performance of roots, reclamation and resilience**

Tanz im August, Berlin, Germany

Photo © Antero Hein

Artistic direction & choreography: Elle Sofe Sara / With: Kajsa Balto, Julie Moviken, Olga-Lise Holmen, Ulla Pirttijarvi, Nora Svenning, Grete Daling, Vilja Tjemsland Kwasny / Original cast: Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska, Emilie Marie Karlsen / Co-choreography: Alexandra Wingate / Music: Frode Fjellheim / Costume design: Elle Sofe Sara, Ramona Salo / Set design: Elin Melberg / Lighting: Øystein Heitmann / Dramaturgy: Thomas Schaupp / Sound technician: Eivind Steinholm / Sewing hats: Zoja Galkina, Unni Fjellheim, Sara Inga Utsi Bongo, Karen Inga Buljo Oskal, Jorunn Løkvold, Hilly Sarre / Sewing clothes: Inga Buljo Oskal, Ann Mari Sara / Title: 'Rájácummá/Kiss from the border' – Niillas Holmberg, Outi Pieski, Jenni Laiti / Production management: Maiken Garder, Nordberg Movement / Tour management: Ingvild Kirkvik / Video & pictures: Antero Hein/ Hein Creations

# Maija Hirvanen
# Mesh

Hang Huang
23 August 2022

## Humans within a more-than-human world – but does the idea outweigh the material?

Tanz im August, Berlin, Germany

Photo © Heidi Piiroinen



On a milky white stage, four dancers lie down as if sleeping. A windy sound caresses their bodies and it seems that someone enters their dreams – otherwise why would their bodies move in a crescendo, as if electrified? The intensity of their dreams tunes down, and their bodies change to a side-sleeping posture, arms and legs brushing the floor from time to time. With the sound effects we can vaguely picture their dreams: bonfire? War? Suddenly, the bodies roll on the stage, back and forth. Here we are: the bottom of a valley? A rabbit hole?

Standing up, the dancers look at each other before threading a movement chain in which each dancer grasps another's forearm, then another, then another. But it is not vigorous enough, and its flatness extends to the following scenes in which the dancers fight, shout like animals, harvest nature, yet even the changing coloured lights don't manage to filter their nonchalance. The choreographer's imagination is less promising than the description in the programme: 'Maija Hirvanen reimagines the human in a more-than-human world.'

The final connection with the audience does add a moment of post-pandemic enthusiasm. Dispatched on both aisles of the theatre, the dancers start vocalising: calling, chanting, or both. Then they look for a seat, crawl between rows, trying to spread their energies with caution among the audience. Yet I hear only one shy reply to the sound, and see only one spectator's body interact with a dancer. Maybe more interactions are expected? Supposedly, yes. Are we turning down the invitation to become meshed in this 'new/déjà vu' world, or is the invitation not warming enough? I left the HAU2 theatre perplexed.

**The bottom line:** a lukewarm attempt at reimagining a human world

Artistic direction & choreography: Maija Hirvanen / With: Marika Peura, Marlon Moilanen, Suvi Tuominen, Pie Kär / Lighting design: Heikki Paasonen / Sound design: Tatu Nenonen

# Ice Hot Nordic Dance
## Time to credit dance and controversy?

Anna Kozonina
25 August 2022

**The big, well-organised Nordic dance platform returns with performances that are variously emotive, well-crafted, surreal and smartypants**

Helsinki, Finland

When shown in less prosperous countries and less democratic cultural contexts, experimental Nordic dance works perfectly as a cutting-edge art form: groundbreaking, critical, sometimes even radical. It's known for its statements on gender and identity and interest in contemporary philosophy; for explorations of non-human worlds and climate change; for never-ending musings on pop culture wrapped in the high-quality scenography and sound design that provide a synthetic theatre experience. So it's by no means naive or old-fashioned.

Yet when presented in condensed manner at a professional platform such as Ice Hot Nordic Dance (Helsinki, 29 June to 3 July 2022), it can lack the power and meaning to reach beyond polished and well-funded aesthetic experiments. It is extremely well-crafted and intelligent – to the extent that it can become decorative, lifeless, and, as often happens with smartypants art, self-negating. This is, of course, how dance can explore its own limitations, deconstructs ideologies and becomes self-aware – but in my opinion, in the 2020s this can no longer exist as the dominant underlying criterion for curatorial choices. As one of my Finnish colleagues shrewdly remarked, the artistic selection of the platform didn't respect dance that much – as if dance itself were not relevant.

This criticism might echo the fights of the early 2000s, when old-school critics didn't understand an intellectual and self-deconstructive turn in dance that was supported by theoreticians and dance dramaturges. But twenty years later, this plea has a different background. A lot has been done to expand dance and choreography and turn them into tools of critical exploration. Today, when the world is falling apart, this baggage should be taken to a new stage by embracing more 'traditional' attributes of good dance performance: emotion, playfulness, joy, sensitivity, togetherness, and, no matter how radical it may sound, even *dancing*.

### When self-denial of dance gets tiring, emotional statements come in force

The only time I felt deeply emotionally vitalised during Ice Hot was at its last performance: *Vástádus eana – The answer is land* by Elle Sofa Sara (Norway). Quite traditional in its realisation, with simple but dramaturgically precise composition, it is concerned with content rather than formal aesthetic self-reflection. It was the



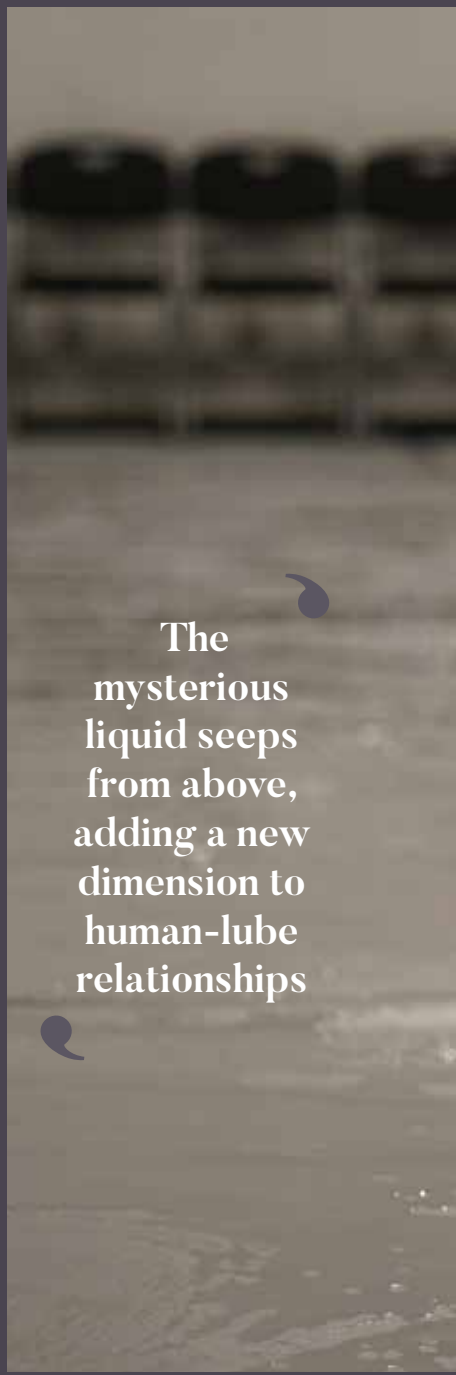
Elle Sofe Sara, *Vástádus eana – The answer is land*
Photo © Antero Hein

only show of the platform that started outside the black box, in front of the theatre where passers-by could encounter the performers and the audience and get a glimpse of a closed professional event. Seven women in traditional Sámi headwear, with loudspeakers in their hands, presenting themselves proudly and furiously to the audience on all four sides around them, started the show with stomping and singing, as if trying to connect with the space and take over it. They later moved towards the theatre stage, encouraging spectators to follow them, thus organising a long procession and putting the viewers into a choreographed form of collectivity for the first time during the showcase.

With dancing and singing as its main components (wow!), the piece echoes a truly painful narrative around the Sámi's relationships with the land, colonisation and climate change. So much so that it doesn't need to deconstruct its own means of artistic expression: it's enough to give space for breathtaking *yoiks* (traditional Sámi songs), folk costumes and simple choreography inspired by people's movement at protests. Refreshing in its simplicity, honesty and soulfulness, it created the space where contemporary dance practices can still be touching and clear for different audiences while dealing with acute problems. The audience, that definitely had seen all kinds of dance shows before, gave it a standing ovation – not for masterful dancing or choreography, but for being sincere.

The same vibe circulated around the first show of the programme, *Funeral* by Swedish duo Mattias Lech and Lisen Ellard. Like some other performances touching upon death, it works with singing and rituals and explores the body as a space where grieving and emotional transformations unfold through movement on different levels: from breathing, trembling, rampaging and releasing tension to actual dancing. It takes place in muffled light, starting with performers lying on the floor, with microphones resting in front of their faces while they breath and sing, creating the soundscape for the unfolding action. The piece resembles people telling stories of their encounters with liminal life-death experiences through moving and singing: in pairs and groups, embracing different stages of that experience, from unbearable pain to silent humbleness. It also strives to create the space of togetherness through the sound: before the show, the makers encouraged the audience to join them in repeating a simple tune.

Although performances on this theme can sometimes be similar to each other (I recall Michiel Vandevelde's *Dances of Death* recently shown in Helsinki), this does not detract from their merit, as the theme itself is not necessarily an arena of searching for novelty. When contemporary choreographers deal with life experiences from which dancing rituals initially appeared, they often choose to go in one of two directions. They either contemplate how our highly technologised reality is essentially mystical, irrational and ritualistic (hence eccentric shows such as *Eden Detail* by Estonians Jette Loona Hermanis and Johhan Rosenberg (see p. 45) or they sincerely work with intense emotions, trance and liminal



> The mysterious liquid seeps from above, adding a new dimension to human-lube relationships



*Fluids* by Finnish collective WAUHAUS
Photo © Samuli Laine

states of consciousness through the body, leaving critical distance behind. The first exposes cultural mechanisms behind our emotions, affects and beliefs, the second gives us a unique experience of something we will all go through, regardless of how sceptical we are. The directions reveal different artistic intentions; at Ice Hot, the second one was almost missing, and I felt its absence.

### Smart and hilarious: still some excitement to share

Let's dive now into good old 'expanded dance': self-reflective, deconstructive, smart and non-dancey – favoured in this platform over more movement-based forms though at the end of the day it may tire spectators with its tediousness, elitism and detachment from the world's problems. However, I found a couple of pieces successful in combining movement research with conceptual background and emotional infectiousness.

The hilarious *Fluids* by WAUHAUS (Finland), already touring for some time, shared the joy of interacting with lube with always excited and slightly jittery spectators. Not really working with dance in the traditional sense, it explores how bodies adjust to unusual material conditions, being unable to keep steadily grounded or totally control their movements. The show challenges the idea of decorative scenography: on the contrary, the arrangement of space becomes the main partner for performers. The floor is covered with lube, so almost impossible to walk on, and the performers slide, sometimes gracefully, sometimes awkwardly, focusing on adjusting their movement to the unusual environment rather than purely to gravity. The mysterious liquid also seeps from above, as well as from the performers' clothing, adding a new dimension to human-lube relationships.

*Fluids* is successful in at least three ways. First, it presents a visually compelling, explicit movement experiment in which the materiality of space has a direct, obvious impact on bodies. So much so that the task of the dancers is not just to move on their own (embodying their will or that of the choreographer) but to initiate movement through pushing, then transmitting the impulse through their bodies as they adjust to the capricious lube. It creates a different hierarchy between humans, the space, and the quality of its materials, revealing the agency of things that we usually perceive as inanimate and passive. The second advantage of the show is that this almost hackneyed theoretical topic really gains power by becoming embodied and explored through the dance performance. Third, it's just hilarious! While diving into the sensuality of the lube, it does not neglect its images: look at this proud, stately man floating through the liquid trying to keep a fragile balance with a thoughtful look; or a greasy huddle of bodies which one performer uses as a children's slide – just to enjoy the very moment of momentum, rushing through the space and scaring spectators by almost bumping into them.

However, although the show maps these opportunities for exploration, it does not realise even half of them. A more precise and elaborated selection of these human-

> **A good attempt to take over a symbolic space of capitalised pop culture**

lube encounters would probably make it a contemporary dance masterpiece.

BamBam Frost's *YES* (Sweden), probably the most powerful and catchy show of the whole programme, is compelling in terms of costumes, scenography, movement material, pantomime (!) and humour, and bears the familiar imprint of one of its co-producing venues, the small and famous MDT theatre in Stockholm. Of course, it deals with pop culture and the strong emotions it strives to stimulate, with references to street dancing, pleasures, playfulness, sex-positivity and shining, dangerous young femininity. YES! But first of all, it's visually fascinating. The space is taken over by a huge piece of furry fabric made of colourful flaps, hanging from the ceiling and reaching almost to the spectators' feet, resembling a frozen waterfall of thick and fluffy substance. This landscape seems full of potential yet stays uninhabited and virgin, until it is discovered and explored by a strange female creature who seems to have learnt some Krump dancing in past lives, which she uses to joyfully attune to her environment.

BamBam's changing outfits are another work of art: fringed cowboy pants, sequinned denim jackets, radiant colours. All work as huge lego pieces that create an experience of being astonished and seduced by young powerful energy. The show doesn't create a coherent visual 'narrative', rather working in a serial logic, surprising the audience with new 'entrance moments' and then interrupting the pleasure of gazing. Towards the end, however, it gives the spectators what they want: a synchronised duet dance of two beautiful young ladies enjoying themselves in their shining seductiveness. It's probably a good attempt to take over a symbolic space of capitalised pop culture, appropriate it and embody its pleasures to redefine the rules of the game. The tension between the pop and the artsy also appears in its timeline: interrupted pleasures, a prolonged finale, dramaturgy that does not follow the audience's expectations.

Inés Belli's *Metasexy* (Norway) is the inevitable show in the programme that deals with sexualised aesthetics through repetition – the topic is ubiquitous in our times but artistic approaches to it differ from piece to piece. *Metasexy* deals with fashion shows, glamour magazines and commercial aesthetics, and the type of sexuality and femininity promoted there. Since nowadays this doesn't feel like such a powerful tool for creating or imposing certain types of identity any more, the show loses a critical

Inés Belli: *Metasexy*
Photo © Tale Hendnes



> It requires a lot of creativity to fight the mind's drive to make familiar images out of performative nonsense

layer. This is for the better: this work is much more powerful aesthetically than 'critically'. As often happens with well-crafted repetition-based pieces, it presents carefully selected movement patterns – waves, hips sways, shaking, shifting weight from one side to another – that add up to slow-paced travel along the catwalk. The more rigid the structure is and the clearer the movement boundaries are, the more intense is the movement, and the performers do an excellent job to keep it contagious. *Metasexy* definitely stays in the viewers' bodies, long after the show ends – a sign of profound movement work, catchy sound design and decent dramaturgical choices.

### 'And then... nothing happened'

This phrase is occasionally repeated by big bulky dreamy Herman Nyby – one of the most charismatic performers in Sonja Jokiniemi's *ÖH* (Finland) – precisely catching the impression that this action-packed piece intentionally builds up. For more than an hour, a strangely 'homey' space occupied by seven performers (including Jokiniemi herself) is constantly transformed by multiple, simultaneous and seemingly ordinary activities that nevertheless fail to fit into an image of a recognisable action. A performative installation rather than a dance piece, *ÖH* deals with the aesthetics of the ordinary, constantly undermining the semantics of the familiar, thus transforming it into the uncanny. Performers disassemble the wooden wall of their imaginary 'house', organise a place for having tea, polish objects with a stiff shoe brush, play with fabrics, settle down for a silent conversation, jump on each other, repeat short movement sequences, constantly reorganise the space but never do anything that would 'make sense'. Common objects and action patterns put together in unfamiliar logics create a space of ever-unfolding absurdity in which the physical effort makes for a huge contrast to the inner emptiness and lack of motivation. 'And then... nothing happened', repeats Nyby, and the show takes another turn, making the audience's minds struggle to create meaning again.

It actually requires a lot of creativity to fight the mind's drive to make familiar images out of performative nonsense. The puzzle gets completed just a couple of times when one of the multiple scenes is suspended, letting the viewers enjoy the fragile stability of the image – for example, when Nyby makes a sculpture out of his body, pouring milk and holding an elegant saucer, and freezes letting the audience contemplate the milky waterfall, reminiscent of a renaissance fountain.

*ÖH* surprises with its contrast between effort and purpose, its well-planned choreography of multiple simultaneous actions that requires an enormous amount of self-control, physical power and devotion while creating nothing but a state of ongoing absurdity. There is something sad, disturbing and profoundly wise in this very principle, and it makes *ÖH* as powerful as it is hard to watch.

This show gave me a key to how I actually experienced the Ice Hot programme in general: as a complex, extremely well-crafted and well-organised venture that felt closed in on itself, slightly detached from the audience and the world around.



Herman Nyby in Sonja Jokiniemi's *ÖH*
Photo © Katri Naukkarinen

Initially announced for February rather than June, the whole thing had been programmed before the new war in Europe started (indeed some of the works were from well before the pandemic), yet that made it feel like a glimpse of a bygone time: choreographers busy with their own scattered artistic interests, works that don't make space for participation, inclusion, community-building, discussion or even the practice of dancing. Instead, the prevailing formats were smartypants theatre performances behind the traditional fourth wall. It looks a bit insensitive, with time-honoured topics now appearing as a broken record, without challenging any public or professional consensus. But times, and the world, have changed.

Maybe – at least here, and for the moment – dance theatre has become a safe place for self-centred artistic processes, based on professional consensus that tolerates 'radicality' to the extent that it loses profoundly-needed components such as controversy and conflict. •

# TANZWERKSTATT EUROPA

**Evgeny Borisenko**
29 August 2022

**Munich's long-running, many-stranded Tanzwerkstatt Europa serves as a quality sample of what's in the air of current contemporary dance**

Munich, Germany

*Evgeny Borisenko's trip was provided by Tanzwerkstatt Europa*

It is rare for a dance festival to carry a name that matches its essence to the same degree as Tanzwerkstatt Europa. This Munich-based workshop-festival was founded in 1991 by dance enthusiast and programmer Walter Heun and by the production company Joint Adventures.

Over more than thirty years, Tanzwerkstatt Europa has grown to become the largest and by far the oldest contemporary dance event in southern Germany and has attracted dance professionals and choreographers from across the globe along with a loyal Munich public.



Aya Toraiwa in
Isabelle Schad's *FUR*
Photo © Dieter Hartwig

# Gestures from the Zeitgeist

This year, Tanzwerkstatt Europa has yet again walked along two parallel yet intertwined paths: a three-week programme of lectures, classes and workshops for dance professionals and performers; and a two-week melting pot of performances, film screenings, discussions and even picnics, open to all.

Heun fittingly describes Tanzwerkstatt Europa as 'a workshop of new ideas and aesthetics in contemporary dance'. So it is difficult to boil down the festival's programming choices to a single idea or slogan, unlike with some other dance festivals. Heun says that he seeks quality of artistic and aesthetic material first and foremost; whether or not a particular artist pursues specific political agendas or tunes into socially charged topics has never been a selection criterion as such. Each year, Heun strives to devise a patchwork programme of 'what's in the air in the young contemporary dance scene'. The 2022 edition of Tanzwerkstatt Europa, hosted by **Muffathalle** and **Schwere Reiter**, is no exception. Despite a great variety of dance techniques, what all the festival shows have in common is the rigour of even the slightest movement and the utmost precision of each gesture.



One of the most somatically complex shows of the festival fortnight, **Alexander Vantournhout**'s *Through the Grapevine*, epitomises this approach and amazes by the virtuosity and ingenuity of its dance vocabulary. When two slender dancers (Vantournhout himself and **Axel Guérin**) enter the stage and exchange candid stares, they immediately start comparing their willowy limbs, measuring their armspans and height – to rare giggles from the audience. This prologue sets forth the ambiguity of their partnership on stage: loyal and dependent on one another, yet competing and teasing at times.

Their ensuing skin-to-skin dance routine is staggering. Guérin and Vantournhout intertwine their arms and legs in loose-jointed deadlocks, block their torsos in impossible equilibriums, hurtle into each other's arms, and knot their legs and arms to form an eerie and symmetrical two-backed creature. The growing intensity of this sweaty exploration of balance and strength only highlights the performers' sportsmanlike attitude, while they nudge and cheer each other into yet another jaw-dropping twist. Their dedication and mastery are off the scale and are paid back

Below:
Alexander Vantournhout and Axel Guérin *Through the Grapevine*
Photo © Bart Grietens

Right:
*Earths* by Louise Vanneste
Photo © Caroline Lessire



> A mighty introduction to what contemporary dance and 'nouveau cirque' are capable of

by an explosive ovation. While the dancers' motives and the show's overall ambitions remain vague, *Through the Grapevine* has a grip strength of such force that you want to recommend this show to all your friends as a mighty introduction to what contemporary dance and 'nouveau cirque' are capable of.

Like many other artists, Vantournhout was invited to Tanzwerkstatt Europa not only as a dance maker but also as a teacher. His dance class was illustrative of the approach in *Through the Grapevine* and dwelt upon the diverse somatic potentialities of partnering on stage: leaning on and controlling each other, leading and being led, depending on and challenging the partner, teasing and being teased. Vantournhout's students were invited to share their takeaways and insights in front of their peers during the festival's final evening.

Just as an unrooted tree becomes mere wood, a choreographed gesture isolated from its source, from its 'why' and from its driving force, often trades off its sense against its beauty, and risks turning into artifice. In *Earths*, Louise Vanneste emphatically proves the importance of tuning into the very essence of movement. But even before the movement comes the scent. The scent of moss carpeting the stage is intense, and it immediately carries me back to the most soothing childhood memories: mushroom hunting in the forest in late autumn, bike rides through humid birch groves. When the four dancers appear on stage, all clad in white, my perception has already definitely changed.



What ensues can be best described as a mental journey. Movements start at fingertips: first, gentle flutters, then sudden twists and hardly perceptible bends and shivers. The piece unfolds through a series of repetitive gestures, tilts, sweeps and curves, by which the dancers scan and gauge the space and each other, only seldom abandoning their initial postures. When they coalesce and break apart, Arnaud Gernier's delicate light occasionally warms up the space and highlights the irregular contours of the moss chunks. Not the faintest stir escapes my attention – each quiver seems to come from deep within, as if the dancers inhale and exhale by moving. Their unalloyed attention to the space surrounding them makes me recall the words of French theatre director Claude Régy who said: 'When a person on stage moves their little finger, everyone and everything in the space should become aware of this movement and respond to it.' In *Earths* the dancers tune into the ecosystem and the energy flows, and progressively abandon their human agency and willpower to form an uncanny community with the moss-covered clearing. And there comes the point in the piece



when movement ultimately regains its core function and faculty – that of communication and language yet to fathom or decipher.

Isabelle Schad's trilogy *FUR*, *Turning Solo 2*, *Rotations* also operates on the terrain of attentiveness to gesture and careful yet rather detached choreography. Schad seems to deliberately avoid any contextualisation, and commits to showing the dancers as they are in a series of portraits. This selection of two short solos and one duo, all devised during the successive lockdowns, evoke a flurry of associations. In *FUR*, Aya Toraiwa executes a startling solo in which her knee-length hair is by turns an extension of her body, a veil, and a shroud. *Turning Solo 2* is a meditative reflection on whirling which sends two dancers in a sombre spinning ritual. But Schad's methodical approach to movement reaches its emotional heights in *Rotations*. Alone on stage and back against the wall, Claudia Tomasi starts her solo with quick fluttering arm movements in front of her plexus. Soon, springy rhythm gains her entire body, her head swings, her hands frenetically cut the shaft of light above her head drawing evanescent golden traces. As the tempo intensifies, Tomasi manages to accomplish a rare feat – transform cold method into a transcendent moment of pure dance glory.

Theatre and dance stages have always been full of flat and overblown stereotypes of tough and aggressive masculinity. In a revival of his 2014 work *Arrangement*, British-Irish choreographer Joe Moran tends to reconfigure narratives around toxic male expression and challenge the objectification of men in contemporary dance. By manoeuvring social gestures and carefully embedding them into his rough and playful dance vocabulary, Moran complicates the habitual discourse and queers the straight lines. It would have been a too-easy and straightforward trick to leap to another extreme of the gender binary and paint male frailty and feminine traits in thick strokes. Rather, Moran subtly subverts iconic male rituals. A rugby scrummage becomes a slow melée tinted with tenderness and acceptance of failure; a street fight morphs into a quirky display of embarrassment and angst; and a victory celebration finishes in a graceful *bras en couronne*.

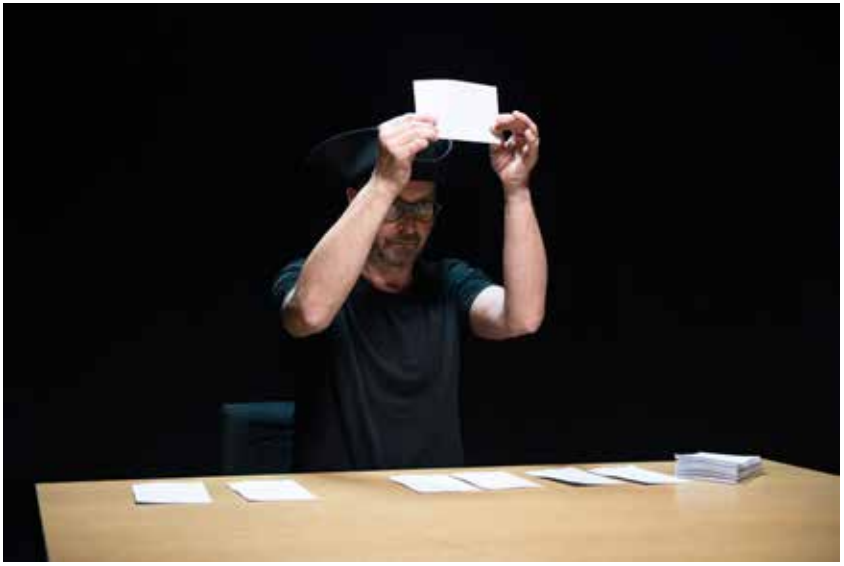
Halfway through the show, all six dancers unexpectedly open up to questions from the audience. We thus learn about their favourite TV show ('RuPaul's Drag Race'),

how they describe themselves (sexy, magical and energetic), whether they do Scottish folk dance (No), or whether they want to go and take a shower (a firm 'Yes'). Instead of reinforcing the binaries, Moran sows doubt and instils ambiguity in a funny and smart feat that reminds us that even a simple gesture cannot lend itself to a straightforward interpretation.

One of the recurring motives of any dance festival remains a reflection on the act of performing in front of the audience, its elusive contractuality, its hidden codes and cues. When asked about current dance trends, Heun also highlighted the recent resurgence of 'fourth-wall shows' in which dancemakers fearlessly attack the thin symbolic screen separating the stage from the viewer. There can hardly be a better example of this specific genre than the double bill *Rewriting* and *Science Fiction* by British choreographer Jonathan Burrows and his long-standing collaborator and composer Matteo Fargion. In *Rewriting*, Burrows deals out and reads out index cards containing random quotes from his well-known *A Choreographer's Handbook*. His tongue-in-cheek delivery is complemented by repetitive tinny tones that Fargion playfully extracts from his miniature Casio keyboard. Hardly leaving his chair, Burrows employs an increasingly elaborate series of hand gestures – he flips and flicks the cards, brandishes them at arm's length like a conjurer setting up a card trick. His seated armography is startling from the first finger tap to the very last arm sweep. Aphorisms read out during this odd solitaire are by turns thoughtful and banal, but all can be easily tagged as truisms: 'Do whatever you need to do', 'Complete and utter failure is always an option', 'Most people prefer to dance than to watch other people dance'.

