

TanzWerkstatt Berlin

Interview with Ulrike Becker and André Thériault

Superamas, a company new to Berlin, will be starting off Tanzfest this year with a program including seven works that could be described as belonging to the areas of video, light design, and installation. What is a group with that spectrum doing at a dance festival?

A.T.: Superamas is made up of four guys with completely artistic backgrounds - theater, design, film – actually, only one of them comes from dance originally. Besides their very sophisticated use of sound, video and light, the thing that stands out about their work is how they incorporate montage and framing techniques from film into a performance situation. The program takes the viewers along on a tour of several staged spaces at Podewil and ends up at the studio stage at Dock 11. We have shown work from artists who similarly resist categorization at Tanzfest before, and I believe Tanzfest is a suitable forum for such work. After all, contemporary dance is no longer only about inventing new kinds of movement, but rather about honing or playing with an audience's perceptions, working with images and fantasies from the world of advertising we live in. That the viewers will keep moving during the evening is part of this concept.

One of the highlight's of this year's festival is the guest performance by the John Jasperse Company from New York, who will be presenting their new piece, Giant Empty, at the Schaubühne.

U.B.: Jasperse is a highly interesting individual because he has remained an independent artist despite his considerable success. He works in the tradition of Trisha Brown, and in the U.S. he performs at the same festivals as Brown and Merce Cunningham. His work is produced by the Brooklyn Academy of Music and supported by William Forsythe in Frankfurt. He developed *Giant Empty* with his own company during his residency in Frankfurt. Forsythe is very committed to Jasperse's work; not only did he ask him to create a choreography for the Frankfurt Ballet, he commissioned the Jasperse Company to come up with their own piece to show in Frankfurt.

The New York magazine, TimeOut, has called Jasperse a "postmodern wizard." What is that hinting at?

U.B.: It's definitely an expression of high esteem. Maybe it refers to Jasperse's unusual talent for taking formalism in movement to an extreme without making sacrifices in terms of content. Though the piece is called *Giant Empty*, it's anything but empty. Jasperse manages the feat of wowing the viewers with formal stringency and at the same time moving them emotionally. In that respect, he really is a wizard.

This year Tanzfest will be featuring three productions from Africa. How do they fit into the festival?

U.B.: We are presenting work by young artists engaged in an exchange with European culture while remaining committed to the aesthetic and themes of their own countries. Their work does not cater to the European audience; rather, they aim to mediate between cultures and address the topic of disparate lifestyles coming into contact with each other.

What does that mean?

U.B.: The theme of different cultures is particularly evident in the work of Faustin Linyekula from the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country currently in the news almost daily due to the civil war raging there. In *Triptyque Sans Titre*, Linyekula shows how his country's turbulent history has shaped the attitudes and lives of young people today. Faustin spent a considerable time training and working in Vienna and Paris before returning home to work and open a center for the arts in Kinshasa. Taking these experiences as a stimulus and working with French musician Joachim Montessuis, Linyekula has created a piece that gives us a sense of the tensions that exist between tradition and modern urban life in Kinshasa.

Can the theme of authenticity be found in the other two African pieces, as well?

U.B.: *Duas sem Três*, a duo by Raiz di Polon, a group from the Cape Verde Islands, does not exhibit any European influences. The piece develops its own fascinating vocabulary of rhythm, movement, and singing. That a duo consisting of two women has created a work on their own, that it was not created by the group's (male) head choreographer, is interesting in light of the fact that, in this nation of emigrants, women have taken on the main responsibility for maintaining traditions and culture. It is the imagination of these women that dominates the stage in *Duas sem Três* ('Two without Three').

Compagnie Gàara's production, Dilo, sounds fascinating, as well. I read that Opiyo Okach will be improvising and the choreography will change with the time, place, and audience. Is the piece an experiment with the Berlin audience?

U.B.: No, it simply means that improvisations, even if they are structured, are always influenced by the special circumstances of a particular evening. I'd like to mention that Opiyo Okach, who is from Kenya, will be taking part in the project *Le Vif du Sujet* in Avignon this year, for which he has asked British choreographer Julyen Hamilton, another master of improvisation, to create a solo for him.

The two pieces you last mentioned are part of the new Nite Flite series with four late programs, which promises some unusual formats. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

A.T.: Vera Mantero for example won't be dancing, she'll be singing, with which she already delighted Tanzfest audiences in 2001. Juan Domínguez will be showing a text piece, in the literal sense of the word, and theoretician and critic Mårten Spångberg will be demonstrating his views on the production, reproduction, and appropriation of artistic material using his own body, by reconstructing an improvised solo by Steve Paxton from the late 1980's, among other things.

This year's Tanzfest features Bruno Beltrão, a new discovery from the young Brazilian dance scene whose work has been praised by Jérôme Bel as truly contemporary dance.

A.T.: Bruno Beltrão works with hip hop and breakdance; however, it isn't like the hip hop you see from New York, France, or Germany. Beltrão isn't interested in displaying skill, or "moves." His work is about identity, stage presence, and perceptions, themes not unlike those explored by Jérôme Bel. After Beltrão said goodbye to conventional breakdance and breakbeats ("James Brown is dead") in his first piece, *Too Legit to Quit*, he choreographed a breakdance duo without

music, i.e., without beats – a revolution. In his solo, *Me and My Choreographer in 63*, the voice of the performer – his wonderful dancer Eduardo Hermanson – serves as a soundtrack that determines the beat, rather than as a conventional rapper's voice. A recording of a conversation between Beltrão and Hermanson demonstrates impressively how the dancer's language and mental leaps correspond to a rap rhythm. To highlight the logical development of Beltrão's work, we will show the pieces in chronological order.

Zwischenrufe will be a part of the festival again. What will be featured this year?

A.T.: New York dance theoretician, André Lepecki, has invited two Brazilian colleagues with whom he will reflect on dance, theater, and politics in a kind of performance discussion.

In addition, the series will feature short first works by two young artists, Astrid Endruweit and Mette Ingvarsen.

Another special feature of the festival is the research group, led by Jérôme Bel, in which forty performers and non-performers deal with the problem of creating and conveying artistic material.

A.T.: For one week, Jérôme Bel will work with twenty members of his company and twenty guests in a non-goal-oriented manner. The project is a preparation for his next production, which will be completed in 2004 and shown in Berlin. We are supporting the production by providing the means and financing for this research phase. There will be four research phases in all (Rio de Janeiro, Paris, Sheffield, and Berlin). The twenty guests will be chosen together with Jérôme Bel from the over 120 (!) applications we received.

The last festival weekend at Podewil sounds exciting. What will you be showing?

U.B: Three short pieces in which music and voice play a prominent part. Before Vera Mantero gives her concert with Pedro Pinto, Thomas Hauert, formerly a dancer with Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker, will be showing his newest solo. In this piece, sound- and light design, dynamic movement, and singing complement one another: singing as movement.

A composition by Morton Feldman serves as the basis for the piece by Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion, *Both Sitting Duet*. Although, or one could even say *because* the choreography is silent, it revolves around the theme of music.