

Thursday, February 22, 2007, 8pm
Friday, February 23, 2007, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

The Forsythe Company



Three Atmospheric Studies

*The Forsythe Company is supported by the City of Dresden and the State of Saxony,
as well as the City of Frankfurt am Main and the State of Hesse.*

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Three Atmospheric Studies

A Work by The Forsythe Company
North American Premiere

Part I + II *Clouds after Cranach*
Part III *Study III*

Direction William Forsythe
Music, Part II David Morrow
Music, Part III Thom Willems
Stage Lighting William Forsythe
Text, Part II William Forsythe
Text, Part III Dana Caspersen, William Forsythe and
David Kern
Costumes Satoru Choko and Dorothee Merg
Sound Design and Synthesis Dietrich Krüger and Niels Lanz
Voice Treatment, DSP Programming Andreas Breitscheid, Oliver Pasquet and
Manuel Poletti, in collaboration with the
Forum Neues Musiktheater Staatsoper,
Stuttgart
Speakers, Part II Amancio Gonzalez, David Kern and
Jone San Martin
Speakers, Part III Dana Caspersen, David Kern and
Ander Zabala
Duration 1 hour, 30 minutes
Premiere February 2, 2006, Spielzeiteuropa,
Haus der Berliner Festspiele, Berlin

Three Atmospheric Studies is a triptych of dances drawing on a wide range of iconographic traditions. It is also choreographer William Forsythe's most explicit and most political work: a great performance, simultaneously furious and reflective, on one of the central conflicts of our time. Forsythe succeeds in creating imposing images of war purely by means of the human body; however, despite their great clarity, he refuses to use these images to articulate a specific political thesis, preferring instead to generate choreography and direction out of the fatal inner energies of the conflict.—*Peter Michalzik*

The Forsythe Company

Dancers

Yoko Ando, Cyril Baldy, Francesca Caroti, Dana Caspersen,
Amancio Gonzalez, David Kern, Marthe Krummenacher,
Ioannis Mantaounis, Fabrice Mazliah, Roberta Mosca, Nicole Peisl,
Christopher Roman, Jone San Martin, Yasutake Shimaji,
Elizabeth Waterhouse, Ander Zabala

Staff

William Forsythe *Artistic Director*
Dr. Vera Battis-Reese *Managing Director*
Susanne Brenner *Technical Production/Stage Supervisor*
Dorsey Bushnell *Personal Assistant to the Artistic Director*
Thierry Guiderdoni *Artistic Assistant to William Forsythe/
Ballet Master*
Dietrich Krüger *Sound and Video Designer*
Roserita Kuster* *Make-up*
Niels Lanz *Sound and Video Designer*
Dorothee Merg *Head of Costume Department*
David Morrow *Pianist/Composer*
Ulf Naumann *Technical Production*
Julian Gabriel Richter *Production Manager*
Mechthild Rühl *Press/PR/Marketing Manager*
Tanja Rühl *Technical Production/Lighting Supervisor*
Max Schubert *Technical Director*
Paul Viebeg *Planning/Stage Manager/Tour Manager*
Martina Zimmer *Assistant to the Managing Director*
Melanie Zimmermann *Assistant to the Press/PR/Marketing Manager*

* guest

North American Tour Representation

Rena Shagan Associates, Inc.
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Felicitas Willems *Tour Coordinator*
Anne McDougall *Company Manager*

Desastres de la Guerra: How William Forsythe's *Three Atmospheric Studies* Turns Dance into Political *Tanztheater*

Political content, which has almost fully disappeared from the theatre, can appear in unexpected places. *Three Atmospheric Studies* is, to my mind, an example of the most political intervention and position-taking currently on offer in the theatre. Impossible? How can a piece by a choreographer often seen as an aesthete express basic truths about some of the most pressing conflicts of our times? How can *Tanztheater* morph into the political at all? Can dance really hold its own—fundamentally, not merely by making use of allusion or reference—when it comes to today's complex political realities?