Left: *Arrangement* by Joe Moran
Photo © Camilla Greenwell

Below: Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion's *Rewriting*.
Photo © Hugo Glendinning



If in *Rewriting* Burrows and Fargion's waggish acting and slick dramaturgy save the show from veering towards highbrow pretentiousness, *Science Fiction* tests audience expectations with a handful of sheer self-indulgence. Both standing behind synths, Burrows and Fargion in turn build up a simple one-handed tune by adding extra notes, layers and occasional snare drum beats. The pair frequently describe their approach to performance art as based on the rules of musical composition. In *Science Fiction* however, their suite quickly loses its grip and sounds like a friendly conversation between two old pals who can hardly hide their indifference to the outer world (the latter paying back by a series of walk-outs).

> **This festival has also become a workshop for its audience – training grounds for their eyes and ears**

Ultimately, this uncanny double bill was a welcome and witty break in the otherwise movement-based festival programme, and left me musing about the limits of post-dramatic trends questioning the artist-audience contract. When does the tension between our expectations and on-stage delivery break? And where lies the line between smart *mise-en-abyme* and hermetic arrogance?

Traditionally, all editions of Tanzwerkstatt Europa feature a symposium, a day-long event full of lectures by dance makers and theorists, performances of shorter format, workshops and discussions. This year, it took the form of an 'artistic-theoretical experience course' housed on the lush grassfields of 'Fluffy Grounds', a disused open-air bath facility. Its sprawling programme (teasingly entitled 'And the beat goes on...') included free tai chi and yoga workshops, art installations, lectures and performances. A 'lecture tent' housed Dr Eike Wittrock's short retrospective of drag shows and queer performance history, Alexandra Baybutt's talk about somatic practices in everyday life and, most notably, a groovy lecture by psychologist Peter 'Dr Dance' Lovatt, during which he not only updated the audience on the positive influence of dance on the human brain and hormonal balance, but also aptly illustrated his findings by top-notch Travolta-inspired moves and jovial disco sequences.

The performative part of the afternoon turned out to be just as inspiring. Joe Moran presented *Thirst*, a short duo which delves into notions of power dynamics, dominance and submission. Louise Vanneste danced a solo version of *One Foray*, a dazzling 'journey through an imaginary landscape' inspired by Michel Tournier's novel relating his version of Robinson Crusoe's shipwreck. Always with her back to the audience, Vanneste slowly drifts through a strand of sand endlessly bending and warping in sweeping meanders, as if she is translating Tournier's words by and into her body – a soundscape and an accompaniment of her solemn progression. Vanneste's fluid solo quickly created an eerie powerfield shielding the viewers from the outside hubbub – a gentle mental bubble that I had a hard time leaving.

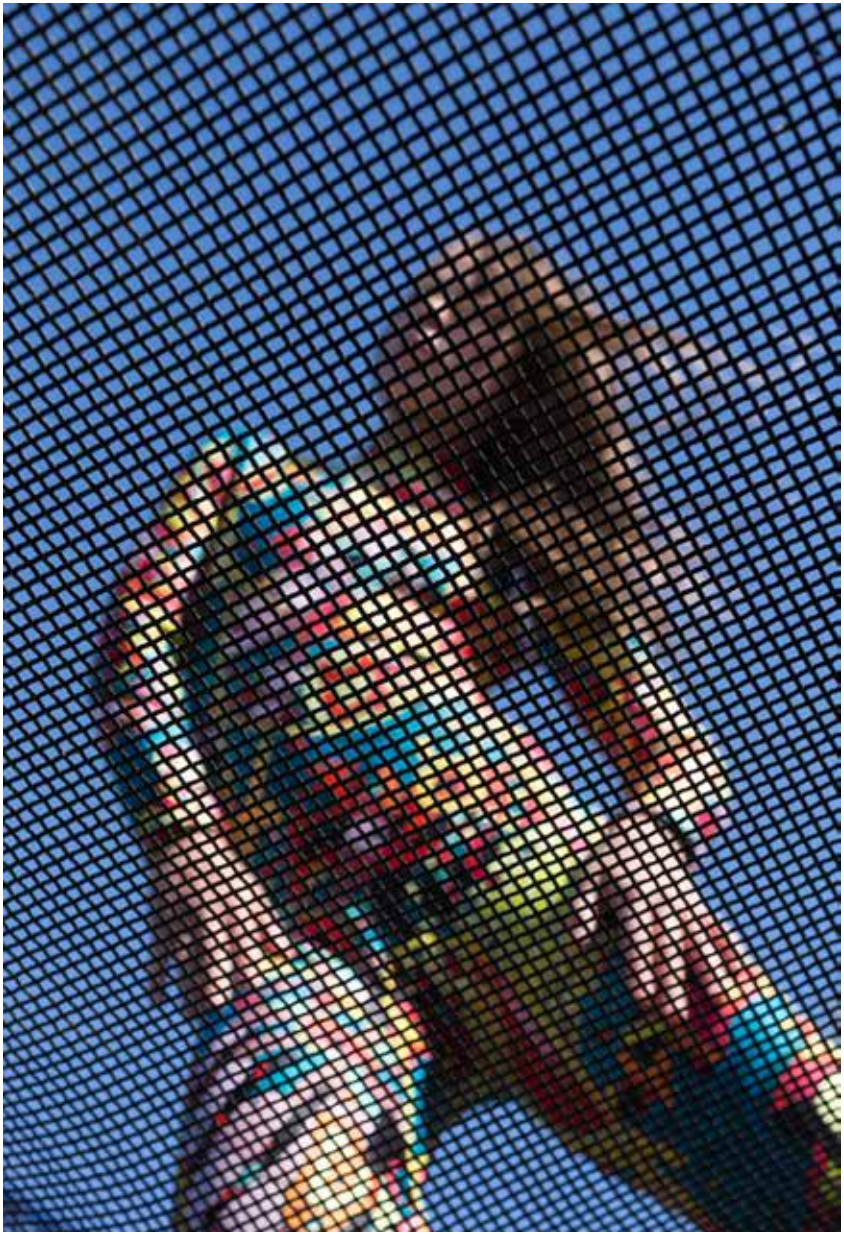
The staple of the afternoon symposium, and arguably of the whole festival, was Roza Moshtaghi's performative art installation *Bouncing Narratives*. This work had been selected as part of Aerowaves' Twenty20, but because of Covid-related travel restrictions, has hardly been ever shown outside the Nordic countries. Spectators are invited to enter into a scarcely decorated freight container with a trampoline as its roof, and squat on the pillows that upholster its steel interior. A thick trampoline mesh grids the sunlit sky. Two dancers clad in brightly coloured bodysuits step on the trampoline and start to bounce, backs upright and facing each other, to Lykourgos Porfyris's diffused rhythm. Animated by subtle pace shifts, their bouncing morphs into a subdued confrontation, a series of dramatic collapses and frenzied bends, a joyful hug and a mesmerising final embrace under a large veil covering their heads.

This rich and carefully calculated oscillation would have never reached its hypnotising effect had Moshtaghi not modified the viewer's gaze. We are forced

Opposite:
Roza Moshtaghi's *Bouncing Narratives*
Photo © Josh Lake & Ben Pender

to look upwards, our view obstructed by the regular web of the trampoline that responds to each bounce by a deep menacing sag. Feet appear larger than hands, faces less visible than shoe soles; the body height is abolished and even its shape becomes a matter of doubt. Moshtaghi skilfully stirs our perception to render us vulnerable and alert, and to let her bouncing narratives cut through us with the efficiency of a hot butter knife. And just as a greater truth always lies beyond our understanding, Moshtaghi's piece escapes literal interpretation and navigates the tension between what we perceive and what we don't.

One single thought kept buzzing in my head after a busy afternoon in 'Fluffy Grounds'. While I was still incapable of fully grasping the zeitgeist of Tanzwerkstatt Europa, its 'workshop' spirit has suddenly become crystal-clear. By putting together works of varying ambitions and concepts but of unquestionable quality, this dance workshop-festival has also become a workshop for its audience – training grounds for their eyes and ears and a laboratory in which they reconsider their presumptions and challenge their taste. The 2022 edition of Tanzwerkstatt Europa has also emphatically proved the conceptual versatility of choreographed gesture. Even stripped from theoretically complex ambitions, it can become a screen on which the spectators can project their own memories, emotions and worries. And when they leave the theatre and everyday life regains its frenzied pace, they will recognise its beauty everywhere: disturbing and evocative, yet strangely familiar. •



# Ex Machina

Georgia Howlett
1 September 2022

## The unnerving AI disco dance in Alex Garland's movie provokes ideas about dance, autopilot and self-programming

youtu.be/b7C69HqnV8s

People often claim they learnt to dance before they could walk. In Alex Garland's 2014 *Ex-Machina*, Ava (Alicia Vikander), a highly advanced humanoid AI, need not learn at all: 'I always knew how to speak, and that's strange isn't it?' Yes Ava, it is.

Technology is prolifically used to research and enjoy dance in new ways, but dance itself, in its non-metaphorical representation, is an extension of our natural states – it is human. When narcissistic Nathan (Oscar Isaac) initiates a disco duet with one of his humanoids, it makes sense aesthetically – a computer programmed to replicate human behaviour – but its insinuations are less benign: dance is abstracted from its humane essence and suspended to be reclaimed, an unsettling forecast of a future where one questions to whom, or to what, dance belongs to, if it belongs anywhere at all.

Before this dance, Nathan had selected young programmer Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson) to participate in a version of the Turing test with Ava. They are isolated in Nathan's mountain mansion, a hedonistic universe, airless and delusional in its self-proclaimed prestige. This slick set-up deteriorates as the folds of deception multiply, and Nathan's intentions become increasingly ominous.

Intending to confront Nathan, Caleb instead finds humanoid Kyoko (Sonoya Mizuno), who begins undressing (a disconcerting reaction) before Nathan enters drunk, and commands a dance. A red light instantly soaks the not-so-cosy lounge, much like the blood that will later drench Nathan. As if Oliver Cheatham's 1983 song *Get Down Saturday Night* were Kyoko's ON switch, she begins to swing her hips and point luringly at Caleb, the gormless onlooker. It couldn't be untimelier.

This charade is Nathan's casual assertion of authority. Rather than science jargon or physical force, he chooses a ludicrous, pre-programmed dance routine to momentarily squash Caleb's concerns. Movement is used to manipulate and infuriate as Nathan joins in, side stepping and arm pumping. The gimmicky duet is 'spontaneous', but they synchronise like Wii-Dance animations, careful, and with creepy body efficiency. Kyoko might sway her hips but she's still a computer, and her wan expression reminds us so. She is not consumed by an urge to groove: this is merely a code in her software, and club dancing is just another of Nathan's indulgent, programmed pleasures, alongside sexual and domestic servitude.

The scene ends abruptly. Out of kilter with the nuanced landscape conjured thus far, its farcical presence strikes a jarring faultline halfway through the film. Kyoko's blatant, faultless execution lacks nuance: one movement replaces another with dull surety, which only accentuates the multiplex threat of technology, especially when it appears outwardly harmless.



Sonoya Mizuno and Oscar Isaac in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*. Publicity still © A24 Films

At the arrival of this dance, we realise we'd been craving normality beyond Nathan's bubble, and that this is not it. And it ends with as much sentimentality as Macbook OFF button. Movement is the product of an operating system, an innovation, but somehow static in its pre-determinedness – in this reality, system errors are the extent of spontaneity. Humanoids may have curved limbs and flushed cheeks, but it is a deception. Their priority is to replicate behaviour, not feel it, a fact difficult to discard when watching a dancing AI. Or this one, anyway. Yet this intelligence originates in human creativity; the two concepts are no longer so easily distinguishable. The experiential learning that shapes a human's relationship to dance may not be authentically present in AI, but the creator can programme it to appear otherwise. Credit is given to them when the AI seems to be experiencing dance as the dynamic process that it is, a surrender to play and pleasure in movement.

It's a rabbit hole, and this brief moment of film feels like a descent into it. And I wonder about dancers, who often practice steps so well they could perform them without active thought. Is the human experience of autopilot not itself a version of self-programming? What exactly are the criteria for being a dancer? Breath in your lungs and blood in your veins seem like reasonable starting points. But wherever we look, and increasingly so, there is a screen where there was once a body. Considering the restless pace of tech substitution, it would be naive to deny that new realities with fundamentally shifted definitions of dance are forming. In fact, we've probably welcomed them already.

**Wherever we look, there is a screen where there was once a body**

# Paths through ImPulsTanz

**Lena Megyeri**
6 September 2022

## Themes of climate, memory and sound emerge from Vienna's sprawling ImPulsTanz festival

Vienna, Austria

The more time I spend at Vienna's month-long ImPulsTanz festival year after year, the more I'm convinced that it is not just one festival: it is as many festivals as the number of its visitors (this year that number was around 137,000). From the 122 performances, 230 workshops, 128 free dance classes in the 'Public Moves' series and the talks, discussions, dance contests, exhibitions etc., each festivalgoer needs to curate their own selection, resulting in a very unique festival experience. One thing is sure though: if you, like me this year, are lucky enough to spend several weeks at ImPulsTanz, around the third week you won't even bat an eyelid if you see someone starting to dance at a tram stop (true story). For one month, dance becomes an inherent part of the city.

My ImPulsTanz consisted of 16 shows and 1 workshop; here is my account of the thoughts and issues that arose during those weeks of living in an intense dance dream.

### Climate concerns

The festival was opened by Tanztheater Wuppertal with one of Pina Bausch's last works, *Vollmond* from 2006. The show is a series of joyful nonsense in Bauschian manner, with Bauschian characters on a stage dominated by a huge rock and water – lots of water. Towards the end of the first act it starts raining, and soon the scene is literally flooded, a playground for dancers to swim, splash and spill. When you enter a theatre, you are often expected to leave reality behind, but this time, amidst news of severe drought throughout Europe all summer, it felt a bit uncomfortable to watch a performance that turns an entire stage into a swimming pool to provide a spectacular backdrop. *Vollmond* dates to a more carefree time (only 16 years ago!) but I couldn't help wondering: in the near future, will it still be acceptable to create and perform such a show? Given our resources – will it be possible at all?



Water in times of drought: Pina Bausch's *Vollmond* Photo © Yako One



**In the near future, will it still be acceptable to create and perform such a show?**

Now, 16 years later, the discourse about sustainability and climate crisis is as present in the dance world as everywhere else – both on and off stage. On stage in the ImPulsTanz programme, **Akram Khan** took up the issue in his reimagined *Jungle Book*, set in a dystopian near future where Mowgli (a young girl in this version) has her family torn apart by a terrible flood. Designed to be enjoyable and comprehensible for younger audiences too, *Jungle Book Reimagined* uses crystal-clear dramaturgy (by Sharon Clark) that many contemporary dance shows painfully miss. Khan puts his choreography at the service of Tariq Jordan's text, illustrating it almost word by word. That means less room for intricate dancing than usual in his pieces, but he compensates with clever character-building through movement, with funny and hyperactive Baloo outshining everyone else. Music and sound design are enhanced with extracts of climate activist Greta Thunberg's most powerful speeches, but this time it is Mowgli's mother's gentle lessons about respecting nature (presented in the form of flashbacks through beautiful animations) that really speak to our hearts.



Jolente De Keersmaeker and Jérôme Bel.
Photo © Herman Sorgeloos

Off stage, **Jérôme Bel** has been one of the forerunners of sustainable working in the dance field, announcing in 2019 that his company wouldn't fly for work any more, and that he would conduct rehearsals online. His decision was met with scepticism and criticism – until one year later the pandemic forced everyone else to do the same. For his current show, *Dances for an Actress*, he doesn't allow the printing of programmes; instead, said actress, **Jolente De Keersmaeker** (younger sister of Anne Teresa) starts the performance by reciting all the credits and information that we would otherwise be reading on a piece of paper that most of us would soon dispose of. It's reasonable, but there's more: De Keersmaeker announces that the power consumption of the 60-minute show will equal that of a vacuum cleaner used for an hour. Many in the auditorium laugh, but I get a little sad; this time I'm wondering whether the dance world will be able to find a balance between being wasteful and feeling guilty about the ecological impact of every step it takes.

## Revisiting personal and collective history

In *Dances for an Actress* (which so far has two versions, one with Valérie Dreville and one with Jolente De Keersmaeker), Bel wants to pay tribute to iconic works of dance history. He has worked many times with amateurs before, and his actress (De Keersmaeker at ImPulsTanz) is not

a trained dancer either, but she brings a professional presence to the stage, which makes all the difference. She doesn't try to recreate the selected scenes, but rather creates her own interpretation of them. In the first scene she remembers childhood ballet classes and clumsily presents their exercises, before moving on to Isadora Duncan's *Prelude*, to Chopin. The first revelation comes when she takes off her clothes to perform Pina Bausch's solo from *Café Müller*: it's not like Bausch's original at all, and yet somehow she still captures the essence of the scene, not through movement but through the tragedy she brings into it. Then cut to Rihanna's 2012 hit Diamonds, to which De Keersmaeker improvises a badass free dance, still in the nude, showing her wit – not for the first and not for the last time during the evening.

With the next scene she pays tribute 'to Kazuo Ohno and my father': her distorted face, changing from one grotesque grimace to the next, tells quite different stories about the two personalities. She sits down to catch her breath and begins to describe two YouTube videos, and as she speaks we begin to see the scenes in our mind's eye. One of them is easy enough – you soon realise it's John Travolta's iconic disco scene from *Saturday Night Fever*. The other is lesser known: a scene from one of Simone Forti's works. If you haven't seen it before, you are now forced to imagine it with the help of De Keersmaeker's words; what an original way to recreate a dance.

Bel has stated countless times with his productions that dance doesn't just belong to professional dancers, and *Dances for an Actress* is further proof of that. But it's also more: it's an experiment with ways of preserving and interpreting important pieces of our dance heritage.



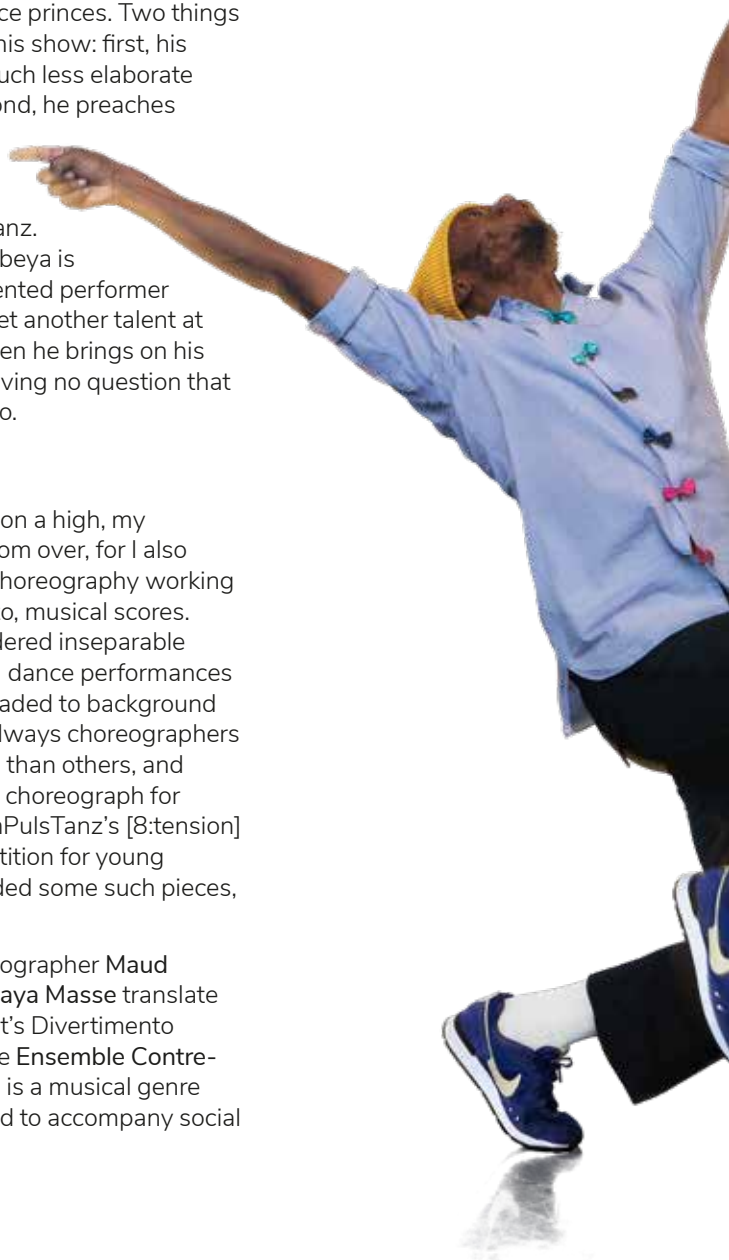
Channelling spirits from the past: Boglárka Börcsök in *Figuring Age*. Photo © Andreas Bolm

Boglárka Börcsök also evokes figures of recent dance history in her piece *Figuring Age*, but in quite a different way. In 2015, the young Hungarian choreographer met several elderly dancers in Budapest, and together with filmmaker Andreas Bolm she decided to make a documentary about three of them, resulting in the movie *The Art of Movement*. Irén Preisich, Éva E. Kovács and Ágnes Roboz were aged between 90 and 101 at the time of filming, and all three have since died. Before showing the footage, Börcsök herself embodies the three women, whose ghosts, she says, have entered her body. With porcelain skin, dressed in white against the white walls of mumok, Vienna's museum for modern art, she indeed looks rather otherworldly. Her transformation from narrator to old lady is quick and complete:

her moves become heavy and burdened, and she frequently asks members of the audience to help her as she walks to a sofa or a bed, fragile and trembling. Even if we are just feet away from her, the illusion is perfect: the signs of old age are so authentic that she is almost painful to look at.

Börcsök merges the women's words and stories as she talks about how modern dance flourished in Hungary before the second world war but was banned after it, ending many dancers' careers; or when she explains how she chose to be a dancer because her father didn't let her study medicine. She sporadically illustrates her words with hand gestures and movements, some of which we recognise later as we watch her protagonists (all in amazing shape and physically active) on film in their homes. The constant change of Börcsök's face is just as dramatic as her body's, and among the many transformations of her expression I see another ghost appear: for a couple of moments, she uncannily reminds me of Mary Wigman in her *Hexentanz* solo. If I'd had any doubt before whether Börcsök really was a medium for departed dancers, they were gone at that moment.

The solo *ME – NMU – AMI*, performed by **Mani Obeya** and created in collaboration with Austrian artist **Willie Dorner**, is like a reckoning with his own loaded history, before moving on to a new, happier identity. 'Our bodies are political' is the conclusion of the Nigerian-born, British-raised dancer, after telling us about his difficult start in the dance world for an hour, while presenting ballet and tap numbers with incredible lightness, precision and the manner of a born entertainer. These qualities didn't protect him from the racism of the dance elite who told him things such as: black boys never get to dance princes. Two things weaken his cause in this show: first, his text and talking are much less elaborate than his dancing; second, he preaches to the converted, as diversity is by now a very natural value of a festival like ImPulsTanz. Whatever the case, Obeya is clearly a very multitalented performer – and demonstrates yet another talent at the end of his solo when he brings on his band Sofa Surfers, leaving no question that he's a true rock star too.



## Scores of the body

If Obeya's solo ended on a high, my ImPulsTanz was far from over, for I also found a rich seam of choreography working with, rather than just to, musical scores. Music is widely considered inseparable from dance, and yet in dance performances it often becomes degraded to background noise. Still, there are always choreographers who are more musical than others, and perhaps even liking to choreograph for music, not just to it. ImPulsTanz's [8:tension] showcase and competition for young choreographers included some such pieces, of which I saw two.

In *Diverti Menti*, choreographer **Maud Blandel** and dancer **Maya Masse** translate into movement Mozart's Divertimento K136, reworked by the **Ensemble Contre-champ**. 'Divertimento' is a musical genre that was mostly played to accompany social



Mani Obeya in *ME – NMU – AMI*, created with Willi Dorner
Photo © Lisa Rastl Dorner

gatherings from the second half of the 18th century – and just as it was meant to be heard rather than listened to, so *Diverti Menti* is a production that must be better to perform than to watch. Masse constantly adjusts her simple steps and arm swings to the music, experimenting with speed and time. She keeps her eyes shut throughout, which means she shuts us out too, in a sense: it all happens more between her and the music than between her and the audience. The dynamic only changes at the end when she finally opens her eyes and sees that the giant hourglass that stands upstage still has some sand left to run down. The ensemble plays the last movement for her to dance to again, then again and again; we watch her getting tired, and we become immediately involved – a little late, but still in time to create a great theatrical moment.

Lenio Kaklea's performing attitude in *Sonatas and Interludes* is quite the opposite of Masse's. She begins by telling us that she didn't feel much connection to John Cage's work when she was asked to create a work for his pieces for prepared piano – until she found out that Cage used this instrument when he worked with African-American choreographer Syvilla Fort. Kaklea decided to accept the commission to highlight Cage's often forgotten collaboration with female choreographers, but as she announces: 'Tonight the music is at my service.' She keeps up this cheeky attitude during the whole show, often coming to the front of the stage to face and examine us. She constantly surprises her spectators, whether with her playful face study in front of a camera; with her choreography composed of elements of completely incompatible dance styles; with suddenly 'losing' almost all her clothes; or with disappearing from stage and sending out a drone to finish the show. I feel like not just the music, but the audience too is at her service.

Israel Galván, widely considered one of the best flamenco dancers in the world and a revolutionary of his genre, takes a unique approach to music and sound in his *Radio Concert*: he turns his own body into an instrument – or rather a whole orchestra. Galván, who has performed in complete darkness before to direct his audience's attention to sound and rhythm, has long wanted to make a music CD recording of the sound of his dancing. He found partners for his project in ImPulsTanz and Austria's national radio ORF, so for three nights he was allowed to perform in the broadcaster's magnificent Kulturhaus and make a recording. He dances barefoot, in sneakers, in flamenco boots, on wood, metal, coins, stones and a foot drum, creating a devilish symphony all by himself.

If we followed his intentions we should probably close our eyes to concentrate on what we hear rather than what we see, but it's impossible to take our eyes off him. Galván's stage persona is an enigma, and that's what makes it so irresistible. He says he has always been shy to dance with other performers, preferring the company of objects on stage. But on his own, he carries around such an air of confidence and determination that he easily owns any theatre hall, and not only with his easy-to-like virtuosity. I'm looking forward to hearing the recording to really be able to focus on the sound without distraction, but I'm sure that

even then I will see the dance as well, once again, in my mind's eye. After all, this is yet another way of recreating a dance.

