



Volume 62, Number 4, December 2010

PINA BAUSCH. By Royd Climenhaga. Routledge Performance Practitioners. New York: Routledge, 2009; pp. 146. \$30.95 paper.

Pina Bausch, by Royd Climenhaga, is a brief, readable introduction to the life, work, and influence of this passionate and enigmatic choreographer. The book is part of the Routledge Performance Practitioners series, which presents introductory profiles of influential contemporary dance and theatre artists. Writing with the student in mind, Climenhaga does a fine job of putting Bausch's work into historical perspective and artistic context: her personal, social, and cultural influences and artistic inspirations are appropriately interwoven with commentary and analysis, as befits an artist whose work explored the blurring of boundaries.

Pina Bausch (1940–2009), who worked in the small industrial city of Wuppertal, Germany, remains the most controversial, innovative, and influential choreographer of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Her single greatest legacy is *Tanztheater*, a postmodern approach to performance expression that interweaves the intellectual elements of theatre—dramaturgy, text, character, and social awareness—with the more abstracted, raw, and immediate bodily expression of dance.

Bausch began her studies in Germany at age 14 under the direction of Kurt Jooss, who had been one of the most renowned teachers and choreographers of the pre-Hitler period. Although she drew on the emotive work of German expressionists and the social consciousness of Brecht, Climenhaga shows that it was her studies in New York City in 1961 at age 21 that defined her work as a dancer and choreographer. The vibrant and churning tumult of American modern dance, new theatre practice, Happenings, and experimentation in music and the visual arts was a catalyst, becoming the foundation of her postmodern dance-theatre vision. Like her expressionist predecessors, Bausch rejected that which concealed, made pretty, or anesthetized behavior and bodily presentation. She passionately interrogated the limiting conventions of performative expressions and expectations that she inherited. In her visually striking and emotionally evocative dance works, she transcended established technique and jettisoned that which did not reveal the raw-bone immediacy of life itself: "To understand what I am saying, you have to believe that dance is something other than technique . . . when you create a new work, the point of departure must be contemporary life—not existing forms of dance" (50).

Her process-oriented work was shaped by the moment and by the people with whom she worked. Climenhaga describes her choreography as a confluence of intellect, emotion, striking visual metaphors, and evocative staging that unearthed the deep social structures lurking beneath the modern psyche. She condemned many of life's injustices, especially those suffered by women, a central theme of her work. Shaped in no small part by the shadow of post-Nazi Germany, Bausch questioned accepted social and gender constructions and defended women from what she saw as an aggressive, often destructive German patriarchy.

Bausch did not stage stories, but rather experiences —at once immediate, personal, and universal. In so doing, she expanded the vocabulary of performance expressiveness that has informed and deepened modern theatre and dance. As documented by Climenhaga, contemporary choreographers, designers, actors, directors, and writers alike have been shaped by how Bausch defined the authenticity of the theatrical moment. In this way, her work took Brecht a step further, with the event enacted on the bodies of her performers potently yet ambiguously wavering between the theatrical and the real. The Wooster Group, Bill T. Jones, Rude Mechs, Theatre de Complicité, and Anne Bogart's SITI Company are just a few who have imported Bausch's principle of dance construction to theatrical development as means of exploring new performance work and open dramaturgical structure.

Climenhaga, a scholar and physical-performance creator working with the Human Company in New York City, did not work with Bausch, but his practical experience lends an immediacy and insight to his study of her work. The scholarship here is not exhaustive; instead, the book is presented in out-line form as befits the student-friendly, introductory objectives of the series. The author serves as a guide, connecting fragmentary material and thus reflecting Bausch's methodology as a process of adaptation—taking bits here and chunks there to mold into a particular work. Echoing her method, the portrait of Bausch and her work presented here is fractured, a composite of scholarly analysis, interviews with Bausch and her many collaborators, reviews, production photos, a wonderful sample of her exercises, and Climenhaga's own personal reactions and insights. This approach works well to capture the restlessness, resilience, and intuition of Bausch and her work: "Nothing helps me. Not what I have already done. It is done. Each time, you are a beginner. I want to give up, actually, but I don't . . . it's complicated. It all takes so much strength. I'm so fragile. It's emotional. I get little sleep, you try to sleep, but you can't. I'm thinking too much" (42).

As Climenhaga's book makes clear, Bausch's work is about feeling, questioning, and self-structuring—such are the fundamental themes of life and art: "I'm feeling. I don't make plans; it's always open. Something suddenly happens. It's scary" (60).

THOMAS RICCIO

University of Texas at Dallas