For years, political art (and not just in the theatre) has proven wanting. The contexts have become so complicated that art addressing political topics has either seemed overly simplified—especially when it has not shied away from taking a stand—or undermuscled and pale, since it has not pressed on into the moral dimensions necessary to adequately consider and depict political subject matter. At best it has been witty, an *aperçu* that briefly accords us a feeling of freedom.

Three Atmospheric Studies consists of three parts that are referred to as “compositions.” First come Compositions 1 to 3; the fourth is a crucifixion scene by the painter Lukas Cranach, with the fifth being a modern-day press agency photograph depicting an exploding landscape in the Middle East. Both pictures can be seen hanging in the foyer during the performances. Compositions 4 and 5 correlate, to the extent that Cranach's thunderhead—not just a meteorological phenomenon, but a divine, biblical one as well—can also be seen rising from the detonation in the photograph. Here we see the underlying structure that informs all of the evening's compositions, throughout which a single scene repeats itself on multiple levels. Bringing these repetitions into alignment is the main challenge confronting the viewer.

In contrast to the theatre's other creative talents, Forsythe is almost always present when his company performs and is constantly altering what happens on stage. *Three Atmospheric Studies* radicalizes this principle, given that the piece has evolved considerably having gone through a number of iterations.

With the exception of one sentence, Composition 1 is completely silent. “My son was arrested,” says dancer Jone San Martin, pointing to her child. By virtue of his red t-shirt, the son remains easily identifiable as he moves among the other less conspicuously clad performers. In the troupe's movements, gestures and images of an explosion and of the son's arrest can be discerned, and the boy's flow of movement repeatedly ends in the arms of two “police officers.” As the movement freezes, those so inclined will perceive stills of one, two or three scenes: an explosion, an arrest and the horrified recognition of incoming rockets—tattered snapshots from the unending flow of war-time imagery.

The flow of movement constantly grows in agitation; the dancers' ever more audible breathing seems a sort of musical score. In the work's first version, the movement's fluidity was paramount, and the dancers gave the impression of being loaded, self-charging particles in the centre of a storm cloud—an “atmospheric study” in the most literal sense. War, the explosions in the Middle East—to give one interpretation—can be viewed as manifestations of a great cosmological aggressiveness and potency. In the final work, this aspect has receded into the background, although it remains present, in favor of the boy's capture, which then persists as a defining moment: My son was arrested.

The complexity increases in the second composition. The mother sits opposite an interpreter, who is supposed translate her accounting of the events into Arabic. Their efforts are meant to make the proceedings official. Thus, the mother considers it important to make herself understood, and the translating then evolves into the focal point, with the interpreter, who gradually relinquishes his neutral stance, taking on the key

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Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Lamentation Beneath the Cross* (1503)
Bavarian State Painting Collections, Old Pinakothek, Munich



Reuters/Athar Hussein (November 15, 2005)

role. At first, both mother and translator agree to proceed as precisely as possible, word for word. “My son,” she begins. “*Ibni*,” he translates, explaining with over-exactness that he has to unite the two words, “my” and “son.” What follows starts to spin out of the mother’s control, with the interpreter accusing her of being unfocused and the mother herself soon suspecting that his view of the entire situation is incorrect.

This scene, one of increasing alienation and uproar, is underscored by a box next to the mother, from which a whining, accusing tone emanates, a tone that might arise from the centre of her being were she not suppressing it. At the same time, the scene is interrupted by another dancer, David Kern. He traces lines across the stage that define the artistic vanishing points of the fourth and fifth compositions, embellishing the set with the perspective chosen by Cranach and recorded in the war-scene photo. He then

describes an apartment building, an overturned automobile, the cloud rising from an explosion; within Composition 2, Kern is depicting Composition 5. During the time that the dispute between the mother and interpreter devolves into an open fight, he describes Composition 4: the mother wailing at the foot of the cross. The mother onstage reacts with indignation; she claims she is not part the fifth composition, but belongs to Composition 1 instead. She is not the figure of the mother eternally bewailing her loss, the icon of the conflict; her story is concretely defined. She insists that a truth exists that can be ascertained, that something happened to her son which can be explained.

