

# LIBERATION FROM THE BONDS

*Even in Ballet the Post-Modern won't let itself be denied. Hartmut Regitz sketches examples of the esthetic turn of events in classical dance.*

No ordinary Ballet premiere. When William Forsythe calls to a world premiere in Frankfurt, one must, to begin with, even as an onlooker, let one's self in for an adventure. For nothing appears as one normally expects it of a performance: in his presentations of-ten enough, the dancers can't keep

their mouths closed; the music is artificially produced by an emulator; and the stage set, just like the lighting, possesses in this context a meaning that characterizes the little word *decor* as all too incomplete. *A Possible Scene of A Crime: Ballet*, as Thomas Wördehoff pointedly captioned a production re-



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port in 1983 about Forsythe's earlier Frankfurt *Gänge*, looks from the beginning on simply *other* than a traditional dance piece. But even that is only thinkable, now as before, there where it always took place. In the theatre.

*Limb's Theorem*, the title of the latest Forsythe creation, is just one example, but as a case-study thoroughly symptomatic – not alone because dance is examined here in terms of its current expressive power, but because

the Frankfurt Ballet Director utilizes a technique that has a history. Forsythe obviously completely accepts Ballet in its conditional being. Nevertheless he liberates it at the same time from its esthetic bonds. He is not concerned with a classical line, nor with the pretty appearance of someone who triumphs over their own gravity. Rather, having internalized the theories of Rudolf von Laban, he opens a space for his art which he can fill with a new

dynamic. That the basic material of his movements works broken, like a puzzle put together in a manner passing to the times, explains his standpoint: even Ballet can no longer deny the post-modern.

Forsythe has so far consistently gone his own way. Academically educated in New York, he had already developed an aptitude at the Stuttgart Ballet, of which he first became conscious under the impressions of Pina Bausch: as one among many possibilities. Influences of the Wuppertal Tanztheater can be found in Forsythe's oeuvre (*Dream of Galileo*, *Orpheus*) even in his Stuttgart time. But, at the latest with his *Gänge* (and its consequent confrontation with the choreographies of George Balanchine) he claimed a field of action in Ballet requiring the production conditions of established theatre, even when it places them in question. His dance, as new as it defines itself, formulates itself simultaneously as a part of a century-long tradition.



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Other choreographers were more radical than he at the beginning. Johann Kresnik, long decried as an enfant terrible, wanted, for example, no longer to bend himself to the dictatorial command of ballet at the end of the Sixties and, first in Bremen, then in Heidelberg, finally again in Bremen, sought for a new context of meaning for his time-art. The choreographic theater, as he formulated it in pieces like *War Instructions for Everyone* or, latest, *Ulrike Meinhof*, makes a tabula rasa of the handed-down tradition. It mirrors the political and social facts of our time and helps itself, seemingly without scruples, to this movement material, which in a certain sense comes from the street: that is to say, daily gestures, social behavior patterns, a cross-section of dance rudiments through all categories. Crucial is, that they are useful for his theme and create a fomenting atmosphere which animates the audience to thought.



