"DANCE, DANCE, *OTHERWISE*, WE ARE LOST" –*PINA BAUSCH*, THE GREAT CHOREOGRAPHER, WHOSE WORK WE CELEBRATE ON THE EVE OF SPRING DANCE AT THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE. BY RACHEL SHARP

PHOTOGRAPHED BY *WILL DAVIDSON*

Pina Bausch and Coco Chanel never met, but if they had, the two icons would have had far more in common than their bird-like figures, elegant deportment and passion for cigarettes. One was, of course, one of the most important fashion designers in history, the other arguably the most influential composer of modern dance, but both rose from humble beginnings and battled critics to redefine their crafts, becoming national treasures in their respective Germany and France in the process.

While she's less famous than the fashion icon, at least to those outside the ballet community, Bausch's life story is no less fascinating. She was raised in postwar Germany, and went on to become one of the 20th century's most eminent and innovative choreographers, with a staggering 45 works to her name. She broke ballet convention to define a new genre of performance known as dance theatre (or *tanztheater* in her native German), which — to the horror of dance purists — focused less on technique and more on sending messages through confronting movement, words and dramatic but minimalist set design. ▶

Juliette Barton wears **Gucci** dress, $3680. Styled by **Jillian Davison**.

Barton wears **Michael Lo Sordo** dress, $2200. Opposite page: Richard Cilli wears **Wrangler** jeans, $130 (worn throughout).

Barton wears **Maticevski** dress, $3845.
Fragrance note: **Givenchy** Dance
With Givenchy eau de toilette.

Barton wears **Rochas** dress, $3845.

Gucci dress and briefs (sold as set), $7470.

T by Alexander Wang dress, $270. All prices approximate. In this portfolio: hair by Alan White at The Names Agency; makeup by Justine Purdue at The Names Agency. See Buylines for details and stockists.

We take cross-pollination of arts genres for granted in today's multimedia world, but back in the 1970s, Bausch's Tanztheater ruffled conservative feathers, but sparked an international choreographic revolution nonetheless.

"Pina Bausch didn't just change the face of contemporary dance; she really changed the face of theatre as well," says Wendy Martin, curator of Spring Dance, Australia's only international contemporary dance festival, dedicated this year to Bausch's legacy. "She did what so many theatre artists for so long were trying to do: understand and represent the essence of our humanity — the good, the bad; everything that we are."

Bausch (born Philippine Bausch in Solingen, Germany) spent much of her early childhood fascinated by the behaviour of customers in the small cafe of the hotel her parents owned. (Later, one of her most famous works, *Café Müller*, was based on some of the things she'd seen while watching from under the tables.)

She was a relatively late starter, starting ballet lessons at age 14 with respected choreographer Kurt Jooss, already a key player in the German modern dance movement that was beginning to free itself from what it saw as the creative shackles of classical ballet. "I loved to dance because I was scared to speak," the famously shy Bausch once said of those days. "When I was moving, I could feel."

By the age of 18, she had excelled enough to win a scholarship for the prestigious Juilliard School in New York at a time when the boundaries of classical ballet were being pushed in the US. Bausch was enthralled and took a job as a dancer with The Metropolitan Opera so she could afford to stay in Manhattan, but was eventually lured home to Germany in 1962, age 22, to be lead soloist in Kurt Jooss's Folkwang Ballet. In 1973 she was named director of the prestigious Wuppertal Opera Ballet, in Wuppertal, in northern Germany. Her beloved Tanztheater Wuppertal, as she eventually renamed it, and its troupe of disciple-like elite dancers, became her creative vehicle for the next 35 years, travelling the world often to perform in prestigious venues such as Saddler's Wells in London and Théâtre de la Ville in Paris. But while she always met with famous audience members such as Andy Warhol, David Bowie and Robert De Niro, who came to congratulate her after the shows, it was more out of professional duty rather than a desire to socialise, her dancers recall.

Like Chanel, Bausch was elusive, rail-thin (choreographer Paul Taylor, who worked with her in New York, described her in his autobiography as "one of the thinnest human beings I've ever seen") and most often seen with an intense expression and cigarette dangling from her slim fingers. But those closest to her also describe a refined sense of humour, sharp intelligence and a huge smile that lit up her face when something pleased her.

