GERMAN DANCE AWARD 2026

CHRISTIAN SPUCK · TADASHI ENDO · GABRIELE BRANDSTETTER

ORGANISER
Dachverband Tanz Deutschland e. V. (German Dance Association)

PATRON
Prof. Dr. Norbert Lammert, Honorary Chairman of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and former President of the German Bundestag

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GERMAN DANCE AWARD 2026

CHRISTIAN SPUCK

HONOR FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

TADASHI ENDO

HONOR FOR OUTSTANDING DEVELOPMENT IN DANCE

GABRIELE BRANDSTETTER

Award ceremony on 28 February 2026
Aalto-Theatre Essen

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FOREWORD

The German Dance Award (Deutscher Tanzpreis) is the most prestigious award for dance in Germany. It has been presented annually since 1983. Founded by Ulrich Roehm and the German Professional Association for Dance Education (Deutscher Berufsverband für Tanzpädagogik e. V.), it has been awarded by the German Dance Association (Dachverband Tanz Deutschland) since 2018. Anyone can submit nominations. The German Dance Award honours outstanding personalities of the German dance scene. While the focus is on the artistic work of choreographers and dancers, personalities from other areas of dance or future-oriented initiatives can also be honoured.

This year, the German Dance Award will be presented to choreographer and artistic director Christian Spuck for his courageous, sustained and exceptionally successful relaunch of the Berlin State Ballet, Staatsballett Berlin.

Prof. Dr. Gabriele Brandstetter, Professor of Dance Studies, will be distinguished with the award for outstanding development in dance for literally setting thinking about dance in dynamic motion, thereby fundamentally changing and expanding this conceptual field. Tadashi Endo was a great master and teacher of butoh: for his exceptional contribution to the dance scene, the jury of the German Dance Award is posthumously honouring him for his life‘s work.

The laudatory speech for Christian Spuck will be given by journalist and dance critic Dr. Dorion Weickmann, while dance scholar Margrit Bischof will deliver the address to Prof. Dr. Gabriele Brandstetter. Film and opera director Doris Dörrie will speak in honour of Tadashi Endo.

PATRON

Prof. Dr. Norbert Lammert has long been an avid supporter of the award and its former organiser, the German dance arts society Förderverein Tanzkunst Deutschland. As part of the German Dance Award, the Norbert Lammert Foundation has provided regular funding for dance education projects for children and teens. This year, its €3,000 grant will go to the project “When all the senses dance along – an inclusive dance project” from Berlin.

From 1980 to 2017, Norbert Lammert was a member of the Bundestag; from 2005 to 2017, President of the Bundestag. He subsequently served as Chairman of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation until the end of 2025 and is now Honorary Chairman. It is a great honour for us that Prof. Dr. Lammert, a highly respected figure in politics and society, supports the German Dance Award as its patron.

COMMEMORATIVE PUBLICATION

AWARD WINNERS AND HONORS

PHOTO: EVA RADÜNZEL

PHOTO: EVA RADÜNZEL

Christian Spuck
Artistic Director

JURY STATEMENT AND BIOGRAPHY

Following the life of a fictional character, observing her weaknesses and strengths, and preparing the stage for her journey – this is what Christian Spuck did with *Bovary*, his first production with the Staatsballett Berlin, where he took over as artistic director for the 2023/24 season.

Born in 1969 and raised in Kassel, Christian Spuck trained in the John Cranko tradition in Stuttgart after completing his community service; in Belgium, he gained experience in contemporary movement language.

In In 1995, he became a member of the Stuttgart Ballet and was the company's resident choreographer from 2001 to 2012, creating 15 world premieres, including the narrative ballets *Lulu. A Monster Tragedy, The Sandman* and *The Lady from S.* based on E.T.A. Hoffmann. As a choreographer, he also worked at numerous other renowned theatres in Europe and America, as well as an opera director. Finally, he was celebrated as director of the Zurich Ballet, which he led from 2012 to 2023. There he created 15 choreographies, such as *Anna Karenina, Winterreise and Dornröschen*; several of which were added to the repertoire of other major companies in Oslo, Moscow, Seoul, Munich, Adelaide, Amsterdam, Helsinki and Berlin. Spuck received numerous awards and honours, including the German Dance Prize Future 2006 and the Prix Benois de la Danse 2019 for *Winterreise*.

With every change of artistic director, the fundamental question arises for an entire theatre: what will change, what will remain the same? Above all: how? In Berlin, Christian Spuck chose a sympathetic approach that attracted audiences back to the auditoriums and gave the Berlin company the opportunity to change its style: As both an artist and an advocate for the arts, Spuck was able to shape the Staatsballett Berlin with a varied programme and new formats for encounters between artists and audiences, combining the long-established with the as yet unknown. In addition, new formats for dialogue between audiences and artists explore questions about the uncomfortable.

Spuck remains in conversation, seeking dialogue. He shapes and follows this path with the intuition of a dancer, the curiosity of a choreographer and the vision of an artistic director. For his courageous, clear, sustained and outstandingly successful new start with the Staatsballett Berlin, the jury is delighted to award Christian Spuck the German Dance Award!

Someone who likes to share

TRIBUTE BY DR. LILO WEBER
DANCE CRITIC AND WRITER FOR NEUE ZÜRCHER ZEITUNG AND SWISS CORRESPONDENT OF THE MAGAZINE tanz SINCE 1994.

"Love loves to wander, God made it so. From one to another, God made it so." This can make the abandoned person quite angry: at their beloved and at God. In Hans Zender's "composed interpretation" of Franz Schubert's *Winterreise* (Winter Journey), the singer belts out these lines to the heavens as brass instruments blare. And in Christian Spuck's ballet *Winterreise* (2018), the heavens send snow in return. One man writhes in pain, shivering in the cold, while the others hold their twisted hands over him – not to protect him. Later, the winter wanderer will cry "frozen tears" with fervent intensity, while couples spin around each other, hypothermic but beautiful, like an inward-looking, frozen society.

