
Dance as Cultural Heritage Project

Brief description of selected projects 2018

1. Studies from the dance works of Sigurd Leeder

Sigurd Leeder (1902–1981) was a leading figure in German expressive dance. Former students at his Sigurd Leeder School of Dance (which was based in London from 1947 to 1959 and Herisau from 1964 to 1981) have come together in the Sigurd Leeder Dance Association, which aims to ensure future generations can share in the experience of his work. They encountered Leeder's dance teaching at various times and learned the principles of his method from the master himself. Together with renowned dance notation expert Dr. Ann Hutchinson Guest and a group of dancers, they are working on a selection of studies that typify his teaching methods and philosophy. The project also includes a DVD in which the studies, which could stand on their own as works of art, are reconstructed and performed by contemporary professional dancers. The DVD will accompany a publication on Leeder's methods by Ann Hutchinson Guest, and will be available to the public in archives and places associated with Leeder's teaching and work.

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2. Homage to Charlotte Bara

The Belgian dancer Charlotte Bara (Bachrach) lived and worked in Ascona, where she died in 1986. At the Teatro San Materno, a theatre built specially for her in the Bauhaus style, Bara maintained an enduring relationship with multiple genres of the international dance scene. She also devoted herself to her principal interest: sacred dance. The current artistic director of the Teatro San Materno, the choreographer Tiziana Arnaboldi, has researched Charlotte Bara's life and art. Working largely from photographs depicting Bara's dance poses that are archived in the Ascona municipal museum, she has created the performance "Tanz und Mysterium" ("Dance and Mystery"), which premiered on 3 December 2017. In this homage to the dancer Charlotte Bara, three contemporary dancers explore their relationship to her poses and incorporate contemporary elements into the reinterpretation. The project and the accompanying national and international tour aim both to honour a dancer who is not especially well known, and to revive her work and explore it on the stage.

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3. “A la recherche des pas trouvés” – a film on the dance teaching of Noemi Lapzeson

The dancer, choreographer and dance teacher Noemi Lapzeson died in January 2018. She received the Swiss Grand Award for Dance in 2017 in recognition of her hugely influential life's work. Lapzeson was born in Argentina and studied at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York. She worked as a soloist for Martha Graham and was involved in setting up the London Contemporary Dance Theatre. Moving to Geneva, she reshaped Swiss contemporary dance with her work during the 1980s, and her approaches and choreographies influenced several generations of dance practitioners. For a number of years now, her pupil and long-serving dancer Marcela San Pedro and film-maker Nicolas Wagnières have been exploring Lapzeson's teaching methods. In her dance lessons she shared the knowledge and conceptions of contemporary dance that she had collated, filtered and distilled throughout her career. San Pedro and Wagnières' film, which is not so much a documentary as a source of material, captures Noemi Lapzeson's teaching and the way in which she passed on her experience and knowledge to up-and-coming artists.

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4. Tale(s) of Swiss dance – conversations with dance journalist Ursula Pellaton

As well as collecting and archiving existing materials, the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts (SAPA) is committed to creating its own repository of information for the performing arts. Oral testimony from central figures in this ephemeral form of dance art has already been gathered together in the film “Tanzspuren – eine Oral-History der Schweizer Tanzgeschichte”, an award-winning Dance as Cultural Heritage project in 2012. This new project features the journalist Ursula Pellaton. She monitors trends and movements, places and themes in Swiss dance and reports on them in reviews, critiques of performances, portraits, previews and specialist articles. Her knowledge covers half a century of dance history and extends far beyond her publications. In a conversation with Ursula Pellaton using the techniques of the oral history method, her recollections and descriptions are captured for posterity, creating important sources of documentation on Swiss dance history. The audiovisual interviews will also be available for viewing as raw material. They are additionally being transcribed and published in an issue forming part of the SAPA series.

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5. Kulturerbe, tanz! – amateur groups rehearse and present showpieces of contemporary Swiss dance

The “Kulturerbe, tanz!” (“Dance, cultural heritage!”) project headed by dance researcher and educator Margrit Bischof and choreographer and performer Thomas Péronnet engages with Switzerland's cultural heritage of dance history at the physical level. Non-professional dance groups select a dance production from a list of relevant 20th- and 21st-century Swiss choreographers and rehearse it under professional guidance. The in-depth exploration of a specific work is central to the process. The reconstructions and historical reinterpretations disseminate knowledge about dance, while direct involvement strengthens the participants' cultural education: rehearsing the selected dance productions on stage and executing them with their own bodies gives the amateur artists a better understanding of languages of movement, dance techniques and styles. The revivals, reconstructions and reinterpretations will be performed at a festival and thus made accessible to an interested audience.

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