"It was the first time a director had encouraged me to project my own personality on the stage, and it opened a whole new world."

"She used to say that God had not given her a sense of humour," recalls Australian modern dance icon Meryl Tankard, who was a soloist in Bausch's Tanztheater for almost eight years. "She could look right through you. When I first got there, I used to say hello and smile, but she would just look back. So I just stopped saying it. She always said we [people] don't need to talk."

"She was shy, but she had an acute ability to observe other people," adds Wendy Martin. "One look from her and you knew that she was looking into your soul. You couldn't pretend to be somebody else. She could see who you were."

Despite her seemingly frosty demeanour, Bausch — who had a son in the early 1980s, and who, like Chanel, never married but had several long term companions over the years, including Rolf Borzik, the Tanztheater's hugely influential stage and costume designer — loved people, particularly for the faults or imperfections that made them real.

Her many works, for the most part, were sombre and dark, with an intense theatricality, mostly focused on the search for love, intimacy and relationships — particularly between men and women — but also themes included angst, loneliness, rejection, alienation and the struggle for self-identity. More shocking still to ballet traditionalists, her ballets had no plot lines, no conventional sense of story progression or revelation of characters, and featured nature-inspired sets such as waterfalls, soil floors, carnation carpets and even pouring rain. She also did away, for the most part, with elaborate costumes, preferring instead simple feminine shift dresses for the women and classic suits for the men.

Her troupe was highly trained and took daily classes, but that's where ballet convention ended. It was an unusual mixture of shapes, sizes, ethnicities and ages (many danced into their forties, fifties and even sixties), each member chosen for their ability to dance with their hearts and souls as much as their bodies. "I am not interested in how people move, but in what moves them," Bausch famously said.

"It was the first time a director had encouraged me to project my own personality on the stage, and it opened a whole new world," says Meryl Tankard. "I had nothing against being a sylph in a tutu and toe-shoes, but the whole classical repertory suddenly seemed like a museum." Still, for all of her works' melancholy and in-your-face emotion, Bausch always intended to send audiences home with the feeling that — for all its ups and downs — life can be survived.

Along with creating a controversial new dance genre, Bausch also invented a choreography method that is now widely copied throughout the world. As her works had no storylines, she would spark new ideas by asking her dancers questions about memories or day-to-day feelings, making them answer with their bodies rather than words. "You made a dance out of feelings rather than just a series of movements," says Tankard. "We spoke, we screamed, and we laughed and we cried. She made dance relevant. Honestly, once you've worked that ▶

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GETTY IMAGES; TOP FOTO; WILFRIED KRÜGER

Choreographer Pina Bausch at work.

In 1980.

A scene from new Wim Wenders film *Pina*, released August 18.

A scene from *Pina*.

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called the Liberty Cut," wrote Ursula Bloom, with tremendous revisionist sagacity, in *Woman's Own* in May 1942.

Hollywood exempted, the second world war years probably weren't as glamorous as a zillion films have since portrayed them. Just because Keira Knightley and Julianne Moore give tremendous manicure and eyebrow architecture in their respective bomb shelters, I don't think we generalise about the women who really had to cope with this stuff. Bulletins from the beauty front line suggest that by '41 nail varnishes were dying out as duty in canteens, hospitals and munitions factories called for "capable hands".

But it's the make do-ing and mending, the sense of duty, the deeply held belief that looking one's best and keeping it all together somehow went hand in hand, and the quietly dignified courage of that generation that resonates with European and American designers trying to figure out how to do clothes that make some kind of sense in a global recession. These were strong but not slutty women (or if they were slutty they kept it to themselves). Miuccia Prada had the right word when she talked about them being alluring. Pragmatic too. Take their basics: a pretty, fitted (but not too fitted) dress that can do 24/7 duty depending on whether you add or subtract some jewellery, a stole and some heels; brogues (a serious alternative to ballet pumps and the only viable flat shoe with turn-up trousers); a decorative, neat collared blouse that works equally well with drainpipes as with a pencil skirt; a figure-defining jacket that can be belted or worn open; a classic coat. Oh, and lipstick — defiant, exclamatory, red for victory. We have orange and fuchsia to bring to the party now — sales of lipstick are up.

