

# The Man and The Dancer in Mid Life

*Full Bloom* by the Kevin O'Day Ballett of the National Theatre of Mannheim at Tanzhaus Käfertal

By Heike Marx from Die Rheinpfalz

*Full Bloom* is an extraordinary dance piece that touches deeply through its powerful existentialist expression. Kevin O'Day, Robert Glumbek and Luches Huddelston Jr. dance themselves in their mid lives, which, for a dancer, is the beginning of the decline. At Tanzhaus Käfertal they presented a preview of their creation for the Banff Centre in Canada.

Robert Glumbek and Luches Huddelston Jr. are known to Mannheim audiences as both dancers and choreographers. Kevin O'Day, however, has retired as a dancer since becoming ballet director at Mannheim in 2002. His appearance as a performer, therefore, came close to a sensation.

The three have been close, personally and artistically, for years. They are in the same situation: over 40, male, dancers, choreographers. A dancing career usually ends here. At this age, for every man it becomes clear what he may still achieve in life and what he will certainly not achieve. But not everyone will experience it as essentially as a dancer, whose measure is the capabilities of his own body. What has passed is present in memories, and the loss creates helplessness and fears. Only friendship and a together-ness in the striving for achievement can conquer those.

The dance piece was conceived for the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada, will be developed further there and then performed in Toronto, Canada. The Banff Centre is a creative centre where artistic talent is nourished and creators are furthered as artists-in-residence.

*Full Bloom* begins with Mozart and three men who are, lustfully and with graceful harmony, just themselves. They wear suits and ties. No other music can calm an emotional inner turmoil better than an *Andante Grazioso* by Mozart. Steve Reich's music interrupts this harmony. A chair represents the space that a man has conquered in his life so far. He is no longer able to properly sit on it. We can see already very clearly three very different temperaments expressed here. They will shape the process of the piece in a way that we recognize in amazement: the human being is nowhere as much a human as in his own body.

Very distinct styles of music express the clearly distinguished waves of partly carefree, partly melancholy memories, of mutual experiences and of overcome conflict, and intimate gestures of mutual assistance. Different performance styles (Dominique Dumais collaborated in creating the Chopin Duo) in the solos, trios and duos are so completely interwoven that a unity of exiting variety unfolds.

Kevin O'Day, unknown to Mannheim as a dancer, proves himself to be an American Boy full of confidence and optimism. He flirts in manly narcissism with his own body, jumps energetically across the space—and has to accept falls, which he reacts to with comedic fury and disappointment. Robert Glumbek is balancing a line close to tragedy. His retrospective is directed towards strength; he is not surprised by its decline but faces it with bleak anticipation. The small, flexible Luches Huddelston Jr. is a bundle of energy between blissful exuberance and self-reflective irony. He expresses also verbally a position of giving-into-the-circumstances, only to forget about it the next moment in his abundant lust for life, and falls down again into disheartenment. A universal image of man's reflection in mid life.

*Translated by  
Birgit Schreyer Duarte*

# The Right Time to Go On

The Kevin-O'Day-Ballett Mannheim opens its season and the Tanzhaus Käfertal with *Full Bloom*

by Ralf-Carl Langhals from *Mannheimer Morgen*

It's that time when one should already be where one once intended to be. It's that time when man realizes that a six-pack is just as improbable as the grand prize in the game show *The Wheel of Fortune*. In short, one is in his mid to late forties, in one's "best years," in "full bloom." *Full Bloom* is what the choreographers Kevin O'Day, Robert Glumbek, and Luches Huddelston Jr. call their thorough and yet entertaining report on that time in life at which they are themselves, and which for dancers is called "mature age." The trio dance and choreograph themselves and during its 70-minute performance on the occasion of the opening of the Tanzhaus Käfertal in the Alston district they leave no doubts that they, indeed, are in full bloom.

In dignified suits they separately enter the industrial hall that is lit intentionally harsh by Nicole Berry, and that is only charming in a pragmatic sort of way. Ties are being bound, cuff links are being fixed; they're ready for a civilized fight in the office for the survival of the fittest. Instead of sawing the leg of the only available chair they wrestle over it in full dancing commitment. During two triple quartets by Steve Reich we see how the dancers run in business outfits against invisible walls, how testosterone-filled motivation turns into hysterical frustration, how Luches Huddelston Jr. has to take a beating, how Robert Glumbek runs amok against

demands and conditions, how Kevin O'Day is beaten by the circumstances, shaken by seizures. Until they unanimously drop the chair, literally and figuratively, agreeing that no one had imagined civilized professional life like that.

