

# Picture this Post

## Vangeline Theater Presents ELSEWHERE Review- Beautiful and Terrifying

[picturethispost.com/vangeline-theater-elsewhere/](http://picturethispost.com/vangeline-theater-elsewhere/)

Allison Plamondon

June 7, 2018



At some point she must have started to move. The lights, first shining on a hot red sun hanging at the back of the stage, take their time to reveal a figure - a woman wearing a long black dress from another time period, her hair pulled up in a polished bun. She is standing very still - for a very long time. There is a certain elegance and poise to her stillness. One would think that everything is just fine in this world, though the vibrating, abrasive soundscape suggests otherwise. It is a bold juxtaposition and we are transfixed.

At long last, the light hits her face differently and it becomes clear that something must have changed, she must have moved. Her moving with such nuance and control is eventually (but suddenly) contrasted with a sharp change in her level. Technically, she is probably merely bending her knees, but to us, the change is monumental. **We are on the edge of our seats.**

In ELSEWHERE, performed by Vangeline and composer, Yuka C. Honda, **we never know what will happen next.**



©2018 Michael Blase



©2018 Michael Blase

## Vangeline Theater – an anomaly in Butoh world

Vangeline is a teacher, dancer and choreographer specializing in Butoh, the Japanese postwar avant-garde movement form. A French woman practicing Butoh, a typically male dominated field, Vangeline is a rarity who has even founded the New York Butoh Institute. Yuka C. Honda is a musician, producer, composer and performer originally from Tokyo. Honda

has collaborated with the likes of Yoko Ono and Sean Lennon and is co-founder of the band, Cibo Matto. It's no surprise that these incredibly skilled, innovative artists collaborate on a piece that celebrates the life of another courageous woman, Japanese performer Omoto Tannaker (1842-1916). The program states that "ELSEWHERE is a story of migration and cultural encounters and that with this piece they explore their roots while investigating the idea of shared space in performance".

Honda sits at a table just off the left side of the stage. Though we can barely see her by the light of her laptop and keyboard set-up, there is an elegance in her own shifts of movement as she orchestrates the spectacular score. This improvised composition ranges from foreboding to frightening, to deafening, and then explodes into the cathartic before settling into a kind of reverie. The score serves as a powerful duet partner, beautifully demonstrating music as inner life. Butoh, as translated, means "dance of darkness". Vangelina says "It is the realm of the hidden, of the subconscious, of things we usually don't dare look at in ourselves and in others. Butoh reveals our deep humanity." Throughout the piece, the soundscape brings the darkness to the surface and foreshadows what is to come.



'What is to come' is a huge contrast to the opening image of stillness. As the piece evolves, the movement becomes more expressive - stylized and emotional. The word emotional might be a gross understatement. **It is a transformation.** At the climax of the piece, the movement is much more animalistic - Vangelina shakes and flogs herself as her perfect bun comes loose and hair pins go flying! **Unbridled and grotesque,** it seems a far far cry from the opening image physically, but we know that the darkness has been there all along.

Highly recommended for dance and theatre lovers who enjoy innovative collaborations and work that challenges their own expectations.

Interested in Butoh? Check out the [New York Butoh Festival October 12-23, 2018 curated by Vangelina Theater.](#)

PHOTOS: Courtesy of Vangelina Theater

Learn more at the [Allison Plamondon website.](#)

Read more about Allison Plamondon in this Picture this Post feature story - '[Choreographer Allison Plamondon on Merce Cunningham](#)".

[Click here to read more Picture this Post stories by Allison Plamondon.](#)

Summer 2018

# Ballet Review



utes, Harrington and Toledo's talents were slowly revealed: two-dimensional, Matisse, cutout images drifted hither and yon across a winter landscape, harkening back to a time when no one knew what CGI was. An angel hovered. Finally, we arrived in front of the doorway to the Stahlbaum drawing room where the red-blooded Marie and her brother, Fritz, sat awaiting the party. And in those few minutes we witnessed a marriage of theater and cinema that offered a compelling way forward for those wondering where ballet staging might be headed. Isabel Toledo's costuming in act 1 was reminiscent of a Vuillard painting that had downed a few Café Cubanos on Calle Ocho: rich in period detail and earthy color with just enough sweet, vibrant invention to throw a marvelous Miami monkey wrench into the mix.

