

LE TEMPS 12 january 2022

In Geneva, three dance solos revive the wars of our grandfathers

ON STAGE

"Genetrix", to be seen at the Galpon, speaks of the weight of heredity through three ancestors with shaken destinies. Delicate and powerful at the same time.

Against a backdrop of destroyed bridges on the Danube, József Trefeli performs a Hungarian folk dance as a tribute to his grandfather ©Elisa Murcia Artengo

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Published on Wednesday 12 January 2022 at 13:50

A South African grandmother who had a whirlwind romance with a German officer. An Andalusian grandfather who experienced the wounds of the Spanish Civil War. Another, Hungarian, who was detained in Russian prisons during the Second World War... At the Galpon in Geneva, Rudi van der Merwe, Susana Panadés Diaz and József Trefeli take turns dancing their heredity riddled by the violence of history. Projected on three sides of a box-shaped stage, images - often archival - from the group RDYSTDY envelop their subject.

Genetrix, a multimedia project, seduces with its powerful yet delicate profile. And that's not all! In Soursweet, a film shown after the interval, the Chinese-Irish dancer Victoria Chiu talks about her Chinese culinary heritage. Based in Australia, the artist was unable to join the project due to the pandemic, but the rendition of her hypnotic work around her hair and peanuts perfectly shows the charge of her origins.

Blanket and routed soldiers

Genetrix is performed in the white room of the Galpon, which is more intimate than the black room that usually hosts the creations. Spectators and dancers come face to face to immerse themselves in these life stories that make you travel. The first part of call is South Africa and its struggle for independence from the British Crown, its defeat, and then its very strong withdrawal into its identity. Rudi van der Merwe knows the sclerotic effect of this resistance, whose influence can be felt in the patriotic songs and a series of period photographs. We see, in large format, his grandmother at various ages of life who, surrounded by her family, seems to carry the weight of a nation as much as that of her rich dresses, with layers and multiple ribbons.

Fabric again with this multicoloured blanket that the dancer, who knits a red square on stage, seems to be asked to extend. Against a backdrop of images of cavalcades, flames and battlefields, Rudi van der Merwe adopts a slow gesture, most often close to the ground, as if it were not the time for lightness. Later, standing with his arms tracing orthogonal arrows, he recalls the martial time of combat. In this beautiful solo, heredity often appears as a burden.

Rudi van der Merwe in front of his grandmother's blanket ©Elisa Murcia Artengo

Andalusian ghosts

Susana Panadés Diaz's performance is more ghostly. While the Andalusian dancer moves around in the dark and without music, the three walls of the stage are lit up by touches, with photos showing the different rooms of the family home. Like a treasure hunt of memories. A dressmaker's dummy accompanies this exploration, testifying to the activity that his grandfather loved, perhaps anxious to patch up his past torn apart by the civil war. Later, to guitar arpeggios, the dancer delivers a flamenco revisited, more angular and minimal than the classical form. In this solo, in which the dance is magnificently mastered, a sense of gravity also dominates.

Susana Panadés Diaz in front of the couture mannequins dear to her Andalusian grandfather ©Elisa Murcia Artengo

Hungarian boots

Everything becomes lighter with Jozsef Trefeli and his Hungarian folk dances, which he has often explored with Gabor Varga. The dancer first sways back and forth, as if hesitating between past and present. Then, wearing traditional boots, he performs typical point-and-heel figures to the sound of an accordion. As the solo progresses, we hear his father talk about his grandfather and learn about his grandfather's harrowing stay in Russian prisons between 1945 and 1946. A distress that the video makers render with a formidable image of an exodus trapped in the snow. On this long, compact and grey human line, a red path is drawn live, an itinerary on which the dancer makes a horse figure walk. The violence of war continues with these images of numerous destroyed bridges whose steel carcasses float in the Danube...

These sensitive solos have the merit of reminding us that in Europe, as elsewhere, our grandparents experienced major upheavals whose legacy we must manage with understanding and gentleness.

Genetrix, Galpon, Geneva, until 16 January.

LA PEPINIÈRE Jardinez votre Culture

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Fabien Imhof

❓ Chiu, danse, Épigénétique, Galpon, Génétique, GENEtrix, Hommage, Origines, Panadés Diaz, Passé, Théâtre, Trefeli, Van der Merwe, Vie

Paying homage, reconnecting with one's heritage, recreating the bond of memory: dance expresses various ways of communicating with one's ancestors. In Genetrix, four solos explore the relationship of a dancer with a grandparent, in an immersive cinema setting. A poetic show to be seen until January 16 at the Galpon.

