



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

## Marathon ? Only Horses Are Given the Mercy Shot

Scala Wien, 30.03.2025 [ENA]

Few productions manage to capture the raw desperation, exhaustion, and surreal spectacle of a society on the brink of collapse as powerfully as *Marathon* – Nur Pferden gibt man den Gnadenschuss. This electrifying theatrical event transforms the entire venue into a pulsating dance marathon, immersing the audience in the relentless rhythm of survival, spectacle, and human endurance.

With a stellar ensemble, breathtaking choreography, and a searing social critique, this production is a triumphant fusion of visceral performance and poignant storytelling. From the moment the audience steps into the theatre, they are transported to the desperate glamour of 1930s America, where a grueling dance marathon offers a glimmer of hope to the destitute. Robert Notsch's set design is nothing short of spectacular—an expansive retro dance hall that radiates both the allure of golden-age entertainment and the oppressive weight of economic despair. The stage pulsates with shifting light, mirroring the characters' shifting states of exhaustion, hope, and disillusionment.

Anna-Sophie Lienbacher's costumes capture the essence of the era with meticulous attention to detail. From sweat-drenched dresses to worn-out suits, every thread tells a story of perseverance and fading dreams. The visual authenticity enhances the production's immersive power, making the audience feel like they, too, are part of this brutal contest. Bettina Soriat's choreography is the heartbeat of the production, and what a relentless heartbeat it is. The actors do not merely dance—they battle exhaustion, defy physical limits, and embody the emotional and psychological toll of the marathon.

The dance sequences oscillate between dazzling displays of energy and harrowing moments of near-collapse, making the audience viscerally feel the toll of the competition.

Particularly haunting is the way the choreography integrates fatigue into movement. Slow-motion collapses, forced grins through gritted teeth, and moments of eerie synchronization contrast with bursts of frenetic energy, echoing the highs and lows of desperation. The contrast between lively, jazz-infused numbers and the inevitable breakdowns underscores the dark irony at the heart of the piece: entertainment as exploitation.

The ensemble cast delivers performances of staggering intensity. Anna Sophie Krenn as Gloria is a revelation, embodying both the brittle cynicism and fragile hope of a woman who has seen too much of the

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world's cruelty. Her chemistry with Paul Barna's Robert—a naive dreamer thrown into a competition beyond his comprehension—is both heart-wrenching and exhilarating.

Each performer brings a distinct energy to the stage, portraying the desperation, bravado, and broken dreams of the marathon's contestants. Mathias Kahler-Polagnoli and Lotte Loebenstein provide particularly memorable moments, oscillating between exhilaration and exhaustion with heartbreaking realism.

Beyond its dazzling performances and gripping choreography, Marathon is a striking indictment of a world obsessed with competition, spectacle, and the illusion of opportunity. The parallels between 1932 and today are impossible to ignore. The desperate contestants, clinging to the hope of a better future through an inhumane contest, mirror contemporary struggles where survival often depends on endurance rather than fairness.

The play's brilliance lies in how it refuses to moralize overtly, instead allowing the absurdity and brutality of the dance marathon to speak for itself. As contestants drop one by one, the audience is left to ponder:

Is this merely a relic of the past, or have we simply replaced dance marathons with more modern forms of ruthless competition? Few productions manage to be as entertaining as they are thought-provoking, as physically demanding as they are emotionally devastating. Marathon – Nur Pferden gibt man den Gnadenschuss achieves this delicate balance masterfully. With a powerhouse cast, ingenious staging, and choreography that pushes the boundaries of theatrical endurance, it is an unmissable experience. This production is not just a performance; it is a test of human will, an immersive spectacle, and a searing social commentary wrapped in a whirlwind of movement and music. It is theatre at its most raw, its most relevant, and its most exhilarating.

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