

DANCE WORLD PREMIERE

MUSIC MUSIC

Histoire(s) du Théâtre VII

TRAJAL HARRELL



FREE
REPUBLIC OF
VIENNA
FESTIVAL

23 – 25 May
Volkstheater Wien

American choreographer Trajal Harrell is one of the most important figures of his time. His unique style lies not only in his address of seemingly disparate dance languages and histories, but also in the subtle humour that pervades his work. After more than 20 years as a dancer and choreographer, Harrell has finally found the right context to realise an idea that has long been on his mind. With *Music Music*, he creates the seventh part of the series *Histoire(s) du Théâtre* and devotes himself to a central element of his artistic practice: music. For Harrell, music is not just accompaniment or stimulus for movement, but archived memory and history. In a new choreographic context, he now looks back on music that has remained in his consciousness. Revisiting/rehearing/re-feeling: what emerges after the passage of time? *Music Music* is an intimate and intense solo about the transformation of body and heart and thoughts over time.

Duration
approx. 60 mins


barrier-free access

Q&A
24 May, following the
performance

“Trajal Harrell is considered one of the most important choreographers and dancers of our time. [...] His works allow us to glimpse what it means to be human.”

TAGESANZEIGER

Choreography, Performance, Costumes, Stage design, Sound design, Light design Trajal Harrell
Dramaturgy Katinka Deecke **Stage design** Nadja Sofie Eller **Light design** Sylvain Rausa **Sound design** Santiago Latorre **Costume management** Sally Heard **Assistance stage design** Eva Lillian Wagner **Production, International relations, Management** Björn Pätz / Zürich Dance Ensemble

Production Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna, Zürich Dance Ensemble
Coproduction Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne, Lac Lugano Arte e Cultura, KunstFestSpiele Herrenhausen, Gessnerallee, Theater Rotterdam, TANDEM – Scène Nationale Douai, ImPulsTanz – Vienna International Dance Festival

Zürich Dance Ensemble is supported by Ernst Göhner Stiftung.

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna
World Premiere May 2026, Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

A JOINT PROJECT BY VIENNA FESTIVAL (WIENER FESTWOCHEN) | FREE REPUBLIC OF VIENNA AND ZÜRICH DANCE ENSEMBLE
IN COOPERATION WITH IMPULSTANZ – VIENNA INTERNATIONAL DANCE FESTIVAL

IT'S LIKE A WORLD BETWEEN WORLDS

CONVERSATION WITH TRAJAL HARRELL

Music Music is part of the Histoire(s) du Théâtre series. This series features different artists reflecting on their own creative journey and the power of art itself. How did you come up with the idea of focusing on music to tell your story, and what does music mean to you?

At the time when I was invited to be part of this series, I knew I was close to ending a period in my work. And I knew that this would really be the first piece of a new period in which I wanted to focus on music – it has always been an important formal aspect of my work.

Until now the main discourse around my work focused on historical dance questions. I understand why that came to the foreground, but often it was done in a very simplistic and erroneous way – like, “he blends voguing and post-modern dance,” or “he blends Japanese Butoh with other styles.” I actually don’t make fusion dance. So I wanted to bring something else to the forefront of the discussion around my work. I wanted to shift the conversation. Music is a very important part of my life. I really love music and I love dancing to music. It’s part of the joy I find in life.

So joy is a central aspect to your History of Theater.

Yes, absolutely.

How did you choose the music for *Music Music*? Did you go back and listen to every song you ever worked with, or did you know from the very beginning which songs had to be part of this piece?

The piece isn’t completely finished yet, we are still rehearsing. But at first I made a playlist. I chose songs that I wanted to return to, songs that stayed with me. It was intuitive, a sense of taste – it was a long playlist.

