



Aya Sone, Mamiko Sakurai, Krisztina Pasztor, Adriana Rodrigues de Souza, Jana Ritzen, Federica Canana, Mariella Argay and Sandra Munoz Lopez in Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thöny's *Macbeth*. Photo: Thomas Ammerpohl

Macbeth

CLAIRE DOMMETT
 applauds a sombre
 take on Shakespeare
 and sums up a 'Lange
 Nacht der deutschen
 Tanz Compagnien' in
 Braunschweig

In her last season as director of Tanztheater Braunschweig, Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thöny has produced an impressive version of Shakespeare's sombre drama. The plot has been transferred to the present day political scene, with its cut-throat atmosphere and hypocritical morals. Not much blood has to be shed in this fight to obtain power – rivals and opponents are efficiently eliminated with a dose of slander or smear campaigns.

Using a soundtrack of music by Arvo Pärt, André Matthias and Johann Strauss, Lerchenberg-Thöny has interspersed it with the recorded voices of several German politicians. David Roßteutscher gave a convincing portrayal of Macbeth: a good looking young man who is besotted with his attractive Lady wife (Daniela Indrizz) and prepared to do anything she wants in order to prove his manly worth. In a blood red dress (costume designs by Thomas Pekny and Irene Stubenvoll), the cool Lady Macbeth seduces and taunts her weak husband.

A feeling of foreboding fills the air when eight witches clamber quietly across the auditorium

seats, brushing against the audience to reach the stage where they move in unison to Pärt's hypnotic music. These menacing-looking creatures with dreadlocks and baggy dresses represent temptation and the dark side of man's character. One witch remains on the scene throughout, observing unobtrusively.

The stage is dominated by a huge table with variously sized chairs - decor by Thomas Pekny. Duncan (Jiri Kobylka), seated on the highest chair, is the first to be removed by Macbeth. At a society ball the couples swirl to the strains of a Strauss waltz – behind a façade of glamour and pretty dancing, malicious kicks are executed with a smile. Macbeth has arranged for Duncan to be seduced by a dominatrix, an excellent Jana Ritzen, so he has only to pull the curtain under the table aside for all to be revealed in flagrant to the gaping onlookers. Duncan's career is more than dead.

Banquo (Gino Abet) is likewise easily disposed of - his scarf is used to blindfold a rape victim and this 'evidence' is enough to ruin him. By now, Macbeth needs no more persuasion from

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his wife – he is paranoid that anyone could be his enemy. His wife is in any case slowly falling apart.

A reporter with a microphone pesters a young girl, a very lyrical Mariella Argay, with aggressive, meaningless questions. As she tries to avoid him and just dance, he follows her relentlessly and sticks layer upon layer of newspaper all over her body until she breaks down. A very moving statement against belligerent press and media.

Another girl's spirit is broken when she's accused of stealing a bread roll – this was a true case in Germany; a lady was sacked because she took some of the leftovers from the firm's cold buffet! Tied to her chair with the bread roll stuffed into her mouth, she is mobbed by the public.

When the reporter threatens Macbeth that he's been doing background research, he obviously has to go too, and his killer gets stabbed by Macbeth personally. Finally, he has made it to the top of the table and the highest chair, but Macbeth's triumph is short lived - Macduff removes him from the throne and the witches return to creep back under the table of power. The premiere was received with deserved cheers. A shame for Braunschweig that Lerchenberg-Thöny is leaving.

No less than 18 different German dance companies took up Eva-Maria Lerchenberg-Thöny's invitation to perform in Braunschweig's *Lange Nacht der deutschen Tanz Compagnien*. In the four and a half hour marathon the audience was given a unique opportunity of sampling the wide range of dance creativity going on across Germany. Only two of the major companies (Berlin and Dresden) were represented, the rest came from smaller cities and towns. The overall standard of dancing was excellent – and had little to do with the size of the company. Obviously some pieces were better suited than others to the limited time slot and a few excerpts would have benefited from a little explanation - this was the only weak point of the evening – the host was unfortunately more interested in chatting about himself than giving the audience any useful info.

Dresden, for example, showed a pas de deux from David Dawson's *The World According to Us* with Yumiko Takishima and Raphaël Coumes-Marquet (the latter in a gold skirt) dancing to Mendelssohn's 1st piano concerto. Seen out of context, one is left wondering what the complete ballet is about and it would have been helpful to know that Dawson describes this work as a "meditation on Art through the ages".

Berlin's donation was a rather puzzling interpretation of a pas de deux from Béjart's *Ring um den Ring*, with Nadja Saidakova as a grinning Brünnhilde and Michael Banzhaf as Siegfried, to dreadfully recorded Wagner music.

One of the best pieces was by ex-Béjart dancer Giorgio Madia – his first work for Cottbus, *Chopin Imaginaire*, was full of humour, perfectly executed by his nine dancers and - bliss -

accompanied by live music.

Fellow Italian Roberto Scafati choreographed *Warten auf...* for his company in Ulm. Kylián influenced and a pleasant, flowing opener to the evening. Giessen's director, Tarek Assam, made clever use of spotlights to emphasise the ever-changing dominance between male and female in a piece for four of his dancers appropriately entitled *Only 4*.

Argentinian Daniel Goldin is a rarity among directors, having remained with the same company in Münster for the last 15 years. He brought *Kammertanz*. Set to a César Franck sonata, it was disappointing. Whilst the music soared, the movements remained confined to a lot of shoulder rolling and not much else. Another long-time director is Ralf Dörns, who has built up a big dance following in Greifswald over the last 13 years. Virginia Segarra Vidal and Simon Kranz danced a part of *Orpheus and Eurydice* to music by Glück. Davina Krämer demonstrated her strong technique in a striking neo-classical solo from a new version of *Giselle* by Schwerin's choreographer Paul Julius.

Flensburg ballet showed a part of *Blended Schwarz* by Stela Korljan to music by Miles Davis about the musician's life. A pity the music was so badly cut, but the five good dancers made up for it. Two impressive soloists came from Dortmund. Arsen Azatyan showed off his supple virtuosity to music by Joe Cocker, and Barbara Melo Freire, in a feathery white tricot, danced a kind of modern dying swan to Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, choreographed by Xin Peng Wang.

James Sutherland, who has been director of Pforzheim since 2002, choreographed *68 Frühling – kein Erwachen* with some great funky dancing for his company to Bob Marley and Jimi Hendrix. This was followed by an excerpt from Hannover's latest ballet, *Gefährliche Liebschaften* by Jörg Mannes. Cassia Lopes, Karine Seneca and Denis Piza gave an accomplished performance and left one curious to see more.

A very dramatic piece came from Dessau. Tomasz Kajdanski's first work for the company deals with Wedekind's *Lulu* drama to music by Rihm. Heavy stuff and well danced. Braunschweig, as host company, let their witches crawl across the auditorium again in search of *Macbeth*.

Let it Be by the Beatles inspired Jutta Wörne to create a solo for talented Beth Keasey from Nordhausen, and Goyo Montero, director of Nürnberg ballet since 2008, produced *Desde Otello* (Since *Othello*) to music by Monteverdi, apparently dealing with violence against women.

If it had been a choreographic competition – and sometimes it felt like one – then Eric Gauthier from Theaterhaus Stuttgart would have won first prize for his two brilliant interludes: *Ballet 101*, in which Armando Braswell shows 100 ballet positions dictated to him by a voice off stage and then proceeds to demonstrate variations from randomly chosen numbers until he collapses; and *Air Guitar* in which Gauthier himself mimes the playing of four different guitars - classical, cowboy, Spanish and rock. Brilliant!