

DANCE REVIEW

Masters of movement – and provocation

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens
 Choreography by Marco Goecke
 and Stephan Thoss
 At Place des Arts
 In Montreal on Thursday

REVIEWED BY
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If you want a bead on the hot choreographers in Europe, look no further than the repertoire of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. Canny artistic director Gradimir Pankov knows how to go for the artistic jugular, and for his final program of the season he's snagged two contemporary ballet superstars.

Marco Goecke, resident choreographer with both Stuttgart Ballet and Scapino Ballet Rotterdam, has invented a unique, truly unforgettable, dance vocabulary. Stephan Thoss, artistic director of Wiesbaden Ballet, has, with great daring, brought the early 20th century's German Expressionism into the modern fold.

Neither dancesmith is for the faint of heart. Their work disturbs and provokes as much as it enchants. And while these *ballet noir* works are both off pointe,



Not en pointe, but demanding for the dancers. JOHN CS HALL

only highly trained dancers can pull them off.

The dancers with Les Grands are masterful, and the discerning Montreal audience was thrilled.

Marco Goecke
The Firebird (excerpt)
 and *Pierrot Lunaire*

Pankov has linked two of Goecke's works from 2010: *The Firebird (excerpt)*, created for the Netherlands' Maastricht Dance Theater, and *Pierrot Lunaire* for Scapino Ballet Rotterdam.

The *Firebird* duet is set to the *Lullaby and Final Hymn* from Stravinsky's iconic 1910 score. Schoenberg's 1912 masterpiece *Pierrot Lunaire* is an atonal melodrama for voice and instruments.

Both pieces show off Goecke's signature style, embodied by little running steps on tip-toe, fluttering fingers, sharp and crisp arm and hand gestures, staccato body thrusts, unpredictable flicks and shrugs of the head and shoulders, and quicksilver footwork. There is never a moment when a part of the dancer's body is not in motion, yet the movements are always contained, micro rather than macro.

What's astonishing is how Goecke modulates and manipulates his style to match each work. In *Firebird*, a mysterious bird helps a prince in his quest for freedom – so Goecke layers his basic dance language with bird imagery such as wing-swept arms and tiny pecks and nods. Wonderful dancers Aline Schürger and Karel Williams wheel around each other, but always in miniature.

In Goecke's second piece, *Pierrot* is not a commedia clown, but he descends into madness from

his unrequited love for Columbine – the moon – signified by white balloons, becoming his obsession, his guide, his muse. Hervé Courtain is simply magnificent in the lead, and Goecke places him in silvery light, surrounded by seven demons who drift in and out of the shadows.

Here, Goecke's dance vocabulary evokes silent-movie images such as the rubbery legs of the Keystone Kops. This is the choreographer's nod to the clown, but the movement is also distorted, crunched and bent to show *Pierrot's* agony.

Stephan Thoss
Searching for Home

Stephan Thoss is a polymath who also does his own set, costume and lighting design. While Goecke is restrained and minimal, Thoss covers the stage with excess, both in scenography and choreography.

This work, created for Wiesbaden Ballet in 2008, harks back to German Expressionist choreographers with the subjective becoming the driver, and reality replaced by the surreal.

Thoss's stage is awash in huge,

scooping, whirling movement. His dancers hurl themselves through space, and while there may be many things happening at the same time, everything makes sense.

His scenario is about a young woman (Sahra Maira) fighting to find herself. There are three rooms with many doors, and she has to discover the right one to pass through. Thoss has set the work to excerpts from Philip Glass's *String Quartet No. 5* and *Symphony No. 3*, and he uses the composer's driving, relentless energy to propel his dancers.

The girl is plagued by confused versions of herself (male dancer Jérémy Galdeano and four women), all wearing her same dress. A mysterious old woman, played by a man (Marcin Kaczorowski), is oversees her destiny. Her conscious self is portrayed by three ghostly dancers in white. Add to the mix five men who have been part of her life. Now imagine all of the above on stage at the same time. That's Thoss, and it's exhilarating.

Les Grands Ballets' German program continues in Montreal until May 21.