

# MOTION MASTERS

Classical and contemporary dance combine in the thrilling work of Nederlands Dans Theater. Kelly Apter welcomes them back.



Carrizo knew exactly what to do with it. Her work, *The Missing Door* completes NDT's triple-bill, a mixture of fantasy and reality in which a man looks death in the face and is flooded with memories. Having co-founded Brussels-based collective Peeping Tom in 2000, Carrizo has spent the past 16 years 'working to erase the border between theatre and dance'. Arriving at NDT's headquarters in The Hague to choreograph *The Missing Door* in 2013, however, she was a little in awe. 'When we were first asked to work with them we thought, wow, this is a big experience for us,' says Carrizo. 'Because we'd never worked in this way, or worked with dancers at this level.'

Carrizo's style was born out of her own time as a performer, with various companies in France and Belgium, where the line between movement and acting was continually blurred. 'It came from the experiences I had working with choreographers like Alain Platel in Les Ballets C de la B,' she explains. 'I wanted to concentrate artistically on movement, but at the same time to not just see the dancer, but to see the character. That was the line we followed.'

For many choreographers, the dancers at NDT present a delicious box of tricks to play with. But Carrizo remained true to her vision and helped the dancers work on characterisation first and foremost, rather than focus solely on their technique. 'It was a very good experience,' she recalls of her time with the company. 'At first we were laughing, because we thought here are these great dancers, and we're asking them to open and close doors. But they were also searching for the characters and we wanted to create a specific atmosphere for them and find the humanity.'

## NDT1

Monday 21 – Wednesday 23 August, 7.30pm, Edinburgh Playhouse, tickets from £11

The award-winning *Shoot the Moon*, captures the love lives of three couples, danced to a soundtrack by Philip Glass. While *Stop-Motion* looks at poignant farewells, using beautiful music by Max Richter and others to tug at our heartstrings. In both works, the extraordinary technique of the NDT1 dancers is given space to shine. Trained in both classical ballet and contemporary dance, their movement style is a combination of poetic grace and dynamic energy – in short, they're a joy to watch.

## 'We'd never worked with dancers at this level'

But there's another side to NDT1. These dancers also have a dramatic quality – and Argentinean-born choreographer Gabriela

Edinburgh is no stranger to the unique style and skill of Nederlands Dans Theater. Usually, however, it's the youth wing that visits the city, the indefatigable Nederlands Dans Theater 2, filled with sparky 17–22-year-olds.

But those dancers soon grow up, become more emotionally mature, embellish their training with theatrical experience, and graduate into a company deemed the world over as the place to be for both dancers and choreographers – Nederlands Dans Theater 1 (NDT1). It's over ten years since we last saw NDT1 at the International Festival, and although many of the dance personnel may have changed, one thing has remained the same – Sol León and Paul Lightfoot. The choreographic duo has created almost 50 works for the company, two of which are heading to the International Festival this August.

# DIVING FOR PEARLS

Gareth K Vile welcomes Meow Meow back to Edinburgh and finds her getting deep, meaningful – and deeper still.

After appearing in Barry Humphries' evocation of the Weimar cabaret at the International Festival in 2016, Meow Meow is returning with *The Little Mermaid*, a distinctive reimagining of Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale of true love and sacrifice. Far from being a sentimental fantasy, Andersen's story has darker currents of desire and a determinedly modern resonance that Meow Meow has been only too keen to draw out. 'It's super-dark!' she exclaims. Beneath the story of the mermaid who exchanges a life under the sea for the chance to chase true love, Meow Meow has recognised the horror. 'We are living in this strange world of representations of perfection and pressure for perfection,' she says. 'My show is a contemporary examination of love, using *The Little Mermaid* as a spring board.'

Meow Meow takes an approach to musical theatre that combines an iconoclastic attitude to the limitations of the genre, and a sincere enthusiasm for the potential of the classic chanteuse. With more than a hint of sensuality, sharp humour and a charisma that plays with the very idea of the diva, she unites the political and the personal, the serious and the mischievous in a blend of burlesque, cabaret and theatricality that is distinctively her own.

*The Little Mermaid* is ambitious and intense. Meow Meow has commissioned an array of musicians to provide numbers for the show. They include Amanda Palmer, who helped add a punk edge to the cabaret revival, and Thomas Lauderdale, known for the political edge of his work with the band Pink Martini. They help make the show unashamedly theatrical, a structured journey through the myths of desire – and the sacrifices it demands.

'The Little Mermaid gives up the thing that defines her, her voice, in order to maybe dance for the prince and maybe win his love,' she says. Examining the mermaid's exchange as a form of extreme body modification, the

show becomes 'an examination of love and the ideal of romantic love'. Mixing her own experiences into the show's narrative ('there's me at the end of the world, having searched for love'), she uses the fairy story to delve into the human need for passion and perfection.

By working closely with the source story, Meow Meow finds the symbolism hidden in the details. 'The mermaid grows up with a statue of the prince, an immobile image of perfection,' she says. 'In the same way, we all project on people perhaps impossible ideals of beauty.'

## 'We all project on people impossible ideals of beauty'



Meow Meow: 'a contemporary examination of love'

She also recognises a broader political resonance of the myth: 'I was thinking a lot about exile and that is very much a contemporary state. The Little Mermaid leaves her home for a place that is not her country, and in the end she is not allowed to be there either. There are many people around the world who are in this situation, in the obvious way and a more personal way.' *The Little Mermaid* has her signature fusion of the personal and the political, but it never forgets the importance of the emotional in performance. 'I love performing it,' she says. 'It feels like a circus of emotions, with these contemporary songwriters like my sirens.'

## Meow Meow's Little Mermaid

Saturday 5 – Saturday 27 August (except 8, 15 & 22 August), 10.30pm  
Saturday 12, Saturday 19, Saturday 26 & Sunday 27 August, 7.30pm, The Hub, tickets from £15