

Elbphilharmonie: Sasha Waltz & Guests: Danced celebration of democracy
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Hamburg. The dance ensemble spreads out on the stage of the Elbphilharmonie's Great Hall in the dark and begins with minimal movements: a shrug of the shoulders here, a movement of the head there. Three figures dressed in black stand out among the twelve dancers in colorful costumes. They also change direction in their position or immediately take up a new one. The game goes on like this for a while until the three move to the left edge of the stage. Their instruments are already waiting there.

Sasha Waltz & Guests: A danced celebration of democracy in the Elbphilharmonie

Sasha Waltz & Guests have been welcome guests at the concert hall on the Elbe since their "choreographic exploration" of the Elbphilharmonie in 2017, even before the official opening ceremony. The performance "In C" to the minimal music of the same name, written in 1964 by US composer Terry Riley, was only shown at Kampnagel just over a year ago. However, the evening is not a repeat because this time the music trio The Young Gods will be providing the sounds live on stage. The Berlin star choreographer has deliberately designed this dance performance - characterized by its genesis during the pandemic - in such a way that it works in very different spaces. She has already performed open air on the square in front of the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin.

The dance is based on 53 movement figures that each dancer has rehearsed individually and which correlate with the 53 musical phrases of Riley's composition "In C". Both the music and the dance pay homage to the principle of open form. Both the musicians and the dancers can repeat individual phrases and sections of movement at will or enter into a new phrase. Rhythmic shifts and overlapping of neighboring phrases are expressly desired by the composer - as well as by the choreographer. At the same time, there are always constants that enable a gentle, flowing transition. In this way, each performance also has the effect of a new arrangement.

Swiss post-industrial band The Young Gods provide the soundtrack

The viewer does not notice this random principle. The dance and music develop in an astonishingly organic way, intertwining skillfully, repeatedly building to new, ecstatic heights or allowing themselves a brief respite in between with a decelerated episode. The sound, which is normally recorded on tape, sounds rich, full and round here.

The three musicians of the Swiss post-industrial band The Young Gods may not be quite as young as their name suggests, but their sound still sounds very fresh. When they first formed in 1985, their concerts, based on samples and brute walls of sound, were more reminiscent of a powerful electric shock. Today, the three are no longer just rock and electro avant-gardists, they also explore the boundaries of the genre in a dialog with theater, for example with pieces by Kurt Weill or dance. Franz Treichler plays samples and guitar and maintains eye contact with the action on stage. Behind him, Bernard Trontin bangs away on the percussion. While Cesare Pizzi contributes samples from the computer.

Elbphilharmonie: The dance is abstraction in its purest perfection

In this encounter, it is astonishing how well the trio connects with Terry Riley's minimal compositions, sometimes extracting shimmering techno rhythms from them, then layering them with almost Krautrock-like moments of intricacy - and sometimes piling them up into an officially loud wall of sound. With *The Young Gods*, even the lush electronics sound handmade - and they come into their own surprisingly well in the acoustics of the Elbphilharmonie - something that doesn't always work with amplified sounds in this hall. What is missing are the brass sections, but you don't really miss them at all. After all, the composer himself stipulated that the work could be scored for any number of instruments.

The dance is abstraction in its purest form. Sometimes the dancers perform delicate hand gestures, soon they write large arm circles in the air. Sometimes there is a lunge backwards, followed by a jump, sometimes gently dancing step sequences or demanding floor combinations develop. Sometimes distances are bridged while running. The dancers form up in groups of two, three or four, cross over with others, repeat the movement, vary it countless times, striding, gyrating - sometimes even a collision is averted at the last second.

It looks like chaos - but a very orderly chaos. This multi-colored dance tableau, which goes far beyond the pure aestheticism of the well-formed movement of well-trained, expressive bodies, ultimately reminds us that every person is part of a wonderful community.

"In C" can also be understood politically. It is a democratic choreography in the best sense of the word, in which each dancer can dance out their own freedom within the rules and alternate between leading and following. The emphasis is on adhering to the rules. For Sasha Waltz, "In C" is a piece about "being part of a group as an individual, not an individual in the group". Ultimately, it is a celebration of the democratic principle, which, in times when it is increasingly endangered worldwide, has an unbroken appeal.