

A man and a woman are dancing in a dark, intimate setting. The man, with a beard and wearing a light-colored tank top, is in the foreground, his hands on the woman's waist. The woman, with long dark hair, is behind him, her back to the viewer. The lighting is low, creating a moody and intimate atmosphere.

ALL
TOMORROW'S
PARTIES
POST-PANDEMIC
DANCING
BRVNJAR
ABEL BANDLIEN



From the rehearsal of
All Tomorrow's Parties
at Oslo Nye Teater /
Centralteateret
on 22 June 2024.
Foto: Tonje Brustuen



From the rehearsal of
All Tomorrow's Parties
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MANUAL FOR THE PERSON HOLDING THIS PROGRAM

Imagine yourself in a theater on the opening night of West Side Story at Det Norske Teatret in Oslo, 1982. The lights are dimmed, the audience quiets down, and following a few seconds of total stillness and darkness, the stage suddenly explodes with light and sound, and is filled with dancers, choreography, scenography and song.

If you picture all of this transpiring before a big, black backdrop instead, you will have a clear image of the opening of All Tomorrow's Parties. The dancers give their all, as if this dance were the very last dance they would dance. Throughout the performance, the big, black backdrop moves forward. Slowly, almost invisibly, it advances, pushing the dancers towards the

front of the stage, swallowing up the scenography along the way, making it disappear, until the dancers are trapped, balancing on the edge of the remaining half meter downstage. Finally, the dancers are also swallowed up by the big, black backdrop.

After some time, a small slit is made in the middle of the big, black curtain, revealing a beam of light. Music and smoke seep through this little opening. The opening expands and you are invited through this opening into a disco featuring a DJ, a mirror ball, and a bar in the corner. Together we dance in remembrance of two dancers who died of AIDS-related complications: Bjørn Olav Berg and Jack Hansen. Say their names out loud.

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All Tomorrow's Parties
at IMIR,
1. September 2022
Foto: Tord F. Paulsen

FOREWORD BY KAI JOHNSEN A VIEW FROM THE WINGS

The atmosphere at the theater when a musical was on was always quite special. I was 22 years old and a stagehand at Det Norske Teatret in Oslo. At the same time, I was studying theater studies at the University of Oslo, and had started reviewing some theater and dance for the newspaper *Morgenbladet* (which was quite different in 1984 from what it is now in 2025). The plan was to become a director, which I eventually did. In those days, Det Norske Teatret was located on Stortingsgata, where the private theater Christiania Teater is found today.

It was at Det Norske Teatret that the “modern musical tradition had started back in 1965, with what was probably the first production of *West Side Story* outside the USA. Today it is hard to imagine the impact this musical, set in the world of New York City street gangs and back alleys, must have had on a post-war, social democratic Norwegian audience. Perhaps it is not quite as exotic now as it was in 1984, the year I think we’re talking about.

The production was also actually a revamp of Runar Borges’ production from 1982. But to me it was a “foreign element,” since the musical was a kind of an artistic outsider in relation to the basic repertoire of Norway’s otherwise heavily state-subsidized theater. And most of the people involved were actually “outsiders.” It’s true that Det Norske Teatret at the time had a small, permanent ensemble of dancers, but most of them came from, well, “outside.”

This was the petrol age and the right-wing yuppie era in Norway, and the country was about to become a Scandinavian “superpower within the genre of musical theater. A small group centered around Egil Monn-Iversen and Runar Borge staged productions of various musicals in several national capitals. The times were changing in every way.

And the dancers/artists of these shows had a very special charisma. Theirs was a strange alloy, somehow both “plastic (“glam”) and deeply sincere. And it was all about the body. In a way. Especially for the men. I have a definite impression that the performing bodies audiences were exposed to at that time on stages throughout Norway were either linked to the “controlled” classical ballet, or to a “social realist” and partly “Protestant expression. These guys were erotic. And one could sense that most of them were gay, a proclivity I otherwise associated with criminal behavior at the urinals in the dark parks of the city, and the strange nightclub Metropol on Akersgata that I, a heterosexual, had viewed only from a distance. I grew up in Nordstrand, a suburb of Oslo and the self-proclaimed center of the provincial normality of the neo-bourgeoisie and nouveau riche.

I had taken an interest in dance only a few years before, but I had seen a good deal of what existed in the way of “free” dance in Norway at that time. In these productions the bodies on stage were almost exclusively female (Høvik Ballet, Collage Dance Company, etc.).

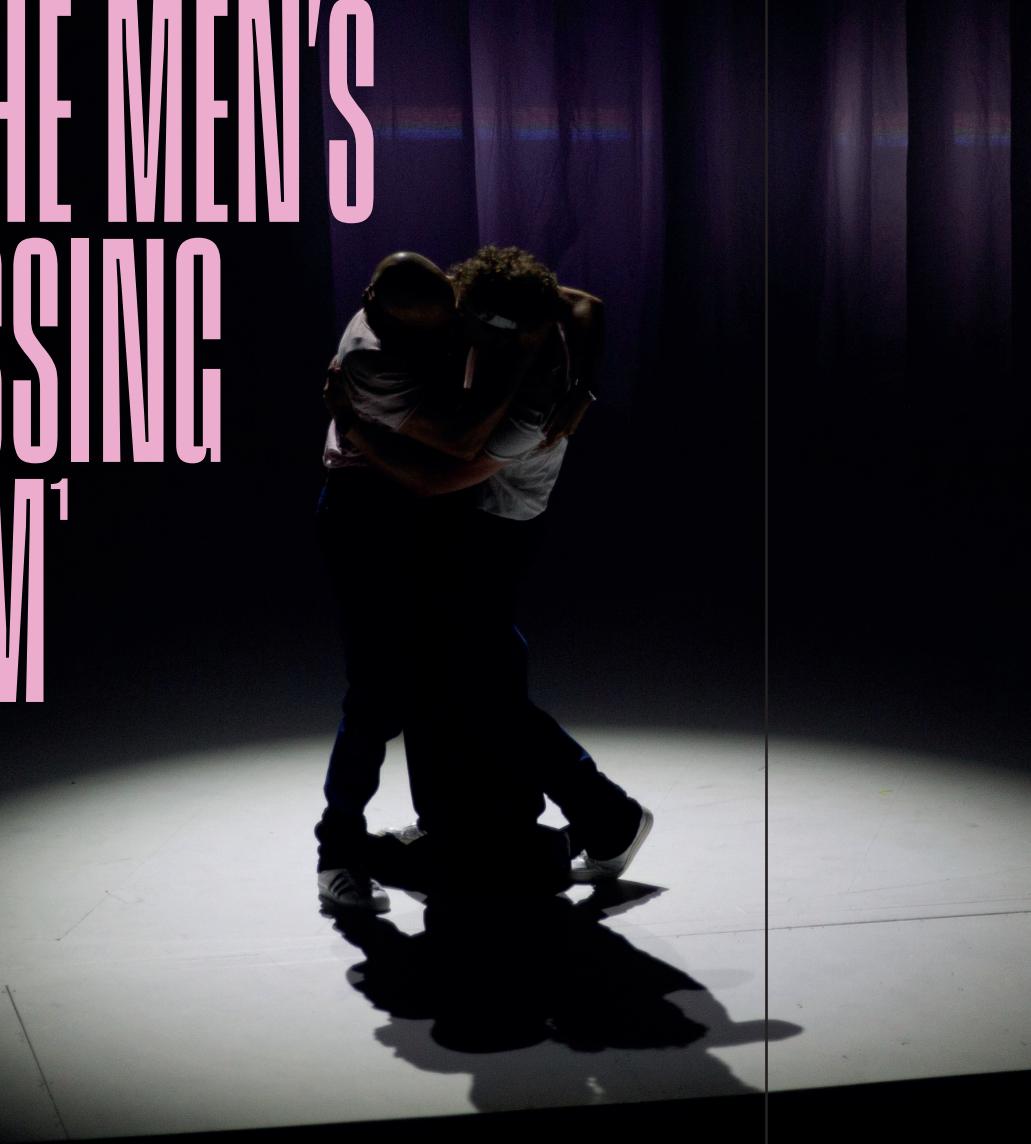
You could spot them – the male dancers – in the corridors, in the cafeteria, in the wings and on the illuminated stage. They radiated potency, power, precision, self-consciousness, secrecy and shyness. And at their best they transformed the stage, life and the space around them into a different kind of force field. I both despised them and felt attracted to them. They represented something “other,” something frightening, tempting and different. They had one foot in the superficiality of American commercialism and the other in the transformative movement of the erotic and shameful underground.

They knew they were good. They knew their interpretation and performance of *West Side Story*, the absolute masterpiece of the American musical tradition, was just about the best in Europe. But at the same time, they were also somehow despised. Maybe that’s why I liked them. They were the outsiders skirting the edges of normality. They were small and big at the same time.

I remember you. I remember Jack, Bjørn and all the rest of you. Your bodies exist in me somehow. And your love. You were a distinctive and precious image of Norway at a time of radical change.

Oslo 15 April 2025
Kai Johnsen

I REMEMBER... WHISPERS IN THE MEN'S DRESSING ROOM¹



From the rehearsal of
All Tomorrow's Parties
at Oslo Nye Teater /
Centralteateret
on 22 June 2024.
Foto: Tonje Brustuen

I remember dancing in a production of the Nutcracker with my local ballet school in Norway in the mid-1980s. I must have been around nine or ten years old. I danced three roles: That of a snowflake, a soldier and the part of the little brother Fritz. In the first act, Fritz breaks the nutcracker that Clara gets as a present from their uncle, who is also a magician. The man who played the magician uncle was quite a character – with long and curly black hair and strong features. He was kind, but when acting out his part, he was also a little bit scary. I remember standing next to him during the curtain calls after the first performance, holding his hand. Somehow, without being told, I knew that he was gay. When I arrived at the theater the next day, there was a strange silence. Our ballet teacher told us that the night before, after the show, the man who played the magician uncle had died. He had taken his own life. From a broken heart, she said. I remember that we cried, but no one dared to ask any questions.

I remember, as a young ballet student in Hamburg in the early 1990s, meeting Eduardo, one of the maestros who played the piano during ballet classes. Eduardo was originally from South America and was our favorite maestro because he would adapt pop songs and play versions of them for class. During my second year at the ballet school, I noticed a physical change in Eduardo. Every day, little by little, he grew weaker and weaker, until one day he stopped coming to school altogether. At first, I thought that he just had a minor illness, maybe a cold, but the ballet teacher

¹ This text is inspired by the book *I Remember* by Joe Brainard, Granary Books, Inc. 1975.

told us that he was sick and would not play for class anymore. I remember the distance in the teacher's eyes when he told us it was serious. I kept hoping that Eduardo would come back. One day during class, the substitute piano player who was covering for him broke down crying. No one spoke of Eduardo again.

