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Tanztage: From stripping to heavy metal

BY NATHALIE FRANK JANUARY 5, 2015

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MELANIE JAME WOLF - MIRA FUCHS. PHOTO BY DAMIAN STEPHENS

The 2015 edition of Tanztage, the Sophiensaele's yearly platform of emerging contemporary dance, focuses on crossover artists who use choreography to approach well-known pop-culture phenomena. We met three of this year's performers.

“Stripping is a pretty interactive thing”

Australian Melanie Jame Wolf performs under the label Savage Amusement, working in particular with on-to-one formats. With *Mira Fuchs* (Jan 13-14, 19:00/22:00), she reflects on her eight years of experience as a stripper.

Who is Mira Fuchs?

Mira Fuchs is not a character – she’s more like a persona that I draw on sometimes. Mira the persona was the starting point for making the show, which allowed me to begin looking critically at my experience of working as stripper in a club in Melbourne for eight years. I use it as a lens for people to consider their position on the brilliantly complex phenomenon of dancing for money that is stripping.

How did it feel for you to come back to that world?

When I started rehearsals, I re-entered a way of being physically that was ‘stripping’. The postures, the gestures, the walk, the very specific vocabulary of movement all came back like second nature – kind of habitual and beautifully familiar. I can only describe it as kind of inhabiting another, second version of myself. Like a twin. And I like that twin a lot. But a twin that was work. All of the movement in the show draws directly on that vocabulary of movement – in both direct and more experimental ways. It’s been totally fascinating to work in this way on a performance with something so deeply ingrained in my body memory.

You work a lot with video and interactive formats – do you use those here as well?

I’m kind of in love with working with video at the moment, so yes, definitely there will be video in *Mira*

Fuchs. I like it as a set – what it brings in terms of scale and immersion in images and how it allows you to play with senses of time. I have made a lot of interactive or participation-based work. And stripping is a pretty interactive thing, in one way or another. With interactive performance I always have an ethic of inviting people into participation rather than insisting or antagonising. That’s something that’s really important to me. With *Mira Fuchs*, we’ll see.



ALEXANDER BACZYNSKI-JENKINS - FEELING REAL. PHOTO BY MIKEY WOODBRIDGE

“The dancefloor is a stage and you work it”

Interested in the critical spaces between event, choreography and performance, Alexander Baczynski-Jenkins studied at the HZT Berlin and Goldsmiths University London. In *Feeling Real* (Jan 17-18, 20:30), he deals with a subject very familiar to him: London’s queer club culture.

Why are you interested in queer club culture?

I go out a lot and I find that something special happens on the queer dancefloor – it's a social performance that takes pleasure in and celebrates hybridity, the libidinal and an intervention in the normative. For me, queerness is about staging complexity. A queer gesture and embodiment often takes pop references, mutates them and wears them with quotation marks. And so the nightclub might not be that different to the theatre. The dancefloor is a stage and you work it. There is something about becoming mythic and transforming through undoing normative desire, gaze, image, sensation. The queer club is a time and space for experiencing nomadic embodiments, counter futures and the reality of desire. Basically, queer fierceness. Fierceness is that quality of on-point fabulous edginess.

Who are you working with on this performance?

I'm collaborating with three queens from the East London club scene. All of them are simultaneously artists, club mythic creatures and gender-fucking hosts. Imma Mess has a background in dance, fashion and performance, Ted Rogers has a project called ArtPornBlog, Mikey Woodbridge is a singer-songwriter.

You've used the phrase "counter-future" in reference to queer clubbing – what do you mean by that?

Jack Halberstam writes about the queer club as a place to feel a future that isn't hetero-normative, the queer club is a place in which hybridisation and being alien are celebrated and idealised. Queers channel a counter-future.

“Classical ballet and heavy metal have a lot in common”

Swiss dancer and choreographer Lea Moro co-founded Berlin’s Acker Festival and is dance curator for Schloss Bröllin’s residency programme. She presents her solo version of the monumental *Le Sacre du Printemps* (Jan 11-12, 19:00).

Why did you choose Vaslav Nijinsky’s version of *Le Sacre* as your main inspiration?

I watched many different versions of *Le Sacre* to find out how I can position myself within this work that was made by so many “big names”. I found Nijinsky’s work to still feel so current, because he didn’t aestheticise the body – women and men look alike – and made a powerful use of the archaic’s strength of movement, working a lot with bodily exhaustion. As I decided to base my solo on his work, I analysed for myself the strongest elements of each chapter.

And you decided to perform all the characters yourself. Do you feel like one among imaginary others, or like you’re representing all of them?

First of all, I asked myself: How many bodies can one body represent? And then at some moments I felt like one specific character within an imaginary larger group. I re-create some characters, like the old wise man or the witch, as solo figures, but it’s still me performing all of them by myself, melting from one figure to another with bodily transformation.

How do you create such a big spectacle by yourself?

To me it's something political to occupy this big stage all alone with such a powerful, famous piece. In contemporary dance, big forms versus small forms are questioned a lot, and trying to use my unique body at the range of exhaustion to produce this big spectacle with all those characters, I've asked myself: What are the elements that make the big spectacle? It also has to do with the contemporary phenomenon of increasing multitasking.

In the second part of the work you use some elements of heavy metal – how did you come to that?

I found out that classical ballet and heavy metal have a lot in common, structurally – the use of this sort of archaic energy, this tendency toward exhaustion, the strong codes... Watching a lot of videos of heavy metal concerts, I observed how the audience behaved with very codified reactions to the musicians' gestures. This creates a sort of ritual that's very interesting related to *Le Sacre*. The heavy metal component allows me to break the fourth wall and involve the audience, calling out to them to witness how I come to the limit of exhaustion.

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