

The New York Times

---

October 25, 2007

DANCE REVIEW | BALLET DU GRAND THÉÂTRE DE GENÈVE

## **Understated Modernism as Interpreted by a Troupe of Zany Individualists**

By [JENNIFER DUNNING](#)

“Oh, my God!” a delighted woman in the audience exclaimed amid the cheers as the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève took the evening’s final curtain calls on Tuesday night at the Joyce Theater. Her apparent wonder was understandable. How has this troupe, making its New York City debut with these performances, managed to stay so fresh and unaffected, and at a time when earnestness and hectic activity for its own sake seem to prevail on both sides of the Atlantic?

This Swiss company has a rich, century-long history. Its director, Philippe Cohen, seems to have a taste for understated choreographic modernists and for zanily but unobtrusively individual performers, all of them exceptionally supple ballet-trained dancers.

The three dances drew too heavily and too similarly on that suppleness. In Saburo Teshigawara’s “Para-Dice” eight dancers slipped lusciously through a mosaic of classical and popular music put together by Willi Bopp. The musical choices shaded their rooted undulations, shifting formations and their rises and falls with considerable emotional coloring, as did the subtle changes of lighting, designed, as were the stylish and simple costumes, by the choreographer.

Andonis Foniadakis took the elegant verticals in “Para-Dice” and sent them shooting into space and crumpling precipitously in “Selon Désir,” danced to the opening choruses of Bach’s St. Matthew and St. John Passions. Boneless-seeming bodies erupted in a well-plotted storm of dancing for what looked like alert, stretched rag dolls.

The costumes, designed by Mr. Foniadakis, looked like nondescript street clothes until you noticed that men were wearing dresses. Bruno Roy and Manuel Vignouille, both tall and, charmingly, a little ungainly in their flapping, rippling short skirts, dotted the fray with piquant accents of humor and odd physical effects. Mr. Vignouille also stood out for his hair, dyed orange-red. Mr. Cohen is to be commended for recognizing how much that hair would add to the evening.

Touring-disaster stories solicited from the dancers by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui were the hilarious heart of his “Loin,” a large-group piece to music by Heinrich von Biber. Performing cockroaches figured prominently in the tales. The piece, whose title, in French, refers to the dancers’ far-flung travels, could have benefited from a little editing. But like the other pieces it created a mysterious sense of something happening.

It celebrated its performers’ skills in passages like a scarecrow solo for Mr. Vignouille and two inventively partnered duets. And “Loin” suggested much about dancers’ lives and the vivid personalities of these performers. May they soon return.

*Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève performs through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 242-0800, joyce.org.*