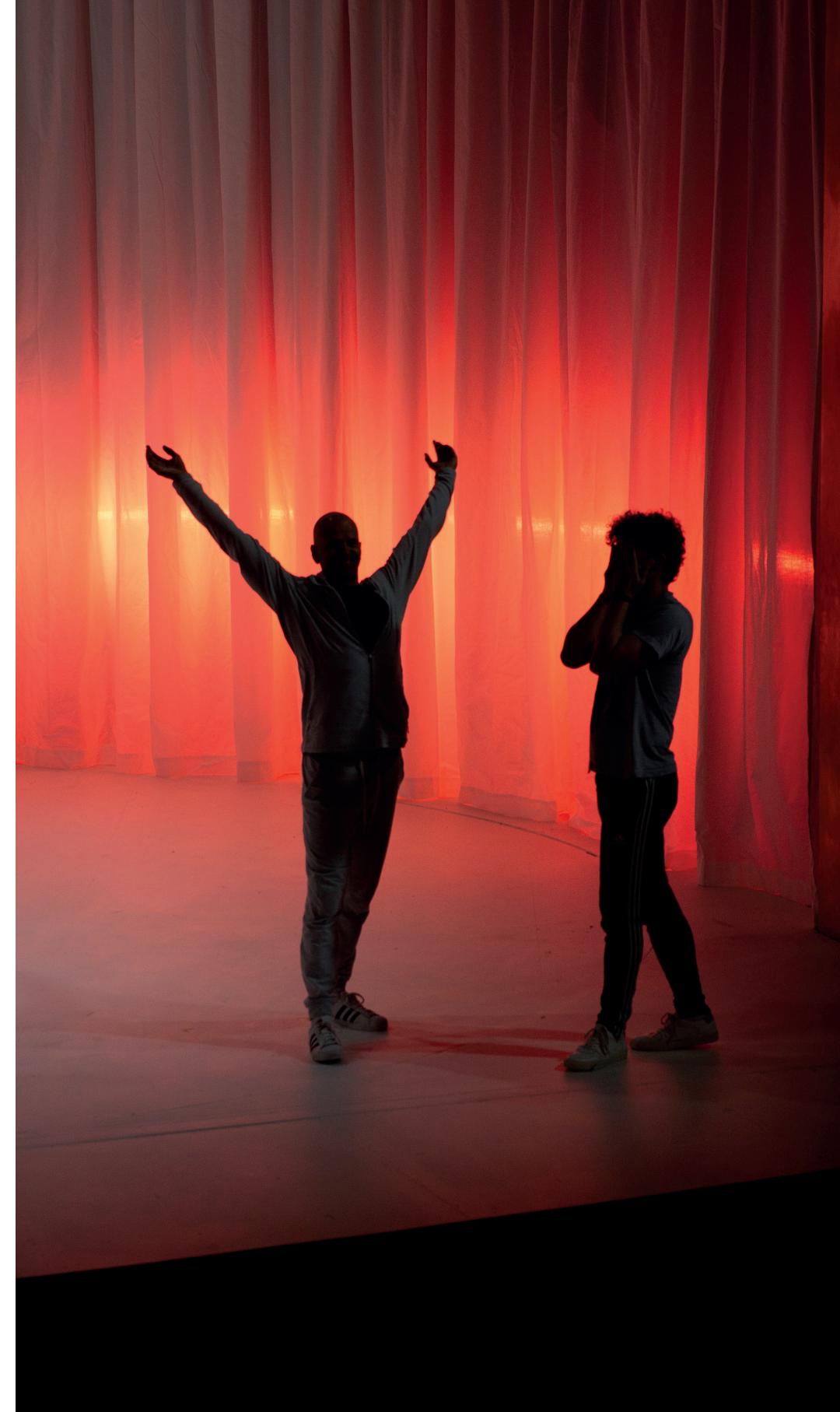
I remember, in my second year at the Hamburg ballet school, receiving a grant from the director of the Hamburg ballet, John Neumeier. The grant was from a fund established in memory of a male dancer who had passed away at the peak of his career. The name of the dancer was Jeffrey Kirk. Jeffrey was a very talented dancer and was highly loved by the director. Somehow, without anyone telling me, I knew that this dancer had died from AIDS. During a talk with the company before the opening night of *The Lady of the Camellias*, Neumeier was asked why he didn't create works addressing the ongoing AIDS crisis. His explanation was that he already had. In his version of *The Lady of the Camellias*, the protagonist, a high-end Parisian prostitute, dies of pneumonia. She is still in love with her young, handsome lover who returns her affections in spite of her illness. Neumeier cried when he said the word lover. Although he never explained it to me directly, the director's eyes expressed it all when he awarded me the grant. I felt honored to receive the Jeffrey Kirk grant.

I remember, as a young dancer with the Netherlands Dance Theater 2 (NDT2) in Den Hague, Holland, living in an old house with several other dancers from the company.

I stayed in a room on the second floor, sharing a kitchen and bath with two Hispanic dancers, Yolanda and Sebastian. It was the mid-1990s and Sebastian would dye his hair blond. One day after work, wanting to take a bath, I found the tub coated with hair dye, and I didn't feel like getting in. Sebastian got very angry, asking me why I didn't want to use the bathtub. At first, I didn't understand why he got so angry. I had already explained to him that the hair dye was the reason. Later I learned that he was HIV positive, and only then did I understand the real reason for his anger. He thought I did not want to use the bathroom because I was afraid of contracting HIV. I never got the chance to clear up this misunderstanding with Sebastian. He withdrew from his contract with the company and moved out of the house soon thereafter.

While rehearsing a dance with NDT2 in one of the studios at AT&T Dance Theater, I recall that a dancer, it was unclear exactly who, had cut their foot and there was some blood on the dance floor. The director, Gerald Tibbs, immediately stopped the rehearsal, making us freeze in our positions, and insisting we not move until the blood had been mopped up. No one said anything about the dangers of infection through direct contact with blood in relation to HIV or AIDS. However, once the floor had been cleaned, and the dancer's foot taken care of, Gerald shouted: "We are living in the 90s!"

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Foto: Tonje Brustuen



How I started to think about the impact of HIV and AIDS on the Norwegian dance scene, and why, as a dancer from Generation X, I ended up conducting this artistic research

Ten years ago, in 2014, I was a member of the board for dance and theater at Arts Council Norway. In a coffee break between two meetings, I had a conversation with Lars Jacob Holm, a dancer from my generation who was also a board member. We talked about the gay dancers and actors who had come before us, and how there seemed to be a lot of repressed bitterness among the dancers of those generations. We talked about life as a gay man in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, about how it must have felt to be considered a criminal, to be diagnosed as mentally ill, and to experience the fear, shame, stigma and hatred of homosexuals during those times and before.

We also talked about how HIV and AIDS had affected this generation, and how many of them, at the time still young men in their sexual

prime, experienced living under the threat of contracting this deadly virus. Fair enough, of course they were bitter, we thought, and this explanation sort of concluded our discussion at that time. But other questions arose: Why hadn't anybody talked about this? Why hadn't anybody written about it? Since then, books have been published about the history of HIV and AIDS in Norway², but none that addressed the vacuum that the HIV epidemic left in the dance scene.

After this discussion with Lars Jacob, I contacted several writers, activists and academics, urging them to write about how HIV and AIDS had affected the Norwegian dance scene. Everyone I talked to seemed to agree that this was an important topic that needed to be addressed, but nobody was inspired to write about it. I also

tried, without any success, to convince archives, libraries and other institutions that have an interest in preserving Norwegian dance history to address this topic in some way. I interviewed some key people from the dance scene, and found that there were enough informants and enough empirical materials to conduct artistic research on this topic.

In 2020, I was appointed associate professor at the Faculty of Performing Arts at the University of Stavanger on the southwestern coast of Norway. My position there includes artistic research, and since no one had addressed this topic, I thought I might as well research it myself. In 2021, I applied for and was awarded a three-year grant from the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) for the artistic research project All Tomorrow's Parties: post-pandemic dancing. With the funding from HK-dir in place, the Faculty of Performing Arts at the University of Stavanger gave me a 50% sabbatical, which allowed me to focus on my artistic research.

I continued to interview people who had survived the HIV and AIDS pandemic of the 1980s and 1990s. I asked them what they remembered from this period. Who was active in the dance scene? Who was active in the gay scene? Did they know someone who had died? Almost all of the informants mentioned two dancers: Bjørn Olav Berg and Jack Hansen. Bjørn Olav was openly gay, and Jack was open about his bi-sexuality.

² *Det ligger i blodet* by Ketil Slagstad, Forlaget Press, 2023.

It was widely known throughout the Norwegian dance scene that both were HIV positive and had died of AIDS-related complications. How did they dance? What kind of dances did they dance? What kind of dance could they have danced had they survived?

I contacted Lars Jacob Holm and he agreed to take part in the artistic research project. That autumn we researched Bjørn and Jack and found out that they were both musical theater artists. We also started rehearsing in Lars Jacob's living room at Aker Brygge in Oslo. We danced excerpts from West Side Story and A Chorus Line, musicals that Bjørn and Jack had danced in the 1980s. Over a weekend at the end of that year, we presented a sample of some of our ideas for a small group, and performed an early version of All Tomorrow's Parties (ATP) in a program called back2back2back, which included two other works by the artists Steffi Lund and Siri Jøntvedt, at Scenehuset at Majorstua in Oslo.

Dag Johan Haugerud, a Norwegian author and film maker, saw this early presentation, and expressed his interest in the project. Dag Johan proposed writing texts for the performance, and conducted interviews with Lars Jacob and me on what we remember about entering the dance scene in Oslo in the early 1990s. This helped clarify my role as a researcher in relation to both the artistic research project and the performance itself. It also helped me understand the context of the queer history of dance in Norway, in which I situate this artistic research.



All Tomorrow's Parties
at IMIR
1. September 2022
Foto: Tord F. Paulsen

THE DANCE PRODUCTION

ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES

In the spring of 2022, I contacted Iver Finley and Marit Sandmark from the performance space IMIR/RIMI/RISK Scenekunst in Stavanger about presenting the premiere of All Tomorrow's Parties. The performance would be part of Gay Pride 2022/Rogaland på Skeivå which took place on September 1-3, 2022. They were enthusiastic about the project, and offered an additional ten-day period to further develop the production in their black box space.

In May 2022, I worked at IMIR together with Lars Jacob Holm and the French light designer and scenographer Corentin JPM Leven,

trying out new ideas, tableaus and scenes for the performance. First, we rehearsed the scenes developed back in 2021: The Overture from West Side Story was played to an empty stage, and the solo from West Side Story, was performed twice, first by Bjørn, and then by Jack, followed by two monologues about their professional careers as dancers and their lives before and during the HIV and AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s.

When researching HIV and AIDS, there are two themes one cannot avoid addressing: sex and death. HIV is sexually transmitted and the impact of this reality on the gay

community needed to be addressed, along with the fear, shame and stigma that accompany a positive diagnosis, sometimes mixed with the sweet aftermath of having had great sex. And finally, death, and the act of dying: the inner struggle to come to terms with this death sentence, but also the difficulty of sharing this with others. Ideas for four tableaus based on these situations slowly formed:

First tableau: The scene "Cruising," in which Bjørn and Jack start flirting. First, they stand a short distance apart, holding up a 1.5x2 meter black cloth between them. Once they discover one another, they use the cloth to draw closer, until they touch, start to kiss, and, through a dance that resembles something between fighting and making out, end up having sex.

Second tableau: The scene "Ofalia," in which Bjørn and Jack await their test results at the Olafia test clinic for STIs in Oslo. Sitting on two chairs, on either side of the stage, they experience the feeling of having just had great sex, mixed with the fear of receiving a positive result on the HIV test.

Third tableau: The scene "Non-Dance," a dance in which Bjørn and Jack seek to come to terms with the fact that they are infected with HIV, are developing AIDS, and that this is a death sentence. They try to dance, but then stop themselves and listen to the urge to dance, not quite able to move. After a while, Bjørn asks Jack if he has danced enough? Jack answers that he wants to dance just a little more.

Fourth tableau: the scene "Forever Falling into the Arms of Death," in which Bjørn and Jack rehearse their own deaths. Bjørn stands in front of

a black cloth, held up by Jack, who is standing behind it. Slowly Bjørn falls back into the cloth and into Jack's arms, as Jack wraps the black cloth around Bjørn, helping him down from a vertical to a horizontal position on the floor. Then this scene is repeated, but this time Jack is standing in front of the black cloth, held up by Bjørn who is standing behind it. Bjørn helps Jack transition from a vertical to a horizontal position on the floor. End scene.

These four tableaus are linked by three intervening dialogues between Bjørn and Jack. They talk with each other as they would have done while sitting in the men's dressing room after a class, rehearsal or performance, in the form of small talk, or whispers. They talk about their experiences, fears, joys, shame, hopes, stigma, dreams, love and death (see complete manuscripts from the performance p.44).

After the fourth tableau, Bjørn and Jack get to their feet and bow for applause. As the audience applauds, they perform a dance based on poses from photographs of them found in archives and scrap books. Bjørn and Jack disappear behind the small black cloth and reappear, over and over, until they both disappear behind the big black curtain. Finally, Bjørn and Jack open a slit in the curtain. Set to the song "All Tomorrow's Parties" by The Velvet Underground & Nico, they invite the audience up on stage to join them in a last dance.

"And what costume shall the poor girl wear to all tomorrow's parties?"³

³ Opening line from the song "All Tomorrow's Parties" by The Velvet Underground & Nico written by Lou Reed (1966/1967).

SUBJECTIVE TEXT: THE PERFORMER

FROM INSIDE
ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES
1 SEPTEMBER 2022,
AT IMIR/RIMI IN
STAVANGER, NORWAY

I'm sitting in the first row in the auditorium, a couple of seats to the right of Lars Jacob. We are wearing the same costume: White t-shirts, dark blue, high-waisted jeans and white trainers. Lars Jacob holds a folded black cloth in his lap. We've just said *tv i tv i* (the Norwegian term for "break a leg") and *toi toi toi* to Corentin JPM Leven, the scenographer and light designer, and to Thore Warland, the sound technician.

The lights on stage are dimmed, and the lights in the auditorium come up. Audience members are chatting as they enter, looking for their seats. They quiet down when they see Lars Jacob and me sitting there. We look at the audience, meet their gaze, say hello, but do not invite further conversation. We silently communicate that this is not a social space, but rather a space for a different kind of experience. A performative experience. When the audience members have found their seats, their banter picks up, until the light in the theater fades out. Together, we look into the empty, dark stage. I can feel the anticipation quivering through my body at this moment, before, all of a sudden, the whole stage explodes with light and sound.

