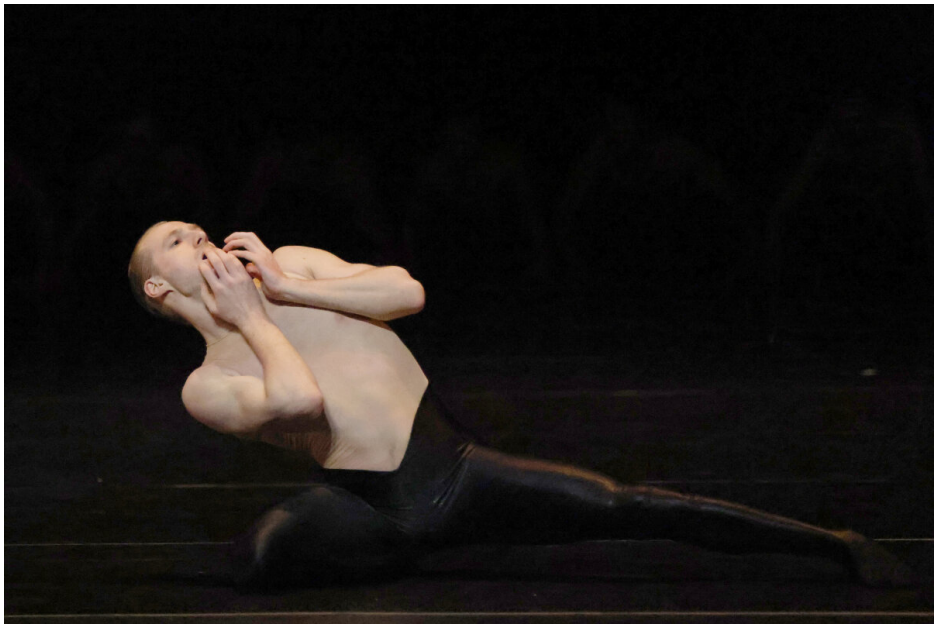


# Rites – Rituals in three stages by OBV

OBV / SHAHAR BINYAMINI / NACERA BELAZA / PINA BAUSCH

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Triple bills in dance always measure attention, not only between works, but in the way bodies and perceptions shift over time: how intensity accumulates, how the eye sharpens, how the mind lingers or drifts. ‘Rites,’ a collaboration between Opera Ballet Vlaanderen, Royal Ballet School Antwerp, Junior Ballet Antwerp, and the OBV orchestra moves across registers of force, intimacy, and ritual. From the mass-choreographic outburst of ‘Bolero X’ to the solitary concentration of ‘La Valse’, and back into the elemental collective of ‘Le Sacre du Printemps’. Taken together, the works form a sequence of intensities, each exploring how bodies are shaped: by rhythm, by space, and by societal structures preceding the individual.

**24 JANUARI 2026**

We all recognise Ravel’s ‘Bolero’ for its contagious melody. The famous opening flute line carries a sedimented cultural weight, sparking expectations that are difficult to ignore, even before a new version is staged. In ‘Bolero X’, choreographer Shahar Binyamini does not attempt to evade this familiarity; he rather embraces it. From the very beginning, his interpretation commits to the music’s driving momentum, allowing the score’s rhythmic insistence to shape both the dancers’ movements and the audience’s focus.

The performance begins with curtains half-closed, leaving a narrow opening at centre stage and holding the audience in suspense about what lurks in the darkness. One dancer enters. His movement language is distorted and curved, yet fluid, his muscular body tenses: weight drops low, shoulders twitch upwards, and his gestures undulate from within. This is far from the linear precision or architectural angularity often associated with canonical ‘Bolero’ choreographies. Binyamini’s idiom is visceral and animalistic; it pulsates with a rawness inflected

by the dancers' virtuosic technical capacities.

## Crouched on all fours, they wait, grinning almost menacingly with their teeth covered by black mouthguards.

As the light expands and the curtains open, the remaining 49 dancers emerge along the back edges of the stage, pressed close together. They are clad in black leotards like a second skin, bare torsos, or nude bodysuits that emphasise their physicality. Importantly, the black lower bodies almost disappear into the surrounding darkness of the stage, while the sweat-glistening skin-coloured upper bodies remain luminous, like floating busts. Crouched on all fours, they wait, grinning almost menacingly with their teeth covered by black mouthguards. It is here that the choreography begins to gather its drive, through the accumulation of bodies: limbs pump and recoil, legs slide into splits with breathtaking ease. At one moment, the distinctive circular formation associated with 'Bolero' appears; but here the mass of bodies encircles both solos and duos, absorbing them. Encounters between dancers flash by - brief, charged, often insect-like: a woman mounting a man moving on all fours (evoking a yoga-like 'bridge pose'); bodies brushing past one another, relentlessly in motion.

