

PRODUKTIONEN

the goldlandbergs_____

Emanuel Gat kreuzt Glenn Gould mit Glenn Gould: den Bach-Interpreten mit dem Radiovisionär. Heraus kommt eine hochbarocke Tanzlandschaft, die eine Foto-Installation berührend erweitert

_____ Von Thomas Hahn



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Articles translated from German by Florence Freitag

Emanuel Gat combines Glenn Gould with Glenn Gould: the Bach-interpreter with the radio visionary. The result led to a highly baroque dance scenery, extended by a captivating photo-installation.

www.emanuelgatdance.com

« By the way, I won't convert to Christianity ». That's what Emanuel Gat begins with smiling, as soon as the conversation threatens to point on the religious symbolism in his « UpcloseUp » cycle. « I've been asked about this at least a twenty times ». He prefers to get that straight out of the way. The Israeli has been in Europe long enough to know that any artistic expression with biblical or ecclesiastical references is subject to many interpretations, especially in France, where he has been living for almost 10 years. His choreography « The Goldlandbergs » is the central piece of the multidisciplinary project « UpcloseUp », that he created as an associated artist for « Danse Montpellier », sponsored by the foundation BNP Paribas. His very own dance company Emanuel Gat Dance will perform the piece on stage. The title and the music play with Johann Sebastian Bach's "Goldberg Variations". Of course Gat uses for this purpose the moving interpretation of Glenn Gould and crosses it with excerpts from Gould's then visionary radio production « The Quiet in the Land » (1977) - inspired by Bach's composing techniques, a counterpoint like built collage of church choirs, excerpts from Janis Joplin's « Oh Lord won't you buy me... » and interviews with Mennonites on the expanding US materialism. The conversations with the isolated members of the Free Church community are filled with biblical references - « And Jesus said... ». The bells are ringing until your head is buzzing. Goldlandbergs ? GouldBachbergs ? Berglandgold ?

Dancers portrayed as religious icons

In addition to Gould and Bach, the performance led to a photographic installation. At least in Montpellier, where the premiere took place, the combination of acoustic and choreographic events alone did not satisfy Gat. He created a dark room with the atmosphere of a chapel in the « Béjart » room of the Agora, a part of an ancient Ursuline convent. The scenery of stonewalls and arches correspond to the genius loci of the room and are perfected by Gat's pictures hanging like holy triptychs on the wall. Again, the public stepping into the darkness could hear the bells ringing and the voice of a pastor preaching: « And Jesus said... ».

Rays of light fall on silhouettes that seem to emerge directly from a "chiaroscuro" painting. They are no biblical characters, but Gat's dancers, personally shot by the choreographer himself. The white back of the Korean dancer Pansun Kim pierces through like the one of a monk at night. Others appear to be inhabited by some higher force and painted in oil. The soloists, the duets remain by themselves, without implying any reference to neither allegories nor choreographies. Nevertheless the illusion of renaissance or baroque on the one hand is due to Gat's vast experience as a photographer and on the other hand to a lucky coincidence.

Not confession...transcendence.

Just by chance, the choreographer near Paris discovered the laboratory of an old Chinese man making amazingly high quality prints on historical photo plates, even from digital pictures. « It was sinfully expensive but very interesting. He had already worked for Helmut Newton and Sophie Calle and did many trials for each of my pictures until every colour was perfect. I spent a whole week in his studio ». Such a retreat has got nearly spiritual quality. So if for Gat « The Quiet in the Land » is not about confession then it must be a metaphysical experience? "Yes, of course. Like for my whole work. But this goes way beyond the more limited vision of any particular religion".

Already 20 years ago, Gat danced his very first solo to Bach's music. Nowadays, he discovers in Glenn Gould's counterpoint collage a similar complexity as in the "etudes" and "fugues" of the baroque composer. « I am much more interested in the structures than in the content. If you listen closely, the interviews with the Mennonites are much more about practical questions of everyday life. » Even by putting the main focus on the beginning of the 52 minute piece -by looping « And Jesus said... », he states: « Gould gives real musical structure to the interviews. And in fact he does it exactly the same way that I approach choreography. He watches people and questions them on their attitude towards life, their fears, their dreams and so on. Exactly like I induce situations during rehearsals, studying how the dancers behave within them. »

Moving closer to the audience

Montpellier provided the opportunity to study this relation on the living object. During rehearsals for another opus, « The Surprising Complexity of Simple Pleasures » the studio doors remained open. Gat tents, as he says, to open up a new chapter on the relation with the public. The sudden exposure to the spectators on the day of the premiere is unnatural and leads to unnecessary stress for the artists. And the visitors can profit a lot more from following the developing process. This is why anyone was allowed to come in and out as they pleased during the 90-minute rehearsals, for free. « Some come every day », the choreographer states happily. But this type of procedure only works during festivals, where of course most of the people attending are specialists without nearly any exception. Nevertheless, Gat considers the experiment as a logical development of his concept, as he considers his pieces a procedural event: Each representation after the premiere is not a repetition, but a step forward.

And what does he do during rehearsals? He stands or sits to the side, gives instructions and lets the music play. Or he takes pictures! Why? « I am not one of those showing steps or figures; therefore I have a lot of free time during rehearsals. I would get bored otherwise », he recognizes with disarming honesty. He can profit from this type of freedom because the creative process between him and each member of the company has subtly been developed. He gives one or two playing rules - and the human mechanism starts working like clockwork at once. In fact, as a choreographer he just needs to write down the sequences. The audience attending the rehearsals even gets a bonus, the images of the dancers being projected in close-up on a giant screen. On the one hand it allows them to perceive many small details and the interpreters seem to be present like in a private conversation. On the other hand they look like Gat's study objects. « With the help of my long lens I can see many details that I wouldn't perceive otherwise. This way I am developing my choreographic point of view ».

Interlaced relationships

In fact Gat rather seems to act more like a kind of choreo-photographer and his interest in photography actually emerged directly from the work with the company. Capturing images he offers himself pictures for eternity, in contrast of the fleetingness of the danced instant. During the performances he lays the camera to rest, of course and he himself does not want to become the object of photographic observation, either. What does he do with his pictures? « I save them. We use some of them for brochures and other material ».

Back to his choreographies that always start on structural elements: contextual relations only come later, as well as the music. That is because Gat worships, like Merce Cunningham once did, the dissociation of music and dance; he refuses any illustration. He nevertheless is, so to speak, a moderate ecumenical "Cunninghamer", distrusting abstraction and emotional nihilism as much as narrative illustration. In « The Goldlandbergs » he stages his dancers like a family in their relationships. There are pairs and small groups, community and individuals. Sometimes he nearly makes them disappear in a golden dusk; sometimes the spotlights shine brightly on them. Light is, as for the photographic installation, a constructing factor and is a lot more powerful than in any other of his previous creations. It is as if we constantly got in and out of a dark room.

True harmony

A frame of enormous proportion hangs over it all - a light well, a watergate. In the end the construction sinks to the ground. Again and again Gat's dancers pause and built a "tableau vivant". Like in « Brilliant Corners » two years ago, the group constantly remains present. Those who don't take part in the action await their turn at the side. Nevertheless, there is much less tension than in « Brilliant Corners ». Everything is round, fluid, floating. Is it because Emanuel Gat had in fact provided a specific choreography for the dancers? The freedom of constructing combinations in real time on predetermined rules that once let to some kind of ongoing electrified circle on stage, visibly give way to the quest of harmony. The Mennonites talk about « the harmony of the Christian experience ». Instants of stillness let in a beam of eternity. « The Goldlandbergs » in fact are inner landscapes.