It's the overture to West Side Story. The overture is dramatic, theatrical and emotional. As I am sitting there, looking into the empty stage, I can imagine the various scenes, acts and movements. Everything is bathed in light from the rig on the ceiling, revealing the stage floor covered with black Marley (dance mats) and three walls covered with

black Molton curtains. The audience functions as a fourth wall. My expectations and excitement almost short-circuit my feelings. This, strangely enough, frees my mind and allows me just to listen with all my senses. I project my imagination onto the empty stage. I visualize whole choreographies involving many dancers in colorful costumes, scenography, and flashing lights. I let myself get carried away by my own projections, which change along with the different themes of the overture. I allow space for my own idea of the importance of giving the audience time to land. Time to forget about babysitters, parking lots and dinner plans. Give the audience time just to be in the theater. To be at a show. Give them time to feel the presence of absence, and release the potential for them to fill the void with their own imaginations and projections. In this moment, anything can happen.

I am so absorbed by my own imaginings, so deeply immersed in my own senses, and so paralyzed by my own nerves, that I miss the musical cue to enter the stage. I glance at Lars Jacob, who heard the cue but chose to stay seated since I didn't react. After almost five minutes without any action other than light, sound and the projections of our own imaginations, I jump up from my seat, and Lars Jacob jumps up too, and together we enter the stage. We walk upstage, stand in front of the large, black backdrop and look at the audience. As the last notes of the West Side Story overture are ringing out, we lift the small black cloth that Lars Jacob has carried with him, holding it up in front of us, like a black square, and disappear behind

it. Suddenly there is silence again, and in the following moments I can feel the audience's anticipation growing. And we're on... Again.

Since I had almost forgotten to go on stage, my senses are now heightened and I feel 100% present. I listen to the music, the prologue from West Side Story, and look at Lars Jacob who carefully takes my end of the cloth out of my hands and keeps holding it up. At the first crescendo in the music, I take a big step out from behind the cloth, so my whole body is fully visible, and stand completely still while I observe the audience. I feel all the emotions of the music and all the tension in my body. I breathe out, shift my weight, and slowly pace back and forth. I alternate between looking at the audience and the big black backdrop. Walking beside it, I touch it with one hand, watching my hand slide over the soft folds in the fabric. I think about death. How concrete and banal death is. How beautiful, hard and soft it is. How final it is and at the same time eternal. I follow my hand as it slides across the backdrop. I walk behind the black cloth that Lars Jacob is holding up. I disappear from view for a moment. I reappear on the other side, playing hide and seek with the audience. Now you see me. Now you don't. I walk back and forth like this, disappearing and reappearing from behind the black cloth. And as I walk, I think about how everything in life and dance unfolds against the backdrop of death. To dance is to resist death.

I start snapping my fingers to the rhythm of the music, turn to the audience, and step into a dance with small jumps, kicks and pirouettes. I focus on my body.

I turn my thoughts off and tune into my senses. I sense the music. In order to cope with all the difficult movements of the choreography, I try to lean into the music as much as possible. In all the jumps I try to relax, and in the pirouettes, I try to be as compact as possible. I am myself. I am G'Tar. I am Bjørn. I am the dance. The music accelerates, and the dance accelerates with it. I feel the contrast of the quick and light dance unfolding in front of the large, heavy, black backdrop. I give everything I've got to this energetic dance, which may also be the last. I do the final pirouettes and land in a forward-leaning pose with my arms out towards the audience. Jazz-hands: POW!

I remain in this pose for a few seconds, holding my breath, before giving in to the impact of all the physical exertion, breaking off. I stop, lean forward onto my knees, and exhale. I drink a sip of water from a bottle on the left side of the stage. Once I have caught my breath a bit, I tell the audience that dancing is hard, and that I'm not as fit as I used to be. That I am a little out of shape. I ask the sound technician Thore to let the music play on while I drink some more water, catch my breath and regain my composure. For me, this break does several things at once. It stops the performance from going on. The show mustn't go on. Takes it down a notch. The break allows me to be honest about how difficult and tiring dancing is. How hard it is to uphold the illusion, to put on a smile. At the same time, it shows how a young, healthy, and strong male body can get cut down by illness, an illness that slowly but surely destroys the immune system and kills with a simple flue. This moment breaks down



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Foto: Tonje Brustuen

the boundary between illusion and reality, the sacred and the profane, the role played and the person behind it. Reality spills into the show, and the show spills into reality.

I introduce myself: I say that my name is Brynjar, and I am a dancer and associate professor at the University of Stavanger, where I am leading a research project about how HIV and AIDS affected the Norwegian dance and arts scene in the 80s and 90s. I explain that tonight I will dance the part of... (here I do a little kick-ball-change step and snap my fingers): Bjørn. From this point on, and throughout the rest of the performance, I am Bjørn. I talk about how I started dancing quite late in life. How I took ballet classes at the Opera in Oslo. That I traveled to Switzerland and danced at Le Grand Theater de Genève. That I went back to Oslo when I was offered an apprenticeship at the Norwegian National Ballet. How a choreographer once told me that the great thing about me is that when I danced he couldn't tell that I'm gay. That I traveled to Paris to take classes and was a part of the gay life of Le Marais as well. That I returned to Norway with a French boyfriend. How I took classes at Studio Oscar. That someone asked me to come out as HIV-positive and to talk openly about what it's like to live with AIDS. How I refused at first, but then changed my mind. Finally, I came out on World AIDS Day after a performance much like this. And that it was probably the very last thing people ever saw me do on a stage.

I am telling the audience all this from memory. I try to remember as much as I can about Bjørn.

Everything I have learned about him over the past two years by interviewing his friends, colleagues and family. But everything I remember and say about Bjørn, I remember and talk about as if it had happened to me. How I danced in musicals at Det Norske Teatret and at Chateau Neuf in Oslo. How I had a small part in A Chorus Line and West Side Story. How I danced the role of G'Tar from The Jets gang in the number "Cool," and that "Cool" is one of the coolest things I've ever done. Then I say that I will try to repeat the success from 1982, but because it played at Det Norske Teatret, we didn't sing "Cool" in English, but "Kald" in the New Norwegian dialect. I start to sing, snapping my fingers to the beat. While I am singing, Lars Jacob, who has been standing at the back of the stage, approaches me from behind, holding up the little black cloth like a black square. As I sing the last notes of "Kald," he covers me up and I disappear behind it. The audience can hear my fingers snapping a few more times from behind the black cloth and then again all is silent.

Here, there is a break, a reset and the performance continues. The black cloth slides back upstage in front of the backdrop. Again, the prologue from West Side Story is played, but this time it's not me, it's Lars Jacob who steps out from behind the black cloth. He repeats the dance I just did, and although both of us dance the same choreography, our personal interpretations are different and unique. In this way, we try to show that no one is replaceable. He dances until he stops: The show mustn't go on.

He catches his breath, and says

that his name is Lars Jacob, but that tonight he is dancing the part of... (and here Lars Jacob does a slide, a turn and jazz-hands, before exclaiming): Jack. While Jack tells his story, I stand upstage left, holding the black cloth in my arms, listening to him. I picture him as a young man; a talented dancer with wishes, hopes, and dreams for the future. I imagine the scene in A Chorus Line in which he played the part of Paul, who tells his coming-out-of-the-closet-story in a monologue. I envision the theater as he describes it: Here is the side-stage, here is the artist's entrance, and these are the stairs. I dream myself away while he sings "Who am I anyway?" Paul explains how his parents caught him doing drag, which in turn forced him out of the closet.

While Lars Jacob as Jack as Paul narrates and sings, I am transported by his performance and by my own imagination. I imagine that Lars Jacob, Jack and Paul merge into one and the same person. For the second time I forget that I am in a performance on stage. I experience everything that is happening right here and right now. I am totally swept away by emotion. It is not until Jack speaks of the only time his father ever called him my boy (which is my cue) that I come to my senses, lift up the black cloth and slowly move towards center stage. Jack finishes his monologue, explaining that his girlfriend came to see the last performance of A Chorus Line, and how she confused reality and fiction by mixing up Jack and Paul. Jack's girlfriend really thought his parents had caught him doing drag. While Jack recounts this misunderstanding, repeating but it wasn't me, I slowly

move downstage with the black cloth held up as a black square in front of me. Jack's girlfriend keeps insisting, and Jack keeps answering but it wasn't me. Slowly I approach him from behind, and as Jack answers but it wasn't me for the final time, the black square covers him, and he disappears behind it. Again, all is silent.

Now that the audience has gotten to know Bjørn and Jack, the performance continues in tableaus. The first tableau is called "Cruising."

TABLEAU 1: CRUISING⁴

From the speakers I can hear 1980s electro pop, the kind often used in gay porn films from the 1970s and 1980s. Jack and I step out from either side of the black cloth which we hold up as a square between us. We are cruising. I try to stay calm and cool, but inside I can feel the expectations mounting. I look around, shifting my weight from one leg to the other, gradually moving to the side, while trying to catch the eye of someone in the audience. I am flirting. I try to make eye contact. Upon achieving this, I drop my gaze, shifting my weight again, looking to the other side. There I spot Jack. Flirting. We make eye contact. We hold our breath. We hold each other's gaze for a moment longer before pulling each other close, using the cloth between us as a towing device.

⁴ Cruising is how men who have sex with men (MSM) meet for casual sex in public places, parks and urinals with other gay, bisexual and straight men. It was a common form of meeting in the 1970s and 1980s, before smartphones and dating apps, but it still exists today.



From the rehearsal of
All Tomorrow's Parties
at Oslo Nye Teater /
Centralteateret
on 22 June 2024.
Foto: Tonje Brustuen

We play with weight and counterweight and playfully try to knock each other off balance with sudden jerks. As we get closer and closer, the cloth folds between our bodies, until we are standing face to face. The attraction between us is real, but we hold back. We want to kiss, but we don't. For a moment there is a silence, a stillness between us, before we let go and enter into something between fighting and foreplay. We try to kiss each other, to undress each other, we try to pull each other closer, and at the same time we push each other away. The music breathes and pulsates and the foreplay/fight breathes and pulsates along with it. We get tired. We lose our breath. We lose some garments. When the music comes to an end, we stand close together. Exhausted, we embrace each other. We both exhale.

After "Cruising," Bjørn and Jack take a couple of steps back to adjust their clothes a bit. Much like dancers in a dressing room after a show or a rehearsal, we start to talk with each other about how it felt. How we are in better shape than expected. That we never had anything sexual with each other before... As far as we can remember... That we're not really friends even. Just colleagues. Bjørn talks about the importance of flirting on the street, on the bus, and in the supermarket. How flirting is the very glue of our existence. Jack says: More flirting! Less talk! While we talk, we bring the two chairs from the front row, the chairs we were sitting on at the start of the performance, onto the stage. We sit down, Jack at stage right and Bjørn at stage left, sharing the stage between us. While talking, we take off our shoes

and pants, everything except our socks and our underwear. While undressing, we continue to talk, until the soundtrack of Tableau 2 can be heard over the loudspeakers: The sound of a kind of slow underwater drowning accident. We both gradually fall silent and more thoughtful.

TABLEAU 2: OLAFIA⁵

We are in the waiting room at Olafia, awaiting the results of our HIV tests. As we sit there, we remember the thrill of cruising: the attraction, the flirting, the kissing and caressing. We remember having passionate sex, penetrating and being penetrated, coming inside each other, embracing each other, holding and being held sensually, holding and being held sexually, whispering intimately into the other's ear, hugging each other tightly, and falling asleep while spooning.

These good feelings become mixed with the fear of receiving an HIV-positive test result. The regret over having had unprotected sex. The fear that this is it. That this will be the time it has all gone wrong. Fear of death. As we wait, all these feelings go through us and mix in us and become a dance of the two strongest human drives: sexual desire and fear of death, alternating between extreme desire and extreme anxiety, at the same time, intertwined.

⁵ Olafia; a test clinic for men who have sex with men (MSM) in Oslo. If Bjørn and Jack had tested positive today, they would have been given treatment that stops HIV, prevents the development of AIDS and renders it dormant. The medicines prevent the possibility of the virus infecting others, e.g. hiv-positive individuals who are receiving treatment cannot pass the virus onto other sex partners.

We reach out in desire and curl up in remorse. We step up onto the chairs reaching for the light like plants. We shrink back as if burned by the sun. Out of fear and shame, we collapse into fetal positions. After a while, we get up from the chairs and move around the stage. We try to move away from the bad feelings and towards the good ones, but how can we do that when what we love the most is, at same time, the source that will kill us?

