

What does it mean to inherit a dance?

*Dixit Dominus* was German choreographer Kurt Jooss' s last and least known dance, made over a period of five weeks in 1975 as a solo for the dancer Lilavati Häger, when Jooss had not choreographed a new dance in over a decade. Set to Handel and integrating Jooss's movement with Häger' s classical Indian training, it consisted of two parts: the first aggressive, greedy and full of false heroism, the second lyrical and based on giving. Because the piece was made as a gift, it is rarely included in Jooss's legacy, but instead entered Häger' s repertoire of solo performances. Jooss scholar Patricia Stöckemann dismisses *Dixit Dominus* as initially having been created "out of friendship," resulting in "a 1976 dance with a touch of Indianness [that] remained in its unadorned simplicity nothing more than marginalia in Jooss' s creations."

*Dixit Dominus' s* first reconstruction in 2003 by the Swedish-born, Indian- and contemporary dance-trained choreographer Rani Nair was also a gift, this one from Lilavati Häger' s husband, Bengt, who knew that she had always wanted to pass on the work and that, after meeting Nair shortly before her death, Häger mentioned she had found the dancer for *Dixit Dominus*. These multiple gifts were mirrored in the message around which Jooss themed the choreography: "What you take, shall be lost to you - what you give, will remain yours forever." Nair toured extensively with the reconstruction, which was relatively faithful to the shapes and timing of the older movement with controlled doses of intentional and unintentional anachronism, presenting it, among other places, at Hanoi Opera House and the Centre National de Danse in Paris in 2004-06. Bengt Häger had told her "when you inherit the piece, you inherit everything [to do with the piece]," and yet, wearing Häger's costumes, hearing stories about her, and attempting to do her movement felt at times farther from, rather than closer to *Dixit Dominus* and its original creators.

So Nair returned to *Dixit Dominus* in 2009 with *Future Memory*, this time focusing not on the choreography but on the stories around it. It is to some degree a second-order performance — a performance about a performance — but it is also a project about history and memory, and about the very personal responsibilities of inheritance and legacy that come out of the work itself, but which also surpass it. Whereas Nair had struggled earlier with *Dixit Dominus' s* ambiguous place outside the canon of dance history, *Future Memory* embraces the possibility of an alternative history, one in which a "minor" dance takes ten years of an artist' s life, and where insider and outsider are much more complicated than we might think. It is a piece in which tradition is configured in a more hybrid way; not Indian versus Western European, but multiple traditions that fix and release ideas of Indianness/Swedishness/Germanness through both real and imagined archives that are deeply unstable. In this way, *Future Memory* is based on a past that is not fixed, but rather one with which we constantly negotiate, and through those relationships open potential that builds into the future.

-- Kate Elswit, November 2012