Despite the number of bodies on stage, exchanges remain somewhat superficial, edging toward the militaristic. Of course, Ravel's score itself marches relentlessly forward, and the choreography follows in near-total obedience. The boxing-style mouth guards lend themselves to this aesthetics of violence and endurance explicitly, producing a momentary discomfort, but dissipate too quickly to destabilise the work's internal logic. The climax arrives on cue, and the ovation is ecstatic.

**La Valse**

With 'La Valse', the evening exhales. Nacera Belaza strips the stage of excess, allowing space to open through a stern but poetic simplicity. The title evokes a couple's social dance, yet what is staged is unmistakably a solitary presence: a single body – Austin Meiteen – on a bare stage, accompanied by flickering shadows, and light that moves in unison with Ravel's marvellously heretical take on the Viennese valse. From his very first appearance, the dancer holds the space with a tense, quiet authority, while light assumes an active choreographic role alongside him. Only a circular patch of light appears on the floor, its edges subtly tightening and loosening throughout the performance, as if breathing. The dancer's face rarely comes into focus, remaining elusive, swallowed either by darkness or dissolved in glare. As he listens carefully and tentatively, the cone of soft white light pulses slowly to the ripples of the music like rays of moonlight piercing through drifting clouds.

The performance works through a play of associative images, each surfacing briefly before giving way to another: mime-like precision, a conductor overtaken by sound, a marionette suspended by invisible threads. Meiteen moves lightly, almost as if floating, deeply immersed. At one moment, he lifts his arms and lets them circle in the air, tracing the outline of an absent partner. The waltz emerges as an imaginative force within the dancer, carried through the concentrated space and light in which he moves. The dancer moves in and out of the evolving shadows, just as he oscillates between obeying the imperatives of the music and stepping aside to observe from a distance. 'La Valse' was once described as a 'choreographic poem', and in the hands of Meiteen, the work retains this spirit as the performer responds to the music's shifting tones.

## When the dancer recedes into darkness, something remains suspended, as if the performance never really ends.

In ‘Bolero X’ the music presses the choreography ever onwards with irresistible force and momentum, in ‘La Valse’ the dancer retains his autonomy. At times the body stops while the music continues elsewhere. The music accumulates to a crescendo, but the body retreats to quiet contemplation. This lack of synchrony sharpens the attention. Rather than complying with the intensity of the score, the body allows itself to take in the surroundings, be pressed and altered by light and sound, but digests it at its own rhythm. There is no real advance or climax, only a state of *existing* and *expressing*. When the dancer recedes into darkness, something remains suspended, as if the performance never really ends, but seamlessly transitions into the fabric of everyday reality.

**Le sacre du printemps**

The headline of the night is surely ‘Le Sacre du Printemps’, a reenactment of Pina Bausch’s most famous choreography, staged by Bausch’s dancer Barbara Kaufmann. Here, the evening returns to ritual, to exposure, to the body placed under collective gaze. By now, Pina Bausch’s iconic staging can offer few surprises, but it nevertheless lands with immediate force that underlines the brutal and unflinching vision of the late choreographer. The stage is covered in earth; as the dancers step inside, soil clings to skin and fabric. The work affects us immediately; it fascinates and disturbs. The representation of patriarchal power and abuse is relevant and refreshingly uncluttered: victims and perpetrators, hunt and hunted, tension and anticipation. One thinks of sisterhood and its dynamics, of society’s rituals from archaic times to the present. Which woman will be chosen for sacrifice? The answer is known from the outset, and the tension is palpable; we are breathless. The earth itself underscores the ritual’s archaic, elemental character. Women in beige dresses, dirtied by mud, move in trembling circles, the red dress is passed between them in turns until the chosen one steps forward and dons the dress, sealing her fate. Bodies crumble, cluster, and pull apart again. Among the women, glances circulate, thick with anticipation.

## OBV’s ‘Rites’ evening is a thoroughly impressive and enjoyable evening of dance brilliantly accompanied by the Opera’s orchestra.

In isolation, there is probably not much left to say about Pina Bausch’s ‘Le Sacre’. Even here, within an evening framed by two very strong more recent works, Bausch cuts through the noise like none other. Nonetheless, in this particular staging, the ensemble appears to retain slightly too much of the crouched, snake-like movements characteristic of Binyamini’s ‘Bolero X’, raising the suspicion that the preparations have been somewhat under-cooked. The final sequence, where the chosen woman dances to death, also fails to fully impose the heightened sense of desperation and desolation, rather retaining a similar intensity to the preceding moments. The performance stays true to the work’s structural and symbolic clarity but despite that leaves one wishing for a greater emotional catharsis.

This triptych is by no means perfect. The dramaturgical decision to place the crowd-pleasing ‘Bolero X’ before the introspective ‘La Valse’ seems to diminish rather than amplify the second. Yet, some minor flaws aside, make no mistake about it: OBV’s ‘Rites’ evening is a thoroughly impressive and enjoyable evening

of dance brilliantly accompanied by the Opera's orchestra.