to the Martha Graham generation. Graham was a Denishawn student and instructor in Los Angeles for eight influential years until she moved east to New York where, in 1926, she formed her own company. And Graham led to the Twyla Tharp generation. Tharp was a Graham student.

So modern dance history became a series of "begats" without a closer look at Denishawn and Shawn's Men Dancers and their beliefs. WCMA's opening wall text set the stage. While recognizing their importance in American modern dance, it also noted that "St. Denis' and Shawn's Orientalism and cultural appropriation implicate them in imperialism, colonization, and racism." Looking at the exhibition's stunning costumes, films, photographs, ephemera, and wall texts through the lens of the twenty-first century show Shawn and St. Denis to not be the saints they are often made out to be.

One early exhibit image is an ad for "Adams, California, Fruit Chewing Gum," starring St. Denis: Celebrities hawking merchandise is nothing new, it demonstrates. There's an issue of the *Denishawn Magazine*, a quarterly that celebrated Miss Ruth and Papa Ted and their accomplishments. It sold for $2 an issue, a goodly sum for the 1920s. There are photos of the two of them in such scanty costumes that they startle even today. The couple's bodies were part of their ticket to success. Shawn in a circa 1923 black-and-white film of the *Death of Adonis* wears next to nothing.

The costumes in the show are dazzling. Shawn bought his c. 1910 outfit for a flamenco number in Seville in 1923. It was second hand and had belonged to a matador who had been gored and was leery of wearing it again. "The green suit," Shawn said, "was so loaded with gold thread and sequins that I staggered under its weight." A film of Shawn performing in it shows the dance was not exactly authentic. Shawn is the focus, and there's little of the participation by others – the clapping and stomping – that would have occurred in the real setting. Nothing detracted from the star.

St. Denis may have bought a lavish silk kimono and obi, c. 1920, on Denishawn's tour of Asia in 1925-1926. She found the costume "as bad as the corset, all contrived allure." Her dance *O-Mika* included the shedding of five kimono, in a sign of liberation perhaps. Again, authenticity wasn't the point. But feminism certainly was part of it. Throughout the show, St. Denis is portrayed as a woman who knew what she wanted and was not docile about getting it. She was a businesswoman as well as an artist.

Shawn's costumes for his 1937 *O, Libertad!* and the accompanying wall text are the most controversial items on display. Shawn hated jazz, finding it unsuitable as cultural expression. His objections to jazz had "racist and eugenic overtones," the WCMA wall text says. In 1926 he wrote, "Do we want to accept the dictum of the hectic Broadwayite, the denizen of the cabaret, the habitué of the slums, the negro from the dives of southern cities, and inhabitants [of the red light district] in San Francisco, as our last word in the way of social dancing?" The Men Dancers were photographed as African Americans wearing, as a museum guard put it, "faux 'fros" and made to look grotesque. Sport was a different story. The costumes for the "Olympiad" section of *O, Libertad!* are dignified, in keeping with Shawn's celebration of masculinity.

The organizers of the WCMA exhibition, led by curator Kevin Murphy, have done a fine job of shedding light on an important era in American dance. They hope the show will travel. Let's hope it does.

New York

Karen Greenspan

When Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker decided to choreograph to Bach, she approached it in steps (no pun intended). "I'm a self-taught choreographer," De Keersmaeker acknowledges, sitting in a honey-colored, wood-paneled room in New York's Park Avenue Armory. Her *Six Brandenburg Concertos* are currently being performed in the Armory's epic 55,000-

square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall on a specially constructed, massive, circular, white stage.

The *Brandenburg Concertos* are the fifth production she has choreographed to the music of Bach – after *Toccata*, *Zeitung*, *Partita 2*, and *Mitten wir im Leben sind/Bach 6 Cello suiten*.Even as a student at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in 1981, while choreographing her first dance work *Violin Phase* to Steve Reich's music, De Keersmaeker recalls, "I was also listening to one of the *Brandenburg Concertos*. But, I didn't feel ready for Bach at the time. I grew to the challenge of undertaking the multivoiced *Brandenburg Concertos* by first choreographing the cello suites, in which Bach writes for one voice – although he still manages to use counterpoint. I also found a choreographic answer to Bach's musical complexity through choreographing to other complex music. I started linking one instrument to one dancer."

De Keersmaeker used this approach to interpret the spectral music of Gérard Grisey in *Vortex Temporum* and John Coltrane's improvisatory jazz structure in *A Love Supreme*. "By taking it step-by-step," she continues, "I finally felt ready to take on Bach's more complex music. With the *Brandenburg Concertos*, I wanted to meet the music with a large ensemble to investigate counterpoint and to use dancers from three generations of Rosas [De Keersmaeker's Brussels-based dance company]."

De Keersmaeker reminds me that the second Brandenburg Concerto was included on a recording sent into space with the Voyager probes as representative of the great achievements of the human race. She reiterates, "Since the beginning, music has been my first partner." In her works, the music is always played live by musicians who are treated as equal participants in the production.

