



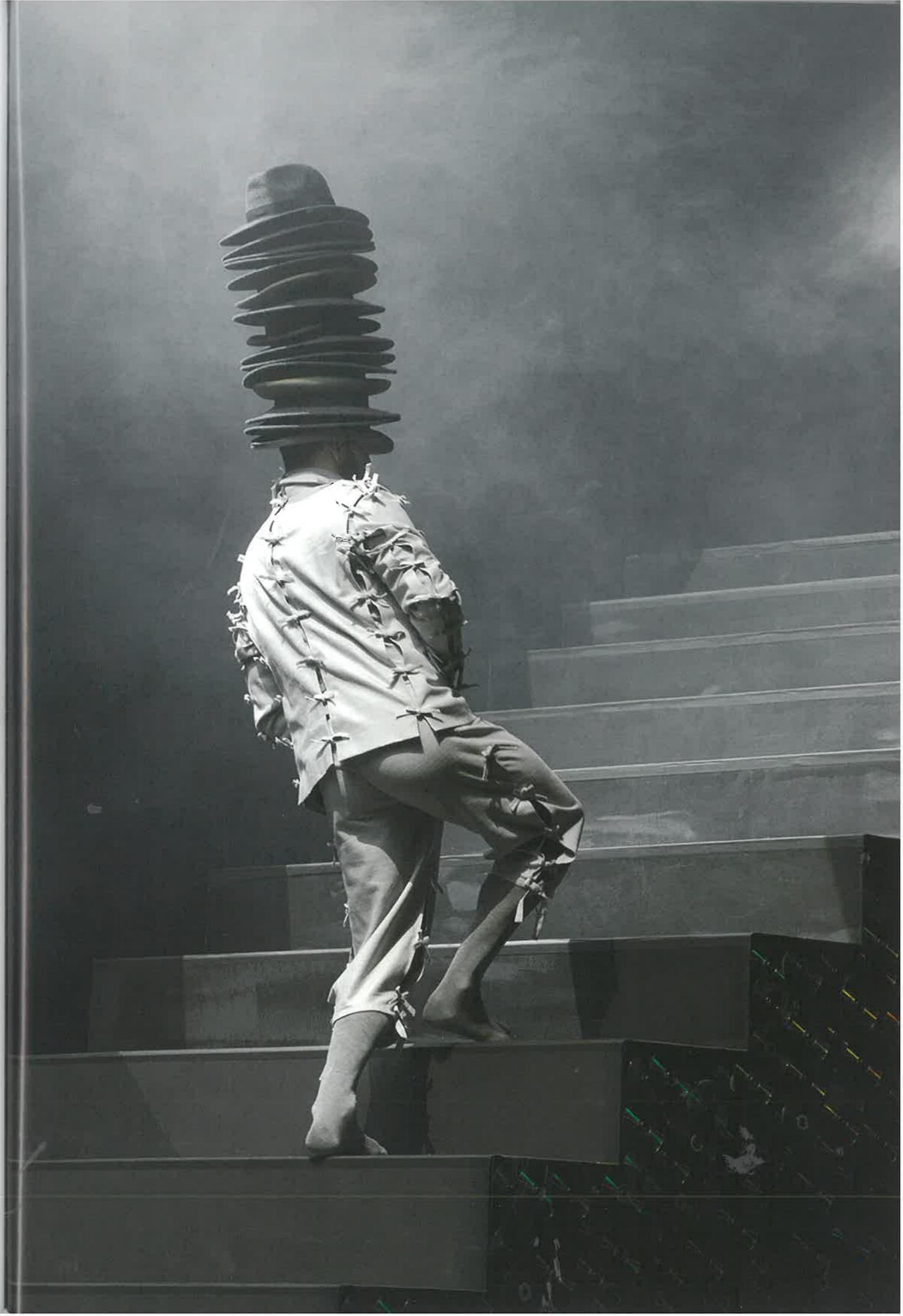
Nürnberg Ballet - Nuria Fau and Joel Di Stefamo in Jeroen Verbruggen's *Where have all the flowers gone*.
Photo: Bettina StöB

Made for Us II

ALISON KENT
weighs up new
pieces by Jiří
Bubeníček and
Jeroen Verbruggen
in Nürnberg

Made for Us II is a continuation of Goyo Montero's intention to enrich his dancers and his audience with works created especially for the ensemble by not just renowned, but also up-and-coming choreographers. The idea began in 2014, when Montero invited both Cayetano Soto and Douglas Lee to produce two original works for the company, and now, three years later, Jiří Bubeníček and Jeroen Verbruggen have presented their creations in double bills entitled *Chapeau* and *Where Have All The Flowers Gone* respectively.

