

E6

dance

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CULTURE

A physical grind that dares the mind to keep up

Les Grand Ballets' triple-bill final outing offers three works by German choreographers

In his typical bold fashion, artistic director Gradimir Pankov has put together a challenging triple-bill program for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens next week – its last outing of the Montreal season. For the dancers, the program is a physical grind and an interpretative puzzle. For the audience, it's an intellectual and emotional dive into deep space. Call it compensation for the blandness of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's *Moulin Rouge*, seen here last month as part of Les Grands' subscription series.

The program's three works are by two German choreographers, Marco Goecke and Stephan Thoss, who over the past decade have each produced more than a score of works for some of Europe's best dance companies.



VICTOR SWOBODA

Karel Williams, a corps member who's undertaken meatier roles over the past year).

Schoenberg's sung text in Pierrot Lunaire uses a German translation of Albert Giraud's poems about a clown-dreamer desperately in love with cruel Columbine. The song cycle was choreographed before, notably in 1962 by Glen Tetley (his Pierrot was once danced by a woefully miscast Rudolf Nureyev) and in 2008 by Alexei Ratmansky with a

casts of 15 dancers conducted what amounted in the second half of the piece to a simultaneous series of frantic individual solos and duets. The variety of leg and arm positions on display at any one time was both fascinating and bewildering. But this was not arbitrary scampering. One dancer's movements led into another's not in any predictable way, but through body lines choreographed to create flow and momentum. Seizing the whole will require more than one viewing.

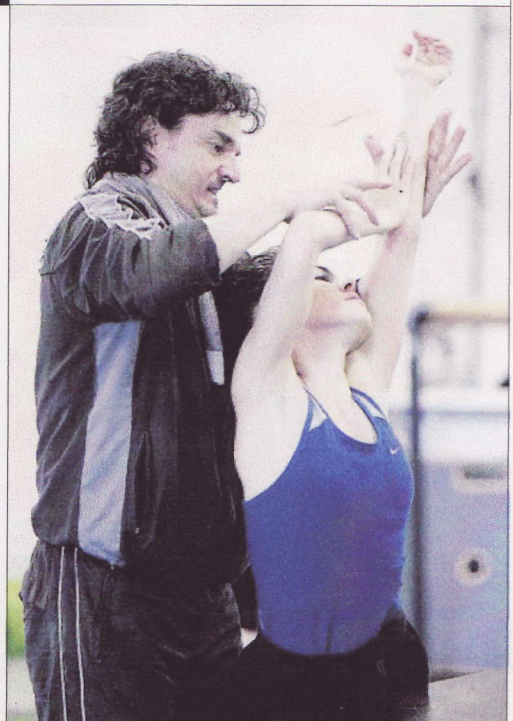
Thoss conceived *Searching for Home* as a look at the many sides of a person's identity, both conscious and unconscious. Several doors set in a backdrop wall served as entries and exits – metaphors perhaps for thoughts and memories, sometimes open, sometimes closed.

Unlike much of German contemporary dance, which is more preoccupied with concepts than gestures, both Goecke and Thoss create works that very much move.

"I'm open to different tendencies, but conceptual work is not my way," Thoss said through interpreter Margret Kaufmann, Les Grands' ballet mistress. "Dancers train so hard to move well that I feel it's only right to incorporate that movement into my work."

Once the Montreal season finishes, the company packs its bags for its first tour of China in about 25 years, beginning with a big gala at the new opera/ballet house in Beijing in July. Wonderful exposure for Montreal abroad, but the tour means there will be no outdoor shows by Les Grands this summer in Lafontaine Park.

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens' German Evening: *Searching for Home*, Pierrot Lunaire and *The Firebird* is performed Thursday to Saturday, May 14 and May 19 to 21 at 8 p.m. in Théâtre Maisonneuve of Place des Arts. Tickets cost \$20.01 to \$97.45. Call 514-842-2112 or order at pda.qc.ca.



PIERRE OBENDRAUF THE GAZETTE

Choreographer Stephan Thoss, who is making his North American debut, goes through movements of his work *Searching for Home* with dancer Graziella Lorriaux of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. See more scenes from the rehearsal at montrealgazette.com/photos

"Dancers train so hard to move well that I feel it's only right to incorporate that movement into my work."

Stephan Thoss

Goecke was initially supposed to create a new work to Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe*, but cancelled because of fragile health (he's cancelled on others, too). Instead, Goecke agreed to restage two 20th-century scores – a duet from Stravinsky's *Firebird*, and the daunting full-length tragedy *Pierrot Lunaire*, by Arnold Schoenberg. In Goecke's absence, the company learned the works from Valerie Lecocq, a longtime member of Rotterdam's Scapino Ballet, where Pierrot Lunaire had its premiere.

Goecke at least managed to cast his pieces. (Intriguingly, one *Firebird* cast has demisoloist Aline Schürger as the winged spirit who enchants

cast including Diana Vishneva (who, incidentally, is in town Saturday night performing with *La La La Human Steps*).

Goecke's supremely dynamic version is appropriately dark.

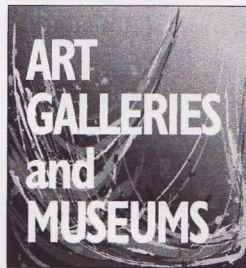
"Marco's pieces are from another world," Pankov commented this week as the company was rehearsing. "The feeling is that it's something beyond dance, particularly *Pierrot*, which is very difficult to choreograph."

In his North American debut, Thoss is restaging *Searching for Home*, a work to Philip Glass's music that Thoss created for Wiesbaden Ballet in 2008. This half-hour piece is a workout for the entire ensemble.

In rehearsal, one of the two

DOUG CAMILLI

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