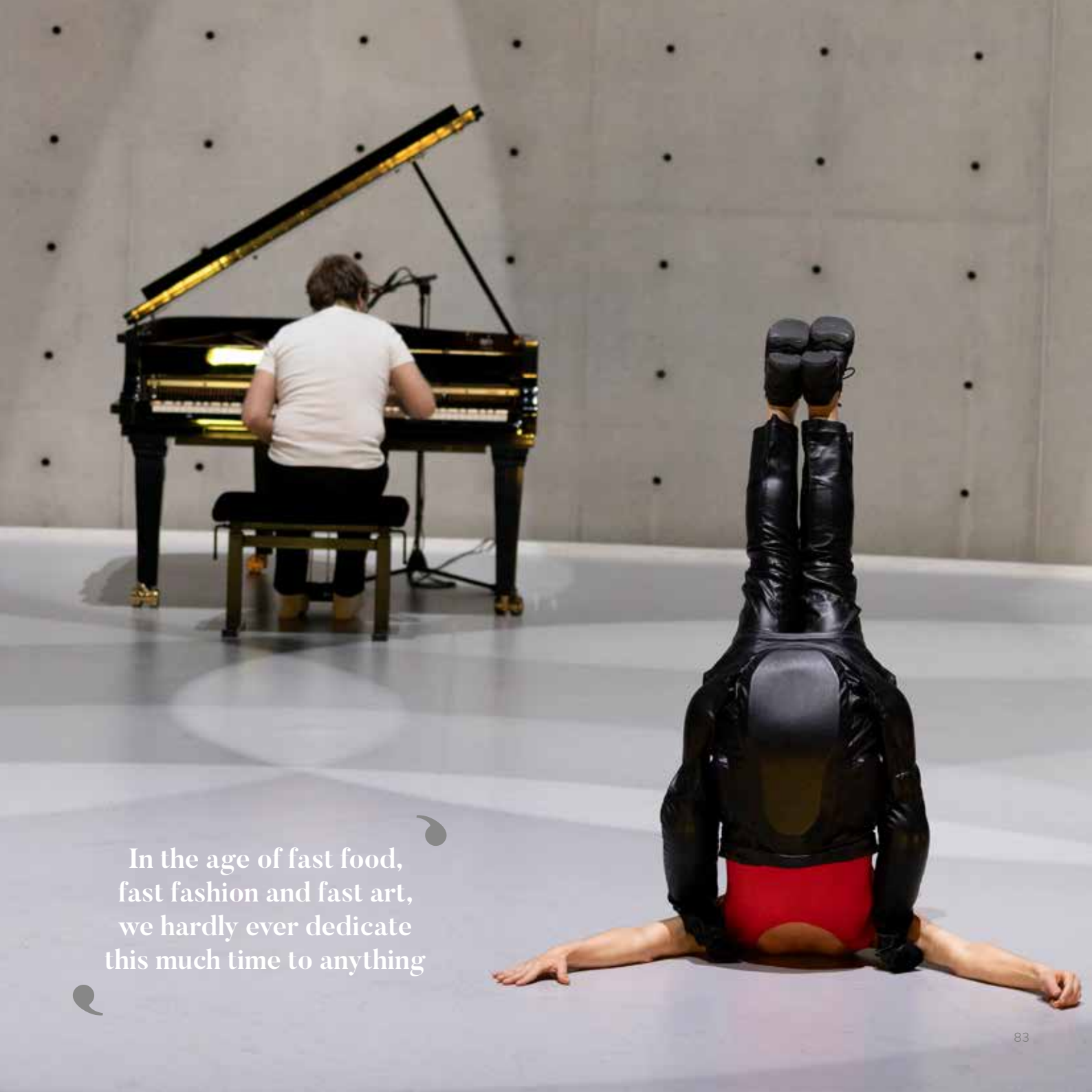
From the beginning of her career Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker has been known as an extremely musical choreographer, whether working with commissioned music or classical pieces, from Bach to Bartók. In her new *Mystery Sonatas/For Rosa*, created for her company Rosas together with Amandine Beyer's baroque music ensemble Gli Incogniti, she takes Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber's so-called Mystery or Rosary sonatas as her starting point. The sonatas were composed around 1676 with the intention of helping a religious practice: the recitation of rosary beads. Just like the rosary, the music is divided into three sets of five: five joyful, five sorrowful and five glorious sonatas. But apart from the biblical references, Biber's music contains many allusions to dance as well: musical dance forms such as gigue, allemande or courante appear throughout. This is fertile ground for De Keersmaeker.

*Mystery Sonatas* is 135 minutes long without intermission. Reviews have called it 'overlong' and an 'endurance test' (if it is that, then quite a few spectators who left during the show failed it); but I'm here to plead for one of the most profound experiences of my festival. It's true: in the age of fast food, fast fashion and fast art, we hardly ever dedicate this much time to anything, especially to enjoying a work of art. And especially if it doesn't involve vagina inspection, onstage vomiting and bloody ballerinas like Florentina Holzinger's *Tanz* – of similar length, though people didn't seem to have a problem enduring it (except for the few who fainted during the show).

Nowadays, you can watch movies or listen to podcasts on double speed – and many do, before quickly moving on to the next one in a constant haze of FOMO. But Biber's sonatas, originating in a slower and probably more sane age, were meant to help focus our attention with their elaborate symbolism and rich emotional landscape, and De Keersmaeker's contribution gives many more layers to an already complex work as the dancers' movements react to the music.

As is usually the case with great works of art, the more time you spend with *Mystery Sonatas*, the more attention you give to it, and the more you get out of it. At first, you notice steps, technique, emotion – and you can stop there, just trying to enjoy the simplicity and purity of movement and sound. Dance, music and scenery constantly offer something new, be it a shift of mood, a change of costume from sporty to airy, or the appearance of a new dancer, so that it doesn't get monotonous. But you can also move on and meditate on structures, patterns, the fine dialogue of dancers and musicians (playing live on stage). And if you've figured this all out (good luck with that), maybe you have time to reflect on how and why De Keersmaeker dedicated this piece to five revolutionary Rosas: Rosa Bonheur, Rosa Luxemburg, Rosa Parks, Rosa Vergaelen and the 15-year-old climate activist Rosa who died in the Belgian floods of 2021. 135 minutes were by far not enough for me to fully appreciate all the layers of *Mystery Sonatas*, and I'm sure it would reveal more of its secrets on second watch (and listen). Yes, it's difficult, it's demanding – but isn't that how good art should be? •

*Sonatas and Interludes*: Lenio Kaklea, with Orlando Bass on prepared piano
Photo © Marc Domage

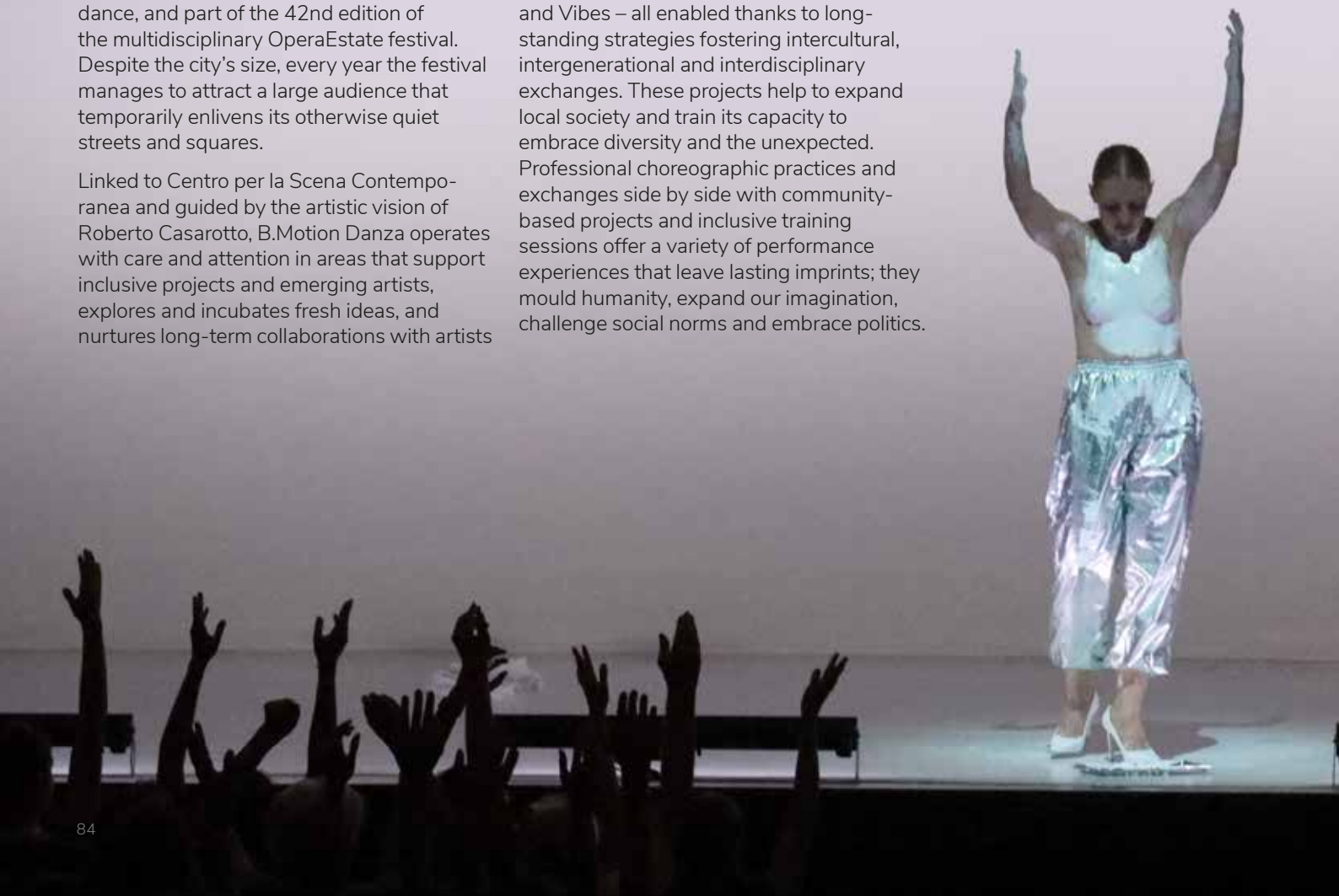


**In the age of fast food, fast fashion and fast art, we hardly ever dedicate this much time to anything**

# Place of freedom?
## B.Motion 2022

In the last four days of the long Ferragosto week (Italy's famous mid-August holiday), the small city of Bassano del Grappa hosted B.Motion Danza, one of the most vibrant festivals in Italy dedicated to contemporary dance, and part of the 42nd edition of the multidisciplinary OperaEstate festival. Despite the city's size, every year the festival manages to attract a large audience that temporarily enlivens its otherwise quiet streets and squares.

Linked to Centro per la Scena Contemporanea and guided by the artistic vision of Roberto Casarotto, B.Motion Danza operates with care and attention in areas that support inclusive projects and emerging artists, explores and incubates fresh ideas, and nurtures long-term collaborations with artists and like-minded international institutions. This year's curatorial choices have been informed by international projects such as Shape It, Dance Well – Movement Research for Parkinson's, Empowering Dance and Vibes – all enabled thanks to long-standing strategies fostering intercultural, intergenerational and interdisciplinary exchanges. These projects help to expand local society and train its capacity to embrace diversity and the unexpected. Professional choreographic practices and exchanges side by side with community-based projects and inclusive training sessions offer a variety of performance experiences that leave lasting imprints; they mould humanity, expand our imagination, challenge social norms and embrace politics.



**Ariadne Mikou**
13 September 2022

# In midsummer, the Italian city of Bassano del Grappa becomes a many-limbed festival of dancing

Bassano del Grappa, Italy

Agnietė Lisičkinaitė: *Hands Up*. Photo © D. Matvejev

## Nurturing empathy

Participants from Dance Well, a project initially dedicated to people with Parkinson's disease, had the chance to perform in *The Lion's Den unlimited* by PocketArt (CZ) and *Molding Bodies* by Ian Ancheta (NL/SV). The joy of the performers in these experiences leaves no doubt about the ethics of involving everyday people in performance-making: its emotional rewards expand beyond the local community.

*The Lion's Den unlimited* is an adaptation of the homonymous work (and final performance at this year's festival) by Sabina Bočková and Johana Pocková (PocketArt) for a group of performers from Dance Well and the MMCDC Agorà Coaching project. Elders and aspiring young professional dancers – each carrying their own unique performativity – reproduce selected gestures from mass media culture: fashion, clubbing, sports and everyday social life. Dressed in impersonal costumes, they build a fluid and organic evolution of movement through repetition. Always in sync with the powerful sound design performed live by Lukáš Palán, this small community of individuals embodies signs of care for each other – a young dancer helping an older lady to walk and keep pace with the rest of the group – allowing us to witness and sense a contagious empathy that culminates in an afternoon party, and perhaps suggesting liberation from mass media captivity.

The deconsecrated San Giovanni Church became the working place that inspired contemporary hip-hop artist Ian Ancheta to create *Molding Bodies* with another Dance Well group, initially inviting the audience to observe the church's architectural details and frescoes. The choreographic narrative unfolds around the negotiations and the challenges faced by a group of visual artists to collaboratively produce a master painting. How do individual actions influence a collective? Spatial relations, domino effects and simple body structures adorned with colourful scarves build sequential *tableaux vivants* – drafts and brush strokes towards a fictional masterwork left deliberately unfulfilled. I appreciated the choreographer's respect for the kinetic possibilities of the group, and was left curious to see how hip-hop culture might expand the aesthetics of joy and care that usually emerge from community-based projects.



> These performances nurture ecocentric approaches, explore the activist potential of humour and awaken slow revolutions

The façade of San Giovanni Church also served as the urban scenery for *Blackbird*, devised by Chiara Frigo (IT) in collaboration with the facilitators of the Dance Well project. In the main square of Piazza Libertà, passers-by either spontaneously transgress the designated performance area or stand at the edges. The main performers hold yellow envelopes and gently ask the seated audience questions and tasks that are easy to perform: write words with chalk on the ground, reproduce simple gestures through imitation, sing a melody, cast their body parts with foil. Through these simple actions, a clear composition in space gradually turns into an unstructured celebration of belonging that unexpectedly unites viewers, participants, performers and pedestrians inside a cloud of colourful suspended smoke that lingers after the performance. *Blackbird* reclaims public space and common time through relationships that emerge spontaneously.

## Re-envisioning tradition/ recycling memory

Community-making and belonging are enabled by also recognising collective memories and sharing personal stories. The past – activated as embodied memory or accessed through archival material – was present in an array of works in this year's festival. Athletic stamina, aerobic breathing, the embodiment of rhythm and stomping feet are some of the ingredients that Aina Alegre (ES) uses in *Study 4 – Fandango and Other Cadences* to explore the memory of the Basque dance tradition. Hypnotically dilating time, *Ara! Ara!* by Ginevra Panzetti and Enrico Ticconi (IT), accompanied by the military sound design of Demetrio Castellucci, originates in the rituals of moving flags – symbols of power, national identity, possession, pride and celebration. *Call Alice* by Temporary Collective (CZ) is an emotional landscape of loneliness and absence imbued with sincerity and humour, where the documentation and archive of a disrupted collaborative practice creatively turn into a performance-making tool. Chasing time coincidences, Elena Sgarbossa (IT) follows a sort of a jukebox logic in *Double:Double*, sampling sounds, images and movements through a sharing of memories stored in a cell phone. In *Some Choreographies*, Jacopo Jenna (IT) recycles fragments of dance archives to create an uninterrupted choreography while a video by Roberto Fassone allows dancing nature to perform and reveal the greatness of the animal kingdom.

## Learning from nature and performing activism

A series of works broke the invisible fourth wall of theatre and temporarily united audience and performers either by asking them to interact in a relation of encouragement or information exchange, or by engaging them directly as performers. In a collapsing world, these performances nurture ecocentric approaches, explore the activist potential of humour and awaken slow revolutions.

In *Insectum in Bassano*, Silvia Gribaudi (IT) and Tereza Ondrovà (CZ) prompt us to think of the world through the perspective of insects, and to reflect on the anthropocentric power that we exercise over them. They employ humour and irony to construct a work that is based on the spontaneity of an improvisational structure and flirts with stand-up comedy. Ondrovà's long and skinny body, almost like a grasshopper, contrasts Gribaudi's roundness and juiciness

of a bumble bee, a relationship that brings to mind the iconic duet of Stan and Ollie. They tantalise us by repeatedly playing from a computer on stage the introductory music phrase from Eurythmics' *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*. When Annie Lennox's voice is finally heard, Gribaudi and Ondrovà appear wearing close-fitting leotards – golden and turquoise respectively – and perform a short unison combination inspired by fancy jazz gestures. Words get lost in the translation from English to Italian through hilarious connections and misinterpretations, and in an interactive process of rendering the audience responsive, they strive to help us embody the somatic awareness of insects. Gribaudi's body-positive approach and Ondrovà's versatility offer a much-needed light-hearted performative approach that contrasts with the predominant conceptual-ism of contemporary dance-making.

In a full house, Daniel Mariblanca (NO) fluidly moves in shapes reminiscent of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs that sought to capture the beauty of the naked body in its detail. Mariblanca's *71BODIES 1DANCE* invites us to look at the human body from an anti-illusionistic perspective and to look at the transgender body tenderly as a vulnerable, yet powerful organism that breathes and feels. The work revealed to me its political potential when it became more personal ('the personal is political' quoted Mariblanca), and when his skills expanded into a confessional monologue and singing, and especially when he provoked the audience to join him in uttering binary slogans. Mariblanca attempts to construct new narratives about transgender identity and at the same time to criticise normativity by seeding hope for a society that, as the lyrics of his self-composed song describe, can transform 'hate into love'. Sitting on drifts of earth on a bare stage, Mariblanca confidently proves that nature is never wrong, even if social norms try to prove the opposite.

Agnietė Lisičkinaitė (LT), dressed in silver pants and a white semi-transparent top with white high heels next to her, places a series of placards on the grass of Giardino Parolini: contradictory written slogans making statements about our world and our declining democracies. Her voice, heard from a small speaker in her hands, asks us to lift the placards and join her in *Hands Up*, a silent protest in the empty streets of Bassano. When we enter the theatre, we see on the screen what we have previously experienced; ourselves marching, the low quality of the video making it look like a real protest on the TV with us as the activists. In front of the screen, Lisičkinaitė dances and sings – emotionally charged, often crying and smiling at the same time – and, topless, covers her breasts and belly with white paint, a colour symbolising purity and female solidarity. In a *trompe l'oeil* technique adapted for the screen, she appears with her hands up in front of the city sign 'Piazza della Libertà', claiming and surrendering to freedom. *Hands Up* is an activist work informed by local specificities (Italian law forbids street demonstrations 45 days ahead of elections) that asks the audience to take action in changing our world, beginning from the ambiguous gesture of lifting the hands up.

The experience of holding my hands up with persistence and against my tiredness made me reflect on how much effort, strength and commitment are necessary to change the world and raise awareness of the failures that torment us. The political is not only personal but above all physical. •



Tereza Ondrovà and Silvia Gribaudi, *Insectum in Bassano*.
Photo © Roberta Plaisant



> ‘Can I give him money, daddy?’ one boy asks

# Edinburgh by numbers

**Róisín O’Brien**
15 September 2022

## Figuring a way round dance at the Edinburgh Festivals

Edinburgh, Scotland

And we’re back. It’s August 2022 and the Edinburgh festivals are up and running at full force. Calls to build back smaller after the pandemic are dwarfed among the human-sized posters and specially erected spiegeltents. Added to the (seemingly?) louder criticisms of the inaccessibility of the festivals, in particular the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, for working-class and disabled artists and artists of colour, and the detrimental effect of short-term lets on affordable accommodation (amplified in but not unique to August), this year Edinburgh also saw rail and bin strikes visibly change the streets. The Fringe Society decided not to bring back their booking app, a decision widely criticised and no doubt felt by smaller shows. All amidst an impending cost of living crisis. Covid-19 still wormed its way into people’s plans and visa issues for visiting performers were not uncommon.

What can experimental dance offer and where does it sit in this maelstrom? And how should it be responded to? The race for shows to get their 4 or 5 stars – stickers at the ready – and the subsequent loss of nuance is a well-trodden path. But I look for a different set of numbers to tell the story of dance at this Edinburgh Festival Fringe.



**8am** Bustling mornings at Portobello, Edinburgh's seafront. Bill Coleman (CA), performer of *Le Flâneur*, is dressed ornately in a black suit that is stitched with rings of sequins. He scuffs the ground with his tap shoes, steps on shells, and pulls out cans from the overflowing bins to crush them underfoot. He hands over instruments to kids passing by on their way to school and conducts a tiny orchestra. The instruments are a mixture of the archaic and comic, squeaky animal-shaped toys which trip up his own performance. 'One more chicken, one more pig' he directs. His furtive manner is almost that of someone unwell, vulnerable as they stumble into daylight. Audiences want to be Good Audiences: 'Can I give him money, daddy?', one boy asks.

**1994** The year Morag Deyes MBE took up the post of artistic director for Dance Base, Scotland's National Centre for Dance. This year was her last fringe programme before turning it over to new artistic director, Tony Mills.

**27%** The reported drop in ticket sales across the Edinburgh Festival Fringe compared to 2019. While some of the dance shows are sadly quiet, the city is far from empty. There are 3,334 shows to choose from. The fringe has been going for 75 years. I've attended 11.

**1 performer** *Sense of Centre* by Jack Webb (UK) is a solo work that mixes projection, movement, film, encompassed by a soundscape that is at times sinister, deep and rich. Over Webb's intensely considered yet fluid movement, a voice open-endingly asks 'do you remember me?' or states 'I've always been with you.' It's a heavily aestheticised performance that holds its audience in its studied grasp. Another solo from Sarah Hopfinger (UK) in *Pain and I* delves deeper. There's very little overtly choreographed movement yet Hopfinger's steadfast and exposed presence on the stage somehow manages to communicate that which remains elusive: the experience of living with chronic pain.

Bill Coleman in *Le Flâneur*.
Photo © Wayne Eardley

**3,872 joint articulations** (estimated) Dances of complexity appear in Hung Dance's *See You* (TW) and *Donuts* from Extended Play Dance (UK), led by Jamaal Burkmar. Director Lai Hung-Chung's choreography in *See You* is jaw-droppingly complex, the performance an effusion of immensely detailed movements that ripple between the white-clad performers. The stage is bare, the themes impressionistic – movement and stamina is all. In *Donuts*, we get slightly more backdrop: three friends get ready for a night out, dressed in comfy clothes and sat on a sofa, framed by lamps and board games. Burkmar's Instagram-friendly choreography is composed of sharp isolations that spark from limb to collaborator in surprising yet harmonious ways. An hour is a long time to watch very similar sketches, but the movement language is engaging.

**13+** Suggested age rating for marikiscrycrycry's (Malik Nashad Sharpe, UK) *He's Dead*, a 'dark fantasy choreography' that asks: 'Was Tupac depressed?' Shrouded in extremely heavy haze, the four tartan-cut, chain-draped performers emerge from the back of the stage or behind the audience like apparitions in a dream. The choreography is likewise imagistic, transitioning from scenes of high kicks and bounces to a lonely figure singing about suicidal thoughts. Projections hover unstably in the air; flags are waved; water is ritualistically trickled down the performers' faces. Dreams can be sensorially powerful but don't always make sense, particularly if you're on the outside. Maybe they don't need to.

**2 genders?** The binary is rejected in Daniel Mariblanca's *71BODIES 1DANCE* (NO), a solo performance that takes its name from the 71 transgender individuals Daniel interviewed when researching the work. The performance at Dance Base is an excerpt of a large multi-art form project; here, Mariblanca appears on his own with transparency and gentleness in a solo that morphs through different sentiments and experiences. There is sometimes a stop-motion like anxiety, or an extravagant pull of the body in a long stretch. The piece builds to a climax and abruptly stops – Mariblanca looks out at the audience, almost exasperated, before exiting the stage. Is it exasperation at a collective inability to empathise with or, in some countries, legally recognise these individuals, or maybe exasperation that these lives are so often portrayed through trauma?



Hung Dance in See You
Photo © Chen Chih-Chang



**26** The bus I catch to the biggest arts festival in the world.

**Zero–Infinity** Meaning is in the mind of the beholder in Eivind Seljeseth's *All Over* (NO). Through individual headphones, a voice intimately outlines the minimalist choreography the three calm but endearing dancers perform on stage. Actions are described; moments of synchronicity hold the audience's attention; personal anecdotes add flavour. *All Over* is whatever you want it to be, for better or for worse.

**10 minutes** There's a 10-minute delay to the 10.30pm showing of United Fall/Emma Martin's (IE) pulsating *Night Dances*. It's ear plugs rather than headphones for this performance in a former church. A dancer dressed only in a blue tracksuit and trainers nervously prowls the space as the audience enter. His is the first night dance. A group of teenage girls enter next, then another lone man, and finally three women dressed in veils. Each night dance interrupts or bleeds into its predecessor but there's no further connection between the parts. The dancers get lost in their own coolly lit world to live guitar and thumping bass. The young girls execute a drilled sequence of high kicks and acrobatics. In some ways they hold more power in their fierce collectivity and youth then the isolated men. An intense audience experience that remains in the venue.

**28 years** *And* by Charlotte Mclean (UK) is inherently unfinished. It's an ever-evolving solo that Mclean has been performing since 2017; she hopes to keep performing it in years to come. This dance poem moves between narration, Scottish sword dance, and deliberately awkward 'Contemporary Dance'. Life floods in: from tears on the phone to worried relatives and the joy of friendships, to Roe v. Wade, the refugee crisis, and women who don't have vaginas. Action and inaction physically press down on her – is she doing enough, she asks, as she crumples to and then lies flat on the ground? A personally dark, intense scene brings the swords back in a completely different way – Mclean easily breaks the tension, 'another wee sword dance for you there'. Status at age 28? Vibrant, imperfect, honest.

# Mei Chen, Yannis Brissot
# Very Tiny Little Drop of Wax

Hang Huang
20 September 2022

## A curiously cryptic hybrid morphs into an echo of a singer's unregretted life

Brussels, Belgium

Choreography, performance: Mei Chen, Yannis Brissot / Music: Very Tiny Little Drop of Wax (Dario Wilmington), Non, je ne regrette rien (Édith Piaf) / Light design: Andreas Schmidt / Choreographic assistant: Dario Wilmington

Unusually, Les Brigittines in Brussels holds an annual international festival when most theatres are still closed for summer. The programme captures new talents such as Mei Chen and Yannis Brissot, ballet dancers based in Germany. At the start of their performance, we sit in darkness longer than usual, an array of tiny baseboard LEDs illuminating the empty floor from the right. Then I hear some noise of movement: where are the bodies? Chen and Brissot, crawl towards the lights from the dark left corner, Brissot in full black, Chen in a black dress polka-dotted with white.

Their journey seems arduous but they move as an inseparable creature: one crawls bringing forward the other, and vice versa. As in silent film, their movements are amusingly faster than usual. When they place their hands on the floor with bent elbows, their forearms recall molluscs; when Chen moves on Brissot's body, they are totally arthropod. The background music sounds even wittier, like a deformed, indecipherable human voice. We aren't supposed to understand a hybrid of mollusc and arthropod, are we?