Appreciative. Fragile. Hesitant. Searching. The chairs are now empty. During this dance, the big, black backdrop has begun moving forward from the back of the stage. It moves so slowly that the movement is almost imperceptible. It is only when the chairs disappear, one by one, behind the backdrop that it becomes evident. The backdrop is pushing us forward, the stage is shrinking, leaving us less and less space to dance. When both chairs have disappeared behind the backdrop, only half the stage is left for us to dance on. The space is reduced, and, with it, also time. I ask Jack if he'll be finished dancing soon? Has he danced enough? Jack replies: No. Not yet. Just a little more. We continue to dance until the backdrop pushes us all the way downstage. There is no more space, so we perform our final moves in front of the backdrop, at the very edge of the stage.

Again, we talk about the experience. That it was difficult, but that it went ok. How hard it is to grasp that it is actually over. How it hurts to realize that it is not possible to continue. If I remember correctly, I think we talked about everything we would have liked to have danced, experienced,

lived. About our hopes and dreams and wishes for the future. Performances we would have liked to have danced in, places we would have liked to have traveled to, people we would have liked to have met, men we would have liked to have slept with, boyfriends we would have liked to have been with. Once we finish talking, we pick back up the black cloth that is lying there on the floor and hold it up in front of us like a black square.

TABLEAU 3: FOREVER FALLING INTO THE ARMS OF DEATH

Over the speaker system I hear the soundtrack to Tableau 3: "Forever falling into the arms of death", a slow and descending soundscape. I step out in front of the cloth, almost naked, wearing only white socks and underpants. Standing upright in the spotlight, I look out over the audience, over the horizon, gazing into eternity. Slowly, from a vertical position, I fall backwards into the black cloth held up by Jack. He supports the weight of my body, as I allow my weight to drop backward into the sheet, falling into his arms. As I fall, he folds the black cloth around my body. Jack resembles an angel of death wrapping his wings around me. Little by little he takes on the weight of my body and slowly lowers me from a vertical position to a horizontal position onto the floor. As the last notes of the soundtrack play, I am lying on my side on the floor, with Jack spooning me from behind. Silence. I maintain this silence for as long as possible, by holding my breath. The silence is broken when, breathing, and I turn to Jack and say, "Thank you very much!" Jack asks me how was it? How do I feel? I feel good. I felt his support, felt safe and taken care of.⁶ We took our time.

When we're done talking with each other, still lying on the floor, I ask Jack if he wants to try? Jack answers yes, and together we get up from the floor. I lift the cloth up and hold it like a square in front of us. As the soundtrack to Tableau 3 plays once more, Jack steps out in front of the cloth, almost naked, wearing only white socks and underpants. Standing upright in the spotlight, he looks out over the audience, over the horizon, gazing into eternity. We repeat the death scene, only this time with reversed roles. Through the cloth, I find the back of Jack's head. In attunement with the movements of his body, I support him as he falls backwards into the cloth, into my arms and onto my body. Through the fabric, I can feel the drop of his body weight into my body. Like an angel of death, as if my arms were wings, I wrap the cloth around him. I hold him and follow the downward movement of his weight, supporting his slowly sinking body. I help him move from a vertical position down to a horizontal position on the ground. As the last notes of the soundtrack are played, I lie down, spooning him from behind. After this, we both stand up and accept the applause. I remember the audience being a bit surprised that the show was over, surprised by our abrupt transition from the death scenes to applause, and perhaps baffled that the performance ended like this?

I don't know. As soon as we've taken a bow, we lift up the cloth⁷ again and enter the final dance number to the soundtrack of Tableau 4: "Noguing" to the ongoing applause of the audience.

TABLEAU 4: NOGUING⁸

In this part, Jack moves the cloth to the side, revealing Bjørn in the middle of the stage striking poses from pictures in programs, newspaper clippings and scrapbooks found in the archives of Dance Information Norway (Danseinformasjonen). While Bjørn is noguing, Jack moves the cloth back and forth a few times behind him, before moving in front of Bjørn and covering him up. Bjørn then assumes control of the cloth and reveals Jack. Jack remains centre stage, noguing to the music, while Bjørn moves the cloth back and forth behind him. The dance accelerates in tempo and the poses evolve every time Jack or Bjørn appears and reappears. The cloth moves faster and faster. The big black backdrop has now moved all the way downstage, and this dance takes place in front of it on the last remaining meter of the stage. At some point we slow down the pace, holding each pose longer before shifting into the next pose. The cloth keeps moving at the same pace. Suddenly, we both disappear, and the cloth stops moving in the

⁶ Here I think we could also have talked about how it perhaps is not so stupid to practice death after all. Since we ultimately are alone in the face of death, it might be possible to share that experience of loneliness. Maybe sharing it with each other might make it less lonely? Maybe it would be easier to cope with our own finite existence if we could share the experience?

⁷ I remember that we couldn't find our t-shirts in the dark behind the curtain after the applause at the premiere, and we had to dance the last dance wearing only socks and underpants. This mishap gave us a careless attitude, which was good for the next sequence.

⁸ Noguing; No Voguing - an unschooled attempt at voguing; the term refers to the dance of a person attempting to vogue, who does not really know how to do it = No Voguing.

middle of the spotlight, right in front of the backdrop, dead center. Hidden from the audience, Jack and I sneak behind the big curtain, still holding the cloth up in front of us. And then, on a musical cue, we both drop the cloth, and – poof! – Bjørn and Jack are gone, like a final disappearing act in a magic show. After the disappearing act, I can remember how relieved and happy I was that everything had gone well, beyond all expectations, and almost completely according to the plan. But at the same time, I was still quite nervous and excited about how the next and final part of the performance would go. While the lights continue searching for us out there, the music keeps on playing and the audience keeps on clapping, Jack and Bjørn change into ordinary clothes and become Lars Jacob and Brynjar again. DJ Borusiade (Miruna Borusescu) prepares her equipment at the back of the stage, and Victoria (Heggelund) prepares a bar on the left side of the stage. Two portraits are projected above the bar, one of Jack and one of Bjørn. The disco ball starts spinning above the stage and the space below starts to fill up with smoke from the smoke

machine. When the soundtrack to Tableau 4 has finished playing, the title track “All Tomorrow’s Parties” by The Velvet Underground & Nico plays over the loudspeaker system. On a musical cue, Lars Jacob and I pull the curtain aside and open a little slit in the middle of it, creating a small opening center stage. Together we dance a bit to the music there in the opening, before we start to invite the audience members, one by one, to get up from their chairs, through the opening in the curtain and onto the stage.^{9,10} Gradually the music changes from the 1960s sound to 1980s electro-punk music, “Smalltown Boy” by Bronski Beat, and we invite the audience to continue the dance in honor of Bjørn and Jack. Ernest Hemingway said: “Every man has two deaths, when he is buried in the ground and the last time someone says his name.”

Through this performance, Bjørn and Jack were given a new life. As we remember them, they live on.

Say their names: Bjørn Olav Berg. Jack Hansen.



⁹The idea was to allow the backdrop to move from the very back of the stage to the very front of the stage edge, as well as to show how the room for Jack’s movement and Bjørn’s movement is slowly but surely restricted over time, also blocking the audience’s ability to see into the stage, until ultimately and finally the curtain is opened up, creating a small opening between the hall and the stage, a kind of portal between two worlds through which the audience can move. Something that is initially experienced as a problem or barrier can later open up and become an opportunity.

¹⁰The idea behind letting the performance All Tomorrow’s Parties end with a party instead of the death of Bjørn and Jack, is to update the history of HIV and AIDS in terms of today’s narrative. The narrative around HIV and AIDS has often ended with shame, fear, stigmatization, loneliness, madness, death and depravity. Early in the process of developing ATP, I interviewed writer and film-maker Dag Johan Haugerud, and he told me that the portrayal of HIV and AIDS, not to mention gay culture in general, is often one-sided, in that homosexuals often are portrayed as victims, as fools or as semi-criminals. He said it is important to portray Bjørn and Jack as fully-fledged human beings, and not just as heroes or victims.

From the rehearsal of *All Tomorrow’s Parties* at Oslo Nye Teater / Centralteateret on 22 June 2024.
Foto: Tonje Brustuen

SUBJECTIVE TEXT: THE AUDIENCE MEMBER BY INGVIHL HELLSTRAND

FROM INSIDE
ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES
1 SEPTEMBER 2022,
AT IMIR/RIMI IN
STAVANGER, NORWAY¹¹

The performance begins with an empty black stage. A black box. I'm sitting in the auditorium, a little to the right of the centre, on one of the rows of benches. In front of me is a whole row of women who work with culture and cultural policy in Stavanger. As we wait, a void fills the theater: there's no one on stage, no one coming out onto it. Where are they? But as the thought occurs to me, I realize that this performance is about absence, and that this absence on stage, this emptiness, is part of the whole thing. A black hole.

A long time passes before anything happens. The emptiness that initially made me restless gradually becomes pervasive, expectant. But there is also a sense of anticipation about what will happen. The play has been described in the following way: "All Tomorrow's Parties is a dance performance that deals with how HIV and AIDS affected Norwegian dance in the 1980s and 1990s. Several Norwegian dancers were infected by the virus, lived with HIV and died of AIDS. But who were they? How did they dance? And last but not least, what would they have danced if they hadn't died? With All Tomorrow's Parties, the artists want to map out the void left behind and try and fill it by staging dances that never took place. All Tomorrow's Parties is a fictional 'enactment' of dance that was never danced." Perhaps it's nothing more than a void – how can you really map a black hole?

But then Brynjar enters, looking like himself but dressed in light-colored dungarees, a white t-shirt and a white headband. He looks a

bit nervous, really, I've never seen him on stage before, only in meeting rooms. He wishes the audience welcome and goes to get his water bottle from the edge of the stage. He takes a big sip and introduces himself as Brynjar, but then he turns into Bjørn, almost imperceptibly. It happens through a dance: He dances a sequence from West Side Story, and tells us that this was danced by Bjørn, a dancer who died of AIDS decades ago. Even though he dances like Bjørn, it's Brynjar who gets breathless and says that it's hard to do this dance.

But then it's as if Brynjar disappears again as he begins to tell Bjørn's story. It's as if the dance creates a shared body that Brynjar can use as a point of departure when he begins the story. And it's an optimistic story from the start: Bjørn says that he started dancing quite late in life but now takes many classes to learn and do what he loves. He wants it so badly that he goes to Paris – the story is vivid, and the storyteller takes the audience with him – we can almost sense him waking up to the views of Parisian rooftops, practicing dance, taking classes and swaggering through the Marais neighborhood every afternoon. We know how he loved it, being out in the world, out here in every possible sense, it was powerful and wonderful. I remember feeling so happy for Bjørn, even though it's exactly this swagger that later leads his HIV diagnosis.

But there are other stories. We, as the audience, meet Bjørn first, and then we meet Jack, who is danced by Lars Jacob Holm. It is here, in the dance, that the dancers Brynjar and

¹¹ This subjective text was written by Ingvil Hellestrand at a writers' workshop at Stavanger Library and Culture Centre, 30 March 2023.

Lars Jacob become the dancers Bjørn and Jack, and that we get to know them and their stories. The sequence from West Side Story that Brynjar/Bjørn dances in the beginning becomes a bridge between the different stories and bodies, and between past and present. There's a scene in Jack's story that makes a big impression on me: Jack describes his own sinking feeling when his parents saw him in drag. I could clearly imagine him standing backstage after the performance he was talking about. In the story, Jack envisions being back on the staircase leading up to the dressing rooms, standing in his drag outfit, hiding from his parents. His mum had come backstage looking for her son but instead spotted a drag queen running down the stairs. And in that moment, I could almost feel the charge of all the emotions in the room when they saw each other, and the pain and the distance – the black hole – that arose when Jack came down to meet them and his parents couldn't meet him as the person he was. They said something neutral, neither proud nor disappointed, but somewhere in between, as if they couldn't quite manage to feel ownership or love or kinship for their son, who suddenly also had a different life, an appearance that was different from the one they were used to.

Both Bjørn and Jack's experiences of dancing, of being able to do what they love, in many ways stand in stark contrast to the costs of the life these two lived. It is as if their optimism is gradually washed away by the prejudices they face, the distance that even their own parents uphold, and of course, the disease, which no one could know

about, but which stuck to them like glue, invisible and noticeable at the same time, and which is still difficult to talk about. A black hole. In society, on stage, in culture, in the labor market.

I like that the performance, which is undeniably about AIDS, death and the cultural narrative of risky sex, manages to include a beautiful, intense and almost desperate sex scene. This scene is a dance, bodies leaning against each other, fueled by mutual desire, but also by possibility, by openness, by curiosity and creativity. It's intimate, it's hungry, but there's also a shadow over it, in a way: they're alone on stage, but at the same time I can picture them in a kind of landscape of bodies, alone in the here and now, but still part of the history of sexuality, to borrow the title of Michel Foucault's seminal work (1976). Sex is part of what it means to be human, and although the stage space only contains these two bodies clinging to each other, it is also one of the eternal and recurring narratives of our entire nature-culture.