Genetrix is based on the idea of epigenetics, which postulates that we inherit our ancestors through our bodies, our gestures, our attitudes. These are thus marked by the experiences of the past, allowing us to create a link with our grandparents, but also, in certain cases, to live with ghosts. The grandparents of the four dancers lived in the 30s and 40s, with all the upheavals that the world has known. Each in his or her own way, for about twenty minutes, brings back memories, emotions, the story of a loved one, through a device that mixes dance and projections on the three white screens that surround the stage. A dive into the intimacy of memory.

Gentleness in the face of war

Rudi van der Merwe, a South African dancer who has been based in Switzerland for many years, begins with what is undoubtedly a traditional song of a mother recounting the departure to war and the loss of her sons. His grandmother was in fact enamored with a German soldier visiting South Africa, whom she would never marry. Kneeling in front of a patchwork rug, his gentle and precise gestures contrast with the violence of the story and the war horses moving at high speed on the screens. As if preparing a ritual, he seems to pay homage to his grandmother's origins, before switching to a dance reminiscent of military gestures, supported by archive images. The music then becomes more rhythmic, with the sound of percussion, as if to underline this duality of his origins. A duality that seems to mark him deeply, and even define him to a certain extent.

As in a bullfight

Susana Panadés Diaz then takes us to a small Andalusian village, with a tribute to her orphaned grandfather, whose life was always divided between poetry and war, he who was a soldier but never forgot the melancholy local poet on his donkey. It all begins with an interior that is revealed through the dancer's movements, as if she were inviting us into her intimate space. Then, as a white bull is projected at the back of the room, its movements recall those of the bullfighter, but marked by a fluidity and a softness which contrast with what we are used to. Far from the ordinary jerks, she reminds us of the ambivalence between poetry and war, which marked her grandfather and with which she has to live. A way, perhaps, to underline a form of appeasement after years of trouble. As if she had finally found the inner peace that her grandfather sought, despite the fire that burned in him and that we are also shown. The archival images that close this second solo resonate like an exposure of the memory.

Finding joy after the horror

In József Trefeli's story, everything begins with a voice-over, that of the father telling the son about his youth in Hungary, before his Father went to war. The first part of the solo thus resembles a journey, that of a farmer, fisherman and musician, who was forcibly conscripted into the army and lost almost half his weight. The violence of the images of a half-destroyed Budapest makes a deep impression. But József Trefeli doesn't stop there and instead gives us a message of hope: that of a grandfather whom he didn't know, but who came back to his country of origin to rebuild it, to rebuild himself. The last dance turns out to be more joyful, with the lively Eastern music that accompanies it, the snapping of fingers and the smile that can be seen not only on the dancer's face, but also in his entire body. All is not lost.

Performing to evoke her origins

The fourth solo takes a particular form: Victoria Chiu, an Australian dancer, cannot be in Geneva because of the health situation. It is therefore through a short film in the form of a dance performance that she expresses herself. Through images with strong symbols, she evokes her Chinese heritage. In a moment of intense poetry, she becomes one with two bags of peanuts, which have become her dance partners and whose sound of rubbing on the floor is accentuated by microphones. As if to remind us of the power of the body and its sounds, which seem insignificant to us but are nevertheless an integral part of us and of our history. If the relationship to the origins is less explicit than in the previous solos, the violence is also suggested, as in this moment when everything, from the fish's head to the dancer's braids, is cut off sharply, before returning to a little more softness.

It is therefore difficult to put into words what is told to us with the body and deeply anchored in it. The best thing to do is to attend a performance of Genetrix and let yourself be carried away by the movements, the music, the words, and the images. So many symbols that narrate a past not always easy, through evocations. Where a movement is worth more than a thousand words.

Fabien Imhof - Holder of a master's degree in literature, he is one of the co-founders of La Pépinière. Responsible for partnerships with theaters, he will take you on a journey through the plays and productions of the region's theaters.

Practical information : Genetrix, a dance creation in co-production, from 6 to 16 January 2022 at the Théâtre du Galpon.
Choreography and interpretation: Victoria Chiu, Susana Panadés Diaz, József Trefeli and Rudi van der Merwe