The event that was presented as real in Composition 1 becomes inherently intangible; it withdraws. This is the central movement in Forsythe’s political theatre: The happening happens, we imagine it, we create an image of it. But

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through this the process also fades, becoming essentially incomprehensible. Thus, Forsythe's composition touches on the key experience to be had in a media-based world: All of the globe's catastrophes are accessible, yet they remain remote; all conflicts are open to the public, but they have become unapproachable.

This visualization of an impalpable process—which remains constantly present with all its painful consequences, thanks to both San Martin's performance and the sounds reverberating from the box—serves Forsythe well, allowing him to illuminate the contrast between pain and intangibility. With *Three Atmospheric Studies*, Forsythe's theatre makes clear the loss of "real" war, which, since the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union or, at the latest, the first Gulf War, has characterized the political education of a generation of television viewers. Only here, in experiencing loss, are real-world happenings again substantial, happenings we know constantly take place, despite their diffuseness. This "sense-ability" is not achieved through association or empathy or identification; it results from the discrepancy between the feeling of loss and the knowledge that ensues by layering one composition onto the next.

In the third composition, Kern describes a cloud formation, using the voice of a weather announcer or an evening-news expert. While he is performing, the dancers again evoke a series of explosions. What's more, they crash against the wall, which, with technical enhancement,

resounds with the din of war. The mother sits abject in front of the wall. All of the happening's diverse levels splay apart, visible for everyone to see.

One character now makes tangible the disparate nature of war and suffering, a fundamental helplessness: Dana Caspersen speaks to the mother as a U.S. soldier, using an accent from the American South. She explains that despite the tragic personal consequences, what happened was in order, that there is no reason for alarm—words we recognize. Here we have a bitter indictment against the scorn of those situated in superior positions. And, even worse, this is the voice that acts as if it has everything under control, even in a shattered reality where action, knowledge, sight, feeling and suffering no longer constitute and can no longer constitute a whole.

The cause of suffering mocks the victims. War guffaws at our expense and claims reason as its own. On the one hand, there is a huge gap between this and Goya's *Desastres de la Guerra*: Forsythe is an intellectual artist who approaches feeling through formal assemblages. And yet, a deep kinship makes itself evident between the erstwhile Spanish painter who portrayed war's horrors and today's choreographer of war: Both place warfare and humans in relationship to each other. They show the space between the two to be the space in which power runs wild. They strip war down to the truth. *Three Atmospheric Studies* shows us our *desastre de la guerra*.

Peter Michalzik

About the Artists



As an American working internationally for the last 30 years, **William Forsythe** is recognized as one of the world's foremost choreographers. His work is celebrated for reorienting the practice of ballet from its identification with classical repertoire into a dynamic 21st century art form.

Raised and principally trained in New York, Forsythe arrived on the European dance scene in his early 20s as a dancer and eventually as Resident Choreographer of the Stuttgart Ballet. At the same time he also created new works for ballet companies in Munich, The Hague, London, Basel, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, Paris, New York, and San Francisco. In 1984, he began a 20-year tenure as Director of the Frankfurt Ballet where he created many of the most celebrated dance theatre works of our time, such as *The Loss of Small Detail* (1991) in collaboration with composer Thom Willems and designer Issey Miyake. Other key works from the Frankfurt Ballet years include *Gänge* (1982), *Artifact* (1984), *Impressing the Czar* (1988), *Limb's Theorem* (1990), *A L I E / N A(C)TION* (1992), *Eidos:Telos* (1995), *Endless House* (1999) and *Kammer/Kammer* (2000).

Forsythe's choreography and his companies' performances have won overwhelming audience acclaim and the most prestigious awards the field has to offer, such as the Bessie (1988, 1998, 2004), Laurence Olivier Award (1992, 1999),

Commandeur des Arts et Lettres (1999), the German Distinguished Service Cross (1997) and the Wexner Prize (2002). He has been chosen as Choreographer of the Year several times by the international critics' survey.