As for the dancers . . . young Erick Rojas, who played Drosselmeier's nephew and Marie's love interest, possessed a preternatural stage presence and feet and legs that David Hallberg fans would salivate over. Lauren Fadeley in the *Waltz of the Flowers* was so ebulliently extreme I wondered what she ate for breakfast. Jennifer Lauren as Sugarplum danced capably but did herself no favors by wearing a plastered-on smile that never wavered. Simone Messmer's Sugarplum, on the other hand, was yet another reminder that this girl desperately needs a partner who can match her technical and artistic acumen. Renan Cerdeiro (the finest male dancer MCB possesses) could be that partner but, for some reason, he rarely is. As Lauren's Cavalier, Cerdeiro was impeccable, but of course in New York City Ballet's version of *The Nutcracker*® he has no variation in act 2 so we are deprived of that pleasure.

Much of the second-act costuming here followed the NYCB model. Ashley Knox as Dewdrop wore a ribbed bodice and flimsy, no-nothing skirt reminiscent of a burlesque photo spread and her dancing was similarly intoxicating. Christie Scituro proved to be a sexy Coffee. Alas, after thoroughly enjoying this cornucopia of marvelous colors and charac-

ters and the unbridled joy of a thousand three-year-olds at a Sunday matinee, I concluded that Mr. B put all that titillation into act 2 to wake up the fathers in the audience. And it worked. Thank you, Mr. Balanchine®™.

## New York

Karen Greenspan

Out of pitch darkness, a luminous filigree dress appears before a large disc lying flat on the floor. The perimeter of the disc is lit up like the corona of a completely eclipsed sun. This celestial body is the creation of European designer Tilen Sepič. The dress, aglow with cool light, is a fiber optic textile design by French company LumiGram. The dancer who inhabits this ethereal marvel is Vangelina, a French-born Butoh performer, who dances in the tradition of this Japanese post-World War Two, expressionistic dance form, but who carries the vision into aesthetic possibilities of the twenty-first century.

In an intimate space at Theater for the New City in Manhattan's East Village, Vangelina Theater presented a program of two solos called *Butoh Beethoven: Eclipse*. In the first piece, *Eclipse*, Vangelina bewitched the audience as she moved with immense, concentrated slowness in an elemental relationship with the sun disc – that of wonder. Her face and skin were cancelled out in the absence of light through the entire piece, so all that was visible was a slow-moving dress. Her drawn out and painstaking movements to crouch to the floor, lift the disc, stand up, revolve around to place the eclipsed orb against the backdrop, and continue her revolution to face the audience again were hypnotic. It felt like attentively watching the movement of the earth's twenty-four-hour rotation on its axis. Sounds of flowing water and contrasting abrasive traffic noise washed over the intent performer.

Suddenly the sun disc goes completely dark, and the incandescent dress moves downstage in fits and starts. The arms are moving, but all we see are the lit, bell-shaped sleeves slowly rising and descending. And then the dress

goes dark with the click of a remote – one section at a time – and the luminous vision is no more.

As we broke for intermission, I glanced at my watch and was astounded to discover that the piece had lasted a full half hour. Vangeline, with her controlled flow of energy and compelling energetic shifts, obliges a depth of concentration that nullifies time.

The second work of the program, *Butoh Beethoven*, in complete contrast to the first piece, embodied an extroverted, impulsive, aggressive energy. Draped in a full-length black robe, Vangeline stands on a dark mound surrounded by a circle of lit, white pebbles. She holds in her hand a red, flashing light that she manipulates for strobe effect against her jerky, writhing torso – all to the sounds of air raid sirens and bombers.

After this overture, she squats to the ground, extinguishes the red strobe light, and in the darkness picks up a conductor's baton. The baton lights up like a magic wand as we hear the sound of an orchestra tuning. The illuminated baton appears to float upward as the dancer's body is invisible on the unlit stage. When the stage lights do come up, Vangeline sheds her black robe to reveal a long white dress composed of tiers of handkerchiefs designed by Todd Thomas.

She launches into an impassioned fit of conducting Beethoven's Fifth Symphony – hair and dress whipping and flying about, white-powdered face contorting in grotesque expressions. Her arms churn up the music's majesty as she appears to draw the powerful sounds, at times from the earth and then from the heavens.

She descends to the ground in a state of internal process as her contorting face takes on the appearance of a ghoulish mask. She ex-



Photo: Daniel R. Street

Vangelina in *Butoh Beethoven*.

tends a trembling, claw-like hand as a loud drone drowns out the symphony. Is this the torment of the master of sublime sound going deaf? From this morbid scene, Vangeline (Beethoven) recovers to the sound of planes hovering over crashing waves. Then, only crashing waves are audible as she drifts backward into unlit darkness. And once again, as if to embark on another act of creative genius, she illuminates the conductor's baton and stretches her arm upward.

