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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Luminous Ballet Evening: The Moon Wears a White Shirt

Volksopera of Vienna, 27.03.2025 [ENA]

The fusion of three visionary choreographers—Martin Schläpfer, Karole Armitage, and Paul Taylor—creates a transcendent evening of dance in *The Moon Wears a White Shirt*, a program that explores the full spectrum of human experience, from introspection to unrestrained joy. Brought to life by the 24 extraordinary dancers of the Wiener Staatsballett, this performance is a breathtaking testament to the power of contemporary ballet, blending poetic expression, philosophical inquiry, and sheer technical brilliance.

Opening the evening with a profound meditation on love, longing, and human frailty, Martin Schläpfer's *Drittes Klavierkonzert* is a deeply affecting work that lingers in the soul. Set to Alfred Schnittke's haunting *Concerto for Piano and String Orchestra*, the ballet unfolds like a dream—at times ethereal, at times nightmarish, always pulsing with emotional intensity.

Schläpfer crafts movement that is both precise and unpredictable, mirroring Schnittke's shifting musical landscapes. The dancers, led by the exquisite Nina Cagnin, embody a spectrum of emotions—desperation, passion, resignation—communicating the unspoken depths of the human condition.

The partnering work is particularly stunning, oscillating between moments of tender connection and sudden rupture, symbolizing the paradox of intimacy and separation.

The stark yet evocative set design by Thomas Ziegler amplifies the ballet's emotional power, with shifting lighting by Alex Brok that creates an almost cinematic effect, transitioning from deep shadow to blinding revelation. Meanwhile, pianist Alina Bercu delivers a spellbinding interpretation of Schnittke's score, seamlessly integrating the music with the dancers' every move. This ballet is a revelation—one that challenges, moves, and ultimately transforms its audience.

Karole Armitage, a choreographer known for her fearless innovation, delivers an intellectual and sensorial masterpiece with *Ligeti Essays*. Inspired by the poetic, enigmatic song cycles of György Ligeti, this work delves into the complexities of human interaction, existential questioning, and the interplay between form and chaos.

The choreography is strikingly intricate, with dancers executing rapid, angular movements juxtaposed

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against moments of exquisite stillness. Armitage's roots in both classical ballet and avant-garde experimentation shine through, as she seamlessly integrates influences from Balanchine, Cunningham, and the punk aesthetic that first defined her career.

Here, Olivia Poropat is a standout, her movements sharp yet fluid, embodying the very essence of Ligeti's fragmented, mysterious compositions. The live musical accompaniment, featuring the Volksoper Wien's stellar musicians, heightens the ballet's cerebral beauty, with the strings and percussive elements mirroring the dancers' complex rhythms. Armitage's ability to create a world that feels both ancient and futuristic, both intimate and vast, is nothing short of extraordinary.

The evening concludes with a burst of pure joy in Paul Taylor's Dandelion Wine, a work that radiates warmth, nostalgia, and boundless energy.

Set to the baroque brilliance of Pietro Locatelli's Violin Concerto in C minor, this ballet is a masterclass in Taylor's signature style—lyrical yet athletic, structured yet spontaneous.

Riccardo Franchi leads the ensemble with an exuberance that is infectious, his leaps and turns brimming with the sheer joy of movement. The choreography is filled with playful interactions, as dancers form and reform patterns that mimic the free-spirited dynamism of a summer's day. The inclusion of folk-like gestures, alongside Taylor's signature fluid partnering sequences, creates a sense of timelessness—a celebration of life's fleeting yet unforgettable moments.

The visual elements enhance this atmosphere perfectly. The stage, bathed in golden light, mirrors the warmth of the choreography, while the costumes provide a sense of effortless elegance. Locatelli's virtuosic violin concerto, performed with dazzling precision by concertmasters Bettina Gradinger and Vesna Stankovic, adds an additional layer of brilliance, underscoring the ballet's exuberant character. The Moon Wears a White Shirt is a rare gem—an evening of dance that transcends the physical realm, delving into the intellectual, the emotional, and the ineffable.

The Vienna State Opera Ballett, under the impeccable musical direction of Christoph Altstaedt, delivers performances of the highest caliber, with each dancer embodying the unique demands of these three masterworks.

Martin Schlöpfer's poetic introspection, Karole Armitage's philosophical daring, and Paul Taylor's life-affirming exuberance combine to create a ballet program that is as thought-provoking as it is breathtaking. This is contemporary ballet at its finest—uncompromising in its artistry, fearless in its storytelling, and deeply moving in its execution.

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For lovers of ballet, music, and the human spirit, The Moon Wears a White Shirt is an experience not to be missed.

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