During an illustrious career as a principal dancer with John Neumeier's Hamburg Ballett and later with the Semperoper Ballett in Dresden, Jiří Bubeníček, alongside his vocation as a performing artist, had already created over forty works, taking him to places as far away as New York, Tokyo and St. Petersburg, as well as closer to home in Europe, so once he retired from the stage in 2015 it was logical he should continue along his chosen choreographic path. In *Chapeau* Bubeníček uses the hat as an analogy to symbolise an aim or goal in life; the girl with three balloons suggests a dream that remains unattainable, and





Nürnberg Ballet - Isidora Markovic and Daniel Rocas in Jeroen Verbruggen's *Where have all the flowers gone*. Photo: Bettina Stöß

a glittering staircase, which revolves at different moments to reveal a window and a blank wall, indicates the start of a long journey but as yet leads to nowhere. It is a study examining the influence of society and its effects on the individual, from which the central figure engages in duets, trios and small groups, moving to an eclectic mix of some of Dave Brubeck's greatest hits and other moody jazz classics. In a light-hearted moment to Brubeck's familiar *Unsquare Dance* number, Rachelle Scott and Aleksandro Akapohi appear in a window at the side of the stairs delivering a precise and sharp sequence of quick-fired arm and head movements before falling through the window and back again, aided by others, with timely accuracy. Scott is tall, with limbs that seem to extend forever, yet moves with such delicacy and exactness while adopting a wonderfully droll attitude towards her partner, she is quite mesmerising to watch. The piece moves along at a steady pace, culminating in a final scene where the main protagonist agonisingly attempts to reach the top of the stairs despite being constantly hindered by the others feeding the desire and fear of not knowing

what lies ahead. Beautiful lighting and stage and costume designs by Nadina Cojocar make this a visually appealing work that is witty and also sends out a contemplative message.

The terrorist attack in Brussels in March 2016 was the inspiration for Belgian choreographer Jeroen Verbruggen's work, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone*, named after the legendary song written by the American songwriter Pete Seeger in the 1950s. At the time it was considered an anti-war folk song, although Seeger himself never acknowledged this, instead allowing the listener to decide the meaning for himself. For the main body of his piece, Verbruggen chose the final movement, the *Adagio*, from Gustav Mahler's *9th Symphony*, which in the latter stages acquires a techno beat remix by Benjamin Magnin de Cagny, adding some contrast and a definite change of mood and dynamic. Flowerpots filled with plants hang upside down ominously above the stage before crashing to the floor like an explosion, after which hard hats are worn, as a sign of safety maybe; a girl on pointe appears to represent death, luring the others towards her

like the grim reaper, yet Verbruggen has not set out to deliver a deliberate political message or present a requiem for the dead, but examines the aftermath of such atrocities and their effect mostly on the youth of today. It is a real ensemble piece: earthy movements with beautiful partnering work and fascinating lifts which infiltrate the entire stage area quietly but with a specific purpose. To the sultry tones of Marlene Dietrich's famous interpretation of the Seeger song, the ensemble lay down their hats and lilt their way off the stage with a simple repetitive sequence until the last man is left standing. For all its sombreness, Verbruggen has produced an uplifting, even joyous work of art with a little tongue-in-cheek added that leaves a very gratifying afterglow.

To say that Montero knows his dancers well would be an understatement, and a great deal of thought must surely go into his selection of the people he likes to commission to create something significant for his ensemble; these two particular, very different works complemented each other perfectly, ultimately serving to demonstrate the versatility and proficiency of this exceptional company.