© Nora Kirschmeier

When the stage becomes brighter, the hybrid evolves into two stand-alone beings. Sometimes they dance alike, jumping like frogs for example; sometimes they compose a sign, like a sleeping 'L', Chen sitting on the chest of flat-out Brissot. The choreography becomes erratic but the continual emotional connection between the dancers keeps it engaging. Suddenly, a familiar melody starts fusing with the background music: a song by Edith Piaf. It's not a necessary reference, but since I have it I cannot stop thinking of Piaf in the dancers' quick short steps. Her thrilling voice emphasises the dramatic effect, making me believe that the deformed human voice has now been decrypted. Here comes an end, brief and crisp: two bodies lying under a spotlight, motionless. The sentiment behind this on-stage death could be universal, as Piaf sings: no, I regret nothing.

**The bottom line:** a witty and imaginative duo freely inspired by a singer

# Oona through the ages

Sedera Ranaivoarinosy
7 October 2022

**Oona Doherty ventures down new roads as well as looking back at where she's been**

Oona Doherty needs (almost) no introduction. If you've been following contemporary dance these past few years, it's likely her name is familiar to you. Born in London but Belfast-bred, she was chosen as an Aerowaves artist in 2017 with her piece *Hope Hunt and the Ascension into Lazarus*. Since then, her work has consistently been touring Europe, receiving praise for its raw energy, its gender-questioning sensitivity and in-your-face vulnerability.

Her newest piece, *Navy Blue*, continues its European tour, alongside short films co-created with Luca Truffarelli, *Hunter Filmed* (2021) and *The Devil* (2021). For Doherty, film and stage work go hand in hand. In her time as a dancer for Dutch company T.r.a.s.h. and later with Irish choreographer Emma Martin, whether she was performing for the camera or on stage, she was fed and guided with cinematic references from David Cronenberg to *Jumanji*. 'They give you cinema,' she tells me on a Zoom call after the Paris performance of *Navy Blue*. 'I was always given little movies in my head and that was my reason for dancing.'

It's only fitting her own stage work would then gain a second life on screen. 'In all my films, I'm actually trying to say what's on stage,' she explains. 'You have a chance to be more eloquent because you're completely leading the eye. You're going more directly into the sensation. Instead of having a cocktail, you're having a shot of vodka.'

Just as she seems to be embarking on a new phase in her career as a more established dancemaker and artist, those three works offer three snapshots of key insights into Doherty's vision. Looking at the works back to back, we see her going back to her roots, processing through her own dance history, all the facets of her style and technique.

We start with *Hope Hunt*, her first big recognition, thanks to *Hunter Filmed*. 'I really felt like it's the first time that I've seen how it feels to do the hope hunt, from the dancer's perspective,' she says. 'That is because of Gaspar Noé. See how he filmed *Irreversible*? That's what I said to Luca. "Film it like Gaspar Noé, fuck it if we don't get all the choreography in",' she recalls, referring to the film's dynamic and immersive camera work. 'Also the spiral of the *Lazarus*: it's the start of MDMA, it's the bottom of ketamine… It's got weight in it.'

The approach to *The Devil* was more traditional yet surprises us with its villainy. 'We were just having a good time, just playing and trying to do something different, like "What if we stick to more of a narrative?"' In this short film, beyond the hunt we've seen her explore in previous pieces, another theme emerges: what needs to die for something new to be born?

Which brings us to *Navy Blue*, an exploration of the fragile equilibrium between collective strength and individual insignificance. Created with and for 12 dancers, it evokes the power of solidarity as much as the

crushing loneliness of human struggle. Its genesis is a reminder that taking a few steps back can help us go leaps and bounds further than we started.

'It was during lockdown. I rented a small dance studio down the street; the kids' ballet class was off so I was able to get in. It was also the studio where my ballet teacher – she's not alive any more – taught when I was a kid. I just started doing ballet to get strong again and I was really enjoying myself,' Doherty says. 'You know when no one's watching you can like, do your stuff. So I was playing with Maria Callas and Rachmaninov because it was so dramatic, so romantic, so painful to listen to, it helped me get into my ballet groove. It grew from there.'

Doherty's foray into such conventional form feels like a far cry from her early works, but these ballet dancers come in blue workers' overalls. Suddenly, the redundancy of the barre is not so different from that of an assembly line. The evocation calls her home in more ways than one. 'Not that I believe in ghosts but, it was my old ballet teacher's room. And my contemporary dance teacher's gonna see my show in London… Yeah, Susan would be really proud,' she says, teary-eyed.

Doherty's work shines by its meatiness, its unique colour, brought on by the hope and asperities her collaborators bring with them to the work. Her forever inspiration: painter Francis Bacon, whose works she even displays in her home. 'The solo at the end of *Navy Blue*, of Helium, an arm, a blur… That's really Francis Bacon to me. That kind of painting where you get the figure of a man and the taste of a soul, because of the texture of the paint.'

Her own soul is going through a deep transformation, as her relationship to dance and performance mends from a more tortured, complicated phase born out of mostly working alone. 'Navy's helped me come out of that. I've transcended it in that now I know that I need to dance with other people,' she explains. 'Once I get into creative flow and I get to work, I can dance all day but now I just need another person in the room. Because if you're really on your own when you're dancing, you're really digging: what is judgement, what's good, what's bad? I got a lot of juice out of that for four years but maybe I just need that fun and dance with other people now, you know?'

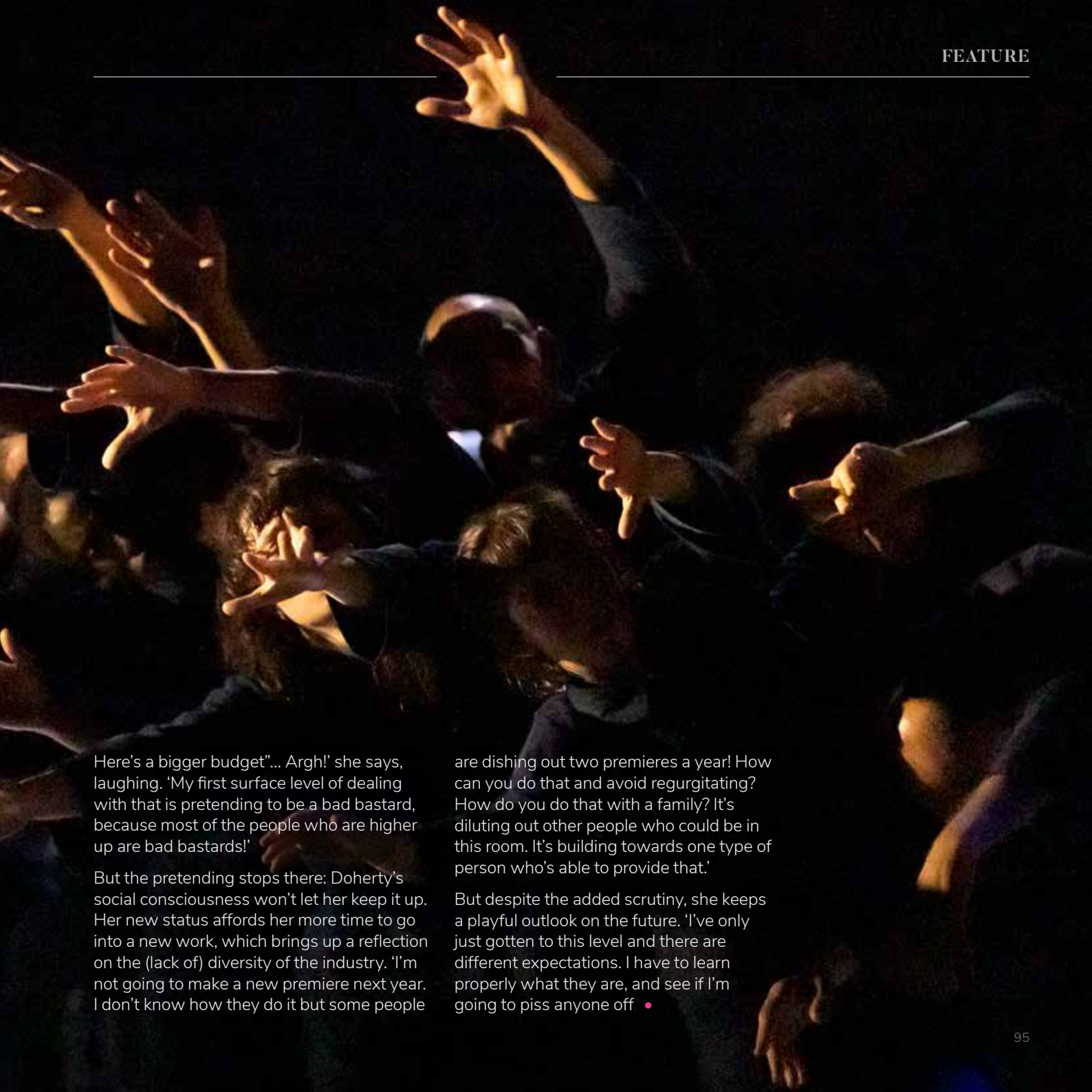
This need even shows on her shows' programmes. *Navy Blue*'s credits cite Oona Doherty as the choreographer 'in collaboration with the dancers' – an obvious statement for anyone who's been in a dance studio during the creation process, but still all too rare to see in the programme booklet given to the audience at a national theatre. 'All shows are made in collaboration with the dancers. It's strange that we don't write it that way – it should be the norm.'

*Navy Blue* also marks Doherty's debut as a Scaling Up artist for Big Pulse Dance Alliance (a European contemporary dance network launched in 2021). She is aware she has unlocked a new phase of her career. 'I've been very very lucky. Especially given where I'm from. Maybe it's an Irish thing… I'm really chuffed but maybe have a little bit of guilt about it, too? There are just so many other choreographers and dancers, there's so much amazing work in Ireland and it doesn't tour… So I guess I'm just lucky.'

She's tried to process this ongoing trans-formation through her work, notably *The Devil*. 'It was me trying to get comfortable with being told, "Here, you can be bigger,



Oona Doherty Navy Blue
Photo © Sinje Hasheider

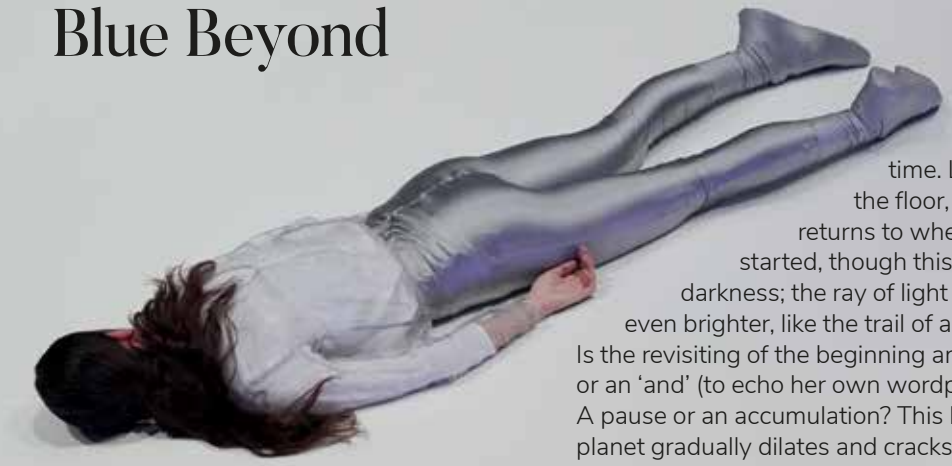


Here's a bigger budget"... Argh!' she says, laughing. 'My first surface level of dealing with that is pretending to be a bad bastard, because most of the people who are higher up are bad bastards!'

But the pretending stops there: Doherty's social consciousness won't let her keep it up. Her new status affords her more time to go into a new work, which brings up a reflection on the (lack of) diversity of the industry. 'I'm not going to make a new premiere next year. I don't know how they do it but some people are dishing out two premieres a year! How can you do that and avoid regurgitating? How do you do that with a family? It's diluting out other people who could be in this room. It's building towards one type of person who's able to provide that.'

But despite the added scrutiny, she keeps a playful outlook on the future. 'I've only just gotten to this level and there are different expectations. I have to learn properly what they are, and see if I'm going to piss anyone off •

# Eleonora Siarava
## Blue Beyond



Dressed in the colours of ice and silver, Eftychia Stefanou rests on the white floor as if suspended inside an unknown universe intersected by a thin stream of light. She stands, her gestures and steps staying close to her body, like incomplete but always precise movements rehearsing the future. Occasional familiar gestures – a greeting wave, arms that swim or dive – emerge like memories of a forgotten life on earth. She tests the gravity on her planet by jumping and cutting the space vertically, the sound of every landing turning into a steady metronome. Every now and then she collapses and the movement lingers in her head, wobbling like a toy with a run-down battery.

Speaking through a microphone, she proposes the central theme of the work around the exploration of the nature of repetition: is it ever possible to repeat a gesture or word in exactly the same way? The spoken words get recorded and blend into the soundscape by Yannis Tsirikoglou, live voice and its reproduction swirling in time. Lying on the floor, Stefanou returns to where she started, though this time in darkness; the ray of light shines even brighter, like the trail of a comet. Is the revisiting of the beginning an 'end' or an 'and' (to echo her own wordplay)? A pause or an accumulation? This hermetic planet gradually dilates and cracks under the crackling and effervescent sounds of an exploding candy that melts in her mouth.

With *Blue Beyond*, Greek choreographer Eleonora Siarava continues her exploration of time by building an atmospheric world of superimposed temporalities. Sounds, gestures and blue hues require our continuous attention as they overlap, preparing an end that never comes. Providing a new context for every iteration, their deliberate precision proves the impossibility of exact repetition. With its immersive elaboration of cyclicality and its distinct formalism, Siarava's work moulds an introverted emotional landscape that straddles minimal futurism and abstract nostalgia.

**The bottom line:** A hermetic planet inhabited by a lonely female humanoid in search of interrupting the inevitable cyclicality of time

**Ariadne Mikou**
10 October 2022

**Time, space, light, cycles – Eleonora Siarava's Blue Beyond is both cosmic and minimal**

Thessaloniki, Greece

Photo © Archlabyrinth

Concept, choreography & artistic direction: Eleonora Siarava / Performance: Eftychia Stefanou / Sound design: Yannis Tsirikoglou / Space design: Eleonora Siarava / Light design: Eliza Alexandropoulou / Set construction: Christofili Kodolefa, Athina Koubarouli / Dramaturgy advice: Betina Panagiotara / Costume: Georgia Dipla / Production assistant: Nefeli Vlachouli / Visual communication: Christofili Kodolefa / Photos: Archlabyrinth / Production: Per_Dance Choreographic Research Platform

# Georgia Tegou & Michalis Theophanous
## Reverie

*Reverie* is a place, home to four people in black tulle and silk. At times, a cluster of balloons replaces a head, at others, they are held on string with childlike innocence. In this place, sounds are distant, as if on the moon. The piece, first seen in Athens in 2020, re-emerges after many pandemic curtailments as the opening of London's Dance Umbrella Festival.

Synne Lundersgaard slowly parades and surveys with chin raised proud. A sheet of astroturf trails her, another lays upstage, creased like an abandoned duvet. Her face suggests she knows something we don't. Free of this grass gown, her movement is fairylike. But she has a temper, prone to outbursts that send her from floating to flailing. When the others arrive, they carry her, passing her like a jewel that cannot be dropped.

William James wears a grey headdress, an angry knot. He stutters, frustrated like the labyrinth on his head, and navigates the space with awkward, stilted progressions. Nathan Goodman dances on now flattened grass, a border that effectively encloses our attention – he swivels indecisively, but his cutting movements are assertive with tightrope precaution.

Joined by Virginia Poli, the four confront each other through tender vignettes; in these expressions we thankfully find some grounding amidst the mythical abstractions elsewhere. Later, they collide in a flurry. Tangling themselves, they duck, spin, and swipe at negative space. When phrases repeat, precision loses to exhaustion, but an urgency is present that wasn't before.

*Reverie* uses spectacle. Visual deception unfolds soundlessly, save the prop that unexpectedly pops. Balloons follow James like curious white orbs, tethered invisibly. Legs vanish behind the grass gown as Lundesgaard rises high, leaving gravity behind. Often, darkness falls, and a hand-held light is guided by two scurrying legs. What cannot be seen enforces scrutiny of what can.

Whether a fixed reality, or just passing through, I am uncertain. But when watching, we exist in our own in-between state, no doubt dreamlike. In this place, the subconscious wanders.

**The bottom line:** A dream that leaves more feeling than it does clarity

Concept, direction, choreography: Georgia Tegou & Michalis Theophanous / Dancers: Nathan Goodman, William James, Synne Lundesgaard, Virginia Poli / Costume designer: Justin Smith/J Smith Esquire / Music composition & sound design: Jeph Vanger / Dramaturgy: Xenia Aidonopoulou / Lighting designer: Mike Toon / Creative producer: Lia Prentaki / Original creative producer: Mark Mallabone / Production manager: Chris Burr / Project coordinator & marketing associate: Lia Garbola / Original cast: Arianna Ballestrieri, Fenia Chatzakou, Michael Incarbone, Kostas Papamatthaiakis / R&D masks: Maryllis Teindeldt

**Georgia Howlett**
11 October 2022

**With its subconscious mysteries and fugitive feelings, Reverie is as much a 'place' as a 'piece'**

London, United Kingdom

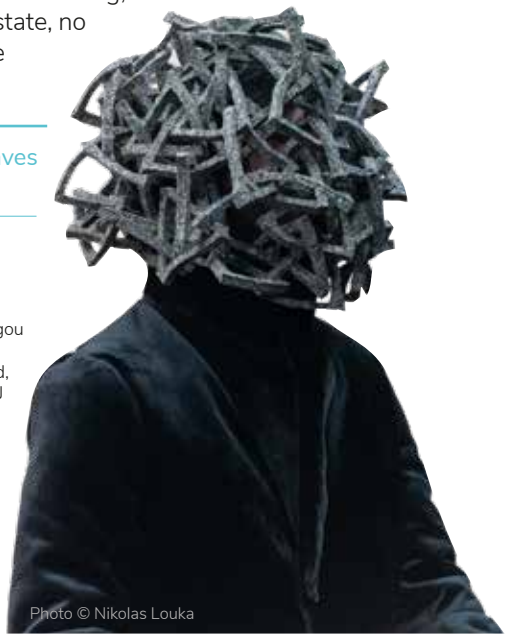


Photo © Nikolas Louka

# Marianna Henriksson & Anna Mustonen
# Eros

Inês Carvalho
3 November 2022

## Singers, dancers and orchestra reach out in a meditation on the unreachability of desire

Zodiak - Centre for New Dance, Helsinki, Finland

Photo © Sinem Kayacan



What is incessant in desire? This quest is the starting point of *Eros*, a collaboration by musician Marianna Henriksson and choreographer Anna Mustonen produced by Helsinki's Zodiak – Centre for New Dance. Five dancers, five singers and eight musicians step into the scene to intersect their practices to explore the Greek concept of eros as unreachable touch. This premise leads the first part of the piece with a frustrating task: the dancers stretch their heavy arms, attempting – but constantly failing – to reach something.

As members of the Finnish Baroque Orchestra prepare to play the next piece, singers and dancers align and wait for a synchronised restart. The lifeless, weighty gestures are now replaced by baroque's ample *pas de bourrée*, pivots and skips. A white-shirted figure invades the scene with frenetic turns and hip movements. Is it the image of Isadora Duncan, fluctuating through space and time? It becomes impossible to understand who is who: singers dance, and dancers lie motionless. They roll towards each other in post-blissful pose until touch finally occurs. Soft face fondles, two hands held, standing bodies hugging each other – climax is not the goal here, but rather a journey of reaching, exploring and continuing.

The ongoing lullaby of tenors and sopranos is only interrupted when the performers carry around the organ, violins, dulcian and lute, a readjustment as smooth as the piece itself. Suddenly, something else happens: an intimate duo illuminated by foggy blue and orange lights. Performers contemplate in quietude the smooth transition between solos and duets. Only the melody shapes the trajectory of these two figures longing to meet each other. A vocal soloist faces the audience while lanterns awaken the audience with a whitish projection to the seating area. As the fade-out empties the space, only the sound of a lute remains. It takes a while before the applause starts, in the desire not to lose the meditative dimension of what was there before us, but is no longer present.

**The bottom line:** Singers, dancers and baroque musicians merge on stage to explore the desire of touch

Assembling and concept: Marianna Henriksson, Anna Mustonen / Choreography: Anna Mustonen / Musical director, harpsichord & organ: Marianna Henriksson / Performers (dancers): Hanna Ahti, Mikko Hyvönen, Anna Kupari, Pie Kär, Eleni Pierides / Performers (song): Tuuli Lindeberg, Sirkku Rintamäki, Teppo Lampela, Juho Punkeri, Jussi Lehtipuu / Finnish Baroque Orchestra: Anne Pekkala, Hannu Vasara, Hanna Pakkala, Louna Hosia, Anna Rinta-Rahko, Jani Sunnarborg, Eero Palviainen / Dramaturge: Masi Tiitta / Costume design: Piia Rinne / Lighting design: Heikki Paasonen / Sound design: Timo Kurkikangas / Producer: Riikka Thitz / i dolci

# Adrienn Hód Soft Spot

Lena Megyeri
8 November 2022

## In its (dis) association of word and action, Hód's work touches a primal fear – of the critic

MU Theatre, Budapest, Hungary

Photo © Vyber Fotek

When Adrienn Hód, Hungary's most successful contemporary dance export, promises an experimental show, one really doesn't know what to expect: after all, for many years now she hasn't done anything other than experiment with the boundaries of theatre, performance, personality and the human body. In fact, *Soft Spot*, created in collaboration with Slovak dancers Martina Hajdyla and Soňa Ferenčíková, is much less radical than most of the choreographer's latest works.

Clad in simple black attire, the dancers' heads and faces are covered with a piece of black cloth throughout, making it impossible to see their facial expressions or even tell them apart. They also wear masks that double as digital screens, projecting words (*position*, *movement*, *tone*, *texture*, *colour*), phrases (*matter of rhythm*, *the shape of void*, *the edge of comfort*) and fragments (*we sit and watch*, *crashes strongly*) that might be used to describe a performance – perhaps in an article like this. To me, the most ominous one that comes back repeatedly is a simple, single word: *meaning*.

According to its creators, the piece plays with the blurring of human qualities and asks what defines us as humans – and yes, it's all there, but to me it speaks of something entirely different too. At one point the screens are off the dancers' faces and left behind at the edges of the stage – and suddenly every critic's primal fear is manifested: words get literally detached from the action, phrases become empty, and I get the frustrating feeling that by trying to make sense of this, or of any show by way of words, I might miss the point completely. The hypnotically running words are now the only things clearly visible. Covered by cumulating smoke and dim lighting, the contours of the dancers are hard to make out as they move around in improvisational sequences. Relief comes when the fog fades, the eerie soundscape turns into gentle melody, the movement becomes more distinct, and the dancers put their masks back on before freezing in a final position.

I'll stop here: not everything needs to be put into words.

**The bottom line:** Hód confronts words with movement in search of a soft spot – and she seems to have found mine



Choreography: Adrienn Hód / Created and performed by: Martina Hajdyla, Soňa Ferienčíková / Music: Ábris Gryllus / Dramaturgy: Ármin Szabó-Székely / Movement cooperation: Márcio Kerber Canabarro / Visual cooperation: Mária Júdová / Costumes: Lucia Škandíková / Light design: Tomáš Morávek / Technical support: Daniel Kozlík / Stage Manager: Romana Packová / PR: Alice Krajčírová / Graphic design: Yara Abu Aataya / Production: Lucia Šimášková / BOD.Y ngo, Jiří Hajdyla/ ME-SA, György Ujvári-Pintér / HODWORKS / Co-production: Tanec Praha z.ú. / PONEC – dance venue, Slovak Contemporary Dance Platform, Bratislava in Movement Association, OFF Foundation

# I is for INTERNATIONAL
## Programming dance from abroad

Autumn 2022 in London, at the headquarters of Greenwich & Docklands International Festival, which has presented a cross-artform programme of (mostly) free outdoor fare annually since 1996 – twenty of those years including Dancing City, a weekend of work dedicated to presenting dance outdoors, against the dramatic corporate backdrop of Canary Wharf. This year's festival is over, and the small team of dedicated staff, overseen by visionary artistic director Bradley Hemmings and nimbly managed by executive producer Ellie Harris, can reflect on the multi-layered challenges they face to preserve the all-important 'I' – for 'international' – in GDIF.

On the surface, it's clear that the large majority of performances in Dancing City 2022 were 'home grown' works from the UK, with just 3 of 12 companies visiting from mainland Europe – unquestionably a less international offer than in previous years. In the wider GDIF festival, this proportion also holds true. Support from the Flanders Institute facilitated a small glut of exceptional Belgian circus artists, and there was a smattering of work from across western Europe. Yet for the festival team, the international element remains an absolute priority. As Harris puts it, 'it's embedded in the DNA of the festival': a vision, and certainly a mission… maybe even a raison d'être in the crowded and competitive UK festival sector. So why the relative dearth of artists from overseas this year?

Just a couple of years ago, GDIF was hit hard by Covid, of course. While outdoor events in the UK got the green light, the pandemic severely impacted costs and labour: the additional load on festival co-ordination included constant monitoring of complex 'traffic light' travel systems across Europe's borders, extensive (expensive!) testing, strict quarantine requirements, social distancing (no more room-sharing), and additional pastoral care for performers leaving their families while infection raged and death rates rocketed. Harris recalls a particularly nail-biting moment shortly before the 2020 edition, booking last-minute flights for Berlin-based **Dolce Compania**, whose plan to drive through Germany to a ferry became inviable and was abruptly aborted. Their air travel swerve brought *Rainbow Ballet* as a highlight of Dancing City 2020, where its segway-meets-catwalk charm made for brilliant and beautiful festival fare – but it was one of only a few international survivors on a programme that had originally looked more like a 50/50 mix of overseas and UK work. The pandemic required what Harris describes as 'seat-of-the-pants, reactive decision-making' – and yet it has arguably brought a longer-term, more profound shift towards having to invest more resources into supporting artist travel from abroad.



**Lydia Wharf**
24 November 2022

# Ellie Harris of Greenwich & Docklands International Festival on the juggling act that is international programming



Dancing City at GDIF 2021
Photo © Stephen Wright

Of course, the UK's uncomfortable exit from the EU has also erected hurdles for visiting artists. While GDIF is included on the UK list of permit-free festivals, it must still ensure that visiting artists arrive clutching a pack of paperwork; invitation letters, UK Border Agency paperwork, goods & vehicles registration… Add to this a layer of Covid complication (method statements, cancellation clauses in contracts, risk assessments affecting not only travel planning but also threading back to creation and rehearsal) and you have a heavy weight of labour and uncertainty that artists cannot shoulder alone. In its clearest shift towards capacity-building to absorb some of this additional work, in 2021 GDIF employed a consultant to develop systems of support specifically to facilitate international exchange, creating two staffing roles – 'artist liaison' and 'international artist liaison' – where before there was one.

While air travel rescued performers during the pandemic, going forward the festival takes its ecological responsibilities seriously, encouraging artists from within 6 hours away to consider travelling by land and sea, working collaboratively with them to generate new, more sustainable models and practices for international touring. GDIF leads by example, but must find ways to balance sustainability with other key principles – around access, for example: land travel is not viable for everyone.

