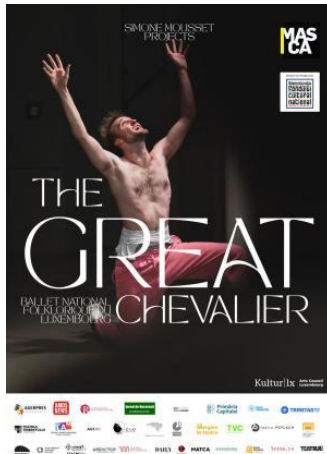


[Article published exclusively on LiterNet.ro](#)

The Place Makes the Show, Not the Other Way Around – *The Great Chevalier*

Oana Balaci

October 2025



During a short stay in Bucharest, I managed, together with my mother, to visit for the first time the Brâncovenești Palaces Cultural Center and its gardens on the lakeside, thanks to the invitation of the Masca Theatre. In this historic space with a special kind of magic, outdoors, on a late summer evening (September 13, 2025), the performance *The Great Chevalier* by the fictional *Ballet National Folklorique du Luxembourg* took place, as part of the showcase program of the Alternative Theatre School, which brings together four international performances.

Part contemporary dance performance, part interactive satirical *performance*, the Luxembourgish comedy can easily catch the audience off guard if, as in my case, one sits down without doing any prior research. Since I like to let myself be surprised, for a few minutes I actually believed the entire introductory speech of artistic director Simone Mousset — about the “founding mothers” who danced fifty years ago in exactly the same space, about the scandal of the Liechtenstein company, and about the great Monsieur Chevalier (Louis Chevalier), a renowned artist who took from his precious personal time to perform the famous *Pigeon Dance* in front of us.



I began to grasp the subtle irony only when Mara Bugarin entered the stage, in the role of the performative translator. That’s when the comic effect started to be felt, since the illustrious character seldom gave her the necessary time to translate from English into Romanian more than a few words — which, anyway, everyone understood — at the end of his long sentences. Dressed in his purple suit and round sunglasses, Mr.

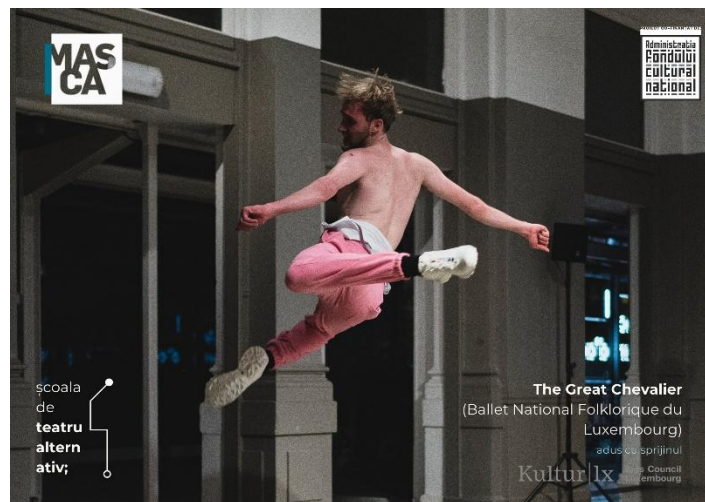
Chevalier looked like a modern-day John Lennon who had descended from the heavens to do a favour for the gathered commoners come to see him. He didn't have time for trivial details such as "does everyone understand what I'm saying?" Of course, the text mattered less. What truly counted in this performance was attitude.



The interactive nature of the show revealed itself quite early on. It didn't take long before the artist stripped off his pretentious clothes, solemnly handing them over to some lucky spectators. Among them was a gentleman clearly unfamiliar with theatre — since he laughed and commented, surprised by the strangeness of the artistic act — who, upon receiving Chevalier's trousers, delivered an absolutely delightful line: "What am I supposed to do with these, can't you see how big I am?" (By the way, it's really great that Masca manages to attract so many new spectators through all their unusual events.) Once changed into a pink tracksuit and freed from the constraints of his costume, the dancer instructed the audience in the secrets of his nature-inspired movements: "the grass" and "the flowers." Those who didn't follow his command were reprimanded, and the unseriousness of some catapulted the protagonist into the height of an existential crisis.



The tormented artist, burdened by the importance of his revolutionary vision that no one else understood, provoked bursts of laughter when he began to remove his lavalier mic, fall into bushes, crawl on the ground, and disappear from the audience's view with the pathos of a man who knows his purpose in life but cannot fulfil it because of others' ignorance. For what is a Knight without the horses he can command at will? Not even the glasses of water repeatedly offered by Mousset to calm him could prevent the inevitable. In fact, she and Bugarin were forced to watch helplessly as another great artist was crushed under the weight of his own genius.



Surely this show, with its healthy dose of improvisation, would have been different without the gravel path beneath the stage, without the bushes behind it, without the stairs to its right, without the little girl who held the horse-patterned cloth, and without the audience who reacted as they pleased to Mr. Chevalier's demands. For this very reason, the place makes the show — not the other way around — and the Brâncovenești Palaces proved the ideal space for *The Great Chevalier*. But most of all, in such performances, it is the audience who makes the show. And I was immensely glad to be part of it.

(photo: Cristinel Dâdă / Teatrul Masca)