Who was this French-American young woman – a dancer who was most likely shaped in the styles and technique of the West? What inspired her to become an exponent of butoh? Shortly after the performance, I sat down with Vangeline to discuss this and more. She had been trained in ballet and jazz and was working as a jazz dancer in 1999 when she saw Sankai Juku (internationally known butoh troupe founded in 1975 by Ushio Amagatsu) perform at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

"I fell in love. So, I started looking for a butoh teacher," she disclosed. She had felt limited by the sexualized roles she was cast in as a woman in Western dance and was looking to explore beyond that. The decision to perform her own work came hand-in-hand with embarking on butoh training. At first she labeled her choreography "butoh-influenced." After five years and a thorough review of her work, her Japanese mentors gave her the permission and encouragement to use the white face paint that is a hallmark of the form and to call her work "butoh."

She has now studied for eighteen years with butoh masters in Mexico, the United States, and Japan. Her primary teacher is Tetsuro Fukuhara, a sixty-eight-year-old, second-

generation butoh artist with whom she collaborates on projects and events with the goal of making butoh accessible to the general public. Vangelina emphasized, “Butoh masters of the second generation are passing. We are navigating the challenge of preserving a rich legacy, but also giving space for new work and evolution.”

One of the new areas Vangelina doggedly pursues is the use of butoh in prisons. She explained that she had always felt an affinity for imprisoned populations and remarked, “I have often thought that not having dominion over your body is a kind of death.” Early on while teaching butoh classes, she recognized the potential of the form. Indeed, the intense concentration on body awareness honed through butoh training makes it a particularly transformative practice for incarcerated populations. For three years, her proposals were rejected by the New York Department of Corrections. Finally, after calling herself a “modern dancer,” they offered her a trial opportunity to work with a female population. After three months, the administration recognized its value and bought into it.

She explained, “Correctional facilities are very noisy places. There is no privacy and people are always measuring and evaluating each other. Butoh gives the participants the quiet space to concentrate on awareness of their own bodies and emotions. This translates into less anxiety, more receptivity, and more accomplishment.” But this is not a one-way street. Vangelina sees the prison work as a natural extension of butoh’s investigation of the unconscious. She asserted, “Prisons are the part of society that we don’t really look at or acknowledge. They are part of the uncomfortable, taboo material that Butoh examines.”

I questioned Vangelina about the relationship between the two performance pieces. She sometimes dances them in reverse order. She replied, “They are two sides of the same coin – one is feminine; one is masculine. One is the moon; one is the sun.” She confessed that switching from one to the other is difficult either way, although, she is finding it easier to

make the transition from the slow, controlled, minimal movements of *Eclipse* to the expansive energy of *Beethoven* as opposed to the other way around.

Not surprising, Vangelina admits to having a gripping fascination with things that glow in the dark and the body’s reaction to light and darkness. In *Eclipse*, Vangelina is the source of light. In *Beethoven*, the creative impulse symbolized by the conductor’s baton is the first and final glint of light. Perhaps one can only discover the light if one truly probes the darkness.

## Paris

Vincent Le Baron

When Christmas comes around, the Paris Opera Ballet always presents a classic full-evening ballet but, unlike Anglo-Saxon countries, there is no obligation to present *The Nutcracker*. This suits the slightly less home-loving Parisian and is made possible because state funding means that ballet companies do not have to replenish their coffers with seasonal sweetmeats. However, the Opéra Bastille (the Paris Opera Ballet’s modern venue) can always sell out with a Rudolf Nureyev production, which means an alternating cycle of one of seven or eight of his ballets (although *Raymonda* and *Cinderella* are rarer in the rotation than *Swan Lake* or *La Bayadère*).

This year, Aurélie Dupont, director of the company, opted for *Don Quichotte* and the eighteen performances provided exciting opportunities for debuts and two guest artists: Isabella Boylston from American Ballet Theatre and Isaac Hernandez from English National Ballet. Most Nureyev stagings remain faithful to the original, but in 2002 Nicholas Georgiadis’ production of *Don Q* from 1981 was dropped and costumes ordered from Elena Rivkina and sets from Alexandre Beliaev. The outcome was, and remains, disappointing: some kind of Goya-inspired Espagnolade with disputable choices, such as ugly shells on the facades with too much luminescence at the end of the second act.

# BWW Review: BUTOH BEETHOVEN: ECLIPSE Pierces The Nether Realm

[www.broadwayworld.com/off-off-broadway/article/BWW-Review-BUTOH-BEETHOVEN-ECLIPSE-Pierces-The-Nether-Realm-20171211](http://www.broadwayworld.com/off-off-broadway/article/BWW-Review-BUTOH-BEETHOVEN-ECLIPSE-Pierces-The-Nether-Realm-20171211)  
by Juan Michael Porter II



Butoh Beethoven: Eclipse

Photography Credit: Michael Blase

Like an earthbound Hecate - a mythical witch and the third Greek godhead of the moon - Vangelina straddles conventional boundaries while blazing forward. Continuing her mission to pull butoh into the 21st Century, this mysterious master of minimal movement cast a spell over the packed house at Theater for The New City in her latest production *Butoh Beethoven: Eclipse*. The *Eclipse* aspect of this performance in particular kept audiences enthralled during the spooky pre-Halloween story.

