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Vienna: Lusthaus

by CHARLES L. MEE

[*Vienna: Lusthaus* was a dance-theatre piece made in collaboration with Martha Clarke—so *Vienna: Lusthaus*, as a combination of movement and music and text, can't be done by anyone else. The text for the piece, however, can be taken (see [about the \(re\)making project](#)) and given a whole new title, produced, and billed as a play by Charles Mee.]

At the Cafe (Timothy Doyle and Brenda Currin)

HUGO

I was at a performance of *Fidelio* last night.

MAGDA

At the Hofoper.

HUGO

Yes. I was sitting in the stalls next to Leonard.

MAGDA

Leonard?

HUGO

Kraus's nephew, you know, a man who is, in fact, quite congenial to me.

MAGDA

I'm not sure.

HUGO

A man with whom, in fact, I have long felt I should like to make friends.

MAGDA

Leonard, of course. I understand.

HUGO

At any rate, I was sitting there, quietly enough, inoffensive really, looking at my program, and all of a sudden, without any warning at all, Leonard flew through the air across the seats, put his hand in my mouth, and pulled out two of my teeth.

Aunt Cissi (Timothy Doyle's boudoir speech)

At night Aunt Cissi wore a face mask lined with raw veal.

In strawberry season, she covered her face with crushed fruit.

Always, in every season, she took baths of warm oil to preserve the suppleness of her skin-though once the oil was nearly boiling, and she nearly suffered the fate of a Christian martyr.

She slept on an iron bedstead. She took it with her wherever she went. She slept absolutely flat. She scorned pillows.

Sometimes she slept with wet towels around her waist to keep her figure.

And in the morning she would drink a decoction of egg whites and salt.

Once a month, she had her hair washed with raw egg and brandy. And then she put on a long waterproof silk wrap and walked up and down to dry her hair.

She wore tight-fitting little chemises. And satin and moire corsets made in Paris. She never wore a corset for more than a few weeks before she threw it away.

She wore silk stockings attached to her corset by silk ribbons.

She never wore petticoats. In truth, in the summer, when she took her early morning walks, she would slip her feet into her boots without stockings on, and she wore nothing at all beneath her bodice and skirt, and she would walk forever. She would walk for four or five hours, every day.

She would walk forever and ever.

She could never get enough of walking.

India (Brenda Currin)

I was in India several thousand years ago fondling a horse.

(Silence. She checks to see if this is going to be believed. Proceeds.)

A blondhaired boy was on the horse. We were strangers. I was touching the horse, and then I was touching him, and others were watching us. And then he came down from the horse and kissed my quim.

Oh . . .

I thought . . .

Oh . . .

He is French, because . . .

because he . . .

because he knew how much I loved to have him . . .

kiss my quim.

And I was very glad. And so we danced.

And I saw that he was very strong, and hard as a rock.

His penis was small, but very firm and round and powerful, and I loved it.

And I was ready to have him come inside me.

But he didn't.

I thought: perhaps this is the way it is in India.

Penetration is not important.

And I felt like a barbarian, expecting entry when he had something more civilized in mind.

Mother's Speech (Brenda Currin)

My mother and I were in a white, sun-filled summer house together, and my mother was at the top of the stairs, and I was at the bottom looking up at her, and she said to me all of a sudden: do you remember always to hold onto the bannister when you go up and down stairs? And I reassured her that I did, even though I didn't. Good, she said, and yet, she didn't remember herself, because one day she was carrying an armful of tulips in the upstairs hallway, and, even though she had lived in the house for thirty-five years, she forgot to pay attention, she let her mind wander for a moment, and she walked right out through an open window and fell to her death.

The Fountain (Robert Langdon-Lloyd)

My daughter and I were standing on a balcony in an interior courtyard looking down at the fountain. She was just about to turn around and go back in to dance when I said, "No, wait a moment," because I wanted her to see the fountain. It's beautiful. From the very center comes a great gush of water. Just at that moment the central plume of water started to rise. It grew higher and higher and I said to Marie—"Perhaps they haven't quite got it under control." And then it inclined slightly toward us so that suddenly the plume of water rose up directly into Marie's face and positively drenched her. And she laughed. I put out my hand to deflect the water so it wouldn't continue to shoot right into her face. And just then a woman's voice called to me from inside the ballroom—Let her get wet!

What's that, I said.

Let her get wet, the woman called, let her get drenched. Otherwise what's the point of life.

And so, of course, I did.

Orchard Speech (Timothy Doyle)

I was descending from a great height...not the sort of place meant for climbing. I was holding a large branch in my hand that was covered with red blossoms. By the time I got to the bottom the lower blossoms were already a good deal faded. I saw...a manservant there. Yes... using a piece of wood to comb thick tufts of hair that were hanging from the tree like moss. I asked how I might transplant this beautiful tree into my garden. And this young man put his arm around me and embraced me. I was shocked of course. I pushed him away and asked whether he thought people could just embrace me like that...and he said it was allowed.

River Speech (Robert Langdon-Lloyd)

I was standing once on the bank of the Danube near a small bridge with several students from the University. We had gone down to the river with the idea of rowing and all of us, not just I alone, were struck suddenly by the unexpected beauty of the water which looked almost silky. We longed to have it run through our fingers, to swim in it, to taste it. The stream swelled up over the bank, over the wet grass that was a shade of emerald green almost painful in its brilliance and depth. It seemed that the stream overflowed with the very essence of life itself. And then it started to rain. A great heavy drenching rain, clear raindrops as large as crystal prisms. But this was what was most extraordinary of all— It rained on only one half of the river, leaving the other half and its bank in brilliant sunlight. I stood back from it and looked. I couldn't move at all. I understood that I might have stood on this river bank all my life waiting for this to happen-but this would be the only moment that I would be in the midst of such a miracle.

