

**TANZ IM AUGUST – INTERNATIONALES TANZFEST BERLIN**  
**AUG. 17 – SEPT. 1, 2007**

**Susanne Foellmer speaks with Ulrike Becker, Bettina Masuch, and André Thériault**

*The program for this year's festival is quite diverse, but one trend does seem to stand out: There appears to be an increased interest among choreographers of different generations – such as Jean-Claude Gallotta and Olga Pona, for example – in emphasizing movement.*

U.B.: Jean-Claude Gallotta's piece DES GENS QUI DANSENT is about dance, plain and simple, and at the same time it's great theater. Gallotta comes from the tradition of dance theater, but he also draws on other influences, such as the work of Merce Cunningham. He belongs to the pioneering generation of choreographers who redefined contemporary dance in France during the early 1980s. In DES GENS QUI DANSENT he assembles dancers of different ages on stage, with the oldest ones being around sixty. The piece is about personal histories and relationships, and when seeing it you inevitably notice the different qualities of younger and older performers' movements – and it's absolutely fascinating! Gallotta's approach is choreography in a literal sense: inscribing movement into three-dimensional space.

A.T.: Artists like Jean-Claude Gallotta set the course for many developments in contemporary dance. Yet, though acclaimed all over the world, they haven't received much attention in Germany in recent years because there was more interest in other aesthetic approaches. And yet it is precisely these choreographers who are now entering into a dialogue with younger creators of dance – and have succeeded in staying true to themselves while also keeping their art fresh and topical.

*Olga Pona's piece is about the anxieties, hopes, and dreams of young people in the Soviet Union. Its highly narrative style seems quite different to me from the aesthetic we've seen in the festival in recent years.*

A.T.: Both Olga Pona and Saša Asentic specifically define their work in opposition to the western dance aesthetic. Olga's frame of reference is the Soviet Union in the 1960s and '70s, when the country's citizens had little contact with tourists from the West. Saša, on the other hand, assertively challenges the marginalization and exclusion of Eastern European art from the definition of what is "contemporary" and Western cultural imperialist claims that it is derivative.

*Pona herself has said that she isn't concerned if her style is considered outdated in a western context.*

B.M.: If you look at the festival program as a whole, you'll see very different ways of working with movement – alongside narrative approaches, there are others that deal with music and movement in a very formal way, as in the work of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Yvonne Rainer, and Xavier Le Roy. The latter two have discovered music as a source of creating movement. The question is – does the movement generate the music or vice versa?

A.T.: And both works are inspired by Igor Stravinsky's SACRE DU PRINTEMPS.

*That is indeed interesting. SACRE DU PRINTEMPS always seems to appear on the scene when a paradigm shift in the aesthetics of dance is imminent. Just think of Pina Bausch in 1973 and Jérôme Bel in 1995.*

U.B.: That goes back to the festival in 2005. Even then we saw that certain experiments had apparently reached a dead end. And, after all, SACRE DU PRINTEMPS has always been a revolutionary work, right from its premiere in 1913. Who knows, maybe it is again the harbinger of a shift, this time towards a new joy in pure movement.

B.M.: That goes hand in hand with the question of the classical dance tradition: LaLaLa Human Steps and Sarah Michelson use the narratives and forms of classical ballet as a reference point and view them with a contemporary eye.

U.B.: We've been seeing a growing interest among younger choreographers in tapping into the history of dance. I see that as an indication of an increased self-confidence – they can refer to tradition without feeling compelled to distance themselves from it.

A.T.: Yes, for example Jérôme Bel and Véronique Doisneau approached the subject sociologically, from the angle of content two years ago.

B.M.: Sarah Michelson explores what the movements of classical ballet can express in a contemporary setting and looks at the ambivalent reactions produced by idealized physical beauty and virtuosity. You see that in the costumes, for example. She has a performer wear, a typical Martha Graham dress, but the vocabulary is not typical of Modern Dance at all. The effect is unsettling and plays with our expectations of what a performance should be.

*There's quite a strong "Berlin presence" this year...*

AT: Yes, we're showing more Berlin-based artists at TANZ IM AUGUST this year than ever before. That's our response to the current artistic and political dynamics that have emerged in the city with regard to dance. There is a greater awareness of dance, and recently more Berlin-based choreographers have approached us about showing and supporting their work. That's one of the reasons we decided to co-finance two productions this year – the pieces by matanicola and Xavier Le Roy – because, despite the recent attention dance has received, funding that would enable choreographers to develop their work is still sorely lacking. And now that the focus on dance has become so strong, adequate funding is especially important for artists so that they can live up to the increased expectations and produce the kind of interesting, pioneering work that Berlin has become known for.

*This year is the first time you've invited an existing program – Lucky Trimmer, which is a regular feature at Tacheles.*

A.T.: We're showing a number of open formats this year. Uwe Kästner and the Lucky Trimmer team approached us with the idea of incorporating performances marking their tenth anniversary into this year's festival program. We liked the idea and took them up on the suggestion. Lucky Trimmer in Berlin is modeled on the Danceoff!

series in New York, and we're showing five pieces from each of the two cities. We observe the dance scene in Berlin closely, and we feel it's very important to reflect local developments in the festival. The BREAST PIECE by Alice Chauchat and Frédéric Gies is a good example. Both choreographers are members of *praticable*, a "research group" devoted to exploring different bodywork techniques as a source of movement material. The format of *praticable* is unique insofar as even we didn't know until quite recently which of the members would be showing their work during the first half of the evening. Part of the idea behind the project is to show a work-in-progress alongside a finished piece.