In impressive, highly versatile forms of motion we learn of the play of young puppies, of the goofing-around of best buddies, of the aggressive display of power of dog-like barking men, and we get the partly funny, partly subversive commentary on these men-binding forms of socialization.

One grows old as soon as one stops to go out dancing. Therefore the performers swing their hips, show off their vocabulary in ballroom and club dances, ask themselves with Edwin Starrs War "What for?" and mime sex in the rhythm of Balkan sounds by the Bucovina Club. But besides memories of the past, quiet fatherly joys and a decent portion of humility, other, darker thoughts take over, too, thoughts about illness, death and desperation, to be seen for instance in Robert Glumbek's "Don Giovanni" scene with rococo coat and blindfold, which he takes off with the help of his colleagues.

## **More than fuller hips and hair loss**

We wouldn't do justice to the show were we to only view it as an evening of men's fight

against aging. Rather than commenting on hair loss, sciatica and fuller hips, the choreographers deal with their own courses of live as dancers, even with aesthetic developmental processes. Thus, the shedding of each costume, the commercial business suit, the rococo coat representing classical dance, or the glamour jacket representing Broadway show dance, always happens in collaboration with the other artist friends.

They are, however, three very different dancers. Robert Glumbek has astonishing strength, an almost acrobatic physicality, while Luches Huddelston Jr. shines from within and knows how to transform this quality into a bursting stage presence. Kevin O'Day's official return as a dancer is nothing short of a sensational comeback. His palpable joy of movement is overflowing in its details, together with dizzying arm work, constantly new ideas, and great acting skills. Strengthened by their biographic processing, the three go together—now fearless and brave—into a black field of uncertainty. For them there is no question: It is the time of full bloom, the right time to go on.

*Translated by  
Birgit Schreyer Duarte*

# Three Dancers Fighting Age

National Theatre premiere of *Full Bloom* in Mannheim's Tanzhaus Käfertal

By Claudia Hempel from Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung

Once upon a time there were three ballet dancers. To be exact: choreographers. Although they did not permanently occupy themselves with their own deaths, they nevertheless had become aware of their mortality. They were over 40 and saw with slight amazement what they had become and what they hadn't, and that amidst the harsh competition out there a 42-year old opposite a 25-year old sometimes looks like a frog waiting for his magic re-transformation.

The fact of mortality robs us of hope and offers certainty about aging and death. Mortality is the single most intimidating fact. The fear of mortality is great and fundamental. How great it is can neither be expressed in words nor in dance, but still rather in dance than in words. How to transform this fear into dance is shown by Robert Glumbek, Luches Huddelston Jr. and Kevin O'Day, ballet director and chief choreographer at the National Theatre of Mannheim. Together they have created the dance theatre piece *Full Bloom*, a studio version of which had its premiere at Mannheim's Tanzhaus Käfertal. Glumbek, Huddelston and O'Day will be developing the piece further at the Banff Centre in Canada and, subsequently, stage it there and in Toronto.

Death and aging come from the same place, as we all know. Dancers have a fearful respect of age that virtually forbids them to say the word "aging." Over thirty years before retirement, age creates for them a line, drawn by mortality, between wanting to do and being able to do. *Full Bloom* discloses this line.

Three men find themselves in a world that claims that they are no longer needed as dancers, without asking them. However, dance is their life, their identity, their desire: the reason for being. Therefore, they ask the world to dance: music, please. Accompanied by Mozart, Chopin or Neil Young, Glumbek, Huddelston and O'Day unfolded a world of melancholy and sometimes angry gestures of desperation, of pain and of defiance. We saw the world of a sinking ship where the life boats are missing.

The choreography kept its balance between ironically performed moments of weakness and of deeply expressive posing. This created sequences of highest quality in which experience and skill came together in a wild dance. Of this we wanted to see as much as possible, for as long as possible.

The men try defiantly and stubbornly to fit into a stage world that no longer exists for them. But they will all but fit this world. The stage no longer needs them. All they can do is claim that they don't need the stage either. So they do. And glance over, where the stage is.

*Translated by  
Birgit Schreyer Duarte*