In *Bartók* and *Toccata*, the musicians play an entire section of music with no accompanying choreography at all. In some works, the dancers continue dancing long after the music has ended. For the *Brandenburg Concertos*, De Keersmaeker partnered with B'Rock Orchestra, a group from Ghent that focuses on early and contemporary music. The ensemble plays the entire set of six concertos while standing (except for the cellists, of course) under the baton of conductor and violinist Amandine Beyer.

In the production, the dancers take on the norms and conduct of musicians in an orchestra. They walk into the hall wearing individualized black dress clothes (as classical musicians do for performances) designed by An D'Huys. The dancers take their places on the giant circular stage in readiness to perform – much like musicians preparing play at their music stands. And since there are no wings, the dancers remain present and visible even as they wait to join in for their dancing sections – as members of an orchestra do.

Upon entering the Armory Drill Hall, one is awed by the sheer size of the space and the geometric statement of the giant, white, circular dance platform (85 feet in diameter) built specifically for the Armory presentation. But then one notices a massive, round, metal lighting cluster emitting a golden glow that had been lowered to hover just above the stage surface. While the musicians tune their instruments, the apparatus rises up to the rafters – like the Voyager spacecraft lifting off with its prized Brandenburg contents. As the house lights go dark, one observes that the lighting element in the apparatus is in the shape of a five-pointed star.

This stunning lighting device and the elegant set design, described below, are the creations of Jan Versweyveld. The light cluster evolved, according to Versweyveld, as a result of the enormous depth of the performing platform. He wanted a central light source that could light the front as well as the back of the space. When he explained his idea to De Keersmaeker, she suggested that the light source be configured as a star.

The graceful and suggestive set of graduated beads strung on metal chains form a pendulum curtain along the back rim of the cir-

cular stage. Versweyveld shared that he wanted to add an elegant detail referencing the decadent wall treatments and ornamentation typical to the Berlin and Brandenburg palaces of the Prussian empire. The beaded chains are spaced in accordance with the Fibonacci Number Sequence,[1] creating a visual representation of mathematical proportions, which are also the essence of musical harmony.

In fact, one of the first principles Versweyveld learned after first working with De Keersmaeker in 1995 is that music *is* mathematics. Since then, math and, particularly, the Fibonacci series, as the mathematic translation of patterns in nature, influence all of his work – lights and sets. The design suggests the mathematically ordered grace of a pendulum wave,[2] and I fully expected that someone would set it off – although no one did. The set design is one of several examples of the golden ratio[3] employed to enhance the visual aspect of the production.

The overarching visual image and theme established in the first movement of the first concerto is that of sixteen dancers in black dress clothes walking forward in unison in a horizontal row stretched across the stage. Their gait reflects the rhythm of the bass line of the music as the dancers repeatedly proceed forward and then turn around and walk back upstage. They carve the grand space with the simplest of movements, giving a sense of structure and solidity.

By breaking the musical structure down and using the most basic human movement – walking – De Keersmaeker makes the music visible: one note, one step. After all, what could be more fundamental to human beings than walking? Once human beings evolved to stand erect and had a vertical perspective, walking defined the human experience of the world.

While working on two productions about ten years ago, De Keersmaeker consciously began to use the concept of "my walking is my dancing." She recalls, "I started to consider the origin of movement in the human body. How does the verticality of the spine affect the nature of movement vocabulary? What is the simplest human movement? Inevitably, you arrive at walking. Walking organizes your time and your space. I started linking one note with one step. It was a way to match the complexity of the music. By taking the different musical voices apart and linking stepping with the notes, I found an approach that allowed me to illustrate complex, contrapuntal music."

But this is not a dry demonstration of music theory. De Keersmaeker's wit emerges unexpectedly as she inserts a humorous tidbit into the upright walking sequence during the fourth movement of the first concerto. Two of the men in black walk a leashed, white dog back and forth alongside the line of walking dancers while the horns are playing a hunting theme. The natural, quick pace of the happily panting, four-legged creature provides an amusing contrast to the organized walking of the dancers so precisely coordinated to the rhythm of the music.

When a dancer breaks away from the walking (bass) line for a solo, De Keersmaeker creates a visual counterpoint. Here, the movement vocabulary investigates the horizontal axis. De Keersmaeker identifies it as a more social axis that uses the extension of the arms as well as the leaning and bending of the torso to convey reaching, pushing, giving, and so on.

These solos contrast to the verticality of the supporting group's continued upright walking. In this way, De Keersmaeker illustrates

1. Fibonacci, the important Italian mathematician, in *Liber Abaci* (1202) called for the use of Hindu-Arabic numerals in the West. He also popularized the eponymous mathematical series in which each term is the sum of the two preceding ones.

2. A series of simple pendulums of monotonically increasing lengths that, when set in motion, produce an exquisite choreography of traveling waves, standing waves, beating, and random motion.