It's clear that GDIF are responding to numerous, seismic systemic shifts in the UK landscape. The determination to shoulder a burden of additional work rather than leave it with artists is truly admirable – but what if further, unforeseen complications are added to the mix? In 2022, prioritising visa applications for Ukrainians escaping war created a crisis for UK circus, when the subsequent delays in processing artist visas meant cancelling tour dates. Across Europe, the spike in energy costs is presenting huge financial challenges to theatres and dance houses. Might the UK's international festival circuit face a 'perfect storm' if conditions worsen? And is there still an appetite to visit, given the multi-layered barriers artists face?

It's a 'yes and no' from Harris. She still feels an excitement from artists about visiting the UK – particularly as part of the well-established GDIF programme which has built a reputation for premiering and presenting new work. But there's undoubtedly frustration and reluctance. While GDIF is doubling down on its capacity to 'support artists properly', the budget breakdown for projects with multiple international partners clearly illustrates the disproportionate cost of a UK leg of touring.

Currently, those partners still see the value of propping up the UK element, but will that continue with the cost of every stage of production elevated to the hilt by rocketing energy costs? Where will the tipping point lie? The steadfast, cool-headed approach of festivals like GDIF, going the extra mile to preserve a long history of international exchange, makes a huge difference, but for how long? I'm sad to say that despite all their efforts, the brutal irony is that this year's Dancing City was cancelled entirely due to the death of the Queen. Nobody saw that coming. •

# CoisCéim Dance Theatre
# Go to Blazes

**Karina Buckley**
29 November 2022

## A mix of live and VR performance in response to Joyce's classic novel becomes a heady, scented experience

Dublin, Ireland

Cast: Justine Cooper, Jonathan Mitchell, Rosie Stebbing / Voiceover: Caitríona Ní Mhurchú / Director & choreographer: David Bolger / Composer & sound designer: Denis Clohessy / Projection designer: Neil O'Driscoll / Lighting designer: Matt Burke / Costume: Arran Murphy / Hair & makeup: Val Sherlock / Scents: Justine Cooper / Props: Martin Cahill / VR director: Enya Belak VR filming / Post-production: Igor Crnković / VR sound recordist: Alexis Nealon

Part of *Ulysses* 2.2 – a melting pot of multi-media treatments marking the centenary of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* – David Bolger's *Go To Blazes* for Coiscéim Dance Theatre mixes live performance and virtual reality in response to Chapter 4, which introduces our (anti)hero Bloom, his faithless wife Molly, and the sights, sounds and smells of their Dublin home and neighbourhood. At 30 minutes, it is as bite-size and evocative as the 14 pages that inspired it.

Beginning with lessons in the properties of perfume, Justine Cooper uses jars and sprays of lotions and potions to conjure the (mal)odours of the fragrant text – from the acidity of urine to the burnt caramel of porter – matching their top, middle and base notes to points on the musical scale. So far, so Joycean.

The movement begins when the action transitions from real to virtual. Through 3D goggles, an impressive streetscape mixing past with present morphs to a ghostly interior world. Rosie Stebbing draws us in, her dance of the seven sails going from fluid to frenetic before she whirls like a dervish and disappears into a projected version of herself. Knives sharpen and blood spatters as the screens flood with images of butchery, the acrid smell of searing flesh filling our other senses. Smoke fogs up our goggles.

When it clears, Cooper is back, this time as Molly to Jonathan Mitchell's Bloom. Their



Justine Cooper and Jonathan Mitchell in CoisCéim Dance Theatre's *Go To Blazes* by David Bolger. Photo © Ste Murray

gestures mirror each other, with weight play holding them up and letting them down. There are hints of powerplay: she dances on tables while he promenades around her; he holds the safety cord so that she can fly; he cradles a tablecloth like an infant, suggesting an unfathomable loss. But there's no doubting who's in charge as Denis Clohessy's driving soundscape climaxes and Molly subjugates her cuckold – literally walking all over him. A short trio of lifts and falls follows before Molly dons goggles herself, striking staccato poses.

All too quickly, it's over. We emerge intoxicated from the heady cocktail of actual and virtual, past and present, scents and sensibility.

**The bottom line:** A live and virtual treatment of a classic text that comes right off the page into intoxicating life

# CODA 2022
# Movement research for every body?

Yasen Vasilev
1 December 2022

**Looks forwards and outwards from the CODA seminar on the theme of disability**

Oslo, Norway

Yasen Vasilev's trip was provided by CODA Oslo International Dance Festival



Workshop with Candoco
Photo © Lars Opstad/CODA
Oslo International Dance Festival



Theatre director Kjersti Horn speaking at the Sentralen Seminar
Photo © Lars Opstad/CODA Oslo International Dance Festival

The twentieth anniversary of CODA Oslo International Contemporary Dance Festival, marks a pivot in its course. Stine Nilsen, artistic director since 2017 and former co-director of the London-based mixed-ability company Candoco, has always had disability in her focus, but for the first time this year the festival made mixed ability, disability, and different bodies its central theme, traced through (almost) all the shows in the programme. If there are often mixed feelings within the European contemporary dance field about some of UK's cultural policies, there is common agreement on the considerable progress the UK has made on issues surrounding (dis)ability. Nilsen brings this knowledge and experience to Norway and is using the platform of CODA to promote structural change in the field – from education to stage representation.

A seminar giving voice to local and international artists, programmers and policymakers living and/or dealing with disability was the discursive bind that held this year's programme together, and articulated CODA's ambition to move from critique to action that can create change in the long term. In line with these goals, Kulturrådet, the Norwegian arts council, presented a new grant scheme which pays a full-year salary to a person with disability integrated as a professional advisor into a cultural institution to help it become more inclusive with both audiences and artists.

The first panel included Norwegian actress **Ipek Mehlum** and director **Kjersti Horn** sharing their personal paths to becoming professionals in the field and the obstacles they faced because of their disability. This was followed by a second international panel with both artists – **Katarzyna Żeglicka** (Poland), **Joel Brown** (US/UK/Candoco) – and programmers/producers **Veera Suvalo Grimberg** (Sweden/Dansekompaniet SPINN) and **Anna Consolati** (Italy/Oriente Occidente). One major problem that came up in these talks is that the term 'disability' covers a wide range of differences that require different specific needs and adjustments; that can make it difficult to build solidarity or project a common vision.

The seminar first outlined various problems that persist in the Norwegian context – in terms of education, access, diversity in the field, and far too little professional opportunity. Formal education is often not designed for difference. It aims for uniformity, as does a lot of the work on stage.

Furthermore, the struggles are different if you are disabled and want to work off stage (as director or scenographer for example) or on stage, as well as if you work with theatre or dance. When performing on stage in dance, disabled artists can be confronted with two extremes: either 'overcome' your disability by reaching a technical level that appears to transcend difference to fit into normative professional standards, or make disability and difference the central topic of the work where you problematise your own existence.

Examples of highly contrasting choices were evident in the CODA programme. Reinventing canonical works of contemporary dance to include disabled artists is indeed empowering. It breaks the conventions of what the body on stage 'should be', it proves what can be achieved with dedication and hard work (if ever given the space and opportunity), it highlights once again why these scores became part of the canon in the first place, and it also shows how our societies are changing. This was the case with Candoco's brilliant reinterpretation of Trisha Brown's 1983 piece *Set and Reset* (see pp. 109–110).

Striving to present the widest spectrum of practices, CODA also delivered quite the opposite strategy with *NORMAL* by Bergen-based transgender-inclusive company 71BODIES, led by Daniel Mariblanca. The project, co-produced



Actress Ipek Mehlum signing at the Sentralen Seminar
Photo © Lars Opstad/CODA
Oslo International Dance Festival

**What does it say for a society that someone needs to be given a voice, rather than claim it themselves?**

by CODA, BIT Teatergarasjen, Carte Blanche and DansiT, evolved over a year of workshops followed by a year of production. The workshops served to invite local disabled and queer protagonists into the production. Formal education in dance wasn't a requirement; rather, they drew from their own lived experiences. Dance nevertheless remained at the core of this multidisciplinary effort to explore how diverse bodies experience intimacy and touch, how normative professional standards can be challenged and questioned, and how vulnerability can be shared safely on stage. The piece included sign language interpretation, and marked the first time that audio description was used for a performance at CODA and Dansens Hus. In *Set and Reset/Reset*, disability is integrated within a now-classical form; in *NORMAL*, the content and the personal take over the form but offer a safe space of inclusion and acceptance.

Inclusive dance is not entirely new to Norway. Established 20 years ago after a university research proposal by Tone Pernille Østern, **Danslaboratoriet** has been a pioneer working with disability. An inclusive mixed-ability dance company supported by Trondheim municipality, it is integrated with the choreographic centre **DansiT**, and is now led by Ingeborg Dugstad Sanders. Danslaboratoriet is run on the border between community practice and professionalisation. Neither a regular dance company (there is no touring, for example), nor just a community project, it strives to introduce its performers to various contemporary approaches to movement and dance-making. The performers train weekly and have worked alongside many artists and choreographers from Norway and abroad, with a wide range of movement styles and vocabularies. The 'laboratory' in its name indicates the experimental as an ethos, and the performers are often co-creators of the work through improvisation and discussion, their voices actively involved in the making.

## Looking forwards

Looking at these examples, I started thinking: how might the artistic voices of disabled artists be emancipated from existing aesthetics or the personal-political? Does the gap between professionalisation and community engagement need to be that wide?

Maybe our understanding of professional standards needs to change, maybe there's a way to reinvent the form so that it not only includes diverse bodies, but allows them to shape it. Representation is important but it's not enough, and can often burden people to stand for and speak for others. What does it say for a society that someone needs to be given a voice, rather than claim it themselves? Yes, visibility can be transformed into political power but it can also expose vulnerability, and frame its subjects as victims. To have real equality, we need emancipation and access, not just representation, visibility and the amplification of voices.

How can this happen? Scenarios for change should come from the artists themselves, but I would like to share one vision (I am sure there are many others) that came to me after the CODA seminar.

I noticed that Norwegian universities were not represented (or at least not given the floor and the mic), even though a lot was said about the importance of education. There has been a recent expansion of artistic research programmes in Norwegian universities, where artists can develop experimental work while reflecting on it over the course of several years. How would the field change, locally and internationally, if there were quota-guaranteed artistic research positions with a focus on disability? For example, a movement research doctorate, where artists with disabilities can explore what their bodies can do, how they can express their lived experience, what kind of movement vocabularies, dramaturgies and new aesthetics they can produce.



Daniel Mariblanca and Jean-Baptiste Baele in *NORMAL*
*Photo © Lars Opstad/CODA*
*Oslo International Dance Festival*

As well as expanding dance in general, this would allow disability to be considered not only on the level of content and representational politics, but on the level of the art form itself. And last but not least, it would employ artists with disabilities from all over the world as full-time professional artist-researchers and give their voices more credibility in the field.

## Looking outwards

I don't know if the above is a good or bad idea. I do know that change is not impossible. One doesn't need to look far to see that the efforts of a small group of people can amplify voices, promote transformation and create lasting structural changes. Italy has become a role model for disability activism in the arts in just a few years. It started with the EU funded project EBA Europe Beyond Access, the 'largest Arts and Disability project in the world', supported by activists, artists and institutions, that led to increased understanding, developed a discourse around the issue and resulted in concrete, practical proposals for change. Led in Italy by the festival Oriente Occidente, and followed by 51 other Italian organisations, the network built expertise on the professionalisation of disabled artists. Chiara Bersani, now the artistic director of Spazio Kor in Piedmont, is maybe the most internationally recognised artist of this development, but there are many others, as seen in the manifesto of Al. Di. Qua.

Change can happen, and does happen. •

# CODA 2022
# Staging diversities



Sanjoy Roy
1 December 2022

## Towards a diversity of diversities at CODA Oslo International Dance Festival

Oslo, Norway

*Sanjoy Roy's trip was provided by CODA Oslo International Dance Festival*

Candoco in *Set and Reset/Reset*
Photo © Lars Opstad/CODA
Oslo International Dance Festival

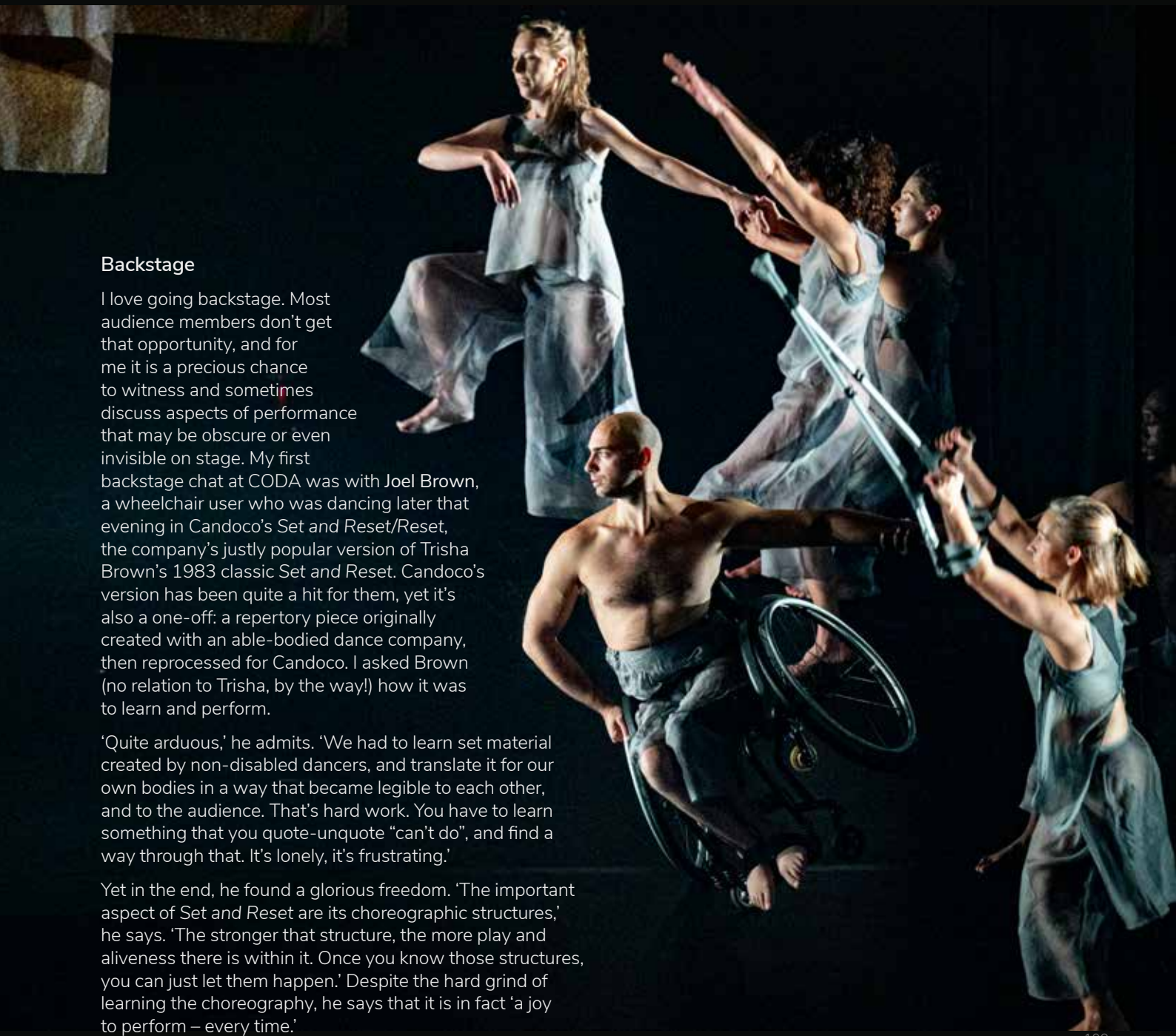
### Offstage

The stage is not normal life. That might sound like an empty truism – what happens on stage is not what happens off stage – yet it's the single main idea I take from this year's CODA Oslo International Dance Festival (12–16 October 2022). I heard it from American-born dance artist Annie Hanauer in the bar of Oslo's Dansens Hus, where she was telling me about the pleasures of being on stage – a space which liberates, or at least loosens her from the norms and normativities of everyday life. She had been using this idea with her performers in the rehearsal studio (a place we might call backstage, rather than on or offstage), during the creation of her new quartet *soft shell*, part of a triple bill performed later that evening by UK company Candoco.

What has this got to do with CODA? Well, when Stine Nilsen became its artistic director in 2017 after two decades living in the UK, one principle that she brought with her was 'diversity' – a contested term, for sure, but one that certainly gestures towards what is different from 'norms and normativities'. Nilsen's first full programme in 2019 put the emphasis on cultural and racial diversity; her second in 2021, curtailed by Covid, was necessarily a make-do programme. This year, the festival's twentieth anniversary, she has turned more explicitly to the theme of disability (already present in previous editions), building on her own background as a member and then co-director of Candoco, which works in this field, as well as on a new recognition of disability within the policies of the Norwegian arts council.

In fact, Candoco would have performed in 2020 had it not been for Covid. When their 2022 visit was confirmed, Nilsen started to wonder how to show 'the diversity in the diversity', as she puts it. 'It was important for me that audiences could experience a disabled maker or performer not as an aesthetic, not as a style, not as a subject – not as one kind of thing. I felt that it was a moment to challenge the norm by celebrating different visions of the dancing body.'

The final CODA programme included such different visions as an evening of work by Candoco, a new commission by Marc Brew (part of a triple bill at the Opera House), a performance produced by 71BODIES/Daniel Mariblanca called *NORMAL*; a central seminar on disability, diversity and inclusion in Norwegian arts (see pp. 103–107), and workshops by Marc Brew and Katarzyna Żeglicka with different approaches to the field of disability. Though the programme was not all about disability, I will focus on that thread here, according to how I (an able-bodied audience member) followed it through the festival.



## Backstage

I love going backstage. Most audience members don't get that opportunity, and for me it is a precious chance to witness and sometimes discuss aspects of performance that may be obscure or even invisible on stage. My first backstage chat at CODA was with **Joel Brown**, a wheelchair user who was dancing later that evening in Candoco's *Set and Reset/Reset*, the company's justly popular version of Trisha Brown's 1983 classic *Set and Reset*. Candoco's version has been quite a hit for them, yet it's also a one-off: a repertory piece originally created with an able-bodied dance company, then reprocessed for Candoco. I asked Brown (no relation to Trisha, by the way!) how it was to learn and perform.

'Quite arduous,' he admits. 'We had to learn set material created by non-disabled dancers, and translate it for our own bodies in a way that became legible to each other, and to the audience. That's hard work. You have to learn something that you quote-unquote "can't do", and find a way through that. It's lonely, it's frustrating.'

Yet in the end, he found a glorious freedom. 'The important aspect of *Set and Reset* are its choreographic structures,' he says. 'The stronger that structure, the more play and aliveness there is within it. Once you know those structures, you can just let them happen.' Despite the hard grind of learning the choreography, he says that it is in fact 'a joy to perform – every time.'

> **I am fascinated by how we use the word 'unison', especially when we work with diverse bodies**

He gives some fascinating insights into the composition that you wouldn't get from just watching it – for example, how everything derives from a set phrase originally made by Trisha Brown, yet that phrase itself is never seen; rather, it is 'reset' in many different ways. It's a work that I have adored for years, and Brown's backstage chat illuminates it, and Candoco's version, in new ways: how its slippery structures are made; what it was like for him to learn and perform; not least, his own dancer's-eye perspective compared with my particular spectator view (he often enjoys individual performers and moments of performance, whereas I tend to be spellbound by the composition).

I go backstage again to observe a workshop led by Marc Brew, another wheelchair user, here at CODA as a choreographer rather than a performer. The workshop (which uses tasks and principles that he also used in creating his CODA commission) is open and accessible to people with all kinds of bodies and abilities. Interestingly, the approach to movement was not so different from what I'd seen elsewhere (and indeed just heard about in the case of *Set and Reset/ Reset*): the choreographer gives open-ended instructions for the dancers to interpret, with no right or wrong outcome. This produces 'material' – material that thus has both a coherent source and a diverse expression.



Brew is interested in that idea. 'I am fascinated by how we use the word "unison",' he tells me after the workshop, 'especially when we work with diverse bodies. Somebody once told me: you can't do unison! So of course I wanted to prove them wrong. I often choreograph a "unison" section, but to me it's not always about doing the same movement. It could be about the timing, or the angle, or the accent. Unison can have a bigger meaning than being exactly the same.' It sounds to me like a way of finding a route between uniformity on the one hand and atomisation on the other. Instead of either sameness or difference, the focus is on affiliation, commonalities.

Brew's workshop is perhaps more distinctive for its approach to people than to movement. He always begins with a personal 'check-in' – a trust-building space where participants share names, pronouns, need-to-knows, how they are right now. 'It's also for us to get to know each other as people,' says Brew. 'Sometimes I've worked with professional groups who have never had that. Some people may have worked together for many years, but they learn things about each other they never knew before.' Thus the workshop becomes 'inclusive' not just of the dancer, performer or movement-maker, but of the person – not always an easy process, but one that Brew finds it valuable for both individual and group.

It's only after the festival is over that I manage to ask Daniel Mariblanca about the workshops for *NORMAL*, and his answers illuminate a different approach to dance-making from those above. Rather than finding ways to include different people within a process, their process begins with the people themselves – whom he refers to as protagonists rather than performers – who

thus become the source of their own material and stories.

'Reality is our starting point,' says Mariblanca. 'In 71BODIES we work with and through important chapters of our lives, artistically. Whether working with the protagonists individually or all together in the studio, I always focus on their own particular qualities, their own stories and unique journeys.'

This perspective, closer to collectively devised theatre than to choreographically directed creation, is consistent with the work's theme, an exploration of the interactions and intersections between disabilities, gender identity and sexuality. It's appropriate, too, that such a multidimensional approach to people is itself multidisciplinary: while dance remains a central strand, the production ended up incorporating different modes and media, including film, storytelling, sign language, poetry and live music. In short, *NORMAL* is in itself non-normative in approach, as Mariblanca affirms. 'I never work from the stereotypes or the speculations of what and who the majority is,' he says.

## Onstage

In the festival, I watch three onstage performances with disability as a feature. Brew's *un-be-known* is the last of a triple-bill of CODA commissions at the Opera House (following *Gigant*, a moody, edgily kinetic sextet by Berit and Anna Einemo Frøysland, and *Flower Boy*, an atmospheric, image-based solo by Carl Aquilizan, hidden like a secret within the petal-like folds of his costume). In Brew's work, featuring nine performers, I recognise the compositional imprint of the workshop I'd witnessed: walking patterns with incremental complexities and choices, movement phrases taken up in different



ways, and yes, forms of 'unison' through gesture, action and orientation that create coherence within diversity. The effect of the personal aspect of Brew's workshop I find impossible to gauge; perhaps it's knowable only to those who were personally involved. The element that lets down the performance for me is the music: lots of plaintive piano, pleasant enough for workshop studies but a little drifty on stage.

71BODIES/Daniel Mariblanca take an entirely contrasting approach in *NORMAL*, a kind of multimodal performative lec-dem presentation that had grown out of the workshops they had been running around the sensorial erotics of touch, for a variety of non-normative protagonists with diverse disabilities: physical, functional, neurological, visible, invisible, congenital, acquired. On one evening, a sign language interpreter is incorporated into the choreography as she relays the stories being told; on another, the company provide a sensory 'touch tour' before the performance, and live audio description during the show to those who choose it. On stage, following an explanatory prelude that puts the whole project in context, the protagonists reveal something of their personal lives, on film or on stage, in words and motion. We become keenly aware of their offstage lives as a hinterland to their onstage bodies

Left:
Daniel Mariblanca's *NORMAL*

Above right:
*un-be-known* by Marc Brew

Photos © Lars Opstad/CODA
Oslo International Dance Festival

– bodies which we see and sense very physically through a variety of intimate, skin-to-skin duets, structured around touch more than phrasing. Still, I struggle to find a way through the work: to me it feels like the offstage and backstage stories overpower the onstage dramaturgy.

Unlike *NORMAL*, the two new pieces on Candoco's triple bill – Seke Chimutengwende's *In Worlds Unknown* quintet and Annie Hanauer's *soft shell* quartet – are not 'about' their performers: their offstage lives are not presented on stage, though they were to some degree an influence on the creation, and of course affect the work backstage. At the same time, there was notably less 'unison', however loosely defined, than in Brew's piece. *In Worlds Unknown* splices stanzas of verse, scrolled on a screen and spoken by the dancers, one of them in sign language (its choreographic incorporation different in function to the sign language in *NORMAL*). The result is a weave of intensely poetic images, non-sequential verses, clusters of action and textured music, affording diverse entry points into the piece – though for me, also too much information to take in.

Hanauer's *soft shell*, more streamlined, also uses splicing, establishing the dancers' differences through signature movements before reshuffling them so that sass, seriousness, poses and wanderings meld into a choppy kind of coherence. For all that, it only gels towards the end, when the dancers don fragments of costume so that they look part real, part fantasy – and finally, like the costumes themselves, parts of a larger whole.

A structure of movement that can incorporate differences rather than being built from them, *Set and Reset/Reset* is perhaps closest in approach to Brew's piece. I've seen both Candoco's and Trisha Brown's versions many times now, and the work still strikes me as genius, for the way it combines casual attitude with compositional exactitude, conjuring high art from happy accidents. Knowledge of its offstage or backstage context is illuminating, but not necessary: the piece works just fine on stage, regardless.

It's interesting that these were all group works, not solos. Each finds, or seeks, a way for diverse people to cohabit a space in a meaningful way. They ask questions of difference: how and why are we together here? In that sense, they are implicitly social as well as explicitly artistic visions.

> **Each work seeks a way for diverse people to cohabit a space in a meaningful way**

### Next stage?

When Nilsen returned to Norway from London in 2017, she found a cultural scene shaken in particular by the #metoo movement. 'In Norway we think of ourselves as quite an equal society, but that was rocking our own sense of equality,' she says. 'It really shifted our thinking around power structures – not only around gender but also around diversity.' Initially, she recalls, diversity was seen predominantly in terms of race, ethnicity and nation ('multiculturalism', to use a British term), but it has widened considerably since then. Her vision for CODA is to embed diversity – or a diversity of diversity – into its programming. That is, to incorporate it as a springboard for exploration rather than a series of boxes to tick, and so to seed changes into the norms and normativities of dance in Norway. 'The ripple effect of the festival may be intangible,' she says, 'but the idea is to leave an imprint.' •

# LEE\VAKULYA
# Burnt [the eternal long now]

**Jonas Schildermans**
13 December 2022

## Dance work as material and metaphor for body labour and physical burnout

National Theatre and Concert Hall, Taipei, Taiwan

What does burning and being burnt mean inside of bodies? That's the point of departure for choreographic duo Zoltán Vakulya and Chen-Wei Lee in *Burnt [the eternal long now]*. The question applies not only to the consumption of energy, the fuel that keeps us moving to a certain length, but also to the need for purpose and self-fulfilment as propellants to persevere, and the consequences when those are missing. A smart analogy of the nonsense inherent in both contemporary work ethics and contemporary dance, which often makes us wonder: what on earth are we doing? And what for?

The work follows a simple but effective dramaturgy: at a constantly increasing pace, a small society of dancers (Lee, Esse Vanderbruggen and Jessica Simet) drive each other, and therefore themselves, towards their downfall. At the start, they lie scattered on the stage, in identical white T-shirts and jeans. They rise slowly to the vibrations of a swelling techno beat, each reproducing their own long-stretched but decisive phrases. As the trio finds parallels between their individual movement patterns, they puzzle themselves together. The bodies become one engine, larger and more efficient. Movements of precise handicraft evolve into the sturdy jerking of heavy machinery.

