

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING A GRANDS BALLETS POSTER



Photo: Sasha Onyshchenko / Dancer: Vanesa Garcia-Ribala Montoya

Montreal, September 20, 2017 – Across Montreal, September usually brings residents a chance to admire the poster for Les Grands Ballets' first show of the season. Unfortunately, that won't be the case this year. The visual for the first ballet in the company's 2017-2018 season, *Stabat Mater*, set to Pergolesi's well-known score, brought a strong reaction from the Société des transports de Montréal (STM), a Grands Ballets partner for over eight years. The STM has refused to let the poster be put up in the city's metro system, considering it to be unacceptable.

An unbearable image?

To explain its refusal, the STM pointed to two provisions of Clause 14 of the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards (CCAS) related to unacceptable depictions and portrayals. The CCAS stipulates that advertisements shall not:

- b) appear in a realistic manner to exploit, condone or incite violence; nor appear to condone, or directly encourage, bullying; nor directly encourage, or exhibit obvious indifference to, unlawful behaviour;

- (d) undermine human dignity; or display obvious indifference to, or encourage, gratuitously and without merit, conduct or attitudes that offend the standards of public decency prevailing among a significant segment of the population.

Les Grands Ballets, itself an advocate of inclusion, openness and respect, clearly embraces the CCAS's ethical standards, which are self-evident. However, the company does not share the STM's point of view regarding the interpretation of the photograph in question. Far from wanting to fuel the controversy, Les Grands Ballets wishes to explain its choice, put the image in context and broaden the debate and surrounding discussions.

The poster, which features a Grands Ballets dancer, was inspired by the main theme of *Stabat Mater*, the unbearable pain that a woman feels on the loss of her child.



Stabat Mater

Capturing the sorrow and anguish of the Virgin Mary at the crucifixion of her son, the medieval religious poem *Stabat Mater*, Latin for “the mother was standing,” was composed by the Franciscan monk Jacopone da Todi and has been put to music many times. It has become a genre unto itself, one where numerous composers have left their mark, and Pergolesi’s version is considered to be one of the most poignant. A seminal and tremendously expressive work of Baroque music, the metaphysical masterpiece invites reflection and contemplation. For choreographer Edward Clug, who chose it as the score for the Grands Ballets production, it is first and foremost a work of hope.

For Ivan Cavallari, Artistic Director of Les Grands Ballets, *Stabat Mater* symbolizes not only the sorrow of the Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross, but also the universal suffering that contemporary society hides away from because it reminds us of death and our finite nature: *“This image confronts us with our own fear of the death we hope to escape. Facing death, mourning, suffering and pain makes us uncomfortable. And yet, we aren’t bothered by the hyper-sexualized images featured in many ads...”*

With this poster, Les Grands Ballets never intended to violate anyone’s dignity. It was simply the sacred reference to Pergolesi that inspired the idea for this image, which was designed to promote a performance that puts spirituality front and centre, just like the company’s entire 2017-2018 season. In addition to *Stabat Mater* as revisited by Edward Clug, Uwe Scholz’s choreography of Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 7* is the other signature work of this dance-inspired evening, which also features solo voice performances and the Grands Ballets Orchestra.

“All we can do is to invite the public to come see the final result onstage and draw their own conclusions,” says Ivan Cavallari.

Stabat **MATER**

BY EDWARD CLUG

& *Symphony No. 7*
by **Beethoven**

BY UWE SCHOLZ

At the Théâtre Misonneuve, Place des Arts, from **October 11 to 28.**
Information: **Grandsballets.com**

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