Clad in a dress that bled light - created from designs by Tilen Sepic with fiber optic costuming from Lumigram - Vangeline slowly flashed across the stage as if she were embodying waning phases of the moon. Her night imperceptible gestures seemed to cleave between this dimension and some dark nether-realm.



Butoh Beethoven: Eclipse

Photography Credit: Michael Blase

*Eclipse* was created by Vangeline to honour Tatsumi Hijikata, the founder of Butoh. In that regard it felt as if she were drawing forth his spirit from another world. Her dress, with its threads of illumination, oozed a penumbra that rippled through the air in beat with her every breath. Moving with a deliberate, excruciatingly slow gait, Vangeline retrieved a circular ring of light that appeared to be suspended in the sky, and used it to frame her face. Facing forward with this ring obscuring our vision, Vangeline subtly shuddered and convulsed as if she were peering through a scrying pool at something of mind-blasting awesomeness. What did she see? Removing the moon totem to commune with us, her placid mien betraying

little, Vangelina opened and closed her eyes with scrupulous elegance. Whatever burst forth through her slow-moving lashes was all she had to share with us concerning her journey to the other side. At that moment, once again, she was the blameless moon clothed in stars. A bewitching fixture affixed in the sky, drawing all eyes to her as if she were a portal to another world. Caught in her enchantment of suspended time, one failed to notice how swiftly the minutes were actually flying by. In a flash, all lights were extinguished, leaving us with swiftly fading memories of the lady in the moon as she passed on an eclipse to the other side.



Butoh Beethoven: Eclipse

Photography Credit: Michael Blase

Following intermission, Vangelina returned as a demonic vessel for Beethoven's shade, conducting his 5th Symphony in herky jerky movements that called to mind a zombie lumbering through majestic tunes. Though exacting in its precision, there was something less enthralling about this conjuring. With her hair flying about as she whipped the invisible orchestra into a frenzy, Vangelina could have been a priestess to the cult of resurrection attempting to recall the soul of Beethoven to earth. Whereas *Eclipse* felt like a communion, this heart-pounding show piece felt like a flashy ritual; more technical virtuosity than soul. While affecting and well-wrought, I preferred Vangelina in her lunar ascension.

Butoh, whether in abstract performance or enhanced by technology and uncommon narratives, is a niche field. It requires an appreciation for quieter moments and patience with stillness. The intensity that a performer of Vangelina's stature undergoes is incredible but

not likely to appeal to a wider audience. Regardless, her solo performance commanded a packed to capacity 400 seat theatre.

This production originally performed on October 14th, 2017 at Theater For the New City.

## Related Articles

---

From This Author [Juan Michael Porter II](#)

---

# The Exhilarating Japanese Butoh 'Flower-Secret' at Triskelion Arts

[greenpointers.com/2017/11/27/flower-secret-triskelion-arts/](https://www.greenpointers.com/2017/11/27/flower-secret-triskelion-arts/)

Allison Considine

Posted by [Allison Considine](#) | [November 27, 2017](#)

[Tweet](#)

As she slowly rose her body from the stage floor to an upright position, solo dancer Vangeline—founder and artistic director of dance company Vangeline Theater—looked otherworldly. Her limbs twisted gracefully as she ascended, but her facial expression was full of pain. Otherworldly is a fitting description for the traditional form of Japanese Butoh—the type of dance that Vangeline Theater teaches and champions.



Vangeline in "Flower-Secret" at Triskelion Arts. ©Michael Blase

Vangeline Theater, along with the New York Butoh Institute, presented *Flower-Secret* at Greenpoint's [Triskelion Arts](#) (106 Calyer Street) as part of the 2017 New York Butoh Festival (Nov. 17-19). The performance featured two solos of the avant-garde movement form, folding in the traditional practice of Butoh with its social and cultural significance, and bringing it all into the 21st century. **Butoh was created post-World War II as a form of protest. The sporadic and unexpected movements and facial expressions of Butoh performers can be unsettling—but the visual impact is indelible. It's meant to be subversive, but is exhilarating to watch.** This historic performance, starring contemporary practitioner Vangeline and Butoh master Tetsuro Fukuhara, is an example of the artists and seminal cultural events that make their way to the corner of Calyer Street and Banker Street in Brooklyn.