In Christian Spuck's ballets, this coldness is embodied by others: the passers-by who carelessly walk past the freezing girl with her matchsticks, the Capulets and the Montagues, the Karenins and the Oblonskis, Russian nobility and petty bourgeois stuffiness – societies frozen in norms and forms. The lovers, seekers, abandoned, homeless and lonely break down in a world of frozen hearts and customs. The emotions of the individual characters, Anna Karenina, Romeo and Juliet, Madame Bovary, are touching; but what is shocking is the frosty atmosphere that surrounds them. Many of Christian Spuck's ballets exude a bitter cold that, thanks to the artistry of the image maker, moves us deeply. This not only applies to *Winterreise* or the ballet based on Helmut Lachenmann's *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern* (The Little Match Girl, 2019), both of which deal with themes of cold and death. Several of his narrative ballets, such as *Anna Karenina* (2014) or his first work with Staatsballett Berlin, *Bovary* (2023), begin with the image of a frozen society, a tableau that gradually comes to life. Even though life has already drawn its last breath.

The choreographer often works with tableaux, allowing the dancers to freeze in motion, to scream silently, their eyes wide open. These are powerful images for a society in which the individual is left entirely to their own devices – those who fail have only themselves to blame.

The artist himself is by no means a cold man and finds it difficult to hide his pain when he has to say goodbye to a longtime ensemble member. Nor can he hide his pride after a premiere. One by one, he calls everyone involved in the production up onto the stage until it is so full that it threatens to collapse. As a choreographer and director, however, he has a keen eye for

the essence of material from times past. He purifies and declutters – and translates it into enigmatic images and moods through which the present appears fragmentary and grotesque.

When Christian Spuck arrived in Zurich in 2012, he was a newcomer as a ballet director. The ballet of the Zurich Opera House was his first company, and with around fifty members, including the junior ballet, it was the largest in Switzerland. It had built up an excellent reputation under Heinz Spoerli. Spuck had big shoes to fill. He grew quickly and soon understood how to lead the company in such a way that its members became his accomplices. When he moved to Berlin in 2023, nearly half of them followed him. Their common goal: to enchant the audience.

Spoerli's Zurich Ballet had enjoyed fantastic attendance figures. Christian Spuck's Zurich Ballet took on cult status. People who had never set foot in an opera house before started going to the ballet. Attendance was between 95 and 100 percent. This is now being repeated in Berlin too.

Christian Spuck knows how to win people over with his work, not only with his own artistic creations, but with dance in general. He is someone who likes to share: happiness, success, choreographic skill and artistic responsibility. He doesn't merely feature his own ballets at the centre of the programme and find something to go along with them. His oeuvre includes many ballets that people in Berlin would love to see again, such as the playful *Nusskna-cker und Mausekönig* (The Nutcracker and the Mouse King, 2017) and, in particular, the musical theatre ballets that he developed in Zurich as his own theatrical form. In addition to *Winterreise* and *Messa da Requiem* (2016), which have already been performed in Berlin, these include *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern* (2019) and *Monteverdi* (2022). They establish this choreographer as a resourceful theatre maker who likes to blend various forms of media and art, bringing together dancers, choirs and musicians to create a Gesamtkunstwerk between abstraction and narration, neither opera nor ballet, but enchantingly beautiful.

We can hope for more work like this, while the artist and artistic director leaves room in the programme for his colleagues. He considers their work to be just as important as his own: Staatsballett Berlin is not a Spuck juke-box. Christian Spuck thinks just as much about the needs of the audience as he does about his dancers' development. Not out of opportunism, but out of respect. One gets the impression that he is as passionate about being an artistic director as he is about being a choreographer. That is the good fortune of Staatsballett Berlin. What other company of this size is led by an artist who can lead and at the same time give the company its own unique signature?

Regards and memories from companions

CLAUS SPAHN, AUTHOR AND DRAMATURGE, COLLABORATION WITH CHRISTIAN SPUCK IN ZURICH AND BERLIN SINCE 2012

The atmosphere at his daily rehearsals says a lot about what makes choreographer and ballet director Christian Spuck tick: in his bright ballet studios under the roof of Berlin's Deutsche Oper, things run calmly and highly focused. Voices are quiet and chitchat minimal. Spuck addresses his ensemble as equals, which is precisely why he manages to persistently demand the highest artistic standards. He gives his dancers plenty of room to express their individual personalities while knowing exactly what he wants and what makes the characters they embody in his narrative ballets so emotionally powerful and distinctive. Christian Spuck is an extremely perceptive choreographer who observes and absorbs everything; a seeker who knows self-doubt yet ultimately leads his creations to their destination with confidence. William Forsythe has said of him that he possesses clarity and decency, has the ability to focus on what is important, is interested in what is happening in the world around him and takes responsibility. Someone who presents himself in this way is able to attract renowned guest choreographers to his company and successfully lead a ballet company in the 21st century.

HELGA AND WERNER ZÜLCH FROM AKTIONSTHEATER KASSEL

Who would have thought that, after Stuttgart and Zurich, you would give the Berlin State Ballet such a substantial boost? For this and many other accomplishments, you definitely deserve the German Dance Award. Congratulations!
Perhaps we contributed to your finding access to your own distinct form of artistic expression in dance during an important phase of your life. That would be wonderful. During your childhood and youth, you took part in the art and theatre courses we offered at the time: the *Schnabel-Babel Orchestra*, the *International Cardboard Figure Cabinet*, a project on *Konrad oder das Kind in der Konservenbüchse* (Konrad or The Child in the Tin Can) and *Der Schweinehirt* (The Swineherd), etc. Then, as a 17-year-old teenager: the *Antigone* adaptation around the Aschrott Fountain in front of Kassel City Hall. And you were there with many performances on your bicycle.

Dear Christian, we are delighted for you. May you always be surrounded by interesting dancers and skilled production teams ready to face the challenges of dance. And good ideas which, according to your often-repeated statement, have a connection to the theatrical. Perhaps we were able to provide some inspiration for this. What a joy.

GRACE ELLEN BARKEY, ARTIST, CHOREOGRAPHER, DANCER, CO-FOUNDER OF NEEDCOMPANY, BRUSSELS

Dearest Christian, Congratulations on your award!
You performed in my second professional performance '*Don Quichot*', a production by Theater Am Turm Frankfurt and Needcompany, in 1993. A performance about Don Quijote, but also about Albert Camus' myth of Sisyphus. Two visions of illusions and reality. Don Quijote lives in an illusory world, while Camus wants to face reality head-on. 'How poor are people who need myths', says Camus. Don Quijote prefers to see his Dulcinea as a chimera rather than accept reality. Mil Seghers played Don Quijote, the most fragile one, stumbling through life, blind to its cruelty. You played Dulcinea, the dream, the illusion. Also fragile in a sort of transparent way. Like porcelain, strong but translucent. How young you were. Probably, your first professional show.

