

Silvia Gribaudi's Grand Jeté

words by Giordana Patumi



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Silvia Gribaudi, known for her choreographic genius infused with fertile irony, continues to captivate audiences with her latest creation, *Grand Jeté*. We had the pleasure of witnessing this performance at Teatro Morlacchi in Perugia on January 18, 2024. For two decades, Gribaudi has charmed audiences with her playful approach to contemporary dance, transforming it from a mysterious and sometimes tedious substance into an engaging and participatory experience.

Grand Jeté represents a noticeable evolution in Gribaudi's expressive tools, realized through a robust ensemble of eleven dancers in collaboration with the MM Contemporary Dance Company. The title of the piece refers to a term in dance that signifies "the grand split in the air." Alongside classical dance elements like plié, battement, arabesque, rond de jambe, pas de bourrée, and pas de chat, the grand jeté stands out as one of the most famous and celebrated moves in classical choreography.

Gribaudi, from the start, playfully deconstructs these established movements of classical dance, turning them from the backbone of ballet into a source of interaction and shared gestures. The performance cleverly engages the audience, blurring the lines between choreographer, performers, and spectators.

Matteo Franceschini's inventive sound design adds another layer to the production, intertwining references to classical repertoire in a continuous interplay of shifting atmospheres.

Silvia Gribaudi, with her amiable yet authoritative presence, leads and is led by the performers, orchestrating and dismantling choreographies in perfect harmony with the dancers of MM Contemporary Dance Company. The show, amid a continuous flow of proposed choreographies, also reflects on the metaphorical significance of this virtuosic step in everyday life. *Grand Jeté* serves as a metaphor for sudden hope, a conscious leap into a better future, often revealed after an abrupt setback.

The title of Zebra Produzioni's new show, *Grand Jeté*, ultimately points to the continuous stimulation of the audience—a distinctive feature of Gribaudi's expressive style. The Turin-based choreographer's dance becomes both a deliberate scenic device for shared experiences between stage and audience and an intelligent mechanism where tradition and innovation intertwine, providing each other with vital energy.

The performance begins with an unasked question, a subtle inquiry in the performers' gazes, and a small gesture that prompts applause, setting the tone for Silvia Gribaudi's latest work. As ten dancers from MMCompany enter the stage, their statuesque physiques and confident strides raise questions about the poetic direction Gribaudi will take this time. Known for deconstructing body stereotypes and gender clichés with playful irony, Gribaudi's compositions challenge conventions and serve as rebellions against predefined models.

In *Grand Jeté*, the choreographer focuses more decisively on the mechanism of representation, delicately and ironically exploring the relationship between the audience and the stage. The audience is drawn into the energy of movements, the vigor of bodies, the resistance of circular runs, and the courage in leaps. The precision of choreographic designs by the eleven performers dressed in black resonates throughout the show, aiming to establish complicity with the viewers through non-verbal communication.

As the audience oscillates in a perpetual pas de bourrée, uncertain whether to respond to the stage's prompts, moments of silence create discomfort, introducing a sense of uncertainty akin to facing an inexplicable transformation. Within the choreographic fabric hide subtle teachings: the dance does not need to be explicitly shown; the grand leap is a predisposition to life, and some days you may feel like number 4, knowing the count starts from 5, 6, 7, 8—it's still a beginning.

Grand Jeté metaphorically invites the audience to leap, leaving behind judgments and fixed positions, urging them to surrender to the spectacle's vision. It challenges viewers to soften roles and expectations, fostering a parallel educational and political dimension in the performance.

Silvia Gribaudi's mastery in communication, coupled with comedic flair and virtuosic maneuvers, transforms *Grand Jeté* into a joyful exploration. The collaboration with the MM Contemporary Dance Company, led by Michele Merola, marks a unique moment in Italian dance history, breaking new ground by merging two distinct companies.

The choice to center the performance around classical ballet, with its deep-rooted presence in the collective imagination, allows Gribaudi to playfully and seriously delve into the meanings hidden in these terms. The collaboration with composer Matteo Franceschini adds another layer of complexity, as he navigates the challenging task of engaging with the classical repertoire while creating an original score.

Grand Jeté was born during a period of pandemic-induced crisis in the arts, representing a historic collaboration between two renowned companies, Merola's and Gribaudi's ZEBRA. The performance not only showcases the talent of young Italian dancers but also emphasizes the resilience and passion within the cultural and dance community.

Silvia Gribaudi's presence on stage alongside these dancers of varying ages, bodies, and lives speaks to a shared passion that allows them to give their all in the moment, encouraging the audience to experience a shift in perception. In the end, the beauty of dance lies in activating the body, and the grand jeté is nothing less than a profound breath.

Grand Jeté invites us to leap metaphorically, challenging us to abandon predetermined judgments and positions, urging us to shift our perspective. The beauty of dance, as Gribaudi emphasizes, lies in activating the body, and the grand jeté serves as a powerful metaphor for taking that significant breath and making a profound leap forward in our spectatorship and, by extension, in our lives.