Limbs chained around each other, hooked elbows securing connections, hips and torsos rotating on top of each other like cogwheels… One of them is rolled out on the floor by the other two, back and forth, like a big chunk of dough. And they take turns in dragging each other over the length of the stage, like a plough over a field. Each time the dragging becomes a bit more effortful, until they strand in complete exhaustion.

Throughout all this we see unrecognisable, distorted abstractions of the performers and ourselves on a large, reflective backdrop. Its surface is deeply wrinkled, like a crashed car, with creases that can never be completely smoothed out again. But this broken mirror ultimately feels rather decorative, merely present, not going through the same development – or is it better to say decline – as the rest of the piece.

**The bottom line:** Three dancers test the limits of physical and mental fuels in an effort to keep surpassing themselves

Photo © Terry Lin

Choreography: LEE\VAKULYA / Direction: Zoltán Vakulya / Performers: Chen-Wei Lee, Esse Vanderbruggen, Jessica Simet Music: Gryllus Abrís / Dramaturgy: Alice Van der Wielen-Honinckx / Light design: Xavi Moreno / Stage and costume design: LEE\VAKULYA / Coproduction: kunstencentrum nona, CCNR Lyon, STUK Leuven, NTCH Taipei, Tanzplattform Rhein Main Residency partners: kunstencentrum nona, L'animal a L'esquena Celra, Staatstheater Darmstadt, Thor Brussels, VIERNULVIER Ghent, Taishin Culture and Art Foundation / Development support: Weiwuying National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts Burnt [the eternal long now] is supported by National Culture and Arts Foundation (Taiwan), the Flemish Culture Ministry of Belgium, and Ms. Sunny Weng





**If everything is gonna break down, what are the things that we need to model?**

On a sleepy December afternoon in the small Irish town of Cloughjordan, diners at Middle Country Café seem at once bewitched and bewildered to find their winter salads being tossed by a troupe of dancers. It's the concluding part of Instant Dissidence's year-long dance and food activism project *As If Trying Not To Own The Earth*. Punters gamely choose their 'preparation method' (a song to soundtrack their salad's assembly) from a selection of pot-luck options, and are served the same seasonal dish via dances of sometimes wildly different flavours.

To the screeching guitars of Warrant's *Cherry Pie*, Gerard Headley and Diogo Santos eyeball each other from either side of the preparation station. There's all the tension of a high-stakes poker game as Thilde Andreasen deals out steel mixing bowls for them to tussle over before their contents are disgorged, one by one, into a serving dish. Santos dings the service bell to indicate that the salad is ready – and to signal his victory.

The opening bars of Purcell's *Food of Love* introduce a prone Andreasen, who mouths the words while Headley and Santos arrange her limbs to balance the bowls in poses that are variously yogic, Egyptian and Greek. The three

# Slow motions through climates of change

Karina Buckley
16 December 2022

**Laughing, learning, touring and slow-moving in the face of climate degradation, with Rita Marcalo's Instant Dissidence**



*SlowMo* by Instant Dissidence, in Helsingør, Denmark. Photo © Jacob Stage

remaining 'flavours' are dynamic variations on a cocktail-shaking theme. With lifts here and arabesques there, bowls fly behind backs, over heads, under legs, the dancers flinging them around with the assuredness and abandon of seasoned mixologists.

It's all delightfully deft and deliciously daft but, as the latest in a series of responses to the climate crisis, it's also designed to get people talking and thinking about eating sustainably.

'In the process of this kind of interaction… people will come in and say "why are you doing this?!" People will start talking to you about it because they always do… and it's fun – like, who moves forward with something if they think it's painful? Now, if they think it could be interesting, people do move forward, I think,' says artistic director Rita Marcalo.

Marcalo's climate 'artivism' began in 2018 following the IPCC's dire warning that countries would have to radically cut their carbon emissions before 2030 to avoid dramatically increased risks to life-sustaining ecosystems and human populations by mid-century – a message (over)simplified in media to: '12 years to save the planet'.

'I made a pledge that over the next twelve years I would create twelve works, each holding a mirror up to our civilisation and reflecting the way in which humanity is addressing – or not addressing – this warning.'

In spite of Covid restrictions, she has made good on her promise, with yearly work that has tackled the climate issue – head-on at first, but as her attitude changed, so did her approach.

'I'm trying to just keep this sense of listening to the world and really responding to what's happening – not being too fixed in what I want to do.'

In 2018, Extinction Rebellion caught Marcalo's attention and the piece that followed – *The Rebellion* – included protests in its rehearsal process and Imagination Cafés in its post-show discussions, where audience members were invited to share their visions of a greener future.

'It's interesting when I look back now because, at the time, I still thought that Extinction Rebellion was going to make a difference and governments were going to respond and that systems would start to change. And some of that did happen but the work that I'm making now is much less hopeful and is more about – okay, so if everything is gonna break down, what are the things that we need to model?'

That modelling began when Covid hit and made one potential future scenario a present-day reality – because a warmer world is one that is more susceptible to pandemics.

'I had to ask questions around, how do I make work remotely? So that first year of lockdown, I commissioned



Imagination Café poster for Instant Dissidence's *The Rebellion*

dancers to make work from their homes because that's what everybody was doing! Nobody could go anywhere.'

She explored questions of geography more deeply in *Spring… As If Trying Not To Own the Earth*, also produced during lockdown. Ostensibly about food growing and food security ('How does somebody like me with no skills whatsoever get a tutorial and try and grow some cabbage?'), it also asks how Marcalo could continue her work as a choreographer in a hyper-local context:

'Let's say we're in a situation where I'm much more grounded in my community, and instead of bringing dancers from abroad, I use my community as dancers. How do I work with people who are not expert dancers, and choreograph something beautiful with them?'

Judging by the results, the answer is: with difficulty. The project films, commissioned and screened in 2021 as part of Bealtaine Festival of Age and Opportunity and Dublin Dance Festival, feel like a quirky exercise in anthropology. Marcalo plants seeds and bakes bread using instructions from her collaborators but without the tacit knowledge necessary to do it properly, narrating her actions with endearingly botched pronunciations of Irish words. Her co-creators are also out of their comfort zones, making movement where they normally make food, creating awkward shapes and phrases that never really catch fire. Still, it's a sporting effort in what were challenging circumstances and a proof of concept for Marcalo, who was modelling for a future where we all need to embrace practices we are not expert at.

'I am new to Ireland and I'm trying to learn Irish – and I'm new to the land, and I was as clunky with my attempts to grow food as I am with my Irish… I am foreign to the language, I am foreign to the land and I'm trying to do it… And [the co-creator] is foreign to dancing and she's trying to do it – and this is what happens when you're foreign to it but you still do it.'

Marcalo approached foreignness from a different angle with *Borrisokane is Dancing* in 2020, a project born out of some initial local disquiet about the opening of a refugee accommodation centre in a nearby town.

'I read somewhere around the huge numbers of migrations that are going to happen (because of climate change) and how that will destabilise society. So this, to me, in Borrisokane was like a microcosm of what will come to be and so I thought, what could I try?'

The resulting short film paired local children with refugee children to dance duets to one another's chosen music, sharing their stories and body language in a fuzzy hug of empathy and mutual acceptance.

Summer 2022 saw Instant Dissidence trial a whole new model in sustainable touring when *SlowMo: Connecting Cloughjordan EcoVillage to Mainland Europe via Land, Sea and Dance* set out to do exactly what it says on the tin.

Funded through Perform Europe – an EU-backed initiative aiming to rethink cross-border performing arts presentation in a more inclusive, sustainable and balanced way – Marcalo planned to slow-travel the company to partner venues in Cyprus, Denmark, Sweden and the UK, as well as to build a digital connection with Italy. Because slow travel takes a lot more money and time than even the dearest,

most delayed Ryanair flight, she had to cut the creation phase from the process to balance the budget and choreograph each piece en route instead.

'We planned everything in advance as much as we could, but just the idea that we were all going to leave home – all six of us; four dancers, myself and the touring producer – and go and perform thirteen days from the first day of departure, and we had no work 'cause it was going to be created en route, was really scary. I mean, it really took all of us to take a leap of faith and go: this is going to work!'

The pieces themselves were a series of vignette responses to letters about the countries they were travelling through, written by people in their destination cities. They were created and rehearsed in public spaces, in the snippets of time before boarding trains and ferries. Once performed, the pieces were discarded and the dancers started from scratch with new stories from their next destination. If it sounds intense, that's because it was:

'(We were) under a lot of pressure – constantly producing, constantly making work. And every time we did a performance in a country, all that work is forgotten – we start creating a whole new one.'



Marcalo describes the vignettes as choreographic gifts to citizens of the destination countries, a concept that allowed her to reconcile her wish to tour internationally with her need to remain socially conscious and locally relevant.

'There's one part of my mind that goes: yes, I think my role is to be rooted here... in this community... And then there's this other part of me that goes: but I love travelling and I've always toured internationally and am I saying goodbye to all that? *SlowMo* says, huh – how about you tour internationally and it's about them that you're touring to? *SlowMo* enables me to do this and still make work that people feel a connection to, because it's their stories.'

Three of those stories were recently brought to life at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance when the UK iteration of *SlowMo* was performed for the University of Limerick's dance students. The passion and playfulness of young lovers in Sweden; the ducking, diving and occasional menace of Danish squat-life, and some feral feline stalking from French Madagascar, all shared a vivid intensity that the dancers attributed partly to the richness of the letters but also to the short timescales in which the pieces were produced, which meant that there wasn't the opportunity to overthink or over-rehearse the content.

While there were upsides to the condensed model of touring, it also brought considerable challenges. Train delays and cancelled ferries meant a lot of additional stress for the producers, and the lengthy journeys took their toll on the dancers.

**How do I work with people who are not expert dancers, and choreograph something beautiful with them?**

Instant Dissidence, *Winter Eating*
Photo © Sophie Coote

'Yeah, it was very tough,' says company dancer Amber Bosteels. 'Especially tiredness – like, waking up early, rehearsing, moving your body and then transport again, rehearsing again... But the creating itself went quite smoothly in my opinion, even if it was always in a different space.'

Despite its obvious issues, the whole company feels that, with a few tweaks, the touring model could be sustainable – for both the planet and the artist.

'Going on tour with slow travel, you need to leave pockets of time in a schedule for it to go wrong and... you need time for it to be flexible,' says touring producer Sophie Coote.

'And then there's the other aspect, the support ... it's a lot more expensive to do slow travel. We see that even in society – the right thing to do is the more expensive thing and I think... the funding bodies need to react to that and need to be offering to fund things in a slow travel way and [acknowledging] that we need more money to do that. It's not just a fifty quid Ryanair flight.'

Of course, days spent travelling are also days not spent dancing – or earning. It's a bitter pill, and one Marcalo and the company have had to swallow on this project, but she hopes that things will change.

'We made the argument that we would need each dancer to be paid some kind of retainer or travel day fee – even though it wouldn't be the full fee – and we didn't win that argument. That is the one thing I am not seeing being acknowledged in the way that funding is changing. Yes, more funding is being given to slow travel, but nobody is yet thinking about "what is the impact on a touring dancer's yearly ability to earn?" Supporting slow travel means supporting people to get paid to slow travel – otherwise people aren't going to be able to do it.'

Financial considerations notwithstanding, Marcalo now intends to roll the project out across Europe and already has interest from five partner organisations for *SlowMo* 2023 – but her motivations aren't purely to model slow travel.

'There was a moment during this tour that I shifted my thinking. I'm like: I don't have hope but I'm going on this different way of touring – but during the tour there was a moment when everything clicked for me. That there is more to it than hope. There is meaning-making and connection. And just talking about it and raising awareness. And even if it is hopeless, you still fight.'

Although gloomy about our climate future, Marcalo believes that the behaviours she's modelling and the connections she's making will resonate.

'I have hope that other people will pick up this modelling ... I don't have any hope that it will prevent a huge change that we're going to have to go through in terms of our civilisation, our systems of living ... But that doesn't mean it isn't worthwhile doing.

'I would say we don't have to be hopeful. We have to be committed to meaning-making ... (to) hold(ing) the space, whatever it is. I believe that if we as human beings pay attention and make meaning out of a situation, learning happens.' •



SlowMo at the In Between Time festival, Bristol, UK
Photo © Paul Blakemore



**There is more to it than hope. There is meaning-making and connection**




18 December 2022

**Springback writers gathered at Oktober-dans Festival in Bergen, Norway.**

**We collated the resulting reviews, presentations and diaries into a special 16-page online supplement.**

**Scan the QR code below to read it.**

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Contents include

Overview and commentaries

Reflections on dramaturgy

Critical issues

Festival diaries

Reviews:

Yeh Ming-Hwa *A Room by the Sea*

Eszter Salamon *Monument 0.10*

Daina Ashbee *J'ai pleuré avec les chiens*

Anne Lise Le Gac *La Caresse du Coma*

Mónica Calle *Ensaio para uma cartografia*

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# Nitsan Margaliot Foresigns

Annette van Zwoll
9 January 2023

## A triple bill of encounters bring mysteries that both captivate and mystify

Kunstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin

Photo © Marieke de Graaff



In a studio on the second floor of a fairytale building, we curl up on a stack of mats for the triple bill *Foresigns*; a mystical title on its own. The first performance, *A Visit*, sets the atmosphere with the orange colour of a comforting sunset. Violin sounds emerge from underneath a quilt-covered table. Two feet in golden heels stick out, then two legs, then the full body of choreographer Nitsan Margaliot. His eyes are closed; we, and the world, don't seem to exist for him. His arms move slightly distortedly as he is joined by musician Mari Sawada, a surprisingly good mover. She gets up unsteadily on her heels, like Bambi trying to walk for the first time. The bodies coexist, expanded by the shadows on the wall. I sink in the gentle softness of the work.

*En Moon* is a solo made for Scott Jennings in 2013. He is a beautiful mover, throwing his arms around himself, cramping his body into agony, covering his face in despair, lying down in acceptance. As the imagery accumulates I understand the actions less. What motives are hidden behind the well executed movements, what foresigns did I miss? And why restage this work in 2022?

In the last performance, *Returning*, Nitsan brings a very realistic silicone torso to the stage, like a poncho with the sides open. Tenderly, he spreads it on the ground. The back first, then the shoulders with a hole for the neck, the upper front torso, and an intact penis. A lifeless replica of himself. As a silent witness, it lies there while Nitsan returns to his living body, grabbing his legs, exploring his face and arms as if to confirm his own existence. A self-investigation pushed by the intensified sounds of cellist Boram Lie that seem to spiral out of control.

The two duets reference one another and exist in their own world, where tenderness meets a touch of loneliness. The question of relevance, though, leaves a lingering trace.

**The bottom line:** Foresigns draws you into its own atmospheric world, but leaves you wondering why

Concept & choreography: Nitsan Margaliot / Performers: Scott Jennings, Nitsan Margaliot / Music: Mari Sawada, Boram Lie / Dramaturgy: Juan Corres Benito / Production: Uta Engel / Public relations: Lea Pischke / A collaboration with the International Theatre Institute Germany (ITI) supported by Fonds Darstellende Künste, with funds from the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media within the programme NEUSTART KULTUR

# Don't Worry Darling

**Lena Megyeri**
17 January 2023

## The dark side of dance takes centre stage in Olivia Wilde's tale of beauty and control

youtu.be/NlM0hZeOyTw

*Don't Worry Darling* is one of those movies that everyone already has an opinion of even before seeing it, due to the countless controversies surrounding it. But between all the drama and debate of whether Harry Styles spat on Chris Pine, whether he can act at all and whether Florence Pugh hates director Olivia Wilde, one thing that hasn't really been mentioned is how important dance is in this film.

The idea that everything that is beautiful in dance can equally be sinister and terrifying has been around since long before *Black Swan*. Wilde plays with this dichotomy throughout the movie – and she even hired *Black Swan*'s cinematographer Matthew Libatique to visually support her game.

Young married couple Alice (Florence Pugh) and Jack (Harry Styles) live in an idyllic 1950s-looking company town called Victory, where the men work on a mysterious project under the leadership of company founder Frank, while the women spend their days in full *Stepford Wives* mode at home. When they are not polishing the house or themselves, they take ballet lessons from Frank's wife, Shelley (Gemma Chan). In the first ballet class scene – which despite Shelley's kind façade, has the aura of the strictest Russian ballet academies – we see the housewives practising at the barre and later arranging themselves into beautiful and graceful formations. 'Remember ladies,' says Shelley during class, 'there is beauty in control. There is grace in symmetry. We move as one.'

In fact, in Victory, everything seems to be about control. But it is also at the ballet class where an increasingly suspicious Alice realises something is seriously wrong with the town and its residents. In a scene that very directly references *Black Swan*, Alice's reflection starts to live its own life, and suddenly instead of herself she sees another housewife, Margaret, an outcast from the community because of her strange behaviour, banging her head against the mirror and hurting herself. After Alice's desperate screams, the vision fades, and it turns out that no one else in the class has seen what she saw.

But now Alice keeps having visions throughout the day. In images that look like flashbacks or dreams, she sees platinum blonde girls who look and dance like they are straight out of a Busby Berkeley movie: a recurring moment is where the girls lie on the floor in a big circle and fold their legs from one side to the other in unison. The main appeals of Berkeley's most famous dance scenes are the synchronised movement and kaleidoscopic patterns, which are fun and pleasing to the eye – but these mass choreographies can also awake an unsettling feeling of higher control. No wonder that, according to the British Film Institute, Joseph Goebbels was a fan of Berkeley. There is beauty in control, grace in symmetry – remember?



Gemma Chan and Florence Pugh in *Don't Worry Darling* Photo: Warner Bros Entertainment

The tension that Alice experiences – and with her, the spectator – reaches its peak at a party organised by Frank and Shelley. As a surprise to entertain the guests, Shelley introduces burlesque dancer Dita Von Teese, who presents her usual glamorous spectacle, including a sexy and soapy bath in a champagne glass. But even this feather-light entertainment gets chilly as we watch Alice feeling more and more trapped and getting very close to a panic attack. An evil flash of the eye from Dita to Alice is all it takes to twist the atmosphere of that charming dance and send a shiver down our spines.

Then finally it's Harry Styles' turn to dance. After Frank calls Jack on the stage and rewards him with a promotion, he asks him to dance – but it sounds more like an order or a threat than a request. Jack breaks into a tap routine, but he has none of the lightness or charm of a tap dancer – if anything, he looks like he's dancing for his life. 'Let's make him spin, shall we?' shouts Frank, who animates the cheering audience like a cult leader, and seems to somehow have Jack's every move under control without actually instructing him. The camera cuts back and forth between the stage and the bathroom where, meanwhile, Alice has a breakdown. While her husband perfectly plays the part of the promising young Victory citizen, she tries to explain to fellow housewife Bunny (played by Olivia Wilde) how nothing is what it seems in this town of illusions. But by the time Jack is finally allowed to finish his dance near complete exhaustion, Alice realises she is entirely alone.

Towards the end, when everything is revealed, it turns out that those Busby Berkeley-like scenes were in fact used for vicious purposes. You can debate many aspects of *Don't Worry Darling*, but you can't deny its smart and well-thought symbolism, and dance is central to it.

**Everything that is beautiful in dance can equally be sinister and terrifying**

# mime time

So that's the end of the London International Mime Festival – at least, as we know it. Founded in 1977 as a one-off event, it grew to become an important landmark in the city's cultural life. Still directed by its founder Joseph Seelig, alongside Helen Lannaghan since 1986, it has certain word-of-mouth, under-the-radar appeal that draws strength – perhaps counterintuitively – from its sheer oddness and unclassifiability. The very word 'mime' masks the varied, genre-busting faces of the festival, which freely incorporates visual, physical and object theatre as well as dance, circus, puppetry, and more besides. The result might be a bit of a headache for marketing, but is often a treat for audiences.

For dancegoers such as myself, LIMF has served as a refreshing annual outing from the sometimes hermetic contemporary dance scene, bringing its own offbeat sensibility, its mix-and-match aesthetics and always with an eye on the audience.

The festival's future direction remains undecided, but it is clear that it will be much scaled down. To mark the end of the era, Springback sent a first-timer (Georgia Howlett) and an old-timer (me) through some of the dancier parts of LIMF 2023, its 47th edition. Read our reflections below, and join us in saluting LIMF for its inimitable mime times.

*Sanjoy Roy*



Georgia Howlett
Sanjoy Roy
23 February 2023

# A newbie and a has-been take separate routes through the London International Mime Festival

London, UK

mimelondon.com



*Triptych* by Peeping Tom
Photo © Virginia Rota

2023 marks the first and last year I will watch the London International Mime Festival in its current form. As a newbie, my preconceptions of mime didn't last long, and my experience of LIMF, abundant with quirks and charms, was a liberating affirmation of the power in the art of suggestion. Performers under the mime umbrella utilise an ever-fluctuating dialogue between disciplines to tell their story. Without language, a piece might be subject to ambiguous interpretation. And yet, just like dance, the urgent presence of the body in its interchangeable states conveys emotion that words can't articulate.

Two pieces into my festival journey, dualisms came to mind. Can creativity be exercised like a skill? *The Games We Play* by Gandini Juggling (UK) hovers somewhere between skill and art, mind and body. A duo for more than 30 years, Sean Gandini and Kati Ylä-Hokkala are received warmly with their nerdy and satisfying musings in the frame of a very serious, very silly, history lesson. The dreaded drop of a ball is not a failure but an opportunity for reflection, coloured juggling patterns can be translated to 'life itself', and these patterns personified to artists and their quintessential styles; the vibrant Hockney blue, the splatter of Pollock – alas, juggling is not simply throwing and catching.

Strange anecdotes of circus animals and three-armed prodigies are told while Kati, comedically mute, prepares the props for their witty interpretation to follow, such as a romantic, entwining duet (or rather ensemble, if you include the balls). Juggling exists as meditation and circus, rhythm and maths, art and even magic. Each game proves an adaptability to the risks of another unpredictable body, not to mention balls. Evidently, I have only scratched the surface of this niche world, but the idiosyncrasy and synchronicity is mesmerising.

Similarly arithmetical, *Through the Grapevine* by Not Standing (Belgium) is like a candidly formed equation. On a white trapezoid stage, Alexander Vantournhout and Axel Guérin, wearing only beige shorts, compare their measurements like two incredibly bored children. They are disproportionate (one much taller than the other), yet clamber into counterbalances as if they were carbon copies. Freaky four-legged creatures move and mutate with heads emerging from peculiar places. When things get complicated, it is like the magicians' cups and balls trick, the source of a limb unclear in a shared ownership of bodies.

Later, the extremity increases, though the deadpan, endearing disposition remains. Besides the clumsy smack of skin on skin, and the subsequent audience laughter, *Through the Grapevine* is a silent and spacious game of immutable trust, bodies reborn in the context of another.

If this is spacious, *The Nature of Forgetting* by Theatre Re (UK) is wonderfully crowded. On stage are four performers, two musicians, a clothes rack and a raised wooden platform. Tom (artistic director Guillaume Pigé) is cared for by his grown-up daughter Sophie (Louise Wilcox), who he mistakes for Isabelle, his deceased beloved wife. Theatre Re uses the characteristics of dementia to paint Tom's life. Muddled places, a memory wearing the clothes of

another, a lingering detail – they fuel Tom with rage as he time-travels, the full picture eluding him.

Matilda-esque school desks set the scene for boisterous teenage years, spinning with young love. Clothes and props fly as we whizz through a patchwork kaleidoscope of visual theatre. Live musicians bolster a rambunctious soundtrack, meticulously reactive to every facial expression. Dialogue is often drowned, but their explosive physicality persists. It's hyperactive, which only emphasises Tom's vacant stare in present-day scenes, where he misplaces his daughter's name as he does his tie, prisoner of his faulty memory. Once these blazing memories of youth simmer down into the past, a long silence is cast, broken finally by a frenzy of applause.

To compare these pieces seems to reduce them to their similar parts. But inevitably, the resonant traces of the last finds a point of connection in the next. *The Nature of Forgetting* finds echoes in *Triptych* by Peeping Tom (Belgium), when one performer laments: 'my memories are running away from me.' If any themes exist between the two, they are enigma and spectacle.

*Triptych* – adapted from three pieces made by directors Gabriela Carrizo and Franck Chartier for Nederlands Dans Theater between 2013 and 2017 – weaves together three stories: *The Missing Door*, *The Lost Room* and *The Hidden Floor*, each a loose narrative with dreamlike logic – i.e. no logic. The rules of physics are capricious as bodies that plummet over balconies reappear, and a whirlwind repeatedly sweeps them into a tornado, spiralling like a restless thought. Movement itself is vulgar; a slap, thrust and fling of flesh, and the dancers spin themselves dizzy before throwing themselves high, landing as if boneless. With each other, no less force is used; the sex scene is a backbreaking confusion of limbs that knots across the floor. The latest addition, *The Hidden Floor*, screams Guillermo del Toro with its sub-aqueous, green-blue stained walls and persistent drip of water. Sunken like an amphibian purgatory, the dancers are stripped naked, stabbing ghost food like wet-haired ferals.



Sean Gandini and Kati Ylä-Hokkala, *The Games We Play*
Photo © Gandini Studio

A choreographed set change is the fluidity between stories, complete with an ominous backdrop of sound. In this unstable reality of prolific illusions, the only consistency is that nothing makes sense. This is Peeping Tom, off-taste and voyeuristic, lurid and hilarious, not unlike the feeling of a nightmare that lingers, even when the memory of it has fled.

LIMF left me in awe of the myriad of ways the body can speak, spin fantasy and craft illusion, without straying from the simplest, most universally felt emotions: love and loss, apathy and wonder, to name a few. My perspective as a naive latecomer is new, but the afterthought is nothing original: we exist only in relation to others. For me, the essence of LIMF is in the language of bodies, the paradox in trust as both risk and safety, and the yearning to understand each other in whatever way we can.

*Georgia Howlett*



*The Nature of Forgetting* by Theatre Re
Photo © National Taichung Theatre

Opposite:
Cie Mossoux-Bonté in *The Great He-Goat*
Photo © Natacha Belova

Below:
Andrea Salustri, *Materia*
Photo © Darragh McLoughlin

In the cult TV series Buffy the Vampire Slayer, there's a moment when Buffy boxes the air in front of her to show a friend how she had beaten up a particularly annoying demon. Buffy reckons the demon got what it deserved, but her friend retorts: 'Nobody deserves mime, Buffy.'

If you laugh, you understand that mime has a spectacularly uncool reputation. Yet the London International Mime Festival has developed a pretty cool one: idiosyncratic, offbeat, inevitably a bit hit-and-miss but always with some surprises and delights; and it attracts a very mixed audience.

Usually, theatre places the human being as its subject, even if (as often happens at LIMF) that being appears in puppet form. Not so in the hour-long performance *Materia* by **Andrea Salustri** (Italy/Germany).



Salustri, its creator and sole live performer is more like an assistant to the materials that take centre stage – polystyrene, in the shape of balls, sheets and granules, their drama driven by physics, not narrative. A ball hovers, as if by magic, over an upturned circular fan; two sheets seem to advance and retreat in the currents of wind machines, like stiff gentlemen suspiciously sussing each other out; a bucket of granules becomes a cosmic cloud, flashing with starlight. Even in the dance that Salustri performs, it's the polystyrene tile wobbling on his fingertips that takes the lead: he simply follows its precarious path.