The bodies on stage will later cling to each other on what will become a deathbed – and then the same closeness, care, love is present – and perhaps also desire? Being able to be present in another person's life, with one's body, skin and hair, is also a form of desire (or there is probably a better name for it, or, if not, there should be). There is a tenderness and a presence that shows the fine lines between sex, violence, closeness, tenderness and distance. The death scene is both immediate and difficult to comprehend – and I am reminded of the meeting between mother and son in Jack's story,

where the familiar and the strange collide for the mother. Such moments of intense closeness and transgressive impossibility are, like death, almost violent in what is both a recognition and a rejection.

Throughout the play, the curtain gradually moves from the back of the stage, moving closer to the edge, as if the room becomes smaller, closing in around Bjørn and Jack. It's the inevitability of death, I think, but it's also the void, the invisibility, the absence, the silence, which constantly draws the dancers in – and then draws us in as well, as members of the audience. Throughout the performance, the two dancers on stage have sometimes also stood behind a black molton curtain during scene changes or re-rigging, and in this way the black hole is with us at all times, both materially and symbolically. As the curtain is pulled closer and the room shrinks, death also comes closer. Death, absence, the cramped space.

But then, when the curtain falls, now positioned right by the edge of the stage, blocking the path where we walked to get to our seats just

a little while earlier, the "curtain" is opened from the inside, and Brynjar and Jacob come out to take a bow. But that's not all they do; they invite the audience to stand up, to join them behind the curtain. I don't quite understand what's happening at first, but then the stage curtain gradually opens, a slightly larger flap, and I can see a disco ball in there: there are lights, there's music! Is it the afterlife? Or is it the continuation? Is it our turn now, is this what we owe them? After the first hesitant audience members are dragged along a little reluctantly, several of us basically rush into the space, we're ready, we want to join in. And we want to dance! Everyone throws themselves into dancing and disco. There's also a bar in there, with two portraits hanging above it. Out on the dance floor, I ask Brynjar if that's Bjørn and Jack, and yes, it is! They're still with us, they're watching over us, they know we'll never be as good at dancing as they were. The space has now opened up and become something else – not just a black hole, but a place where the light breaks through and things become possible again.

All Tomorrow's Parties at Helseutvalgets 39th anniversary

Elsker, Oslo, Norway.
1 December 2022.

Right after the premiere of All Tomorrow's Parties (ATP) at IMIR/RIMI/RISK-Scenekunst in Stavanger, I was contacted by Rolf Martin Angeltvedt, director of the organization Gay and Lesbian Health Norway (Helseutvalget)¹² in Oslo. Lars Jacob works as a volunteer at Helseutvalget and had made Rolf aware of the dance production All Tomorrow's Parties.

Rolf asked us to present ATP at the 39th anniversary of Helseutvalget at the gay bar Elsker in Oslo on World Aids Day, 01 December 2022. This was the perfect context for us to present the work, so we accepted. Since the catwalk-stage at Elsker is meant for drag shows, it was not possible to perform the entire production. We decided to perform three excerpts: the overture, the solos + monologues, and the last noguing-dance.

We shared the evening with Enkemesse - I en allehelgensnatt (Mass for Widows at Halloween) by Svein Fuglestad, a ceremony during which audience members could light a candle for someone they had lost. Performing ATP at Elsker felt relevant and important because many of the people who came to the Helseutvalget anniversary celebration were from the generation who had lost friends, boyfriends and lovers to AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s.

¹² Helseutvalget was founded in 1983 as a response to the HIV epidemic and is a nationwide, politically independent and religiously neutral foundation that works to promote health and prevent disease for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people and other women and men who have sex with people of the same sex.



Foto: Tonje Brustuen

All Tomorrow's Parties as a part of Oslo Pride

Oslo Nye Teater / Centralteateret, Oslo, Norway. 22 June 2024.

In the autumn of 2023, I met with Kai Johnsen, a Norwegian theater director and dramaturg, and told him about ATP. As a young student of theater studies at the University of Oslo in the 1980s, Kai had worked with both Bjørn and Jack as a stage technician at Det Norske Teatret. When he heard that I was doing an artistic research project about the void left behind by HIV and AIDS in the Norwegian dance scene, and that I was researching the dances of Bjørn and Jack, it moved him personally, and he volunteered to be my mentor for ATP.¹³

In October 2023, we spent a three-week period rehearsing the different parts of the performance. We worked on developing the different dance tableaus; "Cruising," "Olafia," "the Non-Dance" and "Forever Falling Into the Arms of Death."

We also worked on developing the monologues and dialogues to be performed between the danced tableaus. At Kai's recommendation, Lars Jacob and I made recordings of our monologues and dialogues, transcribed them, and sent them to Dag Johan Haugerud as a starting point for his adaptation. Based on these transcribed recordings and the ideas expressed in the interviews, Dag Johan adapted the final texts: two monologues and three dialogues.

Kai knew Runar Hodne, the new director at Oslo Nye Teater (ONT), and he also knew that ONT had an ongoing collaboration with Oslo Pride Festival. Kai arranged a meeting with Runar on 10 October 2023, where I presented my artistic research and the dance production *All Tomorrow's Parties*. After the meeting, Runar accepted the proposal to present ATP at Centralteateret (a side stage of

ONT) as a part of the Oslo Pride 2024 program. ATP was to be presented at Centralteateret on 22 June 2024, following a three-week rehearsal period at the theater.

Lars Jacob and I started rehearsing in Teaterkjelleren at Centralteateret on 3 June 2024. During the first week we worked mainly on the new texts by Dag Johan. During the second week, we were given the rehearsal room behind the theater, but due to scheduling problems, we worked for two days in the visual artist Liv Bugge's atelier at TRAFO in Tøyen. For the remaining days of the second week, we rehearsed at ONT. On the last day of this week, Dag Johan came by, made some changes in the text and gave us feedback on our performance.

During the last week of the preparations, we worked on stage with lights and costumes. Corentin JPM Leven (Coco), the light designer, had to deal with an unexpected turn of events. ONT was under threat of budget cuts by the owners, the City of Oslo, so for cost-related reasons, ONT didn't want to take down the scenography for the production that was scheduled for the autumn

program 2024 at Centralteateret. Because of these unforeseen changes, we had to perform ATP using the scenography, lighting, technical rig already installed on stage a: A white back drop, a floor painted white, and neon lights. This was quite the opposite of the black backdrop and dim theater lights that Coco had designed for ATP at IMIR in Stavanger. Also, we were not allowed to invite the audience up on stage for a last dance of *All Tomorrow's Parties* at the end of the performance, as we had done at IMIR two years before. However, Coco succeeded in programming the lights for the performance by using the scenography, lights and technique already in place. For the ending, instead of inviting the audience to dance on stage, Coco hung a giant mirror ball in the middle of the stage, beaming lights throughout the theater.

The performance had been advertised on the ONT website, by Oslo Pride 24 and on social media. In addition, I had invited the colleagues, family, friends, boyfriends and lovers of Bjørn and Jack, plus all of the informants from the interviews, to come to see the performance.

¹³ Kai Johnsen was the main supervisor of my PhD-research project at Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO).



Backstage at Oslo Nye
Teater / Centralteateret
on 22 June 2024.
Foto: Tonje Brustuen

Physical lectures

Throughout this three-year research period, I've been invited to present All Tomorrow's Parties in contexts that included post-pandemic dancing at several meetings, workshops, seminars, conferences and lecture series. Since it's not possible to present the production in these contexts, and in order to say yes to the invitations to present this artistic research, I created a physical ATP lecture.

I have presented this physical lecture at the sharing platform siddisspleis at IMIR/RIMI/RISK- Scenekunst, at the deans' meeting at the University of Stavanger, at Creative Workshop led by Ingvil Hellestrand, at the Skeiv research group led by Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen, at the opening of the Artistic Research at the Faculty of Performing Arts Week, 24 October 2022 at University of Stavanger, at Stavanger Kunstmuseum as a part of Gay Pride 2023/Rogaland på Skeivå on 30 September 2023, and at the Artistic Research Forum of the Norwegian Academy of Music (Musikhøgskolen) in Oslo on 27 October 2023. This physical lecture allowed me to share the research in more contexts.

FULL STAGE TEKT

ADAPTED BY
DAG JOHAN HAUGERUD

PERFORMED BY
BRYNJAR ÅBEL BANDLIEN
AND LARS JACOB HOLM
AS A PART OF OSLO PRIDE

OSLO NYE TEATER / CENTRALTEATERET
22 JUNE 2024

Brynjar Åbel Bandlien:

Good evening, and welcome to *All Tomorrow's Parties*. My name is Brynjar Åbel Bandlien. I'm a dancer, and I also teach dance at the Faculty of Performing Arts at the University of Stavanger. I'm working on a research project called *All Tomorrow's Parties: post-pandemic dancing*, which explores how HIV and AIDS affected the Norwegian dance scene back in the 1980s and 1990s, and up to the present day. I'm conducting this research by interviewing people who survived the disease, and those who remember that time, and can provide a picture of what it was and must have been like. I have interviewed colleagues, friends, family members, boyfriends and lovers of those who were infected by the virus, lived with HIV and died of AIDS. Quite a few of those who suffered through that period find it hard to talk about, so this is sensitive work. There are many reasons for this: Many people remember this as a scary and difficult time, and there are many who also feel ashamed of how this was dealt with, or *not* dealt with. And no matter how you talk about it, there's no getting around the fact that this is personal. Because it's about people; people who had a life, who had friends and family, and who were affected by a disease. These were people who to a large extent also belonged to marginalized social groups. Since it is personal, it also makes sense to start from the personal, as I have done; two dancers who have appeared in almost all the interviews: Bjørn Olav Berg and Jack Hansen. Who were they? What did they dance? And how would they have danced if they had been allowed to live on?

So, as I'm standing here in front of you talking to you, I'm doing it as myself, as Brynjar, but at the same time I'm dancing the role of (kick ball-change) "Bjørn" (snap!).

Bjørn Olav Berg (B):

And me, Bjørn, I started dancing quite late in life. I was already 20 years old when I took my first class at the Norwegian Opera. For those who aren't familiar with dance terminology, "taking a class" means practicing dance. Plain and simple. I was quite good-looking, charming even, some people would say, although my body was a bit stiff. At least in the beginning. A little stocky, perhaps, or a bit like a tree trunk. But that was only because I started dancing so late. However, I was so disciplined and trained so hard that I managed to keep up with the class. At first, I was allowed to be an extra in the opera, but gradually I got to dance smaller parts in ballets. Bjørn took part in pretty much every performance at the Opera. I like to think that people knew me, Bjørn, as someone who liked to be watched. Not because I was vain, but out of respect for those who had come to watch. If you want to be on stage, you have to enjoy being seen, and I think the audience finds that generous. At best, I think it also gives them the feeling of being seen themselves... In a way...

After a few years at the Opera, I travelled to Switzerland and worked in Geneva and – hopefully, I got better and better – and maybe also more, well ... you see the world, you meet other people, and maybe that leads your becoming more open. Less afraid? But I went back home again when I was offered a

position as an apprentice at the Norwegian Opera. There were quite a few gay individuals working at the Opera Ballet, but since everyone dreamed of dancing the role of the prince, and that part was reserved for the dancers who looked the most masculine, very few were open about being gay. I remember one choreographer who said to me: *"The great thing about you, Bjørn, is that, even though I know you're gay, I can't see it when you're dancing."* Obviously, a terrible thing to say, but I've thought about it – and the fact that no-one could see that I was gay perhaps also made me less afraid of being gay. I heard Boy George speak about it once... He said, *"It's not the fact that I'm gay that threatens people. It's the fact that I'm feminine. No-one can handle that."* As I said, it's awful. But yes – I was – I wasn't bothered that much, and so I didn't try to hide it either.

I remember the Opera Ballet was on tour in New York, and one of my best friends in the company – who was also gay – and I, we went out at night and ended up in a gay bath house. My friend left almost immediately, but me, I stayed all night and had – as I remember it – a fabulous time. I completely lost track of time, and when I got back to the hotel the next morning, the tour bus was waiting for me. I remember my colleagues looking out the bus window, watching me, but somehow, I couldn't help smiling, because I felt strong and happy and relaxed in my body, in a way... I think maybe I even glowed a little more than usual... You know, the way you do when you've had great sex.

