

Well-sorted chaos

Sasha Waltz & Guests with "In C" at the Elbphilharmonie

Twelve dancers and three musicians from "The Young Gods" delight Hamburg audiences.

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It is not often that the Konzerthaus an der Elbe receives such a standing ovation, especially when dance is performed here and not - as is usually the case - a major symphonic work. Sasha Waltz and her company achieved this feat on January 7 in the Great Hall of Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie. Together with "The Young Gods" from Switzerland, they got the Hanseatic audience going wild at the final applause: the audience screamed and clapped and stomped for all they were worth. And rightly so. For an hour and a quarter, the twelve dancers had delivered a furious spectacle - highly dynamic and yet characterized by a very unique inner calm.

"In C" is a highly versatile choreography for - in this case - twelve women and men to the music of the same name by Terry Riley (born 1935). He composed this work back in 1964 and it became the initial spark for "minimal music". On just two pages of the score, he provides 53 musical phrases around the note C, which can be used variably by the musicians - resulting in a work with the same basic structure, but always different in its execution. In 2021, Sasha Waltz has also developed 53 choreographic movement sequences analogous to the music, which can be individually created by the dancers, albeit within a specific, predetermined framework. "It's a piece about being part of a group as an individual, not an individual in a group," Sasha Waltz herself is quoted as saying in the program booklet. And so the choreography and music are equally versatile, adapting 'chameleon-like' to the respective circumstances.

The world premiere at the Radialsystem in Berlin could only be streamed due to the coronavirus crisis (see tanznetz from March 7, 2021). Since then, however, Sasha Waltz has been performing the work live - with different musicians in changing, sometimes very special locations: on the roof of the Oslo Opera House, on a shipyard in Rotterdam (together with 50 local dancers and musicians), in front of the altar of Berlin Cathedral, in front of the New National Gallery in Berlin, in the unroofed courtyard of honor at Ludwigsburg Palace, to name just a few. Ursula Kaufmann's photoblog reflects the performance at the Folkwang University as part of the Ruhrfestspiele 2023; in June 2023, the piece was performed with Ukrainian dancers in Kharkiv (see tanznetz from 22.6.2023).

In Hamburg, "The Young Gods" (founded in 1985) took over the musical part for the first time, three not-so-young, excellent musicians from the electro and techno avant-garde: Bernard Trontin (percussion, electronics), Franz Treichler (guitar, sampler, computer, voice) and Cesare Pizzi (computer, sampler), and this electro version with impressive percussion interludes suits the piece exceptionally well.

At the beginning, everyone - including the three musicians - comes together onto the

stage at the back, which is illuminated by red bar lights. For five minutes they walk around - still without music - pausing, moving on as if looking for their place, until the musicians gather behind their instruments and a beat starts, like a metronome. As the light gets brighter, the dancers begin to swing their arms, shrug their shoulders, raise or lower them, stretch or bend their arms and legs, disorderly and yet somehow following an order. The beat is joined by melodic passages from the samplers, the electric guitar or the percussion, and so a well-sorted chaos unfolds on stage over the following 70 minutes, adapted to the rhythm of the music. Seemingly at random, groups of two or more dancers form, imitate each other (or not), take up a movement pattern (or not), let themselves be driven by others (or not), remain in an arabesque (or not), suddenly join together in unison (but only very briefly), only to separate again or unite into several - always guided by or in dialogue with the music, but also in constant dialog with each other.

The rhythms unfold an irresistible magic that literally sucks the audience in and puts them in a trance, some bob their heads, others sway their bodies and hardly a cough escapes the room. The sold-out audience is spellbound as it follows the undulating activity on stage, these fantastic dancers in their clear-colored, simple costumes by Jasmin Lepore with long pants or shorts and loose tops, in the sophisticated lighting design by Olaf Danilsen. The sound swells and ebbs like waves, the dancers come together or scatter like flocks of birds - it is as if you are gliding along on invisible rails until everything comes to a gentle end and floats out into distant, ethereal expanses. After a brief second of amazement, the applause breaks out, unleashing a storm of enthusiasm the likes of which the Elbphilharmonie has rarely experienced. The joy is written all over the faces of everyone involved. A magnificent evening.

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