The design is all black and white – no emotional human colour here – and the sounds are largely amplifications of the actions on stage; yet there is certainly dramaturgy in the crescendi and lulls of action, and drama as well as wonder in this work. It's good to see the material world given primacy on stage; good, too, to read that all that polystyrene is not thrown away (I did wonder) but rather gathered up to be biodegraded by a special species of worm, *Zophobas morio*. All hail the non-human, I say.

Daniel Hay-Gordon and Eleanor Perry – aka **Thick & Tight** – have become LIMF regulars in recent years, having carved out their own art-trash niche by mixing cabaret, drag, lip-synching, history and iconoclasm, often in the form of single-scene numbers that mash together incompatible characters: Miss Havisham (from Dickens' *Great Expectations*) and Queen Victoria, for example; or highbrow American sound philosopher John Cage with middlebrow British musical theatre star Elaine Page.



In their LIMF evening, they also feature collaborators Vidya Patel (in a jagged Indian-dance response to a colonialist commentary by Winston Churchill), Oxana Panchenko (a steppy, highly technical character dance to Boney M's *Rasputin*), Edd Arnold as a thrash-metal Marlene Dietrich, and the **Corali Dance Company** for people with learning disabilities, who multiply the image of eccentric aristocrat Edith Sitwell, or duet with Hay-Gordon in part-parody part-homage to Royal Ballet luminaries Sir Frederick Ashton and Dame Margot Fonteyn.

Crucially, these encounters are underpinned not just by idea, attitude and imagery, but by dance and choreography. Perry and Hay-Gordon are highly skilled dancers themselves, and attract others of similar calibre. Often, they'll break up their characters' exaggerated actions into almost cinematic frame-by-frame moves, so that the choreography comes to feel less like the parody/homage mix that it presents, and more like a kind of glitch art. The result is equal parts entertainment and derangement, and very unnerving.

**Cie Mossoux-Bonté** (Belgium) have long been associated with LIMF, and have a particular and peculiar affinity with the weird and the eerie, realised through uncanny fusions of the human body with costumes, puppets and prosthetics, and supported by canny stagecraft using light, sound and a conjurer's way with misdirection to accomplish tricks of disappearance and transformation.

There's a concept behind their 2019 piece *The Great He-Goat*: gallery attendants in a museum are gradually consumed by the images of Goya's celebrated Black Paintings. You don't, though, need to know that to feel the force of this spookily unsettling work. At the start, there's a row of people in formal dress; but only later do you come to realise that only some of them are alive. The rest are the dismembered heads and limbs of puppets, their faces dreadfully lifelike, artfully deployed by the performers so that they become active parts of the surreal scenes that follow. Two women in deathly white seem to have eight legs between them. A face floats in the shadows, transmigrating from body to body. Several times, figures fuse such that you can't tell which parts are flesh and which prosthetic, until the illusion is suddenly and shockingly ripped apart – only to form another illusion.

Into this disturbing world wanders the figure of a young girl – which only increases our unease. There are scenes of unnerving interrogation, of monstrous voluptuousness, of ritual flailing and finally a kind of black sabbath. If the piece lacks narrative drive – it works by accumulation, not progression – each unnerving set-piece casts its own black-hearted spell upon the audience. The weirdest thing: walking back outside into real life after the show, and finding it other-worldly.

*Sanjoy Roy* Dance+: Love, Death & Robots

# Love, Death & Robots

Kosta Karakashyan
28 February 2023

**Dance and rotoscope animation combine to stunning effect in the award-winning Netflix series**

youtu.be/__AYi_HvcSA

Once in a while, mainstream film will flirt with the world of contemporary dance by introducing a character or a non-sequitur performance designed to enchant or stupefy with its strange beauty. 'Jibaro', the last episode of the third season of Tim Miller's animated Netflix series *Love, Death & Robots*, commits fully to this flirtation by embracing dance as its primary storytelling device in a tale of lust and betrayal between a knight and a siren.

The choreography in the episode is rendered in gorgeous rotoscoped animation. The animators trace over recorded performances of the dancers (referred to as 'performance capture' as opposed to 'motion capture' by the team) frame by frame to produce a realistic result. The rotoscoping approach allowed director Alberto Mielgo to stay as close as possible to the original movement of Los Angeles-based choreographer Sara Silkin. The articulate, sinuous movement of the animated characters conveys the rigorous research by the dancers and Silkin, who was invited by Mielgo to work together on the concept even before the script for the episode was written.

The episode follows the seductive but deadly attraction between the deaf knight Jibaro and The Golden Woman, a mystical siren lurking under an unassuming lake, encrusted in the spoils of war of the soldiers she has driven to death. When Jibaro and an army of knights make their way to the lake, the mythical creature pulls them in deep in the water with her screams, drowning all but the deaf Jibaro. The narrative follows his point of view, tuning out the sound when we are experiencing the scenes from Jibaro's perspective.

This bold and inclusive approach positions dance as the prized, primary storytelling medium in the wordless narrative of the episode, which won two prizes at the 2022 Creative Arts Emmy Awards – for short-form animation and for individual achievement in animation.

The film's appeal comes from the inventive and vibrant choreography by Silkin, which combines sharp, vertigo-inducing turns and acrobatic flips with the vulnerable demeanour of The Golden Woman. Her movement, performed by dancer Megan Goldstein, oscillates between sensual body waves, desperate shrieks and a dazzling sequence where she seduces the knight by snaking and slinking dangerously close to him and his sword. Her movement as she playfully licks his sword and bites the knight's lip is informed by Ohad Naharin's Gaga movement language, remixed with the natural ebb and flow of the river, where the siren lives, and elements of pole dance.

The choreography in the episode becomes apparent the first time the knights are possessed by the siren's destructive song,



Still from the dance scene in Jibaro, from the Netflix series *Love, Death & Robots*

and suddenly launch into a virtuosic, almost balletic flurry of movement that becomes a dance to their death. The way the choreography is incorporated reveals a creative, forward-thinking spirit in Silkin. She has developed emotional subtleties and nuanced gestures into a movement style that often reads as grand and virtuosic for its own sake, and the response to the episode has been wonderful to watch.

Silkin's work is front-and-centre in a larger recent trend for dance and film to turn to movement direction in its different modes (choreography, performance coaching, and most recently intimacy coordination) as an instrument that can refine and elevate the physical work that goes into an emotional film performance. More and more film-makers are turning to a hybrid, dance-adjacent language that is more about embodiment and subtly guided performance than pure choreography to visually establish who their characters are, and how they embody the world around them.

As The Golden Woman lifts her hands softly, with a forlorn look on her face, and lets out a deep guttural scream and the knights are drawn towards her, plunging towards one of the most beautiful deaths one could imagine, there is no need for any other words. •

# Side Step Festival Helsinki

**Anna Kozonina**
14 March 2023

## An impressive programme – but why do we keep caging dance in black boxes and white cubes?

Helsinki, Finland

www.zodiak.fi/en/sidestep

The 20th edition of Helsinki's annual Side Step festival of cutting-edge international dance gathered viewers around the topics of ecology, diversity and contemporary spirituality. Surprisingly, these much-loved themes in Scandinavian performing arts that often stay in the close circle of professionals, seem to have found ways into the hearts of the general audience thanks to careful and insightful curatorial work.



Marco da Silva Ferreira in Jefta van Dinther's *Mountains*
Photo © Urban Joren

### On Earth, I'm Done

In *Mountains*, the first part of the diptych *On Earth I'm Done* by Jefta van Dinther for Cullberg Ballet, brilliant guest dancer Marco da Silva Ferreira managed to embody a whole range of physical and emotional states available to a person in a contemporary technologised world, permeated at the same time with animal instincts and natural forces.

Van Dinther calls the performance archaic-futuristic, but you can also see it as post-apocalyptic, unfolding after an ecological disaster, or in a world where the natural landscape can no longer be separated from artificial powers. This image is emphasised in the scenography: the stage is covered with multiple layers of fabric, which at first resemble sand dunes, icy or rocky relief, but then start to move, slowly rising into the sky, expressing softness, reminiscent of a flowing stream. In this natural-cultural landscape, the human body tries to remember something about animal movements and desires while simultaneously being trapped in technological affects. Da Silva Ferreira moves like a strong, dextrous, flexible beast, but at the same time, abruptly interrupts his movements, depriving them of smoothness and naturalness. The voice morpher brings something robotic to his poetry reciting and singing, making the lyrical genres reminiscent of nightmarish memories.

The composition is based on continuity: it avoids the pauses, scene changes, and collages typical of contemporary dramaturgy. This continuity is manifested through almost all expressive means: the sound series is a monotonous work, only increasing in intensity towards the end; the 'landscape' continuously unfolds in the literal sense of the word: the fabric on the floor is evenly pulled upwards, creating an effect of incessant flow. The dancer always remains on the stage and interacts with the landscape, at one moment wrapping himself in the fabric and hovering in the cradle that arises above the ground. It all looks like a huge unfolding structure that prevents us from defining categories or oppositions, such as nature vs. technology, animal vs. robotic.

At the end, what used to be the surface of the 'earth' floats into the sky, taking the floor covering with it, and turning it into a dark mountain. Will it be a new environment for future inhabitants? And what kind of dance would it feature?

> **Will it be a new environment for future inhabitants?**

### Gracefully grotesque

*Graces*, the widely recognised piece of Italian Silvia Gribaudi, explores beauty, aesthetic standards, and (im)perfection as conventionally represented on stage, with both humour and pleasure. Gribaudi – charismatic, ageing, shortish, with a body far from dance norms – performs in the company of three charming men, of different ages but each with professional dance training and more 'appropriate' bodies. They are the very three graces (a reference to the famous neoclassical sculpture by Antonio Canova.)

The work is an exaggerated demonstration of the dancers' efforts to fit into the expectations of a 'good dance performance.' The brave four embark on a dynamic,



Graces with Matteo Marchesi, Siro Guglielmi, Silvia Gribaudi and Andrea Rampazzo
Photo © Fabio Sau

repetitive dance, like a fitness sequence aiming for maximum synchronicity, but they quickly fall into clumsiness. Trying to demonstrate physical endurance they lose their breath. They show grace, freezing in spectacular poses with serious or enthusiastic faces, shaking the tension off with ironic comments on the strained intellectualism of contemporary theatre. Running in parallel is an ongoing absurd play with basic theatrical effects, light and music, constant communication with technical staff and, most importantly, the audience, who are supposed to evaluate and approve the performers' efforts and the show's spectacularity.

*Graces* was supported by Andrea Zanoli's documentary *Overtour*, in which Gribaudi, a former corps de ballet dancer, tells how she came to work with her changing body. When you gain weight, the body ceases to be as disciplined and submissive as it used to be, she explains, but it also acquires new qualities and its own agency. The film also documents her workshops with women over 60 who find in dance the freedom of expression, the beauty, and the opportunity to play and be someone that society does not expect to see on stage at that age or in such a body. They show little pieces in supermarkets and perform naked, demonstrating the grace and surprising superpowers of bodies overlooked by contemporary visual culture.

In *Graces*, what could have been a rather hackneyed 'diversity' theme comes to life in a charming way. The work is very accessible to any audience and connects general issues around our bodies' lives and images with the professional problem of the dancer's changing body. Paradoxically, irony permits seriousness and directness, and the grotesque prevents overacting; *Graces* ends up being full of kindness.

## Foolish yet smart

Jenni-Elina von Bagh's *As Time Goes By* deals with a very different dimension of humour: the absurd. The only Finnish performance on the programme, it works with common Helsinki-based art topics through quite widespread artistic devices. The show stems from philosophical research on virtual and incorporeal aspects of bodily expression and its becoming, and plays with 'other-than-human performativity' which here means that bodies, objects, scenography, liquids, words, and the space are taken as active agents in creating the show. Despite the hardcore intellectual background of the performance (it is

inspired by feminist philosopher Elisabeth Grosz's *The Incorporeal*), von Bagh's seven performers are looking for fun, non-intellectual and spectacular ways to embody those musings through different encounters on stage, be it putting their bodies in peculiar compositions with objects, playing with nonsense through words, or prancing through the stage in various combinations 'boasting' with their absurdist presence.

Bringing contemporary philosophy and art theory together with research on the various bodies and their artistic expression is a trademark of Finnish experimental dance and performance art education, which can be a source of fantastic potential but also sometimes creates narrowness of the aesthetic and choreographic search *per se*. Sadly, a lot of 'non-human performativity research', no matter how intriguing it may sound, on stage turns out to be an absurdist manipulation with trash and objects, spiced up by short extracts of pop music and an omnipresent scene in which some kind of a liquid is taking over a human body, sometimes questioning its boundaries, sometimes just being a reference to something 'abject'.

Although *As Time Goes By* has collected almost all of those parts into a sort of performative playbook, it was a success in terms of working with time and dramaturgy. When it's hard to make sense of separate fragments of the show, what really matters is rhythm, intensity play, and the work of 'the invisible'. In this sense, the show reached its goals, smartly walking the fine line between the already slightly hackneyed artistic methods and mastering the local performance art 'genre'.

## Reflections on insignificance... really?

**Oona Doherty**'s *Navy Blue* (see also pp. 93–95), supported in the festival programme by two video works (the quite well toured *Hope Hunt filmed*, and *Navy Blue Faces*), surprisingly turned out to be the most conventional performance in terms of aesthetics, dramaturgy, choreography, and probably meaning. The artist's first large-scale production – 12 dancers, to music by Rachmaninov and Jamie xx – looked like a fine combination of all the essential ingredients for a 'proper dance show', which made it almost stuffy. Professional dancers dressed in identical blue overalls – suggesting working class representatives (a recurring image of Doherty's art), labour camp prisoners, or an idea of the dancer as 'universal worker' in a choreographer's hands – sought synchrony at the same time as expressing their individuality within

Jenni Elina Von Bagh's *As Time Goes By*
Photo © Katri Naukkarinen



the collective. The permeating sense of anxiety or dread, reinforced by the sounds of gunshots (in the first part of the piece, all the dancers eventually got 'killed' one after another by an external force), was embodied in expressive, almost illustrative and old-fashioned choreography based on conventional compositional structures.

However, the performance had strong visual and sound design components, which drew the audience into a dreamy and metaphysical space, appearing in the second part of the show. Turquoise light puddled around lying bodies, suggesting pools of blood that grew to create an impressive abstract visual canvas reminiscent of underwater depths or outer space. Here is when we hear Doherty's well-known voice, reciting the quite poetic speech which she created together with Bush Moukarzel.

*Hello.*
*Thanks for coming.*
*It's good to see ya*
*I didn't know you'd be here.*
*I'm surprised.*
*You've come a long way.*
*A really long way.*
*Four and a half billion years.*
*That's a long way to come to see a show.*
*But I appreciate it.*
*[...]*
*Are we floating? Or are we falling?*
*Can a thing be falling if it never hits the ground? Unless everything's falling.*
*Am I falling?*
*I'm the one in blue.*
*Next to the one in blue.*
*Next to the one in blue.*
*Such a small thing, almost nothing, surrounded by darkness, surrounded by all that space. Surrounded by what's called Everything Else.*
*A small, insignificant thing on a small, insignificant thing. A pale blue dot on a pale blue dot.*
*But look again.*
*There's a whole world in that dancer.*
*[...]*

The speech was to create a swaying and choreographing effect, and in the end, it did so better than the dance itself. Commenting on the actual performance, zooming out into outer space, recounting bitty historical events, the names of entrepreneurs and politicians, it culminated in a citation of the show's budget lines, and asked what seemed to be the artist's main questions: 'And what's the point? Who's it for? What will it do?'

Might *Navy Blue* indicate discomfort with her new professional status (Doherty has recently gained much recognition and received the Venice Biennale Silver Lion award), and reveal conflicts between professional expectations and critical distance to her own work? Are the 'outer space' theme and the impressive last solo of a topless female dancer – who seemed to be furiously shaking off her own body to escape the spotlight, the stage, and her physical being – signs of attempting to escape this inner conflict? For me, this aesthetically pleasing, coherent and virtuoso performance left an impression of lack of faith and creative potential, as if creativity had become hostage to big form and the expectations of the theatrical world.





Choy Ka Fai, *Yishun is Burning*
Photo © Diajana Lothert

## Burning hot

Probably the most exciting and well-crafted show of the programme, **Choy Ka Fai**'s *Yishun is Burning* brought together Asian shamanism and dancing, Singaporean spiritual rituals, fascinating documentary video work, live music, vogue ball culture, and western contemporary dance. Performed by Norwegian-Thai dancer **Sun Phitthaya Phaefuang** (stage name **Aurora Sun**), supported by Singaporean Malay band NADA and Chinese drummer Cheryl Ong and the moving image of a virtual 3D deity, the show brought together seemingly distant styles and traditions that nonetheless strive to transcend the limitations of the physical body and identities and open up altered states of human consciousness.

> **The dance became a vehicle not for representation, but for joy**

Referring to *Paris is Burning*, the famous documentary on vogue culture, and inspired by the extraordinary spiritual rituals of the suburban Singapore town of Yishun, the show creates a multimedia canvas made of interviews with shamans, a traditional-contemporary music performance, and virtuoso solo dance in which it is almost impossible to say which tradition – western or Asian – becomes the basis for the choreography to unfold. Trained in the first instance as a contemporary dancer with ballet classes in the background, Aurora Sun masterfully intertwines positions and steps quite familiar for a westerner with traditional Asian dancing patterns, and movements based on local myths (one, he told me, he called 'chopping demons' heads'). Unlike productions that try to justify Asian traditional dancing through

> How can we bring dance as an art form out of stuffy theatrical spaces that hold the production budgets?

exoticisation, Yishun sets it within wider technological, political, economic and ecological worlds.

Being part of Choy Ka Fai's ongoing project *CosmicWander Series* – in which he explores fascinating spiritual rituals as well as other folklore and shamanic traditions of Siberia, Taiwan, Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia and presents them in various artistic formats, from documentaries to installations and stage performances – *Yishun is Burning* also welcomed a more direct encounter with the audience, typical of traditional dance formats that have never been caged by the western theatre box. At the end of the show, Sun's dance was accompanied by catwalk passage and posing by four vogue dancers from the iconic local House of Ninja. Supported by unexpected cheers from the audience, it developed into a form of vogue ball or celebration in which the dance became a vehicle not for representation, but for joy.

### Weird–Place–Stage

As with many festivals, Side Step presented discussions in more conventional artist talk formats, as well as three rounds of something that can be called a 'post-talk-show.' That's how American choreographer and researcher Eleanor Bauer defined the series of events she hosted with experimental musician Chris Peck. Crafted as an improvisation performance in the format of an artist talk on the verge of a stand-up comedy show, merging with live music background or sound interventions from Peck, jazzed up with sporadic dance moments or the appearance of Doctor Dance (Bauer), a fictional character that would listen to your complaints and prescribe a dance as a remedy, *Bauer Hour and Peck a Sec* created a nice formal, sensual and intellectual shift in a programme otherwise designed for traditional theatre stages.

During the talk I attended, Bauer had a conversation with Harald Beharie, a Norwegian-Jamaican performer and choreographer who had just presented his solo *Batty Bwoy*, and the sound designer for the same piece, Jassem Hindi (though in no way participatory, it was probably the most 'socially engaging' show of the week, with Beharie, fully naked, furiously, gracefully, seductively and dangerously moving between audience members). Towards the end of the talk, Bauer encouraged Beharie to ask the most important question for the night. He asked, how can we bring dance as an art form out of stuffy theatrical spaces that hold the production budgets and limit the possibilities for audience engagement?

'Weird Place Stage,' wrote Bauer on a flipchart, as if she were playing Wordle. How did we get stuck in a theatre, that weird place, the most recent box for dance to exist, the least natural, most indisposed to bodily sensitivity and participation, suppressing kinaesthetic empathy and bodily intelligence of the audience? It seemed that the most vibrant shows of the programme came from non-theatrical dance experiences and situations, be it social dancing in *Overtour* or spiritual dancing and vogue culture in *Yishun is Burning*. •

# Léa Tirabasso Starving Dingoes



Apoptosis, the science of programmed cell death, drives a frightening piece for five dancers: *Starving Dingoes*, a collaboration between Léa Tirabasso and cancer specialists Simone Niclous and Alexsandra Gentry-Maharaj.

Dressed in gym clothes, the dancers line up flat on their stomachs on a stage covered with sand-like fragments of orange rubber. Shuffling face down, they advance in regular shunts, chanting operatically. These dancers are cells, and their survival is perilously dictated by each other's functioning. Unpredictable, mutant movement from one triggers shrieking panic in the rest. The first to break the pattern digresses into spasm while another frantically tries to soothe his seizing limbs.

Back in a cluster, momentarily unanimous, they chant and stamp to an electronic beat, like a rotating, ticking bomb, awaiting the dreaded departure of the cell that dysfunctions, signalling decline for all. When it happens, they disperse explosively, stumbling into bizarre interactions, pummelling into each other's torsos, comforting the ones who whimper only to drag them by the head back to the pack. Bodies are adrenalised with involuntary jerks and twitches, posture distorted, and fingers spiked as if electrocuted. They communicate through messy, primal impulse, a pre-language.

Again, they uncomfortably return to clusters, circles that expand into wider ones, engorging the space with agitated rites. The steep escalation of the piece locks us into a dystopian snowball effect, a prolonged death of cancer cells possessed, dangerous to themselves. Ridiculous interactions are comedic until their desperation wears our laughter thin. No choice, no joy, just a harrowing relentlessness.

*Starving Dingoes* grew from analysis of the microscopic havoc wreaked inside our bodies, but it also, through a wider lens, conjures the world outside: do we sacrifice the weakest link for the continued progression of the whole? Finally, the exhausted dancers settle in this Martian desert, like the remnants of society choking on its own chaotic creations, in which humans, more than ever, are interdependent.

Surfacing from animalistic hysterics to take their bow, the five performers are unrecognisable.

**The bottom line:** A stubborn display of the need to survive: urgent, disturbing and laughably berserk

**Georgia Howlett**
16 March 2023

**A piece on 'the science of programmed death' are felt inside, outside and between our bodies**

The Place Theatre, London, UK

Photo © Bohumil Kostohryz

Choreographer / Director: Léa Tirabasso / Producer: Vasanthi Argouin / Administrator: Sousana Eang / Dancers: Catarina Barbosa, Laura Patay, Karl Fagerlund Brekke, Alistair Goldsmith, Laura Lorenzi / Composer: Johanna Bramli & Ed Chivers / Lighting & set designer: Nicolas Tremblay, Thomas Bernard / Scientific advisors: Simone Niclou, Aleksandra Gentry-Maharaj / Philosophy advisor: Thomas Stern / Animal transformation coach: Gabrielle Moleta / Clown: Peta Lily / Tour booker: Vicenç Mayans

# Richard Mascherin Caer Caer Caer

Lights dim. The sounds of a metal punch and a ventilator unfold our imagination behind the curtain. Soon the stage discloses a ritualistic scene: a chair on top of a table forming an altar, black-clad Spanish choreographer Richard Mascherin powdering the centre to generate smoky air; another man in the shadows produces the sound partly sourced from the stage.

When Mascherin climbs up to the chair, his movements recall our feeling at height: legs stay motionless, waving arms try to stay balanced, shivering body tending to lower the centre of gravity. Meanwhile, surtitles convey his falling experiences: injuries and pain, thoughts, the audience's disappointment when he lowers the height. Then he falls – suddenly, naturally, earnestly. A moment of stillness. Lying on the floor, some puppet-like movements of forearms and legs show signs of life echoing with beating sounds. Gradually his body unlocks more movements: crawling, kneeling, side fall. He finishes on his hands and knees, hips rolling. A moment of trance.

Mascherin reappears in velvet red carrying a giant double-sided ladder; the text shifts to aloof politicians expected to fall by the public. When will his next fall be? We stay in suspense as he unhurriedly places the ladder, ascends and descends it, clings to it. Strong beats are back and he starts spinning around, holding the ladder as if extending arms or wings. A moment of thrill. Then he falls – preparedly, resolutely, purposefully. 'I don't want to die. I want to survive.'

Mascherin lifts himself upwards on a pulley system before the curtain closes. Is it a good thing when technology keeps us from falling? Haven't we shadowed the vulnerability of our bodies? Caer, Caer, Caer (falling, falling, falling) is a physical, acoustic and poetic fable showing falling as a fact, and to keep falling as a destiny.