Founded in 2000, Triskelion Arts provides affordable space for rehearsals, classes, and performances. The arts complex moved from Williamsburg to Greenpoint in 2015, and its current home has a mainstage theater, two studios, and a dressing room. Triskelion Arts gives artists the opportunity to develop and present new works, and offers local audiences unique programming.

And this international presentation of Butoh hit close to home with local ties. The show included lilies from [Greenpoint Floral Co.](#) (703 Manhattan Ave), photographs by local photographer [Tal Shpantzer](#), and patrons were offered a discount for the nearby [Threes Brewing](#) (113 Franklin St).

While the presentation of *Flower-Secret* bridged cultures, the solos featured divisive themes: life and death, shadow and light, human and nature. The performances also explored generational and gender divides with white face

makeup, masks, and props.

Vangelina's solo "Spectral" showcased a defining element of the Butoh aesthetic. As she clung onto a string of twine, tangling it around her body, she coiled and emulated the prop. Then her arms blossomed when Shpantzer's images of flower petals were projected onstage.

Perhaps the most amusing sequence was Tetsuro Fukuhara's performance inside a translucent piece of fabric. String lights twinkled and colored lights (designed by Andy Dickerson) were projected onto Fukuhara as he moved through the hollow tube. The final sequence featured Fukuhara dancing with a long garland of white lilies. The stems trailed behind his wayward movements, and the flower-themed evening came full circle in the final pose.



Tetsuro Fukuhara in "Flower-Sceret" at Triskelion Arts. ©Michael Blase

The audience exited through the lobby and Triskelion Arts' outdoor patio, and the secret of Butoh was out.

## About Allison Considine

Allison is a staff writer at American Theatre magazine and a proud resident of Greenpoint.



[View all posts by Allison Considine →](#)



(/index.php)



**BLOG**  
(/blog/)  
3



❖ **A THEASY BEST BET:  
CREEPY SOLO  
DANCE (../..  
../bestbets.php)**

❖ Butoh: a post-WWII Japanese dance form that focuses on the dark side of life with slow, repetitive movements

❖ Solo performance from one of the masters of Butoh

❖ Amazing technical lighting effects

❖ 60 minutes with an intermission

# Butoh Beethoven: Eclipse



**Choreographed, Conceived and Performed by Vangeline  
Produced by Vangeline Theater**

**Off Off Broadway, Dance  
Runs through 10.31.16  
Producer's Club, 358 West 44th Street**

*by Taylor Black on 10.29.16*





Vangelina in *Butoh Beethoven: Eclipse*. Photo by Geoff Shelton.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Vangelina's virtuosic solo performance will make your skin crawl in the best way possible, conjuring the ghosts of tortured geniuses Beethoven and Tatsumi Hijikata and bringing Butoh into the 21st century with technical marvels and masterful skill.

In trying to describe Vangelina's virtuosic solo *Butoh Beethoven*, I keep returning to the film *A Clockwork Orange*, where the protagonist Alex adores the sensuous music of "Ludwig Van" as a backdrop to his ultra-violence, only to later lash out at the Ninth Symphony's use in his aversion torture as "a sin!...Ludwig Van never hurt anyone, Beethoven just wrote music."

The analogy between the film and *Butoh Beethoven* seems perfect: an all-white aesthetic coupled with a revolting, crawling, insectile feel and a complex critique of violence and the disconnect of the modern world, with all this ickiness set to Beethoven's gorgeous, melodious symphonies. And Vangelina herself has a stated goal: to "bring Butoh into the 21st century" through a connection to film aesthetics, technology, and the trials of the modern age. But it seems that perhaps Vangelina knows something the protagonist of Kubrick's film misses: that a piece of music does far more than simply exist, and can be violent, glorious, and wracked with history, a secret the Butoh form of dance knows well.

As the postscript "Admiring Tatsumi Hijikata" suggests, Vangelina conjures the ghost of one of the originators of Butoh, who helped to found the discipline in the wake of World War II and the bombing of Hiroshima. Living in this aftermath, Hijikata's dance form conjures the spectral realm of suffering to explore the darkness within. Butoh dance is described as much by its absence as anything, and Vangelina follows the path of darkness in dancing the absence of these two ghostly, larger-than-life figures. Built from emptiness, darkness, and creepiness, *Butoh Beethoven* admires Beethoven and Hijikata by simmering in the hole their legacy leaves behind.

In the first act, Vangeline enters a dark stage with a pulsating, siren-like heart of light, strobing through the darkness for Hitchcock-creepy stage pictures. With the signature interminable slowness of Butoh movement, the piece transitions into Vangeline, an LED conductor's baton, and infinite silence. As the lights come up the piece transitions into Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony," as Vangeline conjures the spirit of Ludwig Van himself in a corpse-like, tortured grotesque form. The figure proceeds to conduct the orchestra through the first movement, in fitful and captivating moves, though it is difficult to tell who is conducting who as Vangeline both initiates and responds to the musical cue, her face twitching through expressions equal parts orgasmic and agonized.