The other three male performers Mil Seghers, Simon Versnel and Claude Godin were older and absolutely not innocent. They certainly taught you some life lessons. That's what I guess, because every time we talked about you, their eyes twinkled.

Camus' Sisyphus cheerfully believes in the rebellious, perhaps futile, but nevertheless encouraging struggle to turn the hell of this world into a kingdom. Don Quichote would rather be beaten in the face than give up his dream. His longing for love, his quest for beauty. This is what I wish for you, dear Christian, in your work and in your life.

PHOTO: MACIEJ RUSINEK

Tadashi Endo

JURY STATEMENT AND BIOGRAPHY

His life was deeply connected to Butoh dance. This radical form of expressive dance was founded in Japan in the 1950s by Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno. Not limited to fixed forms or techniques, it emphasises the emotional connection between the dancer and their body and the world that arises in the moment of dance.

Tadashi Endo, a Japanese national born in Beijing in 1947, studied directing at the Max Reinhardt Seminar in Vienna and then worked at German theatres, but soon sought freedom: he went on tour as a solo dance performer, accompanied by jazz musicians. It was not until 1989 that he met Kazuo Ohno, who recognised Endo‘s dance as Butoh dance. Since then, Endo has developed his very own Butoh style: like a tightrope walk between Eastern and Western cultures and the art forms of theatre, performance and dance, achieving maximum tension and emotion in the transformation of his images with a minimum of movement: Butoh MA. MA, ‘the void’ or ‘the space between things’, becomes visible in subtle transformations, which he radiates with great concentration and body control. His dance becomes a representation of motionless movement. His body rests, even though he is dancing. He is danced.

Tadashi Endo was not detached from the world. His pieces dealt with the pandemic, war, people drowning in the Mediterranean, the search for the soul of humanity, for connection and community. He conveyed this message of human strength and fragility on dance, theatre and opera stages.

Until early 2025, Tadashi Endo performed his solo works; he choreographed numerous dance theatre pieces for his MAMU Dance Theatre, as well as for companies in Brazil and Mexico. He was also involved in opera productions on stage or as a choreographer. Since 2005, he worked closely with director Doris Dörrie on her opera productions;

and her film *Cherry Blossoms – Hanami* (2008) made him known to an even wider audience.

As a Butoh teacher and director of the Butoh Centrum MAMU in Göttingen, Endo helped this dance find a home in Germany and inspired dancers worldwide from there. In January 2025, he was invited to the Congress of Butoh Souls in Hong Kong as one of the great representatives of Butoh. For his outstanding work in the dance scene, the jury of the German Dance Award posthumously honours Tadashi Endo with the Lifetime Achievement Award.

A different in-between

BY MELANIE SUCHY, CULTURAL JOURNALIST AND DANCE CRITIC

“Walk around your shadow! That is dancing.”

In the past, in Japan, the walls of wooden huts were not airtight. Light seeped through the gaps between the boards, and you could see outside. This space where things can be let through is called “MA”. That is how Tadashi Endo once explained the concept. He put it at the forefront of his work as well as in the name of his butoh centre in Göttingen.

Something that eludes the dichotomy of either/or. Applying white paint to his face neutralises him, the dancer explained in a documentary film by Doris Dörrie. In this way, he detached himself from the unambiguous, man or woman, human or animal, old, young. Or anything of a worldly nature. In the documentary, his wife Gabriele Endo described it as: “The soul goes first, the body follows. Like a shell, moved by the wind.” Between life and death – beyond.

A married couple squats on the border between China and Mongolia. They look across. A Japanese man and woman in China. They are silent for a long time. The man is responsible for guarding the border. “We live here, and people live over there too,” he says. “But they are not allowed to come here, and we are not allowed to go over there. We have worries, and the people over there have worries too. But do you see the sky? It has no boundaries.”

In 1947, the couple‘s grandson, Tadashi Endo, was born. Two years later, the family moved to Japan. He recounted how his grandmother would call him in from playing outside so he could watch her perform martial arts-like dances with fans and swords. But the boy preferred to learn judo and became a skilled volleyball player, always at the front of the net. He could jump.

Later, he incorporated athletics into his instruction. “Japanese drill practice,” two of his students recently called it, grinning. They raved that his summer workshops had changed their lives. Tadashi Endo passed on his knowledge to professional dancers, actors and singers as well as to people of all ages with completely different backgrounds.

He himself first studied theatre, philosophy and German language and literature, reading Brecht, Goethe and European political dramatists. He joined a theatre group and directed plays. With one Sartre production, he criticised the political situation in Japan and was not allowed to perform it at the university. He went from student to one of the rebels who took to the streets. 1969: unrest, fighting for Marxism and against the Americans, who were perceived as occupiers. The police arrested hundreds, including Endo. After four weeks, his father picked him up from the police station, ordered him to drink sake and make a decision: theatre or revolution? Theatre. – Abroad?! He took the plunge. And brought the rebel with him.

He left Japan in 1970. Endo learned German at Goethe Institutes, ended up in Göttingen, enrolled at the university, and really just wanted to do theatre. He directed a university theatre group. That‘s how he met his future wife, who also led a group. She became the mother of their two sons, his manager, the dramaturge for his plays, always by his side until she suddenly died in the spring of 2025, before him.

In 1973, he went back to university to study directing in Vienna under the likes of Samy Molcho, the famous mime artist. Back in Göttingen, Tadashi Endo took on directing engagements. He struggled with actors and actresses, who felt uneasy about his physical approach to theatre. He began to work freelance, performing solos. He searched, never quite satisfied, he later said. He found what he knew of butoh to be “too chaotic and dirty”. Until his wife booked him a workshop with Kazuo Ohno at Impulstanz Vienna. “I was a little embarrassed,” but it had already been paid for. He travelled there. He was 42.

As the border fences were being opened next door in Hungary, Tadashi Endo switched to butoh in the summer of 1989. “It had been sitting on my left shoulder for a long time.” He once assisted Ohno as a translator during an interview. He later recalled Ohno‘s answer to the question “what is butoh?” What can be between questions and answers... “Millions, countless stars collide. A new star is born.” Or the dream of an ugly caterpillar that Ohno recognised as his deceased mother by her beautiful eyes. From that day on, “what I see, how I see” changed, Tadashi Endo recounted.