**Bottom line:** A physical fable about a falling man

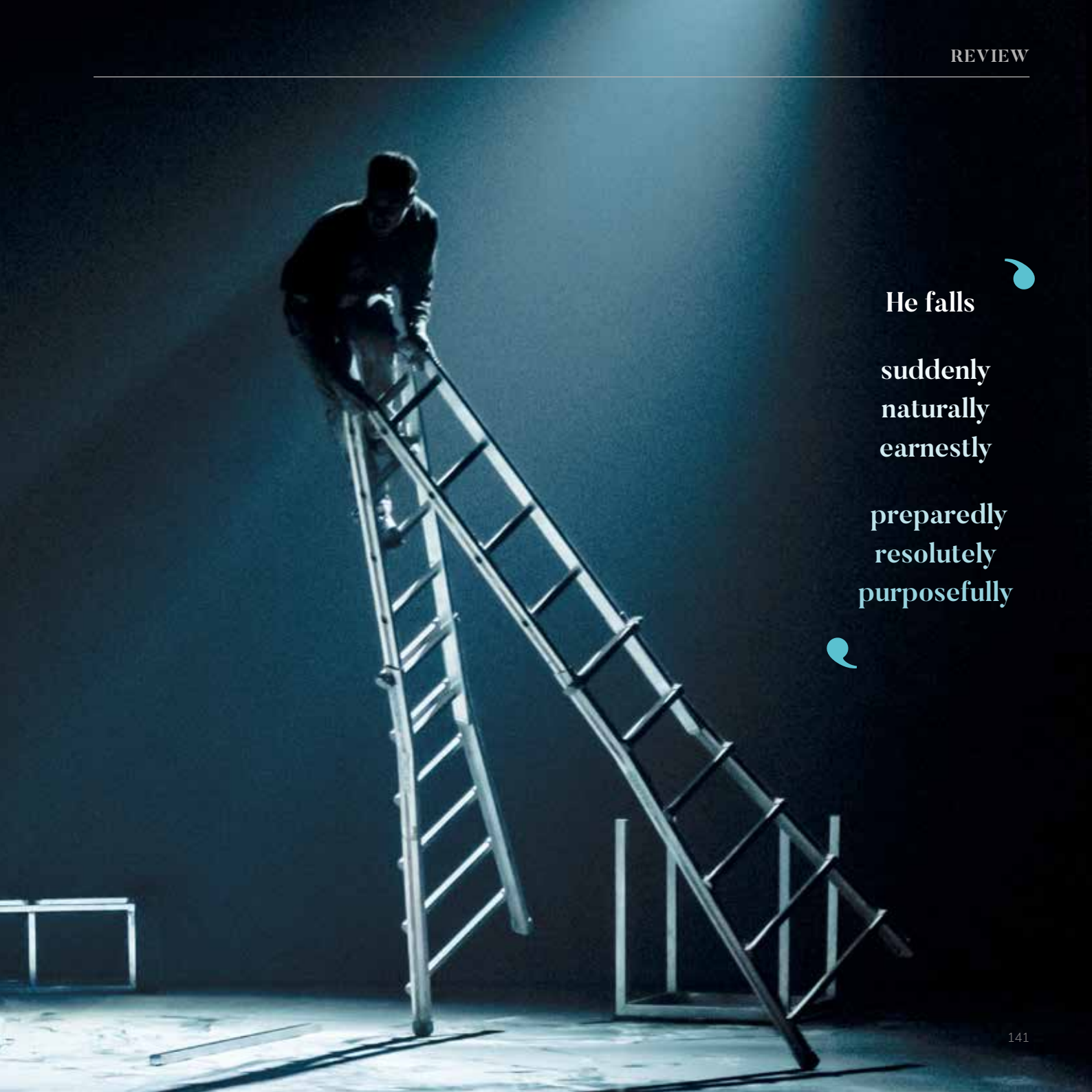
Direction, choreography, concept: Richard Mascherin / Performers: Richard Mascherin, Alejandro Da Rocha / Music & sound: Alejandro Da Rocha / Dramaturgical assistants: Alberto Cortés, Sergio Martínez Vila / Text: Sergio Martínez Vila / Artistic assistants: Marina Rodríguez, Alejandro Da Rocha / Set, costume, lighting: Richard Mascherin / Technical direction: Iván Cascon / Design & lighting assistants: Conchita Pons, Iván Cascon / Costume maker: Marisa Maggi / Distribution & management: Lola Ortíz de Lanzagorta (New Dance Management) / Supported by: Graner - Centre de Creació de Dansa i Arts Vives, Cabildo de Tenerife, Konvent Zero, Centro Coreográfico Canal, Danseu Festival, Mapas Fest, Fiver Dance Film Festival, L'Estruch Fàbrica de Creació, PiedeBase

Photo © Joaquín Ponce de León

**Hang Huang**
29 March 2023

## Falling, failing and the fates that befall us in Mascherin's poetic physical fable

ArtDanThé Festival, Théâtre de Vanves, Paris, France


He falls
suddenly
naturally
earnestly
preparedly
resolutely
purposefully

# ‘What are these peripheral practices?’

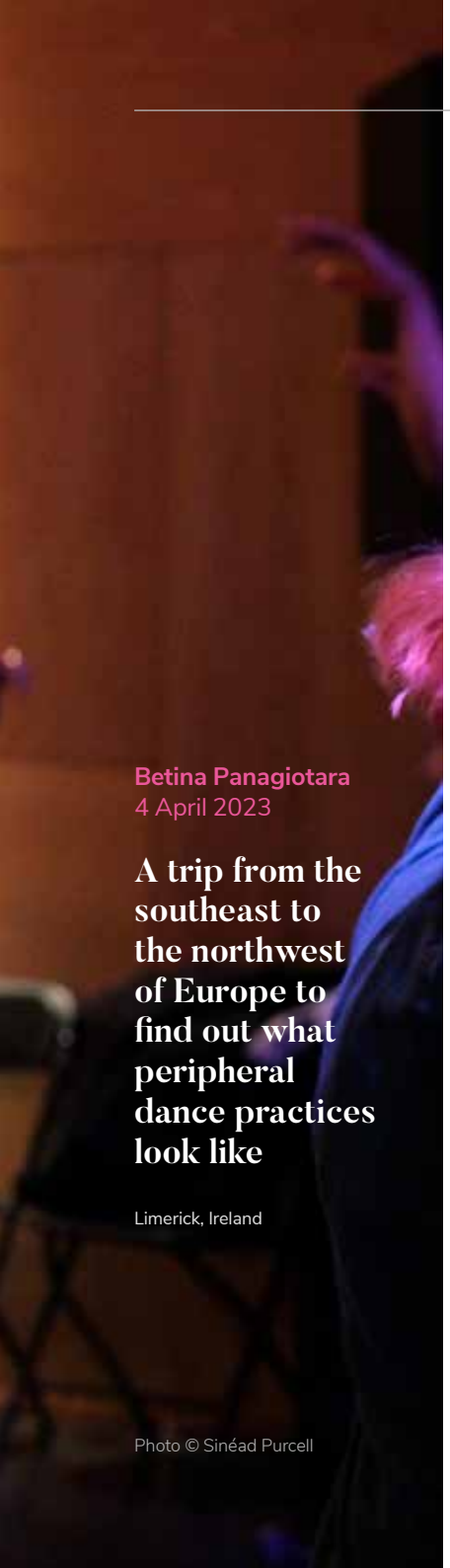


From 9 to 10 February 2023, Dance Limerick and Dance Ireland organised the Atelier ‘Dancing on the Edge, Peripheral Practices’, with the support of European Dancehouse Network, as part of its annual theme of Equity. Its aim was to look into what it means to be on the periphery in geographical, cultural and social terms, with the participation of artists, curators, programmers and cultural policymakers from around Europe. Its main questions were: how can the periphery become the centre, and how can we produce and present work that is rooted locally and connected internationally.

On the day I started my long trip from Athens to Limerick in Ireland, I posted on Facebook that I was very excited to be joining the conference, noting its title. Among the comments from friends and colleagues wishing me safe travels, one stood out: ‘Great! May I ask what are these peripheral practices?’ The question highlighted how we make sense of widely used terms in different ways, so I responded: I will let you know afterwards.

The topic was important to me from a variety of perspectives: I live and work in Athens (Greece), at the southern periphery of Europe geographically and symbolically, acknowledging the power centres of Europe. In addition, I work as a dance theorist and dramaturg, two occupations that in Greece remain marginal to being a choreographer or dancer. I also work with mixed-ability companies, which is considered another peripheral practice. Eager to find out more, I headed as far northwest of central Europe as Athens is southeast, to Limerick – Ireland’s third largest city but a considerable distance, geographically and symbolically, from its capital.

So, here I am. What are peripheral practices?



Betina Panagiotara
4 April 2023

# A trip from the southeast to the northwest of Europe to find out what peripheral dance practices look like

Limerick, Ireland

Photo © Sinéad Purcell

## What does it look like?

The Atelier kicked off with the artist and curator Mary Wycherley, who discussed peripheral practices through the prism of rural and urban, bringing forth the relativity of the terms we use and what they connote. She pointed out how crucial it is to have artists working in rural areas, and emphasised the notion of situated learning as an important tool in the field of the arts. To her, locality matters as it allows the cultivation of a variety of practices, in different places by different artists.

Next came Dylan Quinn, a dance artist living and working in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, who discussed how working in the periphery comes down to partial isolation, less visibility, fewer artistic collaborations, devaluation of work, marginalisation, and a constant re-motivation of your own self to keep on working, creating the terms, the frames, the principles on your own. 'What does it look like?' he asked repeatedly. What does it look like to have a family of four, live in a rural town, and work as a dancer? What does it look like to work alone? What does it look like to create your own opportunities and infrastructures in order to survive? To these questions he recounted a telling anecdote: on hearing that Quinn had moved to the outskirts, a former colleague commented that he would be finished as an artist. Apparently, being in the periphery means the death of your artistic identity.

Or maybe not? Quinn recounted the infrastructures he has created over the years and the work he is still doing, even if he remains invisible to the so-called 'centre'. He also highlighted the necessity to invest time for caring, creating, and working in local contexts as well as the need for artists to be able to survive through their work, arguing for the value of artistic work made in the periphery – and so for its respect, support and inclusion in funding schemes.

Later, choreographer Catherine Young and her musicians drew us into a moving circle trying out a fusion of Irish folk dances, Palestinian *dabke*, Ukrainian dances and afrobeats that she has been taught working with refugees in Ireland. Based in the southwestern county of Kerry, Young also lives in the periphery, but she told us that travelling a lot had made it easier to keep going. It was funny for her to think that a programmer from Dublin or elsewhere would come looking for her in the 'middle of nowhere', so to communicate her work to the outside she needed to travel. Periphery becomes isolation unless kept in touch with the 'centre'.

Nigerian-born mulitidiscipinary artist Tobi Balogan delivered his whole presentation through rhyming – about his name, his black identity and masculinity, the challenges of racism and exclusion, discussing how hip-hop culture is a dynamic site of belonging experimenting with identities and forms of movement. In his work and teaching, he uses repetition and bouncing as his main tools, thinking of bouncing as a wider methodology and mode of thinking: bouncing back and forth not only bodily but also in time, bouncing from his past to his present, creating ephemeral lines of how he shapes and is shaped by the world. Bouncing becomes an empowering proposition in relation to the periphery, a jumping in and out of things that decentralises; or in other words, creates several centres.





Workshop sessions at EDN Atelier 2023 in Limerick, Ireland
All photos © Sinéad Purcell

## On curation and inclusivity

The second day, we turned to inclusive dance practices advocating for differently abled bodies and the ways in which they reshape so called mainstream contemporary dance. It started with a 'Boombox' warm-up: a pre-recorded format created by artist Sanders Verbeek and Stopgap dance company during the pandemic. Boombox is a reversal of what we are used to, as dancers with disabilities take over warm-up sessions that can occur wherever – living rooms, kitchen floors, studios – guided by unknown voices and sounds. Boombox was followed by a discussion on a newly funded research programme looking at law and disability taking dance as its case study – turning the peripheral practice of inclusive dance into its major research example. The discussion on rethinking dance through disability was continued by Stopgap co-artistic director Laura Jones. She focused on the social model of disability, proposing to re-examine the values and educational methods of dance so that we keep asking ourselves how to make our field, studios and methodologies more inclusive, so that inclusive practices are no longer peripheral but become good practice for all.

One idea that kept popping up was curation as caring for one's own community. At a round table on 'the art of co-curation', Jenny Trainor (Dance Limerick director) and Catherine Young shared their experience and thoughts of how they co-curate What Next Festival (see pp. 146–148) as a site for emerging local choreographers, providing them with space and a presentation platform. The roundtable questions were 'Where is the leadership in co-curation?' and 'How much do we or should we as curators implicate the community in the festivals or other kind of platforms that we run?' Community dance quickly became the major topic of discussion, but for those of us from countries where community dance is not really evolved or supported, curation was mostly discussed as a practice that goes beyond the selection and presentation of artworks to take into account, question and address the needs, modes and aspirations of diverse agents within a community or communities. In this sense, exploring how peripheral practices happen and how can they be empowered within the European dance scene is an act of curating.

## Peripheral practices and their potential

What were my takeaways? To me, it seems that peripheral practices are defined by their locality outside of a symbolic centre (in terms of value) or an actual centre (in geographical terms). They are usually associated with devaluation, marginalisation, isolation, and less visibility, infrastructure and funding. Yet at the same time the peripheral is seen as powerful and ongoing – based on this very locality.

The notion of locality thus becomes more and more crucial to the arts today, if we don't want to turn into a giant artistic super-market where there is no difference in artistic works created and presented in Athens, Brussels, Lisbon or Amsterdam and no one cares about the specific conditions that artists and communities live in and work with. Such homogenisation, an aftermath of globalisation and constant

artistic mobilisation, was severely criticised and cut back after the pandemic, making us realise that on the one hand there are fluid and dynamic European identities, and on the other hand that there is a plethora of diverse communities which have different needs, working modes and artistic practices that need to be taken into account in much more inclusive contexts and cultural policies. Moreover, the notions of centre and periphery are also relative, making the dynamics of the discussion complex and ever changing. For example, Athens (my periphery in relation to central Europe) is a centre in relation to a festival in the Cyclades, or Palermo is a periphery in relation to a festival in Rome.

For me, the danger in terms of curating is in trying to make peripheral practices come into the centre. The aim should be to keep them peripheral, local, but with a wider influence that hijacks the centre, so that there never is a 'stable' centre but it is constantly co-formulated and co-shaped by peripheral visions and strategies. That is, we need a co-curation between centre and periphery that will undo this power/knowledge relation and will bring forth locality and specificity, with respect and inclusivity towards the differences within and between the communities that all go under the name of Europe. •





# Local in Limerick

**Greta Pieropan**
6 April 2023

## Local works pair up with international ones at Limerick's What Next festival

Limerick, Ireland

This year, Ireland's Dance Limerick simultaneously presented the sixth edition of their What Next Festival and hosted a European Dancehouse Network Atelier on 'peripheral practices' (see pp. 142–145). Though different in focus and format, the two had much in common: while the Atelier reflected on the dynamics of curation and collaboration between peripheries and centres, localities and mobilities, the festival presented a programme that brought together international and local artists, newer with more experienced, younger with older.

That idea was well framed by *Francis Footwork* on opening night, a VR performance for children by CoisCéim company director David Bolger, and Òwe on closing night, an 'emotional resurrection of a personal and ancestral past' by Nigerian-born Irish artist Mufutau Yusuf.

Between those performances were two evenings that staged new international choreography – Courtney May Robertson's *The pleasure of stepping of a horse when it's moving at full speed*, and Alexandre Fandard's *Comme un symbole* (in the event, unfortunately cancelled) – alongside short creations by local artists. This kind of double programming levers an international presence to give exposure to local creations – and in that spirit, I will look not at the visiting works, but at the local ones.

> The cynical, almost resigned irony of a generation that finds its practice of resistance in humour

*Multitudes: Future Nostalgia*, by young Irish dancer and choreographer **Ali Clarke**, explores the space of the kitchen – an inspiration that is clear right from the beginning, with the performer sitting at a table with a decorated cake in front of her. As she stares at the colourful frosting, she starts to tell a story, constantly interrupting herself, adding broken anecdotes that suggest a relationship in which the love language is food. The words match the dance: as she gets up from the chair, the movements are small, hinted at, and stifled before they can develop into anything bigger. The stops and glimpses of movement seem to mirror the interruptions of the opening stories: maybe responding to some need for privacy. As she sits back down and dips her finger in the cake, we know that she's probably taking a brave step, but in what direction remains unknown.

Limerick-based dancer and choreographer **Rachel Sheil** questions individuality in *What to Say*. She hits the stage to the sound of the 20th Century Fox Fanfare (known to cinemagoers the world over), its pomposity puncturedby the 'fake it till you make it' smile on her face. A funny awkward fight between performer and music continues throughout the piece. Stealing techniques and steps from different styles, from the most contemporary clichés to hip hop echoes and ballet positions, she tries to find a space of silence for her to hold and finally talk. But she's constantly interrupted by new jingles and light-hearted music that pulls her back to the pleasant and pleasing funny side. In this world of pop references, Sheil seems to have found an artistic signature to dig into: subtle melancholia invading the space of laughter, a lack of space viewed with the cynical, almost resigned irony of a generation that finds its practice of resistance in humour.

*Slant* by **Mary Nunan** playfully digs into the archive of a research that aims to create 'something that is also a no-thing, but not nothing'. Nunan walks, bends, jumps, slides across the stage, explaining that she is 'avoiding circles and spirals' – indeed she comments throughout on what she is going to do, sometimes as if she was an external narrator. In contrast to the previous pieces, which also dealt with text and music, Nunan's body holds and owns the stage on its own, strong with experience, sharing – but not showing – an archive of researches and performances that, rather than present a catalogue, help build a whole new piece. As she recalls other performances through



movement and words, the audience starts to laugh, as if an inside joke between those who witnessed those moments and the performer linked them across the space.

Two very different moods hit the stage on the second night too. *Spoonful* by young

Left: Roberta Ceginskaite, *Spoonful*
Photo © Roberta Ceginskaite

Right: Rachel Sheil, *What to Say*
Photo © Simon Alleyne

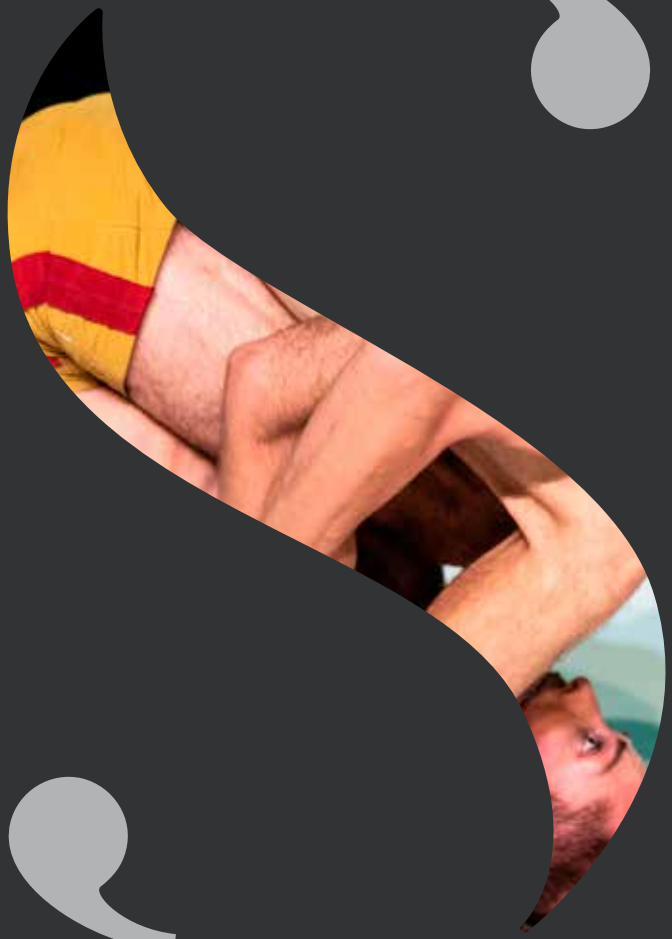
Lithuanian-born Galway-based **Roberta Ceginskaite** starts from a very simple image from childhood: Mary Poppins' Spoonful of Sugar, a song she hums on stage, inviting the audience to join. And yet her work is anything but simple. She duets with a spoon, exploring all the possibilities, limitations and creative ideas that could arise from the interaction with a mundane item turned stage prop. The piece is an absurd yet practical investigation of power dynamics, in which the Disney-like dream of an animate object becomes softly nightmarish, with a spoonful of playfulness.

*Queer Sanctuary* is another duet, this time between performers **Isabella Oberlander** and **Fearghus Ó Conchuír**. A celebration, or maybe a ritual that – like every ritualistic practice – moves through different states of being, it is held together by a dance of wide open movements, mellow floorwork, uplifting embraces and intimate distances. The two performers invite us to be active witnesses right from the beginning, asking people to hold a chain of pearls, that will later appear on stage, contribute to the soundscape and the use of the space, like a shapeless rosary that matches whoever is taking care of it. With lighting first bright, then dark, then pink, the two dancers jump, meet, draw circles, and move on stage in black weightless short gowns that make them look like fairies from a Shakespearean world: strong and fierce, but inviting and playful. Offering us pearls, but keeping us slightly outside their secret world of struggles and joy, they tempt the audience with the attractive danger of the freedom to be oneself. •



Isabella Oberlander &
Fearghus Ó Conchuír
*Queer Sanctuary*
Photo © Nigel Enright

# ABOUT



# Contributors

## Direction

**Sanjoy Roy** UK
Editing / layout
Formerly a publication editor and designer at Dance Books, Sanjoy has written on dance for the *Guardian* since 2002, and contributed to many other publications internationally. His writing archive is at sanjoyroy.net.

**Oonagh Duckworth** BE
Springback Academy
Oonagh is director of Springback Academy. She also manages different cultural initiatives – artistic, sociocultural, participatory, performance, writing and dance orientated – from her own organisation, The Tinderbox, based in Brussels.

Springback is a project of Aerowaves Europe

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## Contributors

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Bas is a freelance writer based between Belgium and the Netherlands. He writes about culture and contemporary art and dance, is an editor at *HART* magazine, and publishes fiction.

**Evgeny Borisenko** DE
Evgeny is a Russian / French arts and dance writer and dramaturg. He was a freelance reporter for the Russian «Театр.» theatre magazine and numerous French online resources. He also wrote about the Berlin dance scene for Tanzschreiber Berlin.

**Karina Buckley** IE
Karina studied ballet and biochemistry before moving into broadcasting and later studying dance. She is co-founder of Climate Without Borders, promoting climate action through storytelling. She has written about dance for Ireland's national public service media and for the Irish edition of *The Sunday Times*.

**Inês Carvalho** UK
Inês is a Portuguese dance communications specialist in the areas of marketing, press and dance writing. She collaborates with the magazines *Dance Art Journal* (UK) and *Gerador* (PT). She also works as a press officer at English National Ballet and co-directs the creative agency diagonal dance.

**Plamen Harmandjiev** AT / BG
Plamen is a freelance theatre and dance writer contributing to various publications in Bulgaria. He is curator and dramaturg for the 2023 edition of the Slavi Shkarov competition for young theatre directors at Sava Ognianov Theatre in Ruse.

**Georgia Howlett** UK
Georgia is a dancer and writer based in the UK. She has performed contemporary and classical stage works by international choreographers, as well as works for television. Alongside Springback, she has contributed to *The Upcoming* and *nb. magazine*, and also writes creative prose.

**Hang Huang** FR
Ever since he saw Wim Wenders' film *Pina*, Hang has watched numerous dance performance internationally. He started his blog dancevisa.com in 2018. With a marketing background, he volunteers for the French non-profit Mécènes DanseAujourdhui and gives advice to dance-related artists. His dream is to become a true dance marketer engaging people around the world to love and support dance.

**Kosta Karakashyan** BG
Kosta is a film director and choreographer, and artistic director of multidiscplinary dance company Karakashyan & Artists. His films and live immersive works have been presented by Columbia Ballet Collaborative, Ballet Arabesque, Cosmos Restaurant and the Gabrovo Biennial of Humour and Satire. His work has been featured by the *Guardian*, *ELLE*, *them*, *GLAAD* and Radio Free Europe.

**Anastasio Koukoutas** GR
Anastasio is an independent dance writer, working also as a dramaturg for theatre/dance performances..

**Anna Kozonina** FI
Originally from St Petersburg and currently based in Helsinki, Anna is a dance critic, researcher and curator, and has written a book on the Russian contemporary dance scene, focusing on emerging dance artists and multidisciplinary projects. She lectures on dance and performance theory, curates educational programmes and writes about dance for several art magazines.

**Stella Mastorosteriou** GR
Stella is a dance artist and dance educator, with a background in architecture. In 2012 she co-created KINOYME dance studio in Thessaloniki, where she teaches and choreographs for children and adults.

**Emily May** DE
Emily is a British arts writer based in Berlin. She contributes to international publications including *ArtReview*, *The Stage*, *Dance Magazine*, *The TLS*, and *Frieze*. She produces and hosts the Terpsichore Podcast, interviewing leading women in dance. Emily also leads editorial projects at the music discovery channel COLORSxSTUDIOS.

**Lena Megyeri** HU
Lena is a freelance dance writer and cultural manager based between Budapest, Hungary and Vienna, Austria.

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Ariadne is a Greek-born dance artist-researcher with a background in performance and architecture. Alongside her creative practice, she collaborates with artists, festivals and academic institutions in research and documentation. She has written interviews, reviews and contributions to journals and books exploring expanded choreographic practices.

**Róisín O'Brien** UK
Róisín is an independent dance journalist, choreographer and producer. She writes for UK and international publications and has produced DanceLive festivals with Citymoves Dance Agency and the visual theatre festival MANIPULATE with Puppet Animation Scotland. In 2021–22, she was an associate L20 artist with the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh.

**Betina Panagiotara** GR
Betina is a dance theorist and dramaturg. She teaches history of dance, and organises educational seminars. Her interests centre on the dramaturgy, history and politics of contemporary dance and performance.

**Greta Pieropan** IT
Greta has a background in Modern Philology and Literature Studies, with a focus on journalism and performing arts. She works with festivals and companies to communicate dance to professional and non-professional audiences. Her research includes dance dramaturgy for creative processes, exchanges between artists and audiences, and new narratives for contemporary dance.

**Sedera Ranaivoarinosy** FR
Sedera is a freelance writer, journalist and translator. After studying journalism in New York she worked in philanthropy and social economy before turning to freelance writing in French and English. Her work amplifes initiatives that foster change. She is a board member of La Fabrique de la Danse, an artistic incubator for the dance sector in France.

**Jordi Ribot Thunnissen** NL
Born in the Netherlands and raised in Catalonia, Jordi studied journalism and choreography. He teaches dance theory, history and dramaturgy in Arnhem, Amsterdam and Tilburg. As a freelance content curator and lecturer, he collaborates with cultural agents across Europe. As a critic, he also contributes to Theaterkant.nl.

**Jonas Schildermans** TW
Jonas is a Belgian dance writer, curator and producer, with an education in art history. He is working with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui on a retrospective publication, and is development officer at his company Eastman. Simultaneously, he is international representative at CHOU Tung-Yen's Very Theatre in Taipei, where he moved in 2021.

**Annette van Zwoll** DE
Annette is an independent dance dramaturge, programmer and project developer, committed to offering alternatives to the status quo. She is co-initiator and curator of What You See Festival (NL) and artistic associate of Bitter Sweet Dance.

**Yasen Vasilev** BG / BE
Yasen studied at the theatre academies of Sofia and Shanghai, and works as a dance dramaturg and critic. He develops his artistic practice through workshops and performances internationally. His work IMPOSSIBLE ACTIONS received the dance award of Sofia City Hall (2021) and the audience award at IKAR 2022. He recently co-authored 'A Letter for transnational fair practice' in the frame A Fair New Idea (Kunstenpunt, BE).

**Lydia Wharf** UK
Lydia has a long relationship with dance, initially as a performer with Michael Clark Company, then as a writer, advocate and, currently, freelance producer. She works with a wide range of independent artists, particularly those facing intersectional barriers to access, supporting the development and distribution of new dance theatre work internationally.

advancing european dance

# Springback is...

## Where

We operate from the field of contemporary dance in Europe, especially its independent arts sector working through cross-border exchanges.

## What

As contemporary dance evolves and traditional media decline, we cultivate dance discourse, communication and commentary that is thoughtful in principle, vivid in presentation, accessible in practice and independent in spirit.

## Why

We believe that critical and communicative dance discourses are beneficial to dance as a whole. That these discourses should be lively, open and pleasurable rather than academic, laborious or insular. And that criticism, contemplation and creativity work better together than apart.

## How

### Springback AAA

Participants enter and can move through Springback along a 'triple-A' pathway:

**Academy** *the gateway*

A short, intensive and mentored review-writing programme that runs alongside Aerowaves' annual Spring Forward festival.

**Assembly** & **Magazine** *the route*

Participants have the possibility to follow through from the Academy by attending an annual Assembly, which hosts live encounters between the writers and a local festival; and by contributing to this Magazine.

**Alliance** *the field*

A flexible network formed by the Springback participants, acting as a field of skills, knowledge and co-operation open to projects, commissions and partnerships.

# What is Springback?

Springback is an evolving project of Aerowaves Europe.

While Aerowaves supports emerging contemporary dance artists through international networking, Springback operates in parallel – not to promote those artists directly, but to enhance the wider dance culture which Aerowaves inhabits, through writing, thinking, framing, reflecting and communicating.

The project began in 2015 with Springback **Academy**, a mentored review-writing programme that takes place at Aerowaves' annual Spring Forward festival.

In response to Academy participants' interests there arose two further initiatives: a yearly **Assembly** that hosts live encounters between the writers and a local festival; and an edited, free-to-access online **Magazine**, launched in 2018 to publish year-round writing on contemporary dance by the Springback network.

This printed **Annual** gathers the Magazine into book form, representing a yearly collage of views, reviews and reflections on a European contemporary dance scene.

At heart, Springback believes that it is worth cultivating critical and communicative dance writing as old media die out. That this can be lively, open, accessible and pleasurable. That criticism, contemplation and creativity work better together than apart.

springbackmagazine.com