TANZPROJEKT MÜNCHEN *Stella*  
Foto: Michael Hörnschemeyer

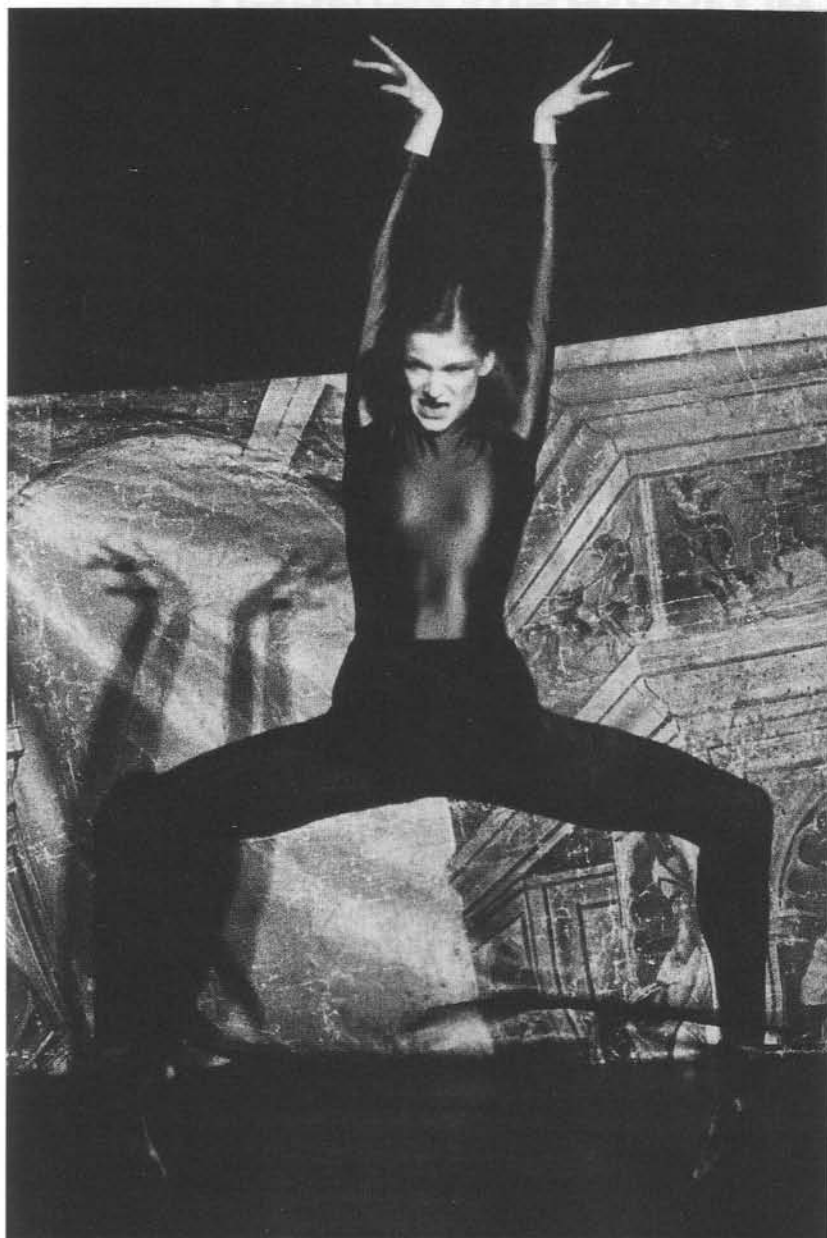
Kresnik was not the only one. Not lastly through their exchange of experiences at the annual international Summer Academy of Dance in Cologne, a few younger ballet soloists on state stages felt themselves encouraged to put something other than the usual into gear. The Cologne Dance Forum grew with time from their work, which was at first presented in choreographic workshops. It was collectively led, at least in the founding years, by Helmut Baumann, Jürg Burth, Jochen Ulrich and Gray Veredon. From 1971 on it tested within its organization innovations which included not only the leadership structure, but also technical renewals through modern dance of American mintage, as well as, like a remembrance, the inheritance which German Ausdruckstanz, embodied by Kurt Jooss, had left behind. A couple of its most important works – *The Green Table* most of all, but also *A Ball in Old Vienna*, *Metropolis* or *Parvane* – were reactivated in the program.



JOHANN KRESNIK Foto: Jörg Landsberg



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Prophetic words, which have been proved in the meantime by reality. For of course the choreographers who come from Ballet have learned from the representatives of Dance-Theatre: choreographers like William Forsythe, Rosemund Gilmore (who with her Lacon Group have gathered success even outside the system, but have meanwhile entered a liason with the Bayerische Staatstheater, most likely out of financial considerations); Krisztina Horváth (who absolutely wants to set forth her Freiburg work in Kassel) or Liz King (who gave up the Tanztheater Vienna and with it her freedom, in order to create from full measure in the future with the Heidelberg Ballet). Holding the example of their models in view, they have perhaps even seized the courage, from an esthetic of resistance, to find their own standpoint – outside, in the independent scene. Conversely, the *Independents* have meanwhile recognized that one must not absolutely lose one's identity in making the rounds through the institutions. The experiment of Heidrun Vielhauer and Rotraut de Neve in Bremen has indeed failed for the time being, but Birgitta Trommler, to name only one, is making an attempt in Münster.

Hartmut Regitz

FORSYTHE, IMPRESSING THE CZAR  
Foto: Gert Weigelt

Apropos Jooss. He who, as one knows today, influenced if not revolutionized the German dance scene in an indirect manner, in that he inspired artists like Pina Bausch, Reinhild Hoffmann or Susanne Linke through their education on the Essen Folkwang School, had already gathered his thoughts in 1935, in a scarcely noticed essay about *The Language of Dance-Theatre* (published in *Ballet* 1986) and wished a *harmonic unity* of such apparently opposed means of expression as academic ballet and modern dance.

*Both art styles, he wrote, observed from the standpoint of their special esthetics, are complete. But in that they are one-sided according to their nature, each of the two alone is unusable in the long run for the creation of an all-inclusive Dance-Theatre capable of solving every task. But they form equally the two most extreme poles between which the art of dance swings. And further: Because technique exists for the sake of form, it is conditioned and created through them. Form, however, changes with the changing Zeitgeist, therefore technique must change and renew itself with this spirit of the times.*