After the closure of the Frankfurt Ballet in 2004, Forsythe established a new, more independent ensemble—The Forsythe Company. The company was founded with the support of the states of Saxony and Hesse, the cities of Dresden and Frankfurt am Main, and private sponsors. Forsythe's most recent creations are developed and performed exclusively by the new company while his previous work is prominently featured in the repertoire of virtually every major ballet company in the world including The Kirov, The New York City Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, The National Ballet of Canada, The Royal Ballet, Covent Garden, and The Paris Opera Ballet, among many others. The Forsythe Company, based in Dresden and Frankfurt am Main, enjoys a yearly residency at the Schiffbauhalle of the Schauspielhaus Zürich and also maintains an extensive international touring schedule.

Forsythe's choreographic thinking has engaged with and contributed to the most significant international artistic currents of our time: from performance and visual arts to architecture and interactive multimedia. He has created architecture/performance installations commissioned by Daniel Libeskind in Germany, Artangel in London, Creative Time in New York, and the City of Paris. His short film, *Solo*, was presented at the 1997 Whitney Biennial. In 2006, a major exhibition of his performance, film and installation work was presented at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich. In 1994, Forsythe virtually reinvented the teaching of dance with his pioneering and award-winning computer application, *Improvisation Technologies: A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye*, which is used by professional companies, dance conservatories, universities, postgraduate architecture programs and secondary schools. As an educator, Forsythe is regularly invited to lecture and give workshops at major universities and

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cultural institutions internationally. He served as the first Mentor in Dance in the inaugural cycle of the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative and currently codirects and teaches in the Dance Apprentice Network aCross Europe (D.A.N.C.E.) program. Forsythe has been awarded an honorary fellowship from the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance in London and an honorary doctorate from The Juilliard School in New York.

With the founding of **The Forsythe Company**, William Forsythe has created a new, agile structure within which to pursue the multifaceted creative work begun in the Frankfurt Ballet. Together with a more intimate ensemble of 18 dancers, Forsythe has built on the intense collaboration developed in the rehearsal studio over the last 20 years and begun to explore a new dramaturgy of social and political engagement. His enduring and evolving interest in developing alternative encounters with the audience is leading the company to performances and installations in theaters, public spaces, museums

and cultural houses worldwide. Supported by the states of Saxony and Hesse, the cities of Dresden and Frankfurt am Main, and private sponsors, the company finds itself in an enviably decentered position from which to approach the rapidly shifting, decentered contemporary cultural landscape.

William Forsythe has radically influenced the kinds of thinking being done in the field of dance through his understanding of the malleability and possibility inherent in the language of classical dance. He has seen the classical as a set of ideas about relationships that in and of themselves have unlimited potential for proliferation of form, flow and dynamic. Now with his new ensemble, Forsythe is taking this relational and connective mode of thinking—that has carved out so much creative autonomy for the individual dancer—and applying it even more radically to a decentralized, distributed model of group intra-connectivity. The newest work explores the implications of a contemporary social shift from a politics of individual sovereignty to one of networked multitudes.

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Dancers

Yoko Ando was born in Yokohama, Japan. Studied theater at the Bunka Gakuin College and dance with Kuniko Kisanki. Worked with Japanese choreographer Kota Yamazaki and theater directors such as Hideki Noda, Robert Lepage, Masahiko Shimada and with Antony Rizzi. Joined Ballett Frankfurt in 2001 and started with The Forsythe Company in 2005.

Born in Woippy, France, **Cyril Baldy** studied in Paris at the Conservatoire National Supérieur. He has worked with the Jeune Ballet de France and Nederlands Dans Theater II and I before joining Ballett Frankfurt in 2002. He has been a member of The Forsythe Company since 2005.

Born in Pisa, Italy, **Francesca Caroti** was educated at the Centro Studi di Firenze. She has danced with Aterballetto in Reggio Emilia and Jan Fabre's company. She has been a member of Ballett Frankfurt since 1994 and a member of The Forsythe Company since 2005.

Dana Caspersen was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota and subsequently trained with a variety of people including Maggie Black and Erik Hawkins. She danced for three years with the North Carolina Dance Theater and worked with Ballett Frankfurt from 1988 to 2004 before joining the The Forsythe Company in 2005.