The soundscape is more than just the "Fifth Symphony" though, incorporating the coughs and shuffling of a recorded audience that brings the music back down to Earth in humbling Butoh fashion. The soundscapes merge the everyday with the epic, echoing the Butoh form's focus on bringing the movement of ordinary labor, pain, and ugliness onto the stage. Todd Thomas' costume hangs with endless shirtsleeves, behaving almost like a second conductor as Vangeline swings in wide arcs, perhaps taking an anachronistic jab at the role of the conductor's hands. The lighting effects are truly stunning, featuring clever use of LED props and costumes that enable the body to act as light in fascinating and innovative ways.

In Act II, "Eclipse," Vangeline becomes a ghostly harbinger of the future, bringing light and darkness together to the world. The surprising co-star here is the costume and stage design. Tilen Sepic and French design company LumiGram collaborate beautifully to create the out-of-this-world stage pictures of Act II, where Vangeline herself is the only light onstage. It is in this piece especially that Vangeline's homage to Hijikata merges with the trials of the 21st century. In slow, almost traditional movements, the figure fills with fiber optics as the sounds of communication swirl around, making the endless speed of the digital into a slow-moving flesh as Vangeline presents her Eclipse. A being of pure light and time, Eclipse is a trance-like exploration of the tension between slowness and infinite speed.

Watching Vangeline undergo these slow, rapt transformations, it is easy to forget how incredibly physically demanding this

movement can be, and she has the control and poise of a true master of Butoh in this 60-minute feat of solo endurance. She is elegant in her ugliness and redemptive in her pain, and the effect is transforming. *Butoh Beethoven* is a difficult, weird, and uncomfortable piece to watch, but for precisely that reason it is incredibly moving and powerful. It is clear that Vangeline is an artist who knows the darkness of Butoh well, and has the incredible skill to make that darkness dance.

*(Butoh Beethoven: Eclipse* plays at The Producers Club, 358 West 44th Street, through October 31, 2016. The running time is sixty minutes with an intermission. Remaining performance is Monday at 8. Tickets are \$20 and are available at **[brownpapertickets.com](http://www.brownpapertickets.com)** (**<http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/2582224>**). For more information visit **[vangeline.com](http://www.vangeline.com)** (**<http://www.vangeline.com/>**).

***Butoh Beethoven* is choreographed, conceived, and performed by Vangeline. Lighting Design is by Andrew Dickerson. Costume for Act 1 is by Todd Thomas. Costume for Act II is by LumiGram. Eclipse Design is by Tilen Sepic. Technician is Betsy Chester. Music is by Ludwig Van Beethoven. Stage Hands are Maki Shinagawa, Azumi Oe, and Stacy Lynn Smith.**

ABOUT US | CONTACT US



Login/Signup with facebook

Classic Login

Got a Show?  
Click Here to List It!

HOME Theater Dance Cabaret Film Contests Who?

DANCE REVIEW

Main Theater Articles Theater Reviews Dance Cabaret

Review: Vangeline Theater's "Butoh Beethoven"

Posted 10/31/2016

«\$20 in Manhattan at Producers Club, The

See Event Page

This Event ended Oct 31st, 2016



Vangeline Theater opened its run of *Butoh Beethoven* at the Producer's Club Royal this week. **A solo work praised for its striking imagery and emotional journey, it did not disappoint.**

Choreographed and performed by Vangeline, a French-born dancer and performer, *Butoh Beethoven's* first act was set to the well-worn tune of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5* and Paul Verlaine's 1866 poem "Autumn Song." The evening begins in complete darkness, save for a glowing semicircle of stones onstage. Tension mounts as strobe effect lighting begins to reveal Vangeline's figure at its center, the light creating angles of darkness across her white-painted face. A glowing baton appears, and circles, like the minute hand of a clock moving backwards in time. Amid a soundscape of bells, planes flying low, and air-raid sirens, Vangeline herself turns backwards in time and space to face a line of pig's head masks strung across the back of the stage. She sheds the black robe cloaking her, and bows to recorded applause, as a conductor does to his audience, before turning towards us—playing the roles of both audience and orchestra—in the silence of all-white garb.