Hugo/Magda (Timothy Doyle and Brenda Currin, speaking both parts together, out of sync)

I was at a performance of Fidelio last night.

At the Hofoper.

Yes. I was sitting in the stalls next to Leonard.

Leonard?

Kraus's nephew, you know, a man who is, in fact, quite congenial to me.

I'm not sure.

A man with whom, in fact, I have long felt I should like to make friends.

Leonard, of course. I understand.

At any rate, I was sitting there, quietly enough, inoffensive really, looking at my program, and all of a sudden, without any warning at all, Leonard flew through the air across the seats, put his hand in my mouth, and pulled out two of my teeth.

Why would he want to do that?

I'm sure I wouldn't know.

Is he a Jew?

No.

So much of life is unaccountable these days.

The other night I was running down the staircase in pursuit of a little girl who had made some taunting remark to me...

Yes.

When, partway down the stairs, an older woman stopped the girl for me so that I was able to catch up with her.

The little girl.

Yes. Exactly. I can't tell you whether or not I hit her, although I certainly meant to.

We all have these feelings.

But the most extraordinary thing did happen: the next thing I knew I found myself copulating with her there in the middle of the staircase, in the middle of the air as it seemed.

Copulating .

Well, not copulating really; in fact, I was only rubbing my genitals against her genitals.

This is the little girl still.

Yes, and while I was copulating with her, or, as I said, rubbing my genitals against her genitals, at the very time I was copulating with her, I saw her genitals extremely distinctly, as well as her head, which was turned upwards and sideways, if you can imagine just how we were at the time, on the staircase.

No.

Never mind then, but here's the point: while we were copulating like that I noticed hanging above me, to my left, two small paintings—and at the bottom of the smaller of these two paintings, instead of the painter's signature, I saw my own first name. Don't you find that extraordinary?

No.

I Don't Like (Brenda Currin, spoken to music)

I don't like Johann Strauss.

I don't like tropical flowers.

I don't like mother of pearl.

I don't like ivory tortoise shell.

I don't like green silk.
I don't like Venetian glass.
I don't like to have my initials embroidered on the edge of my underwear. All those little songs about love, loneliness, woodland whispers, and twinkling trout.
I don't like crochet.
I don't like tatting.
I don't like antimacassars.
I don't like a house that looks like a pawn shop.
I don't like flower paintings done by archduchesses.
I don't like peacock feathers.
I don't like tarot cards.
I don't like cinnamon in my coffee.
I don't like women who wear a lot of underwear.
I don't like buildings decorated like bits of frosted pastry.
I like my windows without eyebrows.
A man is born in a hospital, dies in a hospital, he ought to live in a place that looks like a hospital.

Sweetgirls: Klara (Robert Langdon-Lloyd)

Klara, a seamstress. Once.
Elke, a shopkeeper's daughter. Twice.
Christine, daughter of a Bohemian weaver. Once. After an evening in the Prater.
Alma, dressmaker. Three times.
Mitzi, an actress. Daughter of a bargeman. Three times.
Lina, a music student. Jew. Once. In the private room at Felix's cafe.
Jeanette, milliner. From Moravia. Five times.
Her friend Elizabeth, a lace-worker. Three times.
Grisette, domestic, from the Sudetenland. Once.

Mother's Speech (Brenda Currin)

My mother was sick and she woke up very early one morning in pain. And she asked the nurse to get her a cup of tea. And as soon as the nurse left the room, she said: I'm going to jump out the window with Paulie, come jump with us. I said: Why? She said: Because we don't want to live anymore.

Aunt Alexandra (Timothy Doyle)

My Aunt Alexandra, you know, was always convinced that she was covered with dust, and no one could persuade her otherwise, and so she and her clothes had always to be brushed by relays of maids and even her food and drink had to be dusted before her eyes. She believed, too, that a sofa had become lodged in her head so that she felt it was dangerous for her to try to go through a door in case she knocked the ends of the sofa.

Black and White Butterfly (Timothy Doyle)

This morning, I saw a black and white butterfly on a green leaf, and I waved my hand toward it, and it didn't move. I thought, well, it doesn't notice me. And then I thought, no; it thinks it is camouflaged. It doesn't realize that its black and white color is the wrong camouflage for a green leaf. It is sitting there thinking "I am safe," when it is completely exposed. And then I thought: no. It isn't even thinking whether it is safe or exposed. That whole issue has been left to natural selection.

The Rat (Robert Langdon-Lloyd)

The other night I returned to the one-room place where I was staying. I opened the door and saw a gigantic rat.

It looked me right in the eye.

I clapped my hands to frighten it away but it didn't flinch.

So I lunged for it and got it by the neck and started to choke it, gripping tighter and tighter, twisting its neck, but the little bastard wouldn't die...

And I thought—This is some kind of Greek Fate, isn't it, to be left forever trying to choke a rat.

The Dead Soldier (Timothy Doyle and Robert Langdon-Lloyd)

SOLDIER

How can you tell when a person's been shot?

SPEAKER

At what hour, you mean?

SOLDIER

No. I mean if they were shot before or after they died. What does rigor mortis actually mean?

SPEAKER

That cellular death is complete.

SOLDIER

What does one do to support the lips if the teeth are missing?

SPEAKER

A strip of stiff cardboard, a strip of sandpaper, cotton.

SOLDIER

How does a drowned body look?

SPEAKER

Discoloration over the face, neck, upper chest. Because the body floats downward in the water, usually.

SOLDIER

What colors does a body pass through after death?

SPEAKER

Light pink, red, light blue, dark blue, purple-red.

THE END

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