

British Theatre Guide

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Continu

Sasha Waltz & Guests Dance Company
Sadler's Wells
28–30 September 2012

From Berlin comes Sasha Waltz's two-hour *Continu*, inspired by her work on two major museum-based projects, David Chipperfield's Neues Museum in Berlin, and Zaha Hadid's MAXXI in Rome, to test the audience's resilience.

Seven black-clad women, boxed in by black marble floor and walls, dance to a lone percussionist. Are these women high priestesses channelling Martha Graham and Greek drama, or classical statuary come to life in a museum?

Whoever they are, Robyn Schulkowsky performing *Rebonds A* by Iannis Xenakis on the set with them—her movements, her light-catching silver hair, her sound—knocks them off their pedestals. Long silent pauses. A percussive heart beat. Bells tinkle. Two languages interact.

Prologue over, twenty-four dancers enter as a hunched bunch. Prelapsarian, cowed, they scuttle, cluster, try to break out of the box. Feet beat. *Arcana*, Edgar Varèse's 1927 Stravinskian symphonic work, takes them on an epic journey of the spheres in collaborative creation.

Portentous, reverential, the clash of myth and reality. The contents of museums, the prints on cave walls, the creative process made manifest in sculptural forms, friezes, bas-reliefs, hands reaching out, bodies measuring architectural space.

And faith. Shakers, Quakers, Pentacostalists speaking in tongues. Fear, anxiety, and dystopia... A leader is chosen, who lines them up against a wall and mows them down. Bam, bam, bam. Destroy and resurrect.

Phalanxes, ritual, pairing off, Adam and Eve—the heightened dance language is intense, the international company of dancers dedicated, but there's a chill depressing air in this analysis of our place in the universe, our part in the whole.

Black on black—thank goodness for the restorative interval drink. But, Waltz has a sense of humour after all. The black floor is now overlaid with a white canvas, on which men in flesh-coloured pants explore the capabilities of the body, its balance, the flexibility of its joints, its yogic stillness.

The rest join in, not an amorphous mass anymore, but different tribes in shades of white, beige, brown and black, lightening the last half hour. They walk on walls, paint the floor with their feet, imprint their mark.

Bodies captured in frozen Pompeian form, Waltz's guests, first class dancers, are clay of the best quality. Her laboratory also includes dramaturgy by Jochen Sandig, costume design by Bernd

Skodzig, scenography by Thomas Schenk and Pia Maier Schriever, and lighting by Martin Hauk.

Set to music by Iannis Xenakis and Claude Vivier (*Zipangu*), composers who, like Varèse, were inspired by scientific and mathematical philosophies, *Continu* finishes with Mozart's gentle *Oboe Quartet KV 370, 2 Adagio*.

Dance is part of the continuum – on the white colour-smeared canvas, lifted by six pairs of hands to form a curved backcloth, two dancers perform a sophisticated duet. The Churchillian 'black dog' is chased away with a smile. I'm glad I stayed for the second half.

Reviewer: [Vera Liber](#)