Photo credit: Michael Blase

***Butoh Beethoven* was conceived by Vangeline as a tribute to both the German composer, and the late Tatsumi Hijikata, one of the founders of Butoh as a Japanese art form. In this first act, Vangeline seamlessly embodies the two ghosts simultaneously.** She begins to conduct, in all its delicate intricacy, an imaginary orchestra as it fills the small theater with the increasingly victorious sounds of Beethoven's fifth. In the midst of a **truly captivating conducting performance** (she studied conducting for months during the creation of this piece), **Vangeline's tribute to Hijikata shines through.** Her body is minutely twisted and angled in a **demonstration of precise choreographic grace,** which is juxtaposed with the grotesque contortion of her facial features in true Butoh tradition.

The power of Butoh lies in its willingness to confront ugliness head-on. And as the evening continues, we are transported through time, to an oft-overlooked dark period in Japan's history, and Hijikata's role in repairing a country and culture after the ugliest of world-altering defeats. World War II is conjured repeatedly through Vangeline's use of air-raid sirens and red strobe lighting. And we hear, in the second half of the first act, the words of French poet Paul Verlaine, whose famous poem, "Chanson d'Automne," played a crucial role in communications with the French Resistance during the war.

The second act of the evening, *Eclipse*, opens in complete darkness again. Vangeline's robe is outfitted with fiber optic lights, which create an ethereal effect that is striking in contrast to the concrete imagery presented in the first act. Shrouded in darkness, save for the dress and a hoop, also outfitted with small lights, on the floor, she melts across the stage. **Her movement is so controlled and fluid that it's hard to tell, in the moment, if she is actually moving.**

Set to a soundscape ranging from the Himalayas to New York City, **Vangeline dances a calmness over us.** Where her first act was heavy with the memory of battles fought and European turmoil, the second act uses continual, placid movement to convey rebirth, and a slow healing of the world. The culminating action of this second act is hanging the lighted hoop; in effect, creating the image of a solar eclipse against the back wall of the stage.

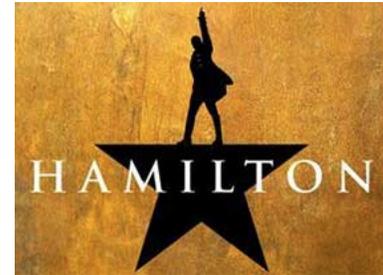
**In a demonstration of strength both muscular and mental, and against the backdrop of a crushed Japan struggling to recreate itself, Vangeline tells the story of Butoh through Butoh, and tells it beautifully.**



SEARCH ARTICLES & REVIEWS



ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT



THIS WEEK'S CONTESTS

rent control  
Win Tickets to 'Rent Control!'

11/8	9.00
11/9	9.00
11/10	9.00
11/11	9.00

Win Tickets to 'Keeping My Kidneys!'

MERCIFUL FATHER  
by Alar Hadari  
Win Tickets to 'Merciful Father!'

# EYES WIDE OPEN



Three dancers brought the Japanese avant garde dance form of [Butoh](#) to Newcastle last week.

To quote the local press, this highly dramatic performance is “not for the frail”.

Butoh translates as “dance of darkness” and it was founded after the Hiroshima tragedy that made the “unimaginable imaginable”. It must have caused a stir in tradition obsessed 1959 Japan. It finds its traditions in [Noh](#) Theatre, dating back to the 14th century, meaning “skill” or “talent”.

The setting is All Saints Church, an austere, circular building with a feeling of being separated from the outside world, but the numbers filling the pews would please any priest. The three dancers are positioned like slender Greek sculptures in the large arched windows. In this Butoh style, they won't be going anywhere soon for some time. **The women move so barely it's hard to perceive them moving at all. But move they do, like flowers opening, draped in organic-looking rags and their motion, or seeming lack of it, is hypnotising.**

**It is also deeply ominous and unnerving.**





*Photo: Claire Palmer*

Over the space of an hour and a half, they make their way down from the windows to the centrepiece of the church, which is surrounded with a circle of flowers. **The acclaimed New York artist Vangelina is the most sensationally terrifying.** The Pagan and Satanic references in a Christian environment are unequivocal. It's August 13th after all, the Day of Hecate, Queen of the Witches, goddess of sorcery and magic! A co-incidence? The promotional literature says this is a participation event. Although the audience are like stone statues themselves, with eyes wide open and barely moving, it slowly becomes apparent that this is indeed a psychological confrontation. A highly intense level of concentration and stamina are demanded by the audience and dancers alike.

Western cultural references could be the witches in *Macbeth*, Baudelaire's *Les Fleures du Mal*, Lindsay Kemp's radical mime/dance show *Flowers* in the 1970s, or Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*. But even with this cache of cultural strangeness under your belt, nothing quite prepares you for the sheer thrill and terror inflicted by the barely perceptible advance of the dancers. You feel sure, like a Stanley Kubrick film, that nothing good is going to come of it, and, as slow as the action, it dawns on you, you're now part of it. It holds you and your complete attention in its grip, like a Venus Fly Trap.





