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Masterpiece of sound, movement, and light

Tero Saarinen's dance about being human.

"Borrowed Light" is breathtaking and timeless in its clarity, seriousness, and beauty.

With the dance production "Borrowed Light," the Tero Saarinen Company in cooperation with the Boston Camerata brought one of the most impressive works of contemporary dance to the Werkstattbühne of the Bregenz Festival. The piece is an experience of quiet power, ascetic beauty, and overwhelming emotionality. What the Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen has created together with his long-time artistic companions, the lighting artist Mikki Kunttu and the singers of the Boston Camerata, is more than a mere performance. It is a danced ritual that, premiered in 2004, still gets under your skin 21 years and 50,000 spectators later.

Even the beginning is of striking simplicity: In the semi-darkness, a single dancer moves through a narrow corridor of light. She stomps, claps, and swings her arms as if conjuring something. From silence, sound emerges, from loneliness, community. Gradually, seven more dancers and eight singers emerge from the shadows, as if an invisible order were forming, nourished by the depths of history and the power of the collective.

Spiritual beginning

Saarinen's work is inspired by the spiritual world of the Shakers - a radical religious movement that flourished in the USA in the 18th and 19th centuries and was known for its strict yet rhythmically expressive dances. But "Borrowed Light" is not a historical depiction of this culture, but an artistic approximation of its innermost principles: purity, devotion, humility, and the desire for a better, communal life. In this movement, there is no nostalgia, but existential urgency. Choreographically, Saarinen relies on a flowing, circling, and intensifying language.

Dance and song as a unity

The movements are clearly structured, but never mechanical. The dancers' bodies seem to be moved from within: Their arms draw circles, their torsos swing, and their steps are large, grounded, and powerful. Clapping and stomping set rhythmic accents, but the focus always remains on the organic unity of sound and movement. Particularly touching is the complete equality of dance and song. The singers are not accompanists, but an integral part of the action. They move, stand, and act in complete choreographic harmony with the dancers. Musically, "Borrowed Light" is carried by traditional Shaker songs, sung by the Boston Camerata under the direction of soprano Anne Azéma with immaculate clarity and archaic beauty. Their voices fill the room with a spiritual presence that does not seem sentimental, but serious, sincere, and

deep. It is this connection of physical and vocal energy that makes the piece so unique; it creates a powerful resonance space.

Another main actor is the light. Mikki Kunttu's lighting design is inspired by the Shaker practice of "borrowed light": windows that bring light into dark rooms. But what Kunttu creates goes far beyond that: Light becomes a seismograph of inner states, it evokes morning light, twilight, nocturnal darkness, festive mood, and sorrow all at once. Again and again, the action plunges into shadow, only to suddenly shine in dazzling brightness - like an image for the inner interplay of faith and doubt, loneliness and community, life and death.

A work of quiet power

After 70 minutes, one does not simply leave the workshop space, but returns from another reality - a place beyond words, where common humanity shines forth in its quiet grandeur. "Borrowed Light" is a meditation on belonging and the light we lend to each other. It is a masterpiece of choreographic and poetic intensity. That Tero Saarinen is one of Europe's most significant choreographers is once again abundantly clear this evening. With "Borrowed Light," he has created a work that touches, challenges, and heals - in its clarity, seriousness, and beauty, it is simply breathtaking and timeless.