3. The proportion or "section" that when used in visual form is said to heighten the balance and beauty of a work. The ratio of two successive Fibonacci terms converges to the golden section.

Photo: Stephanie Berger, Park Avenue Armory

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's *The Six Brandenburg Concertos*.

Bach's use of many voices to create tension and harmony. Her choreographed relationships between the individual and the group reflect Bach's compositional push and pull between the soloist and supporting orchestra.

The fifth concerto provides a humorous illustration of how Bach revolted against the classic orchestral division of labor of his time. The harpsichord, traditionally given a supporting role, suddenly steals the limelight and breaks out in a highly embellished, interminable solo. The harpsichord voice is danced by the tall, strapping Thomas Van Tuycom, in a solo that captures the wit inherent in this musical anomaly. This harpsichord/dance solo suggests a quiet, nerdy character who suddenly hijacks a social gathering with an unrestrained, impassioned outburst; and once going can't seem to stop.

There is no doubt that De Keersmaeker's choreography reflects the architecture of the music – its rhythmic layers, multiple voices, harmonies, relationship between major and minor, the art of variation, and other specifics of the baroque musical language. But, she maintains, "The dance has to remain an autonomous partner and never be enslaved or entranced by the music. I am interested in developing a different strategy in approaching dance and music based on a meeting between the logic of dance and the logic of music."

De Keersmaeker's dances are not simply a literal translation of the music, but also, a personal response to it. That is what gives her *Brandenburg Concertos* their humanity and resonance. As the buoyant third movement of the first concerto commences, the dancers break free of the line to inhabit the full space. Various small groupings form as dancers throw off their jackets to turn, swirl, jump, and soar with lighthearted freedom. With spiraling turns, twitchy jumps, and playful

handstands, a trio of men fills the center. Not merely a mechanical restatement of the music, De Keersmaeker's choreography, with its quirky jumps, jiggles, hip thrusts, and body ripples, is her response to and experience of the spirit and energy of the music.

Foundational to much of De Keersmaeker's later choreography is the use of geometric patterns in the floor plan – particularly circles, spirals, and pentagrams. When I ask about this, she rattles off, "One point is a point. Two points form a line. Three points – a triangle. Four points make a square. Five points create a pentagram or a circle. The pentagram has all the geometric possibilities."

This figure of a pentagram – a five-pointed star, in which alternate points are connected by a continuous line, has been used for thousands of years across many cultures as a symbol with metaphysical power. It is also a geometric form considered to be aesthetically pleasing as the four different lengths contained in the five-pointed star are in golden ratio to one another. This proportional harmony is also found in spirals and in many patterns in nature – such as the spiral pattern of a pine cone or snail shell. So it follows that De Keersmaeker would have swirling, spiraling floor patterns erupt and fill the dance space as the dancers transition from walking the music to running and jumping during up-tempo sections.

However, when I ask if she intended a spiritual aspect to the choreography, she replies, "The spiritual aspect is not something I tried to shape or mold. It is something that emerges from all the rest. It is present in the body – inevitably – because the body is part of nature, and I do consider nature, by its very definition, spiritual."

Bach composed his music according to Pythagorean principles that used mathematical laws to form pleasing harmonic intervals. He was also fond of incorporating numerology and mathematical codes in his compositions, infusing his works with rules, formulas, and symbols – some hidden (non-sounding), some overt. De Keersmaeker reflects and amplifies this facet of Bach's music as well, suffusing her choreography with layer upon layer of meaning-laden features.

De Keersmaeker's choreographic merging with Bach's *Six Brandenburg Concertos* combines her meticulous understanding of the music with her unique kinetic response to it. In this enterprise, she takes us beyond the earthly "meeting between the logic of dance and the logic of music" to a much more exultant expression – in which the two compound each other, and the result is far greater than the sum of the two parts.

Tokyo

Vincent Le Baron

Every three summers since 1976 the hot and humid city of Tokyo has hosted its World Ballet Festival. The concept and its almost immutable format were devised by Tadatsugu Sasaki, who passed away in 2016. It consists mainly of three programs of pas de deux presented by a gathering of the world's most illustrious prima ballerinas and premiere danseurs.

These eleven performances were preceded this year by two full-length *Don Quixotes* starring Myriam Ould-Braham and Mathias Heymann on the first day and Alina Cojocaru and Leonid Sarafanov on the following day. There is a sense of honor for being invited that is enhanced because the dancers of the past have included Margot Fonteyn, Manuel Legris, and Sylvie Guillem.

The more-than-four-hour-long programs take place in Tokyo's Bunka Kaikan, a modernist building designed by Kunio Mayekawa in 1961, located at the entrance of the famous Ueno Park, an epicenter of the city's cultural activity, and close by Le Corbusier's influential Museum of Western Art. As with many things in Japan, the balletic marathon starts right on time, with a very focused audience, mostly female and highly educated in ballet, since dance companies and star performers have been touring regularly in the country for the past fifty years. The Bunka Kaikan cur-