Ohno also encouraged him to give butoh “a home” in Europe. Many butoh dancers had left Japan in search of better working conditions; to survive, they taught. There was a butoh trend on stages and in studios in the 1980s and 90s. In 1992, the Endos founded their centre in Göttingen. They organised an international festival eight times. Tadashi Endo‘s workshops, including those abroad, inspired participants until the very end. Doris Dörrie, who sought out Japanese butoh in Germany while conducting research for Cherry Blossoms – Hanami and found it in Göttingen, reported: “Afterwards, I couldn‘t walk straight anymore. I could only crawl.”

What a life‘s work! Tadashi Endo appealed to many people with the darkness in his productions – roots in the existential, with touches of light. With his devotion to changeability, “I am being danced,” and approach to death. “How do you know when a piece is finished?” I asked him in 2023 about his rehearsal process. “It‘s never finished as long as I‘m alive.”

“I WANT TO PEEL MY SHADOW FROM THE FLOOR OR THE WALL AND WEAR IT AS A COSTUME, COVER MY BODY AND LET THIS SHADOW DANCE.”

Tadashi Endo - Tribute

Regards and memories from companions

STEFAN MARIA MARB, DANCER, CHOREOGRAPHER, DANCE TEACHER, PSYCHOLOGIST, MUNICH

I first met Tadashi Endo in 1991 as a young butoh student during International Dance Week at his Mamu Butoh Centre in Göttingen, where he and Kō Murobushi taught an intensive week-long butoh course. There were many participants from several countries. Butoh was “in” at the time. I knew Kō from a course in Vienna and a stage production we had worked on together. Tadashi surprised me with his rather technical dance class; he placed great emphasis on discipline and structure. I found this a bit perplexing, because ever since I had discovered it, my experience of butoh was that there was something anarchic and wild about it. In exercises such as “Walking”, “Child” and “Animal”, Tadashi emphasised the technical aspect and gave clear instructions on the form and posture of the body. This appealed to my dancer‘s consciousness, but I still missed the inner, irrational and emotional aspects that I knew from Kō and from other Japanese butoh masters such as Kazuo Ohno, Yoshito Ohno, Carlotta Ikeda, Min Tanaka and Mitsuthaka Ishii.

At a 2013 symposium in Munich, Tadashi explained his approach to butoh and summed up: “For me, butoh is Tatsumi Hijikata‘s dance and the method which he developed later on when more and more actors, musicians, painters and writers who were not trained in dance came to him; at the very beginning, however, butoh was a happening, a ritual, it was not dance! But Kazuo gave butoh its spirit, and this was the decisive factor in its subsequent worldwide spread!”

Perhaps Tadashi‘s butoh also embodied his longing for the original Japan of his ancestors. In the programme booklet for *Tengu*, his 1991 solo in which he danced the mountain spirit Tengu from Japanese mythology, he wrote a poem that included these lines: “Stop writhing: you cannot transform yourself. / Stop writhing: come out, show yourself!”

BERNADETTE SONNENBICHLER, DESIGNATED DIRECTOR OF HEIDELBERG THEATRE AND ORCHESTRA

Tadashi Endo had been recommended to me as a master of butoh. Even our first encounter – via video call – made a deep impression on me. Tadashi sat with his wife Gabriele in his living room in Göttingen, and from the very first minute there was a quiet cheerfulness, subtle humour and a warmth that

Tadashi Endo - Regards and memories from companions

immediately created trust. There was nothing artificial about him; it was a quiet, open interest. I immediately sensed that we would find a common path. During my production of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (The Good Person of Szechwan) at Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus in 2023, this impression was confirmed in every rehearsal. Tadashi brought a presence that transformed the space. The ensemble – many of whom were still young – were inspired by him. His daily warm-ups quickly enabled them to feel comfortable in the space. He not only conveyed technique, but also an attitude: alertness, grace and the willingness to confront oneself through movement. His clear, almost meditatively precise body language helped others access something all their own.

One scene on the raked stage of our set remains unforgettable. Tadashi climbed up, stood completely still for a moment, and then performed the death walk. Just a few steps, but they were filled with dignity, vulnerability and a quiet power that filled the room. It was one of those rare moments when art and life touch each other. The fact that Tadashi is no longer with us gives these memories an added weight – and a great sense of gratitude. He was modest, humorous, attentive. He never demanded attention as a “master”, and that is precisely why he was one. His legacy is more than artistic: it is an attitude towards life. And for me, it is a gift to have met him.

PHOTO: MACIEJ RUSINEK

PHOTO: EVA RADÜNZEL

Gabriele Brandstetter

JURY STATEMENT AND BIOGRAPHY

Gabriele Brandstetter is the pioneer of dance studies in Germany. Her great, internationally recognised achievement is the establishment of the subject as an independent university discipline. In her work, she always draws on aspects of theatre, music, art and literary studies, thus cultivating a way of thinking that transcends and overcomes disciplinary boundaries – with dance at its centre.

Born in Munich in 1954, she received her doctorate there in 1984 and habilitated in 1993 at the University of Bayreuth, with teaching qualifications in modern German literature and theatre studies. In the same year, she was appointed to the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies at Justus Liebig University in Giessen; and from 1997 she was Professor of Modern German Literature at the University of Basel. In 2003, she was appointed to the Institute for Theatre Studies at the Free University of Berlin, where she founded the first Master's programme in dance studies at a German university – with a decidedly cultural studies orientation – as well as the Centre for Movement Research. She initiated countless collaborations between dance, art and science, held international visiting professorships and received prestigious awards, including the Federal Cross of Merit.

Precise insight, meticulous observation and exchange between artists and scientists on equal terms: in Brandstetter's publications and the research projects, exhibitions, conferences and festivals she has been responsible for, dance never congeals into mere theory; it always remains living movement. In addition, the Valeska Gert Visiting Professorship at the Free University of Berlin, which she initiated in cooperation with the Academy of Arts and the German Academic Exchange Service, enables students to work closely with well-known dance artists and thus to apply theoretical considerations to practice.

Gabriele Brandstetter has literally set thinking – not only, but above all about dance – in dynamic motion, thereby changing and expanding the concept of science as a whole. It is thanks to her that dance studies has taken centre stage in the arts and humanities over the decades. For this reason, the jury of the German Dance Award honours Professor Gabriele Brandstetter with the award for outstanding development in dance.