I won't drag you through my entire CV, but I did a lot: I moved to Paris, lived in the Marais for a few years, had a boyfriend there, broke up with him, and went back to Oslo again. But this time I didn't go back to the Opera and ballet. I started taking classes at Studio Oscar. And Studio Oscar might sound like an ordinary dance studio, but it was much more than just that. It was like a dance company. That's where all the dancers from the independent field in Oslo met at that time. Everyone from modern dancers, contemporary dancers and musical theater dancers, and there I got to work with many different choreographers. For example, I worked with Kjersti Alveberg, who many people have heard of – yes, she's the one with the head scarf. I danced in several of her productions, both in the theater and on TV. We went on tour and even danced on an oil rig in the North Sea! Don't forget that this was a time when people still were very proud of the oil industry.

Studio Oscar had a very tolerant and open atmosphere, and several of my colleagues there were open about being gay. Or homosexuals, can't we just use that word? But there were not as many colleagues who were open about being HIV positive. Neither was I. I really didn't want to be identified with HIV and AIDS. I also began to realize what HIV and AIDS were doing to gay people: from being seen as an outcast, a criminal, a sick person, morally reprehensible, you were suddenly also perceived as a potential risk of infection – a walking virus bomb that people had to watch out for. At least, that's how some newspapers tried to portray it, right? It's very difficult to... yes, for instance ... yes, look

at my body; this hand here, this mouth, my dick – this is all me, and none of this is dangerous. But all of a sudden, I think some gay men began to see themselves as a potential risk of infection, and that's the worst thing that can happen, because then you turn against yourself, your body, you start to both deny and despise yourself. So, coming out as HIV positive at that time, when that was the prevailing mood... Nope!

But then someone encouraged me to come out. They said: 'Bjørn, why don't you tell us what it's like to be HIV positive? At first, I said no, because I didn't want to be the poster child for it. But then I thought about it for a while, and I realized that it's important that someone talks about it. And since I didn't really feel any of this shame, and I refused to give in to self-loathing, I changed my mind. After a performance on World AIDS Day, the first of December, I came forward and talked about what it's like to be HIV positive and what it's like to live with AIDS. And that was probably the last thing people saw me do on stage... But still ... I don't know. Just know this about me – I was not a coward, I was a pretty good dancer, and I loved people very much. So, remember me like that.

But before all of this, I got to dance in almost all of the big musicals: *A Chorus Line*, *Cats* and *Les Misérables* at Chat Noir, Chateau Neuf and Det Norske Teatret. I danced the role of G'tar from The Jets gang in *West Side Story* at Det Norske Teatret in 1982. And there I got to dance in one of the coolest things I've ever done: the number "Cool." Or "Kald," as it's called, in New Norwegian. And now

I'm going to try to repeat this hit number from the 1982 production of *West Side Story*, namely the song: "Kald".

Starts snapping fingers and sings "Kald," translated into New Norwegian by Kiran Hartvik.

RESET TO THE BEGINNING:

Lars Jacob Holm: My name is Lars Jacob Holm, I'm a dancer and an actor, and tonight I'm dancing the role of Jack.

Jack Hansen (J):
And me, Jack, I'm originally German-American. I came to Norway at the age of four. Adopted. I grew up in Oslo and spent a lot of my childhood and adolescence in the gymnasium where I trained in competitive gymnastics. I found that incredibly exciting, probably because I had pretty good physical prerequisites for excelling at it. I was quite small in stature and densely built with a short, stocky and light body. So, everything that had to do with acrobatics and tricks came easily to me. Eventually, I also started competitive dancing or ballroom dancing and that is something completely different, isn't it, because that is all about the music and the rhythm, and being a partner and dancing in relation to another person.

But it wasn't until I went to Gothenburg to work with Ivo Cramer at the Cramer Ballet that I was able to really immerse myself in dance techniques. That was where I was introduced to classical ballet training that I hadn't done before. I was very physical because of my gymnastics background and had learned a lot about partner work and dance in general through

ballroom dancing, but I had never trained any classical ballet before, and I got to do that there for two years... or actually, I was in Gothenburg dancing with the Cramer Ballet for two and a half years.

But while I was down there, I got a phone call from Det Norske Teatret ... I was simply headhunted by Egil Monn Iversen himself. He called me and asked if I would be interested in coming home to Oslo to play the role of Bernardo in *West Side Story*, which was due to open there in 1982. And this was an offer that I couldn't refuse. So, I packed my bags, travelled back to Oslo, and this was in a way the start of a long career in musical theater. I got lots of job offers in Oslo, and eventually in Stockholm and Copenhagen. Major roles and exciting shows: *West Side Story* in Oslo, Stockholm and Copenhagen, *A Chorus Line* in Stockholm and Oslo, *Cats* at Det Norske Teatret in the new building where it is today, and a whole lot of other jobs.

In addition to this, I've done a lot of shows and been involved in a lot of fun programs on television. I played a monkey in *The Jungle Book* at Bryggeteatret in Oslo.

The last thing I participated in was *Let's twist again* at Hjertnes in Sandefjord, but when it was staged in Oslo the following year, I was too weak to dance. In 1987, I sang and danced in the Norwegian final of the Eurovision Song Contest with Catwalk, a group that was put together for the occasion. The song was called "Dialogue" and it was Anita Hegerland who was supposed to sing it. But when she withdrew just before the final, five dancers from *Cats* just stepped in, so of course the group had

to be called Catwalk. We came in fifth place. Not too bad. It was Kate Guldbrandsen who won, but you probably knew that already... But the fact is that once you've done a lot of shows and roles over a long period of time, most of it is forgotten. But *West Side Story*, which was one of the first productions I danced in, is still with me. And *A Chorus Line*, which I did the following year, in 1983 at Chateau Neuf. I feel that I still carry it with me...

Sings "Who am I" from A Chorus Line, translated into Norwegian by Runar Borge.

This was Paul's song from *A Chorus Line*, which is a show about dancers at an audition. And that's probably the reason I remember it so clearly, isn't it, because it was a show that told our stories. The dancers' musical. The director, or the person playing the director, sits out in the auditorium with the audience throughout the performance and talks to each of the twelve dancers who are auditioning that day. Everyone is allowed to show something of themselves and share a little about who they are.

In a way, I still have quite strong inner images from the story told by Paul, the role that I played. What I remember most is this big open room, high ceilings, dim lighting. It's a side stage. The stage is in that direction, over there. There's a performance going on. And there, on the opposite side, there's a staircase, a quite long staircase along the entire wall up to a door that leads to the dressing rooms. And I come running down those stairs. At full speed. I'm about to go in and take my last bow, but halfway

down I stop abruptly. Because in the middle of the side stage, I spot two old people, my parents, with a huge suitcase between them. They had arrived too early. We were playing our last show at the theater and were about to go on tour that evening, so I had asked them to bring their luggage to say goodbye after the show was over. But old people like to arrive early, so there they were. And there I was. And it wouldn't have mattered so much if only I had told them what kind of show I was in... I had finally landed a long-term contract. It was well paid too. My parents were so happy for me. But there I was, in high heels, fishnet stockings, a short gold lamé dress that went from here to there, full drag make-up, and a wig from here to eternity with pearls and glitter and all the splendour you can imagine. And there they were. I panicked. What should I do now? I had to get on stage... So, I decide to pick up the pace and run past them as fast as I can and just hope they don't recognize me. But as I pass, I hear my mum say, "Oh my God! I run in, take a bow, run back to the wardrobe, take off my costume, wig and make-up, put on ordinary clothes and stroll out thinking, "Are they still here?" But sure enough, there they are, in exactly the same place, glued to the floor between a bunch of drag queens and other theater freaks.

So, I walk over to them. My mum can't look me in the eye and just says, "Remember to eat." My dad is just standing there, staring at the floor and says, "Look after yourself. And then they leave. On their way out, my dad grabs our producer standing over there and says, "Take care of my boy!" And that was the first time he called me that... Yeah.

During the autumn we did *A Chorus Line* at Chateau Neuf. I had a girlfriend, and she came to see that show. A long time afterwards, I even wonder if a couple of years had passed, she suddenly says, "Hey Jack, that drag show you were in back then... "Drag show, I say, "I've never been in a drag show." "Yes, she says. "Don't you remember that? You were even caught by your mum and dad!" But it wasn't me.

Scene 1

Bjørn (B): Fierce!

Jack (J): Was it ok? I wasn't too rough, I hope...

B: I think it was more than okay. To be honest, I think it was absolutely fantastic.

J: That's good.

B: But we never had anything with each other in that way, now did we?

J: No, we didn't really try it out.

B: Well, we did try it out, just not with each other.

J: Exactly.

B: At least I got to try it out.

J: Are you happy to talk about it? Are you proud of it?

B: Proud? After all, it was possibly the most hedonistic time to be young and gay.

Am I proud to have been a part of it? All I know is that I had a good time, that I enjoyed the life I had. What about you, are you proud?

J: Proud? You don't think like



All Tomorrow's Parties
at Oslo Nye Teater /
Centralteateret
on 22 June 2024.
Foto: Tonje Brustuen

that when you're in the middle of something. And in hindsight – can you say that? Bjørn might have said that. Now I'll take it from you: In hindsight, maybe I alternate between being sad and happy.

B: But even if we never had anything with each other in that way, we probably never talked about it either.

J: Not as far as anyone knows.

B: Maybe we could have done that. J: Maybe. But we weren't even friends, as far as I know. Or maybe there wasn't any chemistry there? But we were colleagues, we danced together.

B: Yes, you remember when you and I tap danced with Marianne Skovli.

J: In a red tank top, leather trousers and with a red umbrella? I remember thinking it was funny. I think I enjoyed dancing with you. I look happy. You seemed so confident in your body. Confident in your eyes. It was contagious.

B: Do you think so? That's great! I actually think we were pretty good together. Me, a bit taller, and maybe heavier. Bigger head. And you, shorter and lighter. Me, with spiky, straight hair. You had such lovely curls. We complemented each other.

J: Absolutely. So, who knows?

B: But if we didn't have chemistry like we do now, we still had a lot in common. Or did we? It doesn't necessarily mean that we had so much in common just because we were doing the same thing and fancied the same sex. But still ...

What if we'd figured it out back then? Have you thought about that? Maybe we could have shared some things.

J: No, no. Well ... I'm not sure if Jack shared that much, at least not like you did. I'm not sure that it is necessary to share everything either, is it?

B: No? Well, you can actually get cancer. If you don't let out your emotions, you can get cancer.

J: I would much rather have cancer! But cancer! If you don't express your feelings? I don't think Bjørn was that stupid? I understand that he was sensitive guy who was open to alternative explanations. But I don't think he was naive... I think you're slipping a bit too far out of character, Brynjar.

Why don't we sing a little instead?

B: You would rather sing than talk? Now that's very Jack, isn't it?

Nothing goes in one direction
Nothing great without decline
No true love without affection
Nothing goes in one straight line
Nothing new except the show
So here we go, we go, we go, we go...

("Nothing New" was written by Brynjar Abel Bandlien and first appeared as part of the graphic novel *Strimb Living – 5 years with Oskar*, Hard Comics 2010.)

Scene 2

B: Do you ever think about the fact that ...

J: You do think a lot, Bjørn.

B: Yes! Don't you?

J: It's perfectly fine not to think so much. It's perfectly fine not to talk, and not to share everything.

B: That's how you get cancer.

J: Oh, come on.

B: So, what do you do instead of thinking?

J: I dance, for example.

B: Well, I've experienced that it's possible to think and dance at the same time.

J: Okay. What were you thinking about?

B: I think ... Can I ask you something? When did Jack realize that he was gay?

J: Gay?

B: Or bisexual? Is that a better term?

J: I don't know what I would have said. It's hard to know. People look at you differently. Some define you this way, others define you that way. But who you actually are in the middle of it all, in all the different perceptions people have of you ... No, I have no idea. Sometimes, when you look at yourself in the mirror... Have you done that?

B: Yes, of course I have looked at myself in the mirror.

J: ...and you look past all the vanity stuff and try to look a little further, behind the eyes, in a way. Have you done that? Looked in the mirror and wondered what's really behind your eyes?

B: Yes. And I think what I see corresponds with how others perceive me. I think that's why people like Bjørn too. They have confidence in me because I have confidence in myself. For example, I always knew I was gay and have basically been open about it all my life. This made it quite easy for me to be open about it to others as well.

J: You're simpler than I am. I was never that open, I think... I had a lot of friends. But I was never that open and sociable.

B: And available

J: That too ... Not like you.

B: Something else: Has the question of why you were infected ever crept into your mind?

J: Why?

B: Why?

J: Well, no. Jack wasn't interested in talking about those things. It doesn't matter either. It just happened. Bad luck. There's no need to dwell on such things, Bjørn.

B: No. Maybe there's no point dwelling on it, but I think Bjørn had a need to gather his thoughts. If not to understand it, then at least find a way to accept it, or come to terms with it in some way. Okay, so I'm gay. Okay, so I'm HIV positive. But what does that mean? In the early 80s, it meant that I was going to die earlier than I thought. But how can I come to terms with that?