It could go any of many ways, the movement hinting at burlesque, the grotesque, the obscene or the redeemed. You feel as though the outcome is really up to you, and the tension in the church **is electric**.



*Photos courtesy of Nicole Vivien Watson*

Music duo Trans/Human are on sounds, a soundscape of a beehive and an organic end of times ambient jarring backwash, emphasising the inescapable nature of the horror film surroundings. They take you right up to the edge.

To know how it ends you have to go and see it and create your own resolution.

To repeat, not for the faint hearted.

Review: **Claire Palmer**



## Butoh Beethoven



by M Johnson on 8th August 2015

In a piece that is at times frightening, at times energising and constantly absorbing, solo-performer Vangeline is our white-collared conductor, guiding us through a piece which abstractly explores the work and legacy of Beethoven and Tatsumi Hijikata, the founder of butoh. Using subtle and raw choreography, brilliant accompaniment and the power of her presence, Vangeline succeeds in bringing an essence of these iconic individuals to life on stage.

One of the highlights of the piece is when Vangeline's shadow is dancing with her, its flickering form mirroring her intricate movements

The show enthralls from start to finish. Vangeline's performance is deeply engrossing and demands attention. Even as she stands on stage in almost total darkness, the tension created pulls our focus towards her, leaving us waiting with bated breath for the next glimpse of her movement. From her endlessly expressive face to her masterful pace control, with commanding stillness interspersed with moments of high energy, the choreography is powerful yet simple.

The show has been impeccably designed, and works really well in the space. The presence or absence of light adds a second dimension to the piece. One of the highlights of the piece is when Vangeline's shadow is dancing with her, its flickering form mirroring her intricate movements.

Music, words and sounds wash over the audience and guide the performance along through the sections, providing both a structure for the piece as a whole and a deeply immersive sensory overload. Vangeline has a real feel for the accompaniment, whether it is Beethoven's fifth or the sound of the ocean incessantly crashing in the distance. However, the symbolism behind a dress made from white-collared shirts and the audience of pigs is arguable.

## Edinburgh Spotlight.

### REVIEW – Butoh Beethoven



In *Butoh Beethoven*, New York based French performer Vangeline has created a mesmerising and exhilarating jewel, formed under the pressure of souls twisting through agonies and striving for the release of beauty. Its facets grab and grip attention throughout, presented with intense focus and unbelievable physical control.

The ghosts of Tatsumi Hijikata (co-founder of Butoh) and Ludwig van Beethoven are conjured with such contortions that we watch one possessed – indeed, Vangeline apparently invokes spirits as part of her preparation for performance. Half-closed eyes flickering demonically, contorted features painted white and black, and agile red tongue dancing, this is a living mask under static pig masks strung along the back wall which represent us, the audience. Butoh is a 'dance of darkness', connected to explorations of violence as well as spirits, where fears are to be confronted in 'a dance which crawls towards the bowel of the earth', according to Hijikata, and where it might be possible to transform darkness into the brilliance of diamonds.

In *Butoh Beethoven*, ominous drones of planes, eliciting thoughts of imminent bombing, morph in and out of Beethoven's imposing music – which starts with that oh-so-familiar dramatic de-de-de-daaa of his Fifth Symphony – and song such as 'Le Complainte de la Butte'. We are drawn into a world of passionate struggle, huge pain and the glories of composition, of performance, of pouring one's soul into beauty to combat torment. Butoh followed in the wake of its founders' harsh experiences during World War Two, while Beethoven fought to continue creating despite despair at his ailments. Of the fifth symphony, E.T.A. Hoffmann wrote: "only through this [longing] pain, which, while consuming but not destroying love, hope and joy, tries to burst our breasts with full-voiced harmonies of all the passions, we live on and are captivated beholders of the spirits." It is little wonder then that Vangeline was moved to evoke Hijikata and Beethoven together.

Vangeline's exquisite control allows change where there seems no movement, as well as holding distorted shapes, sinking below crushing metaphorical weight and fighting to rise to the heights of glorious accomplishment. Black shadows emanate from and combine with her stark white figure, and red pulses as a heart beat or flows like fires of hell. The figure (masculine in feel) passionately conducts with a baton that can glow whitely in the dark, as do – faintly – the pebbles curved before it. Emerging finally from heroic struggles, we are transported to a shore of sea sounds, a washing clearance that may carry peace.

While *Butoh Beethoven* started – following long French songs – ten minutes late and then lasted all of thirty minutes instead of the advertised hour, the quality of the production is such that this is still a resplendent piece of performance theatre well worth seeking out: a true tour de force, literally a feat of strength, within and without.