Making the floor dance

A TRIBUTE BY DR. ISA WORTELKAMP, DANCE SCHOLAR

„The earth moves beneath the footsteps of the walker –
and even more so beneath the footsteps of the dancer, who transforms it,
modelling it as carefully as his own body
and the rest of the space.“ [1]
Georges Didi-Huberman

One of the possibilities that dance opens up is enabling us to experience the ground beneath our feet in a different way than in everyday life. A jump is followed by a landing, and gravity causes the ground to move for a brief moment. A slight tremor, a quake or a shock occurs and can affect those who are present in the same space at the same time, both mentally and physically.

When Gabriele Brandstetter took up her professorship at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies in Giessen in 1993, I had just begun my studies and was learning to leave familiar territory behind. She had just completed her postdoctoral project *Tanz-Lektüren. Körperbilder und Raumfiguren der Avantgarde* (later released in English as: Poetics of Dance. Body, Image and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes), with which she opened up new approaches to thinking, reading and writing about dance. Her dance analysis and implementation gave the existing groundwork of historical, ethnographic and sociological dance research a theoretical and aesthetic infusion, expansion and, at times, a shake-up.

In Gabriele Brandstetter‘s teaching, the academic discipline of dance studies emerged as a practice through which the “reading” of images, texts and writings could be experienced as a performative act in itself. Joint visits to performances were followed up with performances of texts we had written ourselves. In this way, she guided us as we explored methods of writing about something that is constantly shifting and can only be captured in motion. As a student, her seminars gave me the opportunity to understand the practice of academic reflection as a “dance about dance”: a first approach, a playful look at closeness and distance, the act of turning around and losing oneself, a leap – and also a landing, with or without stumbling. This “*invitation to dance*” (the title of her 1993 book) also meant ascertaining possibilities of writing about, through and as movement – reading it again and again.

Her own readings of dance were as bemusing as they were inspiring. In them, she interrelated aspects of theatre, music, art and literary studies

[1] Georges Didi-Huberman, „Die Erde bewegt sich unter den Schritten des Tänzers“ , in *Transversale: Raum in den Künsten. Konstruktion – Bewegung – Politik*. 2010, pp. 83–92, here p. 87.

in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary manner, cultivating the field of dance studies as perpetual movement between the disciplines. Groundwork in which she constantly seeks and finds contact with the dancing body, shifting, moving and connecting academic and artistic processes.

Brandstetter‘s idea of inverting the theory and practice of dance also shaped the establishment of dance studies as a university discipline at the Institute for Theatre Studies of Freie Universität Berlin, where Brandstetter took up her professorship in 2003 after her time in Basel. Ten years after our first encounter, she invited me and other colleagues – most of them from applied theatre studies – to collaborate on a concept for the Centre for Movement Research and the master‘s programme in Dance Studies – Body, Movement, Process. The interdisciplinary and intermedial spectrum of what is known as Berlin dance studies attracted not only dancers and choreographers, but also students from other university disciplines such as theatre, film, literature, art and cultural studies, and even the natural sciences. The diversification of knowledge and the openness of this conception of dance were both inviting and challenging: activities such as the gestures of a conductor, the formations of a flock of birds or the movement repertoire of a tennis match became the subject of dance studies movement research.

Students participated in numerous practical projects related to Gabriele Brandstetter‘s fields of research, moving through *Scenes of Virtuosity*,[2] Predictions about Movement, *Concepts of Movere, Topographies of the Fleeting,* and *Intrinsic Aesthetic Eras*. Made possible by the Leibniz Prize awarded to Gabriele Brandstetter in 2004, the institute‘s storage space was converted into a DanceLab: a loft space for dance research, experimentation and study. Thanks to the Valeska Gert Visiting Professorship Grant, which Gabriele Brandstetter and Freie Universität Berlin established in 2006 in collaboration with the Academy of Arts and the German Academic Exchange Service, this also meant the constant involvement of others and confrontation with difference. International guests were invited, including Amos Hetz, Anna Huber, Xavier Le Roy, Deborah Hay, Meg Stuart and many others. In this way, Berlin dance studies were encouraged to embrace further future-oriented movements that make the floor dance. Gabriele Brandstetter knew and knows how to move virtuosically on the dance studies stage, sometimes with delicate taps, sometimes with heavy stomps – sometimes with springy jumps.

[2] The following terms in italics were titles of research projects and recurring formulas in her teaching.

Regards and memories from companions

PROF. DR. BETTINA BRANDL-RISI, THEATRE SCHOLAR, ERLANGEN

Gabriele Brandstetter‘s constant questioning of the “how” of writing shaped me as a scholar of ephemeral objects: objects that, strictly speaking, cannot definitively be defined as objects and perpetually remain at an analytical distance. She succeeds in generating evidence through lightning-fast constellations as well as pointed formulations, images and texts – language as play, as virtuoso juggling, balancing, en pointe, savouring the art of the argumentative moment. As students and colleagues, we soon attended her lectures as fans, always in anticipation of this sparkle, as a renowned colleague in our field put it. What is at stake for her is nothing less than the “art of science,” which she herself invokes in a key essay on the relationship between performance and recording. The aspiration to pursue this poietic, inspiring writing, to render the special nature of her objects present through speech and writing about them, remains the auspicious task of those who have the honour and pleasure of calling themselves her students, colleagues and friends.

MARGRIT BISCHOF, DANCE RESEARCHER, FORMER DIRECTOR OF STUDIES AT MAS TANZKULTUR

A plain announcement: “University of Bern, 2002, continuing education programme in dance culture: aesthetic concepts of dance with Prof. Gabriele Brandstetter, modern German literature department, University of Basel”. It raised questions. Isn‘t dance always aesthetic? Who is this lecturer from the German department? The preparatory texts for this new course block of the continuing education programme were challenging – theoretically, historically and in relation to current dance developments. Her text *Bewegung, die unter die Haut geht* (Movement That Gets Under Your Skin) touched me deeply and accompanied me in my teaching in Bern. With Toulouse-Lautrec‘s image of the cancan dancer, Gabriele Brandstetter introduced us to the corporeal concepts of modern dance and broadened our perspective: it is not about what’s beautiful or ugly, but about perception and naming, about maintaining an unbiased view of dance forms without judgement. Together with dance artist Anna Huber, she interwove the in-between of dance art with the unspeakable in texts. Her wide-ranging knowledge, curiosity about current developments in science and art,

Gabriele Brandstetter - Regards and memories from companions

and her support for many people along the way are what distinguish Gabriele Brandstetter as a laureate..

