

# In the world of dreams, reality took a noose from consciousness – Helsinki Dance Company's DREAMER was a hypnotically impressive experience – Step patterns that followed their own paths emphasized the primal authenticity of dance art



*The very first stage image of the performance was impressive and captivating. Dancer Justus Pienmune sat on a fuchsia-colored stage with a large tuba in his lap. Photo © Kai Kuusisto*

Dance has become the most meaningful form of performing art for me. I don't know why. To be honest, I don't even fully understand what it's all about. Yet Helsinki Dance Company's *DREAMER* once again had a downright hypnotic, powerful effect. I

was immersed in a strange and somehow more familiar reality – the world of dreams.

Beautiful, touching, perfect! You shouldn't really use such flattering adjectives about falling for a loop, but whatever. I was and still am in awe.

Our body speaks to us. It also holds the answer to the question about the nature of reality that has troubled philosophers for centuries. We are alive when our heart beats, and in our dreams we reach for something of the reality called life, all the way back to early childhood. The shadows of Plato's cave only trouble those who are awake.

Perhaps this is what the show's choreographers **Ryan Mason** and **Annamari Keskinen** mean [when they write](#) that the performance is driven by questions about the experience of meaninglessness and how to find meaning in the midst of chaos. Is it possible to let go of the need to see things as permanent or unambiguous? How can you create your own meanings in a world where traditional structures and beliefs no longer hold?

My heartbeat is erratic and my breathing is wheezing like an asthmatic. Yet both voices tell me that I am alive. And for now, at least, that is what truly matters to me.

The very first stage image of the performance was impressive and captivating. Dancer **Justus Pienmunne** sat on a fuchsia-colored stage with a large tuba in his lap. Tuba, of all the possible and impossible instruments in the world, the tuba? Is this a concert of body sounds? Perhaps, but not of the gut thumps that the complex structure of that low-pitched brass instrument first hinted at. No, Pienmunne was clearly imitating the sounds of breathing with his horn.





*The dynamic rush was followed by a static phase, culminating in a scene where Anna Virkkunen froze for minutes, becoming a motionless, living statue. Photo © Kai Kuusisto*

The impression of the concert was reinforced by **Mikko Paloniemi's** long solo, in which he tuned microphones on stage as if he were a conductor. A memorable scene was where Paloniemi spun the microphone on the end of a long cord, creating a strong, swirling soundscape in the performance. The concert impression was also reinforced by **Inka Tiitinen's** clear and audible singing voice. And the final confirmation of the quality of the concert's music was the scene where Tiitinen pressed the microphone against the chest of another dancer. Can you hear a heartbeat?

Still a story, even though the creators of the show convince us otherwise? Well, no, even though we who live in language have a persistent tendency to forcibly twist reality into stories. In the world of dreams, the psychophysical reality of our body takes the reins of consciousness. That real world does not consist of rules and order. Life is a chaotic dance of molecules, guided by chance and probability. We carry the history of the Earth's biosphere in our cells, and in that sense our memories extend back to the beginning of time.

After a conversational and question-provoking beginning, *DREAMER* continued with a wild and chaotic burst of kinetic energy. As a viewer, I naturally set out to search for order, scenes, and surprising twists in this chaos. The dynamic rush was followed by a static phase, culminating in a scene where **Anna Virkkunen** froze for minutes, like a motionless, living statue.

I have no relevant idea of the duration of that frozen dance. For me, *DREAMER* is one of those rare, truly intense art experiences where the sense of time disappears completely. For me, the performance was a fleeting moment and eternity in the same package.

Rock star **Ozzy Osborne** has recorded the ballad *Dreamer*, which can be found on his band's album *Down to Earth*. The album's title reflects the movement language that emphasized the horizontality of the eponymous performance. Deep into early childhood, we were carried forward with the determined way that each of us used before learning to walk. The need for closeness was emphasized in duets and trios, where the dancers got close to each other, hugging and stroking each other's skin.

Sensitive and touching? Yes, yes and yes!





*The need for intimacy that unites us was emphasized in duets and trios, where the dancers got close to each other, hugging and stroking each other's backs. In the photo: Pekka Louhio, Mikko Paloniemi and Sofia Hilli. Photo © Kai Kuusisto*

As I wrote at the beginning, I have no qualifications based on education or experience to evaluate the nuances of the presentation's movement language and the methods used in them. In terms of insights and details, the presentation was abundant.

Mason and Keskinen have purposefully developed their own aesthetics and are searching for new choreographic forms of expression without prejudice. This is how Helsinki Dance Company director **Valtteri Raekallio characterizes the movement language of the performance** [in an article on](#) the theater's website . I can't help but agree. The performance was a play of free associations and imagination, for which the creative, deep interaction between choreographers and dancers had honed the form we saw in the performance.

In this performance, the dance steps progressed along paths that no one had trodden before.

What makes such an old man so passionate about dance? I've been thinking about it. Of course, the strong sense of community in dance has been impressive. In an

interview, Mason and Keskinen talk about a long-term process that began with getting to know the dancers.

“It’s a long process where we experiment with things and go on psychophysical journeys with the dancers. The time we spend with them before we actually build the piece is crucial to the end result,” Mason says.

There is something irresistibly primitive and authentic about dance. I am sure that even the earliest humanoids, our ancestors, expressed themselves through dance long before the first painting was made on the wall of a cave and conceptual spoken language was still in its infancy. Maybe so.

In the near future, artificial intelligence will write our novels and poems, compose and write our music, write, direct and illustrate our films. Or fake them, whatever. On a radio magazine program, an expert in the field told how artificial intelligence gives him superpowers.

How should art deal with such an omnipotent artist? I don’t know. However, I am sure that it will be a small eternity before dancing humans and dancing robots are no longer distinguishable. I personally believe, or at least hope, that the development and global conquest of artificial intelligence will lead to a new renaissance of performing arts based on physical presence and direct interaction, if we have the desire and ability to create the economic conditions for this flourishing.

## **DREAMER**

Helsinki Dance Company premiere on the stage of Helsinki City Theatre’s Studio Pasila on March 20, 2025

Choreographers Annamari Keskinen and Ryan Mason

Set and lighting design by William Iles

Costume design Elina Kolehmainen


sound design and composition Timo Tikka

Accompaniment and cellist Saara Viika

Mask design and implementation Ronja Nylund

Dancers Sofia Hilli, Jyrki Kasper, Aksinja Lommi, Pekka Louhio, Mikko Paloniemi,  
Justus Pienmune, Inka Tiitinen, Anna Virkkunen, Elli Virtanen-Roth

Duration of the performance 1 hour 15 minutes

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