B.M.: Xavier Le Roy's ex.e.r.ce project in Montpellier is similarly open in character. His students will have an opportunity to show their work here in Berlin during the festival. At the same time, they will work together with students from the Cooperative Dance Education Center (CDEC), who in turn are collaborating with other artists from Berlin.

U.B.: One can definitely feel the presence of new approaches in training dancers and choreographers. Nowadays they are learning to assert themselves and negotiate their position at festivals such as ours earlier in their careers. We developed our workshop program accordingly, in cooperation with the CDEC, with the goal of providing the greatest possible number of different forums for artistic exchange.

*That sounds like you plan to expand on the intermediary role that has emerged in the festival in the past couple of years.*

U.B.: This year we've again included what you might call "audience coaching" in the program, in the form of the BACKSTAGE project. It's aimed specifically at young people who are interested in contemporary dance, but who sometimes find it a bit inaccessible. There will be an introduction before four selected pieces – by Jean-Claude Gallotta, Gisèle Vienne, Olga Pona, and matanicola – and afterwards the audience will have an opportunity to talk to the choreographers.

B.M.: And naturally we're hoping for lots of dance groupies, just like backstage at a rock concert. No, seriously, what it's really about is initiating a dialogue between the artists and a younger audience.

*Let's return to what you said before for a moment. Are there any unifying themes in regard to content?*

U.B.: Issues of personal history and identity are a theme that unites a lot of the work we're showing this year, such as the pieces by Michael Laub, Jean-Claude Gallotta, and Eszter Salamon.

B.M.: Eszter Salamon, for example, built her piece around women who have the same name as she does in an attempt to determine the impact of name, cultural background, and gender in shaping our identity. Michael Laub explores similar issues by inviting different people to tell us about their lives.

A.T.: In the Berlin version of his PORTRAIT SERIES, Michael Laub works with both professional and non-professional performers. The portrait idea is also central to the exhibition of Peggy Jarrell Kaplan's photographic work. Kaplan has been portraying

prominent members of the international dance scene since the early 1980s, so we'll also be seeing a number of choreographers who have shown their work at the festival over the years.

*Another focus in this year's program, albeit a less prominent one, is on work from Germany's neighbor France.*

A.T.: Yes. For example, there's Gisèle Vienne from Grenoble, who trained as a puppet-maker. Her piece *KINDERTOTENLIEDER* is unusual in uniting five live performers, eight puppets, and two live musicians on stage. The puppets are life-size and resemble girls and boys of about sixteen. The whole atmosphere of the piece is very dark: Ancient Austrian rituals – in the form of "Perchten," figures who, according to tradition, drive out mountain ghosts – meet the contemporary "Goth" aesthetic in a work about disturbing teenage fantasies, love, death and despair.

U.B.: The musicians performing live on stage make the piece even more intense. A similar constellation features in Meg Stuart and Philipp Gehmacher's production *MAYBE FOREVER* – an amazing duo in which they both push themselves to their limits – where Belgian musician Niko Hafkenscheid performs his songs live.

A.T.: Vincent Dupont comes from a theater background, and in *HAUTS CRIS* he creates a choreography from the interplay of everyday movements, objects on stage, light, and sound. The claustrophobia-inducing stage set consists of a dining room whose scale has been reduced by about one-third.

*As it has in the past, the festival this year encourages the audience to get involved. The sommer.bar invites festival-goers to chill out and talk; Lindy Annis's *ARCADIA* turns spectators into active participants.*

U.B.: Lindy Annis's project is an interactive installation based on the video game "Dance Dance Revolution." After entering a white tent where dance steps are projected onto a wall, the viewers – or rather, participants – attempt to emulate the movements themselves. *ARCADIA* will be set up in Podewils'sches Palais for *Lange Nacht der Museen*, and the same venue will serve as the location for the sommer.bar, for which Kerstin Schroth provided the concept.

*The sommer.bar was very popular last year. Will we see any changes this summer?*

Kerstin Schroth: The concept hasn't changed insofar as sommer.bar seeks to provide a platform for artists participating in the festival, where they can experiment and present another side of their talent. In addition, there will be a number of projects that have evolved since last year, such as *BY-PRODUCT PARASITE* (2), in which Manon Santkin and Leslie Mannès perform spontaneously in various situations throughout the festival. I was surprised by how many companies suggested concerts this year. There will be performances by Eszter Salamon, Paul Gazzola, Vincent Dupont, Peter Lenaerts and members of Gisèle Vienne's company, among others. The program also includes films and an exhibition on dancers and the challenge of establishing and maintaining meaningful personal relationships with their itinerant lifestyle.

This is the first time the sommer.bar is inviting artists to do a residency: Jefta van Dinther and Mette Ingvartsen. They will conduct the week-long rehearsals for their

JUMP DUO in the courtyard of Podewils'sches Palais. Anyone who is interested is welcome to come by and watch. And of course, festival-goers can just drop in at the sommer.bar and have a drink or a bite to eat – or unwind with the help of a professional massage.

*I guess we've said all there is to say – except maybe that the sommer.bar is open daily from 11 a.m. (open end) and that we can all look forward to a diverse and exciting festival. If the last years are anything to go by, I'm sure there are plenty of controversial debates and surprises in store for us. Thank you very much for your time.*

Berlin, June 2007