PROF. DR. CHRISTOPH WULF, PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND EDUCATION, FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE GERMAN UNESCO COMMISSION

It was Erika Fischer-Lichte who brought Gabriele Brandstetter to Freie Universität Berlin. I worked closely with her from the very beginning. Our joint project, “Dance as Anthropology,” a conference for this specialised area of research (the accompanying book attracted a lot of attention in 2008, including abroad), marked the beginning of Gabriele‘s and my friendship, which continues to this day. Her diverse creative research has repeatedly convinced me of the importance of dance for art and culture, for individuals and communities. There is no society in which forms of dance are not an important element of identity. Gabriele took up and further developed my insights into the significance of mimetic behaviour for the development of dance. In numerous conversations and several publications, we were able to illustrate the importance of dance for human beings. Our conversations combined professional interest and personal sympathy.

PHOTO: EVA RADÜNZEL

PROGRAM

DANCE GALA PROGRAM

MODERATION: Vivian Perkovic
Journalist, presenter, reporter for Deutschlandfunk Kultur and 3sat
GERMAN SIGN LANGUAGE: Silke Heuser und Bastienne Blatz, Skarabee, Dolmetschen für Gebärdensprachen Blatz, Heuser & Grombelka Partnerschaft
FILM PORTRAIT: Siegersbusch Film

DANCE

Water
Choreography Souhail Jalti **Music** Alonso Escoz Corbacho (Onzo)
Dance Urban Dance Department & Friends

WELCOME

FILM PORTRAIT Prof. Dr. Gabriele Brandstetter

AWARD CEREMONY Honor for outstanding development in dance
Award presentation

DANCE

NOT BUTOH SOLO
Choreography und Dance Thomas Bradley

FILM PORTRAIT Tadashi Endo
Laudatory speech by Doris Dörrie

AWARD CEREMONY Award for lifetime achievement
Award presentation, on behalf of Tadashi Endo presented to Akira Endo

DANCE

Hasard & Boléro (excerpt)
Choreography Sita Ostheimer **Music** Maurice Ravel, Yehezkel Raz
Dance MiR Dance Company, Gelsenkirchen

INTERMISSION

DANCE

Millennials
Choreography Marcos Morau **Music** Scott Walker, Caroline Shaw **Dance** MiR Dance Company, Gelsenkirchen

Nocturne
Choreography Christian Spuck **Music** Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne Op. 55 No. 1 **Dance** Staatsballett Berlin

Romeo und Julia Balkon-Pas-de-Deux
Choreography Christian Spuck **Music** Sergej Prokofjew
Dance Staatsballett Berlin

AWARD CEREMONY Christian Spuck
German Dance Award 2026
Laudatory speech by Dr. Dorion Weickmann
Award presentation and words of thanks

DANCE

Beethoven
Choreography Christian Spuck **Music** Ludwig van Beethoven, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 5, 2nd movement, Adagio un poco mosso **Dance** Berlin State Ballet

Followed by a reception and party (foyer)

Cultural Salon, 27 February 2026
On the eve of the Dance Gala, the German Dance Association invites you to the Dance Prize Kultursalon at PACT Zollverein in Essen: to hear Margrit Bischof's laudatory speech for Gabriele Brandstetter, to moderated discussions, dialogues between prize winners, honourees, the jury and the audience, interventions by Munich performance artist Ruth Geiersberger, culinary accompaniment and music.
An evening of shared memories and new inspiration.
The German Dance Association would like to thank PACT Zollverein for its cooperation.

Water

CHOREOGRAPHY	Souhail Jalti
COSTUMES	Urban Dance Department
MUSIC	Alonso Escoz Corbacho aka DJ Onzo
COMPOSITION	Jocelyn Pook
LIGHTING DESIGN	Guy Hoare
VISUALS UND ANIMATION	Tim Yip, YeastCulture
DANCE	Urban Dance Department & Friends, Essen

The essence of urban dance on stage: energy, flow, versatility, the inexhaustible power of a culture that is constantly reinventing itself. Like water, the dancers move through space and time, fluidly, explosively – and freely. The choreography celebrates community and individual expression, combining hip-hop, popping and breakdancing with contemporary urban expression. Structure meets freestyle energy. *Water* honours the roots of the underground and the artistic quality of the German urban dance scene: as a tribute to a culture that has shaped generations and as a statement of its anchoring in professional dance art..

PHOTO: URBAN DANCE DEPARTMENT

PHOTO: JORG BAUMANN

NOT BUTOH SOLO

CHOREOGRAPHY	Thomas Bradley
DANCE, VIDEO, COSTUMES	Thomas Bradley
MUSIC	Charles Gounod, BallettMusic aus *Faust*, Allegretto 1, Allegro vivo. Aufnahme: Carlo Rizzi, Welsh National Opera Orchestra & Chorus, Album Gounod, *Faust*, Highlights, 1994

During a butoh training session in Tokyo in 2017, Thomas Bradley was given the task: “become a rooster!” He resisted, finding it illogical, because he could only imitate the animal, its wings, its behaviour, its sounds, but not actually transform himself. At some point, he realised that he could become a rooster precisely because he wasn‘t one. The rooster itself, unchangeable, is already what it is. For Australian artist Bradley, gleaning such insight from unsolvable tasks has become the principle focus of his dance pursuits. This likewise holds true for the work *NOT BUTOH SOLO*, where he embodies the possibility of becoming something he is not: a Japanese butoh dancer and a rooster..

PHOTO: ZORÁN VARGA

Hasard & Boléro (Excerpt)

CHOREOGRAPHY	Sita Ostheimer
COSTUMES	Sita Ostheimer
LIGHTING DESIGN	Barnaby Booth
DRAMATURGY	Hanna Kneißler
MUSIC	Maurice Ravel. Recording: Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Paavo Järvi, Telarc (in-Akustik), 2004
DANCE	MiR Dance Company: Camilla Bizzi, Marie-Louise Hertog, Hilla Regev Yagorov, Chiara Rontini; Alessio Monforte, Pablo Navarro Muñoz, Yordi Yasiel Perez Cardoso, Urvil Shah

Sita Ostheimer‘s choreography for the company transforms the pulse of Boléro into pure physicality. Ravel described his work as a “structure without soul” and its musical motifs as “impersonal”, yet the steady crescendo of the music unfolds a raw human force of urgency, failure and rising again. For Ostheimer, it is “the attempt by us humans (...) to navigate our existence”.