J: Come to terms with it? You do realize that it was a result of your lifestyle, don't you? It's just a fact. Incredibly dumb, of course, bad

luck, that it turned out that way.
Bad luck that you became gay.

B: Really, now? There were others
who had this so-called lifestyle
before me who didn't get it.

J: Right. So, it's a result of your
lifestyle combined with bad luck.
Bad timing, plain and simple.

B: But lifestyle...?

J: Yes, there's no doubt that lifestyle
has played a role here.

B: But fucking without a condom
can hardly be defined as a lifestyle.
Isn't all this talk about lifestyle just
a way of pointing fingers? As if it's a
choice, or something: "I've chosen
this lifestyle". I'm just gay, plain and
simple.

J: Isn't sex a choice?

B: Well, is it? I'm not sure Bjørn
would agree with that.

But do you think we've learned
anything from this? I mean, if it
were to happen again.

J: Learned anything? You've just
said how proud you are of what you
were a part of these past ten years.

B: Proud? Or happy. But maybe
that's how you think when you
look in the rear-view mirror. I'm
happy that I could have sex without
fear, as those who came after us
did. And I'm proud that I didn't
surrender to shame. That I stood up
for who I was, what I had become,
and talked openly about it. If only
so that more people would see
that I was an ordinary person like
everyone else. That it would be
more difficult to dismiss me as
someone who had just been the
victim of a poor lifestyle choice. But

as I said earlier – lifestyle ... I don't
know if Bjørn would ever use that
word.

But – back to my question: Do you
think we've learned anything?

J: It's going to happen again.
There's no doubt about that. There
will come a virus that is spread
through sex. It will, of course, affect
everyone, although it will of course
be even more risky for people with
a particular lifestyle ... or let's say
people who have more sex. Anal
sex. Never imagine otherwise.
That's how it's going to be. The
difference is that now there are
mechanisms to monitor and detect
new viruses. So, in that way it will be
different.

B: Do you think so? So, if it were
to happen again now, it would be
detected earlier?

J: It depends on how smart that
virus is. It could be that next time
it will be a really smart virus that
only makes itself known after a very
long incubation period. Better at
hiding. And then, ten years later...
(clap) BAM!

B: So, the virus will come. People
will die. But the way we react to it
might be different, right? Without
being completely out of touch with
reality, I have a feeling that Bjørn
wanted exactly that. That we should
react in a different way, insist on
using different words, that that's
why he came forward and tried to
be open when almost no one else
was.

J: You are really something. It wasn't
easy. I don't think Jack had it in him.
Or maybe – it's impossible to know.

B: Shall we dance some more?

Scene 3

B: Jack. Are you done dancing?

J: No, not yet. I want to dance some
more. Not for too long. Just a little
bit... (Dances some more...) That's
it!

B: Did you reach any kind of
conclusion?

J: Yeah, I think so.

B: Yeah? I think I could have gone
on forever, but I never arrive at any
conclusion. It's just the same thing.
Over and over again. So I never
arrive at any greater understanding
from this, but I keep trying. It's
good to try things out because
then you can try and fail and then
try again. It's not so bloody serious.
You're allowed to think freely. Don't
you feel like you think better while
you're dancing?

J: Do you mean that you think
with your body? Through your
movements? I have never thought
about it like that, in those exact
terms. But I think it's nice to be
physical.

B: Yeah, you like to be physical...

J: Yes, I do. But mostly because it
makes a lot of sense to me. I find
myself, in some way. Maybe this is
somewhat similar to the things you
were talking about? This is what I
miss the most now.

B: Me too. Do you know what I
find fascinating? That when I
do this ... (Does a movement),
it does something to me. But
it also does something to you
watching me. And now, if you do
the same movement (Jack does
the same movement), it will also do

something to the person watching.
But it will be different, it will feel
different.

J: Yeah? So what?

B: You find it banal?

J: Don't you? It is banal.

B: No, I think it's a small miracle.
That what Jack and Bjørn do is
unique, in different ways. And that
we can't replace them. It's like
attraction, we do this (they do the
same movement), and you (looking
at the audience) feel very different
things, don't you? Let's do it again,
Lars Jacob!

Long pause

J: You're right. I have to admit
something: I've seen you dance,
Bjørn. On NRK, and other places...
YouTube and so on. It's possible to
study you, to rewind, and see how
you do your movements. You're
quite awkward, do you realize that?
A bit weird. Cute, some would say.
But you're also very good, in a way.
Looking at you makes me smile.
I'm glad you existed.

B: Don't forget there are videos
of you too, Jack. You seem more
rough. Bouncy. Impressively
precise. Sometimes I think maybe
you try to appear tougher than you
really are, but in a nice way. A bit
like Prince.

J: The artist Prince? Now, that I
have to take as a compliment.

B: A giant ego in high heels, but
at the same time very vulnerable.
Maybe precisely because of that.

J: Well, he died too...



B: As did you ... Do you think you would have found any consolation, when you were ill, I mean, if you knew that you would live on in a video. Or in someone's memory, perhaps. In some researcher's history writing. Or in someone's mourning.

J: Consolation? When you're ill, I don't think you think like that. There's no comfort. Only pain relief, and I don't know how much pain relief there is in being the topic of a research project.

B: Comfort, or not. For now, we live on in someone's mourning, and I, for one, choose to be happy about that.

J: Are we going to try the last dance or what?

B: The ultimate performance.

On lending my body to Bjørn, on dancing the dances Bjørn danced, on dancing the dances Bjørn never got to dance, and rewriting queer dance history through Bjørn

When I speak these words: *My name is Brynjar, but tonight I am also dancing the role of...* (kick-ball-change snap) *Bjørn!*, it is as if I become him. My body becomes Bjørn's body, and my movements are Bjørn's movements. My thoughts, feelings and memories are Bjørn's thoughts, feelings and memories. My words are Bjørn's words. From the moment I perform this speech act, the words magically transform me, and I become Bjørn. Or more precisely: Bjørn becomes me.

When dancing the choreography from *West Side Story*, I remember feeling how my body fit into each of Bjørn's steps and movements, almost a hand in glove fit. It is as if Bjørn and I become one and the same person. It is a very physical experience. I don't think it as much as I feel it. I am doing it more than being it. I focus on my body and the steps, the skips, the jumps,

the turns, the kicks. By doing it, physically, I lose the sense of time and space, and I am just the dance, G'Tar, Bjørn and myself, Brynjar, all at the same time. This is truly a transcendent experience.

This gives me a sense of enormous freedom. Everything I am, do, think, feel, remember and say as Bjørn, automatically becomes more real, more true, more me. Even when the things I am, do, think, feel, remember and say are based on my own experience. Such as my memory of entering the Norwegian dance scene in Oslo as a young man in the early 90s, not yet knowing if I was gay or not.¹⁴ Bjørn was always quite open about his homosexuality. Even from a young age.

Since I don't have access to everything that Bjørn was going through at the time, or what was going through his mind, I use

my own memories to fill in the blanks. I remember the mood at the Norwegian Opera in the late 80s, at the Norwegian National Academy of Ballet (Statens Balletthøgskole, now KHiO), The Hamburg Ballet, Netherlands Dance Theater and Paris in the 90s. My memories of these moods serve as an entrance for dancing the role of Bjørn. I move, think, feel, remember and speak of the queer Norwegian dance history as Bjørn. My memories become Bjørn's memories and vice versa. Method acting.

This is the magic of theater!

At the same time as I feel an enormous freedom, I am also feeling an enormous responsibility to do Bjørn justice. I feel a responsibility to be him as his colleagues, friends and family describe him: Full of life, laughs, contradictions and complexities. A body with blood running through its veins. A person with ambitions, expectations, desire and dreams for the future. A dancer with talent, ideas and his whole career lying in front of him. A young man with his life ahead of him.

Bjørn died in 1993.

When dancing the contemporary dances from the mid-1990s up until today, that Bjørn could have danced, but didn't get to, I focus on dances that I myself performed

in the 1990s and 2000s. Most of these dances are inspired by certain trends within the history of contemporary dance in the style of Butoh (1992), Post-modern dance (1995), Conceptual dance (1998) and Non-dance (2004).

When performing these dances, the direction of my relation to Bjørn is a reversal of the relation we had when I performed *West Side Story*. Now it is Bjørn who has to keep up with me. I go very spontaneously into these dances, letting the movement and the moves of my partner Jack (Lars Jacob) influence me.

I'm listening as much as I am doing. I am sensing what feels right. I try to do as little as possible, but somehow, I can't keep myself from bursting out in a lot of dance and movement. It is as if Bjørn falls into my body, into the movement, into the dance, into the performance. He gets to dance these dances after all, with the big, black backdrop of death hanging upstage behind me.

This is a good thing. This is how it should have been all along. Together we are righting this wrong. We are writing it. We are rewriting queer history based on the personal memories of Bjørn's colleagues, friends and family members about Bjørn, mixed with my own feelings, thoughts and memories.

¹⁴ Although, I learned that the girls in my class at Statens Balletthøgskole had a bet going concerning this. The bet was not about if I was gay (or not) but whether I was aware of the fact that I was gay (or not.) They told me this at a reunion some thirty years later.

Who has the right to conduct artistic research on the topic of HIV and AIDS?

On informants, ethics and the research process

Post-pandemic

Today we can talk about HIV and AIDS in a different way than before. Even though HIV is still a threat in many parts of the world, new medicines and treatment made available in the past decades make it possible to talk about it in a more open way than previously. Still, there is a stigma connected to the virus that is hard to shake.

In order for the audience of today to relate to this period of the 1980s and 1990s, I wish to draw a parallel to the Covid19 pandemic. My hope is that this recent memory can help people relate to what it must have felt like to be infected with an unknown, deadly virus without a cure, and all the fear, shame and stigma that went along with this. By drawing parallels to the Covid19 pandemic, I hope that it will be easier for the reader to empathize

with how it must have been during the early stages of the HIV and AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s.

Writing about the process in an ethical way

Writing about HIV positive dancers in the Norwegian dance scene of the 1980s and 1990s raises issues related to ownership, appropriation and different narratives. As a queer, middle-aged dancer and artistic researcher within the field of dance, I have some questions about my own role in this research. I have asked myself the following questions:

Who owns the story of HIV and AIDS?

Who has the right to conduct artistic research on the history of HIV and AIDS in the context of Norwegian dance? How do I approach this topic in an ethical way?

How do I take care of the informants who were personally affected by HIV and AIDS? Who am I addressing with this artistic research? In order to explore these issues properly, I reflect on the questions as follows:

Who owns the story of HIV and AIDS?

Traditionally, historians write about history as objectively as possible, trying to create a view from outside the topic. However, recent views on writing history assume that life in the past was as complex and intertwined as contemporary lives, meaning that instead of simplifying their findings into streamlined stories, they aim for complexity and contradiction.

Today, it has become almost as important for a historian to own the history, meaning that they preferably should have first-hand experiences with the topic. For instance, in order to write about LGBTQ+ related topics, one should belong to one or more of these categories.

Who has the right to conduct artistic research on the topic of HIV and AIDS?

Preferably someone who was personally affected by HIV and AIDS should conduct such research. Before I took it upon myself to do this artistic research, I tried to urge other writers, researchers and relevant organizations to address this topic.

Neither Lars Jacob nor I were directly affected by HIV and AIDS, but we both moved to Oslo in 1991, and entered the performing

arts scene and the gay scene in the mid-1990s. We remember the mood at that time and how HIV and AIDS were present but not talked about openly. In our research, we address the topic of how HIV and AIDS affected the Norwegian dance scene through our memories and experiences.

Throughout the research project we have tried to get different points of view from colleagues, friends, family members, boyfriends and lovers. Our objective has been to have Bjørn and Jack emerge as two complex human beings with their own thoughts, feelings, emotions, hopes and dreams for the future. Channeling it through my subjective memories of the interviews, combined with my own dance background and history, I tried to weave a complex characterization of Bjørn. Lars Jacob did the same with his characterization of Jack.

My hope is that more people will understand the impact of HIV and AIDS on the arts in Norway.

How to approach this topic in an ethical way?

Representations of gay, or homosexual, individuals in popular culture are often very stereotypical. The most common stereotypes are the homosexual as effeminate, the homosexual as a victim, or the homosexual as a criminal. Portraying homosexual and gay individuals as heroes, victims or villains is a caricature. None of these are true.

Instead of focusing on Bjørn and Jack as heroes or victims in this artistic research, I chose to focus on how they had participated in

From the rehearsal of
All Tomorrow's Parties
at Oslo Nye Teater /
Centralteateret
on 22 June 2024.
Foto: Tonje Brustuen

the development of Norwegian dance. I chose to focus on how the loss of Bjørn and Jack was more than a personal tragedy – it was a loss for the entire Norwegian cultural scene. Writing from this angle allowed me to focus on how Bjørn and Jack have contributed to Norwegian dance, rather than on the stereotypes mentioned above.

