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Ballett Frankfurt

(N.N.N.N); One Flat Thing, reproduced; The Room As It Was

Berkeley, CA, Zellerbach Playhouse
[Cal Performances](#)
June 3 - 5, 2004



The Room As It Was

[Box Programme for a festival celebrating the work of choreographer William Forsythe](#)

[Europe Dancing: Perspectives on Theatre, Dance and Cultural Identity](#)
(2000), Andree Grau, editor



[BODYCOFFEE Energizing Body Bar](#)

William Forsythe's dances for Ballett Frankfurt are romantic in a Marquis de Sade kind of way. Frenetic, pedestrian, athletic, complex, the works bombard with quiriness. His ability to create unique movement (and lots of it) puts him on a par with American modern dance (and fellow American) geniuses like Merce Cunningham and Tricia Brown, who don't just make dances, but invented whole systems of movement. Forsythe creates dances that leave ballet way behind, that dash all expectations, that dig their way towards grace in the most disturbing, energetic, and real ways.

This is the last season for both Forsythe and the company--the city of Frankfurt is cutting off all financial support systems as of August, essentially killing the company, due to "fiscal crisis." Forsythe will leave behind a considerable legacy. He has eliminated nearly every shred of classicism from the company's repertoire in the twenty years of his tenure. The apotheosis of two decades in Frankfurt, in this final tour, looks like both madness and wonder.

Casting is all-important as well--Forsythe also offers performers as narrative. He chooses interesting dancers, people with varying body types, contrasting natures, multi-cultural backgrounds. Any suggestion of theme or message is fleeting, quickly subsumed by actual movement.

Like Cunningham's work, a nearly total lack of "danceable" music lends a sometimes unsettling, sometimes transcendent, sometimes boring tone to the proceedings. With no pulse or musical mood being suggested, the dancers' lungs become the orchestra, their breathing, the music. The stage is miked. There is loud, almost sexual breathing, deliberate sighing, huffing, moaning, gasping. The dancers signal each other with exhalations. It is the choreographer's way of showing the real dance, the sound of the effort, to make audible the work of the body, hearts and lungs on fire, the toll extracted from bodies moving so dizzily fast.

One might long for more order, simplicity. These four works (Forsythe brought two group pieces and two smaller works, all created within the last five years) are anything but orderly. Many phrases end with bodies collapsing onto

the ground. Graceless flailings flow in and out of total sharpness, toe-shoe precision, sharply etched edges carved by arms and legs. The mix leans toward bumbling, or insanity, but recovers itself in moments of stillness, fingers placed just so on an extended arm.



Ritual Dancers Brooch- Central Greece, 1400 B.C.

N.N.N.N. (2002), a male quartet, alluded to the linked-arms of famous dancing cygnets foursome in *Swan Lake*, but only with momentarily crossed arms, and in the use of a line. Otherwise, this was a rapid-fire exercise in existential mime, gymnastics, and slapstick. Dressed in sporty leisure wear, the dancers, Cyril Baldy, Amancio Gonzalez, Georg Reischl and Ander Zabala were each unique. Together, they were molten energy, finally dashing off the stage in four directions, flying into blackout.

One Flat Thing, reproduced featured 20 stainless steel tables, which the dancers slid downstage in an attack-of-the-senses opening, a sudden blast of noise, bright

light and mass movement. A cast of 14 proceeded to create a kinetic world underneath, in between and on top of the tables. The soundscore, at one point, began to resemble the sounds of mortar shells and gunfire. For a moment the dancers, men and women alike, were bodies tossed onto a battlefield, some furious, desperate place. But then, once again, the movement and the sound all changed, and movement took over, no more war, just dance.

The Room As It Was (2002) was the only dance with females en pointe, and yet the shoes merely added extra punctuation to the mix of pedestrian and quirky complexity of Forsythe's movement. Here, Dana Casperson, a blonde in red hot pants, created bizarrely disappointed combinations that possibly no one else could recreate if they tried. Zabala was her dark-haired partner and complemented Casperson's stork-on-the-floor writhing with a persona that was goofy and movement that was loose and weighted. Passing through this dance as a kind of everyman, he looked like the audience may have felt, slightly lost, disoriented, amazed.

June 6, 2004

- [Michael Wade Simpson](#)