Millennials (Excerpt)

CHOREOGRAPHY	Marcos Morau
MUSIC	Caroline Shat, Scott Walker
SET, COSTUMES	Marcos Morau
REHEARSALS	Angela Boix
LIGHTING DESIGN	Thomas Ratzinger
DRAMATURGY	Anna Chernomordik
DANCE	MiR Dance Company: Camilla Bizzi, Marta Llopis, Chiara Rontini, Zsófia Safranka-Peti; Alessio Monforte, Javier de la Asunción Soto, Yordi Yasiel Perez Cardoso, Pablo Navarro Muñoz, Inoru Toda

Millennials: no cohesion, no permanence, lost in digital hyper-individualisation. This generation wants to fill its soullessness with overcommunication, yet fears connection in the sense of obligation. The Spanish choreographer created *Millennials* in 2018/19 for a collaboration between his ensemble La Veronal and the B.Dance Company in Taiwan.

PHOTO: ZORÁN VARGA

PHOTO: ADMILL KUYLER

Nocturne

CHOREOGRAPHY	Christian Spuck
MUSIC	Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne Op. 55 No. 1. Recording: Study Music, 2017, on piano Emma Czaplica
COSTUMES	Emma Ryott
DANCE	Berlin State Ballet: Leroy Mokgatle, Jan Casier

In 2019, Christian Spuck was awarded the Prix Benois de la Danse for his choreography *Winterreise* (Winter Journey) to Hans Zender's orchestration of Franz Schubert's famous song cycle. He developed the short ballet *Nocturne* for the award ceremony at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. It was praised for its introspective narrative style and complex choreography which, paired with Chopin's music, opens up a dreamlike sphere where the audience witnesses a profound exploration of human emotions. With its fusion of classical and contemporary elements, *Nocturne* represents Christian Spuck's distinct signature choreographic style.

Romeo and Juliet Balcony-Pas-de-Deux

CHOREOGRAPHY	Christian Spuck
MUSIC	Sergei Prokofiev: *Romeo and Juliet*. Recording: Kirov Orchestra St. Petersburg, Valery Gergiev (DECCA 12298165 UPC/EAN 4988031776339)
COSTUMES	Emma Ryott
DANCE	Berlin State Ballet: Michelle Willems, Kalle Wigle

Sergei Prokofiev set William Shakespeare's tragedy about the feuding Montague and Capulet families, whose children fall in love and overcome the hateful feud, to music in 1935 on commission from the Bolshoi Theatre. The work premiered in Brno at the end of 1938. The musical scenes express all facets of the conflict, thus unfolding a powerful scenic effect. Christian Spuck premiered his ballet *Romeo and Juliet* in Zurich in 2012, at the beginning of his eleven-year tenure as director there.

PHOTO: SERGHEI GHERCIU

Beethoven

CHOREOGRAPHY Christian Spuck

MUSIC Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat major, Op. 73, 2nd movement Adagio un poco mosso. Recording: Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Sir Simon Rattle, 1999 (Philips DISC 462 783-2), Alfred Brendel on piano

COSTUMES Emma Ryott

DANCE Berlin State Ballet: Weronika Frodyma, Emma Antrobus; Cohen Aitchison-Dugas, Mark Geilings, Loïck Pireaux, Anthony Tette

Piano Concerto No. 5 was composed between 1804 and 1809 during a creative phase in which Beethoven, coming from the classical period, developed a romantic, expressive style. The powerful, expressive music of the concerto is exemplified by the second movement, “Adagio un poco mosso” (slow, slightly moving). Christian Spuck‘s work explores the serene, calm mood expressed in subtle dynamic changes and carried by constantly rising tension. The choreographer created this sextet in 2024 for the gala celebrating the 20th anniversary of Staatsballett Berlin.

PHOTO: ADMILL KUYLER

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TEAM OF THE GERMAN DANCE AWARD 2026
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The German Dance Association (Dachverband Tanz Deutschland, DTD), founded in 2004 as Ständige Konferenz Tanz, has served as a nationwide platform for artistic dance in Germany since 2006. Its aim is to strengthen dance as an independent art form in terms of promotion and visibility through sustained support. To this end, the member associations and institutions in the DTD have joined forces to speak out in the political landscape of the Federal Republic of Germany with one voice – transcending aesthetic differences, distinct production methods and specific professional fields. Since 2018, the German Dance Award has been presented by the German Dance Association.

The association takes a stand by issuing statements, proposals and concepts for the promotion of dance in Germany, launching campaigns and initiatives, and implementing them in its projects.

DTD projects are funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the Federal Cultural Foundation, the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States, Fonds Darstellende Künste and further foundations, as well as the City of Essen and the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.

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We are grateful to the board of trustees and the jury of the German Dance Award as well as the board of Dachverband Tanz Deutschland, who provide us with expert advice and support.

A big thank you goes out to the artists and speakers who add glamour to our award ceremonies and make the German Dance Award a celebration of dance. We would also like to thank Nina Hümpel, Tobias Ehinger and Marek Tůma, who are responsible for the gala programme.

Once again, we would like to express our gratitude for our prudent and professional cooperation with Aalto Theater (TUP) and PACT Zollverein.

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Finally, a big thank you to the German Dance Association team, whose hard work and dedication ultimately enable us to carry out the German Dance Award project: Sarah Holzmann (production), Alexa Junge (press and public relations), Susanne Schade (VIP tickets), Nick Jankrift (artist relations) and all our energetic helpers in Essen.