There will be a thousand more films idealising this period before we've worked through our fascination, from HBO's *Mildred Pierce*, in which Kate Winslet emotes through floral dresses and hair that looks distinctly Garbo-esque, to *W.E*, Madonna's biopic of Wallis Simpson, which even if it's shockingly bad, will have terrific costumes. ■

Lisa Armstrong is fashion editor of the UK's Daily Telegraph.

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way, you can't go back to 'Oh, here's a lovely move; it looks so beautiful when I do it in the mirror'."

Bausch certainly gathered critics, though. Some described her work as "bad ballet", while one particularly biting review in *The New Yorker* called her choreography "a pornography of pain". In her early years at the Wuppertal Opera Ballet, Bausch was labelled the "Wicked Fairy of German Ballet" for cancelling new productions of *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. A number of her original ensemble quit because there was little conventional ballet left, but that simply made room for dancers such as Meryl Tankard, who did share her vision.

Tankard had just won a scholarship contract with The Australian Ballet at the age of 23 when she attended Bausch's Tanztheater during a holiday in Europe, was mesmerised and tried out for a recently vacated position. "She read the newspaper through my whole audition," recalls Tankard of her first Bausch encounter. "At the end she just said, 'OK, I'll take you'. I nearly died. As I got to know her, I learnt it was very unusual for her to take a person like that. She [usually] made you hang around for months. But I rocked up in a '40s-style skunk [fur] coat, red lips and oil-slicked back hair. She just liked me — although Pina was not like that [aesthetically] at all. She was all tracksuits and black and grey."

When Pina Bausch died suddenly on June 30, 2009, a mere five days after being diagnosed with cancer (her family has never disclosed which kind), it came as a huge shock to everyone, particularly her dancers, who were on tour in Poland at the time. Though heartbroken, they took to the stage that night, crying their way through the performance, knowing it would have been expected by their late director, who lived by the daily mantra: "Dance, dance, otherwise we are lost".

> "I never intended to invent a particular style or a new kind of theatre."

Despite any early resistance in the dance community to her unique vision, Bausch died a Knight of the French Legion of Honour (2003), recipient of the German Great Cross of Merit (1997), and had honorary doctorate degrees from numerous universities, along with long lists of awards including the Golden Lion at the 2007 Venice Biennale for her life's work. "She fitted in so much in her 68 years — more than anyone else did," says Australian dancer Julie Shanahan, who joined Bausch's company 23 years ago at the tender age of 25, and is one of its longest-serving members. "It is still my life," she says of the Tanztheater, which continues to showcase Pina's timeless work today.

Audiences at the Sydney Opera House's Spring Dance festival this month will also feel Bausch's presence, most literally through acclaimed choreographer Alain Platel's work, *Out of Context — For Pina*, which was voted dance show of the year in Europe in 2010. She has also been immortalised in a stunning feature-length movie by legendary German filmmaker Wim Wenders, which opens in Australian cinemas on August 18. It's the world's first 3-D art house movie, a project Wenders and Bausch had talked about often during their 20-year friendship. Despite Bausch's sudden death just days before movie rehearsals were due to start, Wenders carried on filming her Tanztheater after a period of mourning, naming the movie simply *Pina*, which he'd probably agree would have embarrassed his "very shy and very modest" friend.

"I've never intended to invent a particular style or a new kind of theatre," Pina confessed after winning the prestigious Kyoto Prize just two years before her death. "The form emerged quite by itself from the questions I had. In my work I've always looked for something I did not yet know. This is a permanent, also a painful search, a struggle … You stand alone facing life and the experiences that you make, and you have to try all on your own to make visible what you have always known, or at least give a clue or foreshadow." ■

Spring Dance, Sydney Opera House, August 23–September 4. Out of Context — for Pina will also be performed September 3–4 at Brisbane Powerhouse as part of Brisbane Festival 2011, www.brisbanefestival.com.au.