Amancio Gonzalez trained at the Estudio de danza, Ion Beitia and the Centre International de danse, Rosella Hightower. Danced with the Scottish Ballet, NAPAC Dance Company, De Rotterdamse Dansgroep, Reflex Dance Company and Scapino Ballet Rotterdam. Joined Ballett Frankfurt in 1999. Member of The Forsythe Company since 2005.

David Kern was born in New Orleans. He joined San Francisco Ballet in 1981. There, he danced many works by Balanchine and Michael Smuin. He joined Ballett Frankfurt in 1987.

From 1994 to 2004, he was freelance dancer and choreographer living in Paris. He has been a member of The Forsythe Company since 2005.

Marthe Krummenacher was born in Detroit, Michigan, and studied dance in Geneva at the École de Danse de Genève. She joined Nederlands Dans Theater II in 2000 for three seasons. She was a member of Ballett Frankfurt from 2003, before joining The Forsythe Company in 2005.

Born in Athens in 1981, **Ioannis Mantafounis** studied dance at the Conservatoire de Paris. He has worked with the Götterburg Opera Ballet and Nederlands Dans Theater II, and freelanced on different projects in Greece. He has been a member of The Forsythe Company since 2005.

Fabrice Mazliah studied dance in his hometown Geneva, at the National School of Athens and in the Rudra Bejart Atelier in Lausanne. He was part of the Mandafounis Cie., the Nederlands Dans Theater in Holland and the Ballett Frankfurt and has danced since 2005 with The Forsythe Company. Fabrice has also produced several works of his own.

Roberta Mosca trained in Biella with Paola Olivero, in Milano at the Scuola del Teatro alla Scala and in Stuttgart at the John Cranko School. He has worked with Stuttgarter Ballett, Vienna State Opera Ballet, Teatro Comunale di Firenze, Leipzig State Opera Ballet, Aterballetto and Ballett Frankfurt. Has been a freelancer since 2002 and a performer with The Forsythe Company since 2005.

Nicole Peisl was born in Austria, and graduated at the Rotterdamse Dansacademie in 1994. She worked as a freelance dancer, choreographer and teacher until 1997, and joined the Frankfurt Ballet in 2000. From 2004 to 2006, she created several works, taught at different universities and academies and was guest artist with The Forsythe Company, the Daghdha Dance Company and the Episode Collective. Nicole

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has been a member of The Forsythe Company since 2006.

Christopher Roman began in the theatre at a very early age which led him to his career in dance. He has danced professionally with The Cleveland Ballet, The Pacific Northwest Ballet, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, The Pennsylvania Ballet and Ballett Frankfurt. He joins The Forsythe Company in its third season after two seasons of setting some of the works of William Forsythe for other European companies, teaching and performing internationally and pursuing his own creative endeavors.

Born in San Sebastian, Spain, **Jone San Martin** studied with Nentxu Nedel and was a member of Ballet Nacional de España, the Ulmer Theater and the Ballet Royal de Wallonie in Belgium, before joining Ballett Frankfurt in 1992. She started with The Forsythe Company in 2005.

Yasutake Shimaji was born 1978 in Japan. He started modern dance under the guidance of Miyako KATO and worked as a company member of Noism from 2004 to 2006. Yasutake

has been a member of The Forsythe Company since 2006.

Elizabeth Waterhouse was born in Albany, New York, and received her early dance training at the Albany Dance Institute and the School of American Ballet. Elizabeth graduated *magna cum laude* from Harvard University with a BA in physics before completing her MFA in dance at Ohio State University. She has performed in Boston with Marcus Schulkind Dance Company (2001) and with Ballett Frankfurt (2004). She joined The Forsythe Company in 2005.

Ander Zabala was born in Bilbao, Spain. He started dancing with Ion Beitia in 1983, studied at Béjart's Mudra school, John Neumeier's Hamburg ballet school and Rosella Hightower's Centre de Dance International in Cannes. He has danced with the Centre Choregraphique National de Tours, under Jean Christophe Maillot, Ballett Frankfurt (1992) and the Birmingham Royal Ballet under David Bintley from April 1997 to December 1999. He rejoined Ballett Frankfurt in 2000, and has been a member of The Forsythe Company since 2005.