Michael Freundt, Managing Director, German Dance Association
Christina Menne, Project Coordinator, German Dance Award

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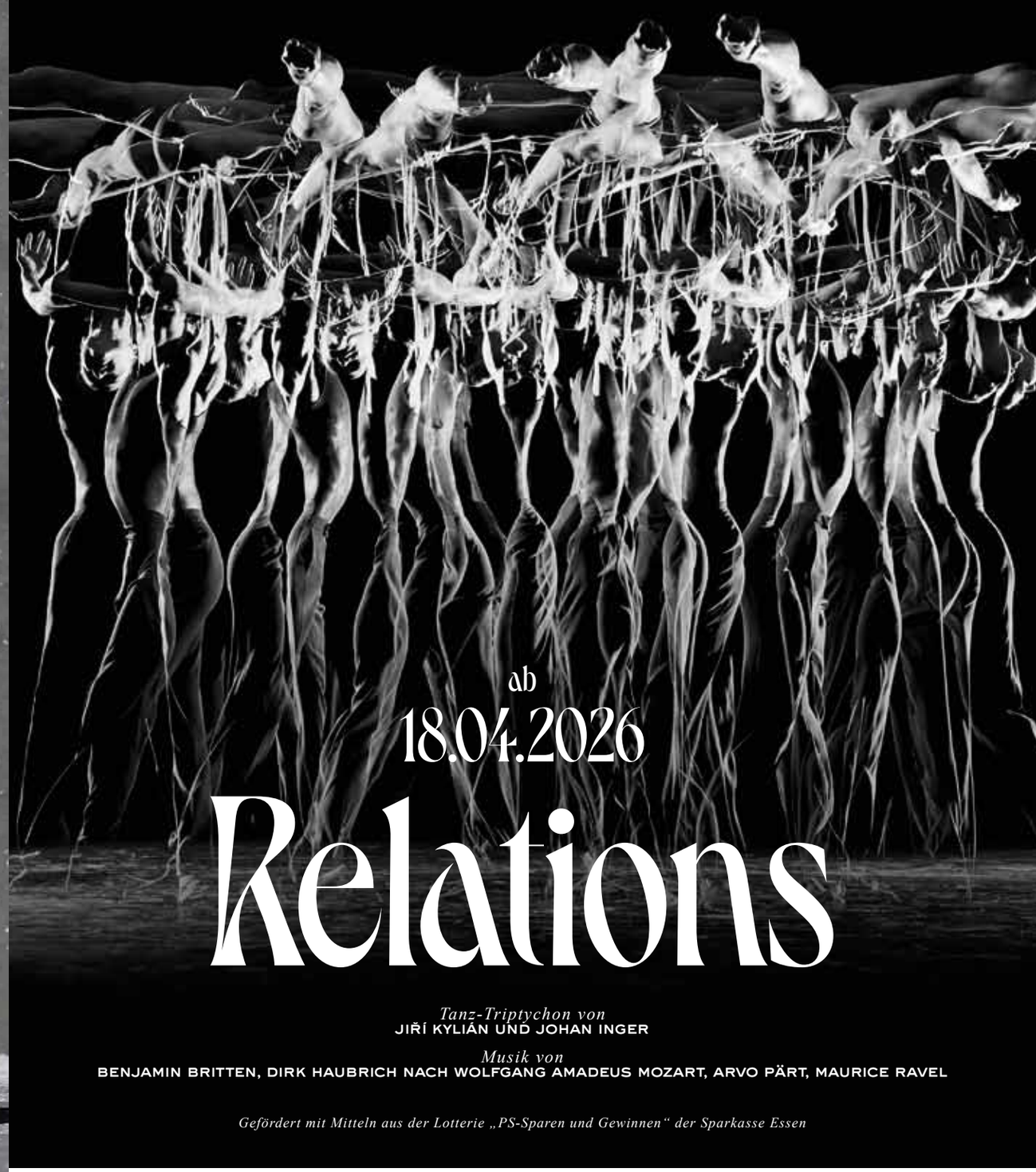

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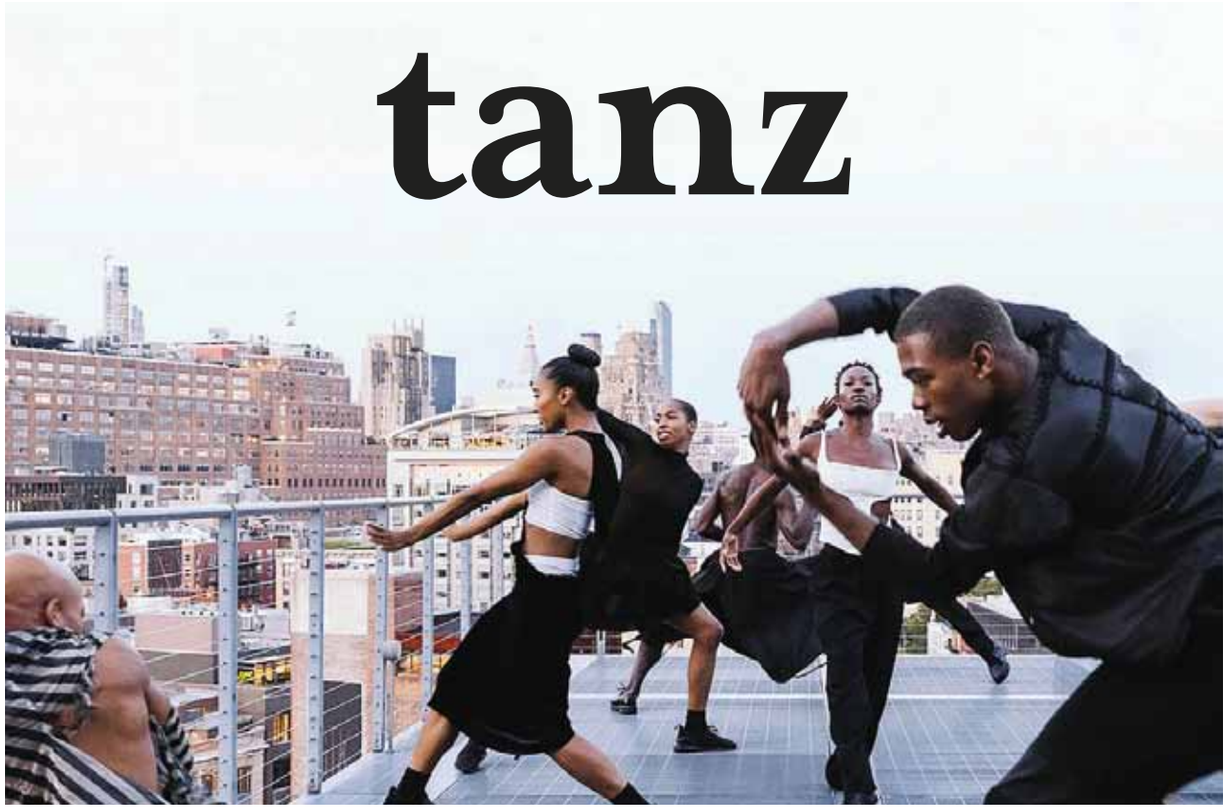

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