How do I take care of the informants who were personally affected by HIV and AIDS?

Before interviewing the informants, I asked each of them to sign a consent form. Most of the informants are artists, and they formally agreed to participate in the artistic research project.

Two informants had some conditions about their participation in the research, and I have therefore not included the information from these interviews

in the material made available to the public, including this critical reflection. Otherwise, all the information that came from the interviews was approved by the informants for use in the public presentation of *All Tomorrow's Parties* at Oslo Nye Teater/ Centralteateret and this critical reflection. The interviews have been registered at the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt).

Who am I addressing with this artistic research?

My target audience includes the people who remember this period, the families and friends who lost their loved ones, and the Norwegian dance scene. I am also trying to reach a broader audience by relating the HIV and AIDS pandemic to the Covid19 pandemic.



BIOS

Bjørn Olav Berg was born under the sign of Scorpio in Oslo in 1951. He began his professional ballet training at the Norwegian Opera's Ballet School under the direction of Joan Harris. He attended the school's pedagogy course, and quickly became an extra dancer. In the fall of 1973, he became a student at the Theatrical Ballet School in Geneva under Serge Colovine. He then accepted a two-year engagement at the Norwegian Opera before moving to Paris to continue his dance studies in 1977. Bjørn had short-term engagements at Le Grand Theater de Geneve with Ensemble Choreographi de la Suisse Romaine, and danced in several other places in Europe with Franchetti, Meyer, Blaska and others. In Norway, he was involved in the Norwegian Dance Theater, the musical *West Side Story*, and countless TV appearances for the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, including *Musikkspill* and several theater productions. In the summer of 1979, he danced in a vaudeville production at the Oslo Nye Teater, choreographed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Trønderlag Teater in 1982 and Peter Pan at Oslo New Theater in 1984.

Brynjar Åbel Bandlien was also born under the sign of Scorpio, but in Sandefjord in 1975. He received his professional dance training at the Oslo National Academy of Arts (KHiO) in 1991-93, and at the Ballettschule der Hamburgische Staatsoper in Germany in 1993-95. He then got a job as a dancer with Nederlands Danse Teater 2 in Holland, with which he toured Europe, USA and South Africa. In 1998 Brynjar started his freelance career in Scandinavia, Europe and the USA, with a base in Berlin. After 20 years as a contemporary dancer, he completed a PhD in dance at KHiO, and has since 2020 been an associate professor of dance at the Faculty of Performing Arts (UK) at the University of Stavanger (UiS).

Jack Hansen is of German-American origin and moved to Norway at the age of four when he was adopted by Norwegian parents. He started with elite gymnastics and continued with competitive dance in Oslo. Jack started his professional dance career with Ivo Cramer at the Cramer Ballet in Gothenburg, Sweden, where he worked for

two and a half years. He studied all forms of dance in Copenhagen and in Cannes. Jack has performed a number of outstanding roles in several musicals in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, among these Paul in *A Chorus Line* in Stockholm, Bernardo in *West Side Story* in Oslo, and *Animalen* in Stockholm.

Lars Jacob Holm was raised on a farm in Vestfold, Norway and his dance education is from the Norwegian Academy of Ballet. For more than 30 years, he has participated in a wide range of dance, theater and musical performances around the country. He has been affiliated with the Oslo Danse Ensemble and the contemporary dance company Ingun Bjørnsgaard Prosjekt (IBP). Lars Jacob played Paul in *A Chorus Line*, Bagheera in *The Jungle Book* at the Norwegian National Theater, and Munkustrap in *Cats* at Chat Noir. He choreographed two premieres at the Norwegian National Opera, and played Dr. Rank in *A Doll's House*, a guest performance in collaboration with Jin Xing Dance Theater at the Capital Theater in Beijing. In 2024, Lars Jacob played the role of Bjørn in the film *Kjærlighet* (Love) by Dag Johan Haugerud, and danced in the performance *Kings* by Un-Magrit Nordseth at Dansens Hus in Oslo in 2025.

Corentin JMP Leven (Coco) was born in Brest, France. He has a Bachelor's degree (BA) in Scenography from Norwegian Theater Academy in Fredrikstad, and a BA in Literature from Lycée Jean-Moulin in Chateaulin. Coco has worked as a scenographer and lighting designer for several performances such as *Ulf Goes*

Religious part 1-3 by Ulf Nilseng (2018-2022), *Hello Brother* by Geir Hytten (2019), *Sirkling* by Tori Wrånes (2017), and *Mother Hunting* by Bianca Casady from the duo CocoRosie at the National Theater in Oslo (2015). He was the light designer and video artist for Bianca Casady and the C.I.A.'s European Tour in 2015. Coco has worked as a light designer at Black Box Theater in Oslo since 2016, and he has directed and played in his own performances such as *Birds of III Omen* (2022) and +- (2020) at Black Box Theater in Oslo.

Dag Johan Haugerud was born in the sign of Capricorn right before New Year's in 1964 at Mysen. He is a Norwegian author and filmmaker. Dag Johan has published the books *Enkle Atonale Stykker for Barn/Simple Atonal Pieces for Children* (2016), *Den Som Er Veldig Sterk, Må Også Være Veldig Snill/Those Who Are Very Strong, Must Also Be Very Kind* (2002) and *Noe Med Natur/Something With Nature* (1999). He has also written and directed several feature films, including, *Som Du Ser Meg/I belong* (2012), *Det Er Meg Du Vil Ha/I'm The One You Want* (2014) and *Barn/Beware Of Children* (2019) for which he won Nordic Council Film Prize (NCFP) in 2020. He wrote and directed the short film *Lyset Fra Sjokoladefabrikken/The Light from the Chocolate Factory* (2019/2020), and the trilogy *Sex, Drømmer & Kjærlighet/Sex, Dreams & Love* (2024). *Dreams* won the Golden Bear at The Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin in 2025 and the Film Critics Award at Venezia International Film Festival in 2024. *Sex* won NCFP in addition to three other prizes at The Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin.



From the rehearsal of *All Tomorrow's Parties* at Oslo Nye Teater / Centralteateret on 22 June 2024.
Foto: Tonje Brustuen

in 2024. Dag Johan has adapted the text for the performance of *All Tomorrow's Parties* at Oslo Nye Teater (2024).

Kai Johnsen was born in the late summer of 1962. He is a theater director, dramaturg and etoile. While studying theater direction at Statens Teaterhøgskole, now Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO) in the 1980s, Kai worked as a stage hand at Det Norske Teatret (DNT) in Oslo. From the wings of the stage, he saw Bjørn and Jack dance in *A West Side Story* (1982). He later directed several plays including *Mercedes* by Thomas Braschs at Den Nasjonale Scene (DNS) in Bergen (1989) and *Når Vi Døde Vågner/ When We Dead Awaken* by Henrik Ibsen at Rogaland Teater (RT) in Stavanger (1990). Kai directed several plays by the Nobel prize winning author and dramatist Jon Fosse, such as *Namnet/The Name* at DNS (1995), *Barnet/The Child* at the Norwegian National Theater (NT) in Oslo (1996), *Natta Synger Sine Songar/The Night Sings Its Songs* at Rogaland Teater (1997), *Draum om Hausten/Autumn Dream* at NT (1999), *Rambuktu* at DNT (2006), *Hav* at Festspillene in Bergen (2014) and *Nokon Kjem Til Å Kome* at DNT (2019). Kai was artistic director of the Norwegian Centre for New Playwriting

(Dramatikkens Hus) in Oslo from 2010–2012. As a dramaturg Kai has collaborated with the Norwegian choreographer Ingur Bjørnsgaard over several years, and designed the dramaturgy for the infamous performance *Ways Of Seeing* by Pia Maria Roll, Marius von der Fehr, Hanan Benhammar and Sara Baban, at Black Box Theater (2018) in Oslo, which ultimately lead to the resignation of the right-wing politician Tor Mikkel Wara, the current Norwegian Minister of Justice, in 2019. In the period 2016–2022, Kai was professor of theater direction at KHiO in Oslo.

Miruna Borusescu was born in Romania in 1984. She got her education at the German School in Bucharest, and completed a BA in Film Photography in 2004. In 2008 Miruna moved from Bucharest to Berlin and started her career as a composer and music producer. She has published several albums for the renowned record label Coméme and has collaborated with Gudrun Gut, known from Malaria and Einstürzende Neubauten. Miruna has written four pieces of music for *All Tomorrow's Parties (ATP)*. She is also a DJ and played at the premiere of ATP at IMIR/RIMI/RISK Scenekunst in Stavanger (2022) and at Centralteateret (2024) as part of the Pride festival.

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Dag Johan Haugerud
Author, script-writer
and film-maker

Simen Sand
Actor, dancer and choreographer

Morten Rudå
Actor, director and drag queen

Geir Morstad
Actor and drag queen

Randi Urdal
Dancer and director of Danseinformasjonen

Arne Fagerholt
Dancer, choreographer
and director

Per Arne Skar
Dancer and close friend

Karstein Solli
Dancer, choreographer
and pedagogue

Øyvind Jørgensen
Dancer, choreographer
and pedagogue

Johan Osuldsen
Dancer, choreographer
and drag performer

Jan Rodrigo de Miranda
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Kim Fangen
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Portrait photo
Dagfinn Tranberg/
Kjersti Alveberg's arkiv/
Danseinformasjonen Oslo

Front page photo
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Assistance in acquiring copyright
Hecate Entertainment Group

For the premier of *All Tomorrow's Parties* at Oslo Nye Teater/ Centralteateret on the 22. June 2024, we applied for the use of music, songs, texts and excerpts of choreography from the musicals *A West Side Story* and *A Chorus Line*. I hired the services of Hecate Entertainment Group in Oslo to acquire the rights to music, songs, text and choreography from the musicals *A West Side Story* and *A Chorus Line*.

Hecate provided contact with the owners of the copyrights, and contracts with the right to use it in the dance performance *All Tomorrow's Parties* at Oslo Nye Teater/Centralteateret in June 2024, and for the final artistic presentation of the performance at Kuppelhallen in Stavanger in September 2025.

The choreography of ATP is inspired by *West Side Story* by Jerome Robbins (1961) and Runar Borge (1982) *Under The Window* (1991) by Anzu Furukawa *Le Dernier Spectacle* (1998) by Jerome Bel *Renverser L'Espace* (2000) by Dans Design *Mountains are Mountains* (2004) by Philipp Gehmacher *4 inkludert Sjoa og Sjåk* (2004) by Ingun Bjørnsgaard

All Tomorrow's Parties: post-pandemic dancing is supported by Faculty for Performing Arts at the University of Stavanger HK-dir/Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills Stavanger Kommune Rogaland Fylkeskommune Danseinformasjonen/Dance Information Norway

Skeivt Arkiv - Bergen
IMIR/RIMI/RISK - Scenekunst
Stavanger Kunstmuseum
Stavanger konserthus/
Kuppelhallen
Rogaland på Skeivå
Oslo Pride
Elsker gay bar in Oslo
Oslo Nye Teater/Centralteateret
Helseutvalget/Gay and Lesbian
Health Norway
Norma T

Thank you to all staff at the University of Stavanger. Special thanks to Elina Sofie Christ Borg Björnström and Gerd Tingvik.

A big thank you to:

Corentin JPM Leven
Dag Johan Haugerud
Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen
Franz Petter Schmidt
Helga Nyman
Ida Nordskaug
Ingvil Hellestrand
Iver Finley
Jasco Viefhues
Jonas Sprattland
Kai Johnsen
Kjetil Slagstad
Lars Jacob Holm
Line Skywalker Karlsen
Liv Bugge
Marit Sandmark
Marte Johnslien
Mathias Danbolt
Malin Graesse
Mette Edvartsen
Mira Popova
Miruna Borusescu
Rolf Martin Angeltvedt
Runar Hodne
Sofie Bakke Ringstad
Steffi Lund
Thore Warland

Special thanks, with love,
to Ola H. Bergseng.

In your hands you are holding the program for the dance production *All Tomorrow's Parties*. This is no ordinary program, however, as it also contains a critical reflection on the artistic research project *All Tomorrow's Parties: post-pandemic dancing*.

Throughout the performance, this big, black backdrop is moving forward. Slowly, almost invisibly, it pushes the dancers towards the front of the stage, swallowing up the scenography on its way, making it disappear, until the dancers are trapped on the last half a meter downstage, balancing on the edge down stage. Finally the dancers are also swallowed up by the big, black backdrop.

In this publication you will find texts, memories, reflections, and photos. As bonus material, the full manuscript from the third presentation of the piece at Oslo Nye Teater/Centralteateret on 22 June 2024 is also included.



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