But once I started working, I realized that this operation wouldn’t be enough for me: just editing a list and dancing to songs, making something like a greatest-hits piece. That could have been the piece: choose nine songs and dance to each one. But I didn’t want that. I realized I wanted these pieces to come together as a whole to create their own story. I wanted there to be a reason why they come together. That together they form a dance within themselves, something I wouldn’t have been able to make otherwise. Or perhaps ghosts emerge

out of this new meeting. That's what I'm trying to do.

That sounds like a very complex journey – almost like the story of the story of the music.

Yes, totally. I hope it works. There's an involuntary sense that all of them are ghosts, in a way. It becomes a kind of ghost story. But it has to slowly become one story – not nine or ten different stories. That's really what I'm working on now.

What effect did listening to these 'old' tracks have on you? How did your perception change, and how is that expressed in your approach to choreographing *Music Music*?

First of all, I'm solo. Many of these tracks are connected to group choreographies. Not all of them, but many. There's a memory – of choreography, of performances I've done – and it's impossible to address that in the same way when I'm alone. When I hear certain songs, I have a memory and a kinesthetic response based on being on stage with other people, on spatial relations, on repetition. That creates a whole dynamic that makes my body dance in a certain way. But suddenly that reaction becomes impossible. So I have to deal with the fact that I can't do what I remember. That creates something very special because I'm stuck in something – that's what I mean by ghost. I'm stuck in a place that's neither here nor there. It's like a world between worlds.

I can try to enter these dances again, but there's always something pulling me in another direction, another reality. This multisensory understanding is uncanny and beautiful. I try to stay in that space and understand that it has its own significance. Hopefully, it creates something the audience can connect to. We all know this sense of remembrance – what remembrance is, how it functions in the body. And joy is very important here, to come back to the beginning of our conversation. Because joy acknowledges suffering. It's not the same as happiness. We can try our best to put these things into words, but that's the beauty of dance: it creates something that can only be danced. It can't really be translated into words.

This multisensory understanding is uncanny and beautiful

Do I need to know your previous pieces to be able to enter this in-between world in *Music Music* with you?

Of course not. We all have remembrance. Everyone has experienced walking into a room in which you had an experience and suddenly you're caught, even if it's just two seconds. You cannot create a new experience because you're still somehow in the old experience, and you can also not go fully back into the old experience because time has passed and you are who you are now. That in-between position is something deeply human – not being able to fully go back and not being able to fully move on.

That's one role we have as artists: to take these small yet very human experiences and make them visible, to create space for them.

Talking about space, what role does the set design play in *Music Music*? To what kind of place do you take us in your history of the theater?

That I will not spoil.

Okay, we'll have to wait and see! Let's move on to one last question. This year, the Vienna Festival is proclaiming the Republic of Gods. Looking back at a famous story of creation, what – for you – is there in the beginning when you create a new piece, the music or the movement?

We could say it's music in this case, but that's also not quite true. These pieces of music already had movement. Those dances already had music. So we could ask: what came first in all of those previous dances? There's no single answer. For the sake of time, we can say: music, music, music.

That might also explain the title of the piece.

I love this title. I often double things in my speech. It's my thing. But it really fits what I'm trying to do. Doubling makes things stronger. Returning to something creates power. There's something very strong in the gap between here and there and that's exactly the space I'm trying to encapsulate.

BIOGRAPHY

Trajal Harrell is a US-American dancer and choreographer, as well as the founder and artistic director of the Zurich Dance Ensemble. He gained international recognition for his work addressing the history of voguing, a dance style from the queer 1980s ballroom scene in Harlem, with early postmodern dance. In later works, he also drew inspiration from Japanese butoh and modern dance. The movement style developed by Harrell highlights the performers as extraordinary and autonomous beings and places them at the centre of his pieces. In Trajal Harrell's works, the body functions as a vessel for memories, speculations, the present, and the past. By interweaving concepts of time and transcultural references, he reveals a multitude of references that show contemporary dance as a complex medium of our existence and celebrate the diversity of art history.

In 2024, Harrell was awarded the Silver Lion for Dance in Venice. His works are shown worldwide in theatres, festivals, and museums.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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