

KULTUR

With healing in every step

Contemporary dance and Sami culture coalesce in Carte Blanche's collaborative project with choreographer Elle Sofe Sara and installation artist Joar Nango. This is a dynamic and important performance – but contains a bit too little dance.

Dagsavisen review



Carte Blanche's new performance "Birget; ways to deal, ways to heal" starts in the foyer outside the Second House of National Opera and Ballet in Oslo. (Photo: Øystein Haara/Øystein Haara)

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DANCE

Carte Blanche

'Birget; ways to deal, ways to heal'

Idea, concept: Elle Sofe Sara and Joar Nango

Choreography: Elle Sofe Sara

Scenography: Joar Nango

The Norwegian National Opera and Ballet

It's not often that Bergen-based Carte Blanche has its premiere in the capital Oslo, but on this occasion they premiered their latest production at the Second House of the National Opera's House in Bjørvika. The performance is titled 'Birget; ways to deal, ways to heal' and is choreographed by the Sami Elle Sofe Sara. The stage scenery is made by the Sami architect and artist Joar Nango, whom Carte Blanche also worked with in 2020. Together they have created a work that revolves around the Sami people's ability to 'master or survive a changing environment', something to which the Sami word 'birget' alludes. The performance attempts exploratory and exciting ways to deal with and heal from the wounds left after many years of various political injustices against the Sami people.

Using contemporary dance as a form of political expression and argumentation is perhaps one of the most difficult things one can do. Contemporary dance is a very abstract language, and as long as one does not transition into the theatre-dance form, the language of the dance will always be very open to interpretation. In this performance, however, the choreographer and scenographer have worked very specifically with political and geographical references, so although at times the choreography can be perceived as a bit general, we never lose sight of what this performance is about.

Placing a screen on the stage with a live broadcast from Ivgubahta/Skibotn in Troms and Finnmark, with two women sitting in national costume jackets looking at the audience, sends a clear message: After many years as subjects in the gaze of Norway's defining power, it's high time for the Sami to gaze at us sitting in the theatre in Oslo.

LES OGSÅ

An interview with Elle Sofe Sara: on truth and reconciliation at the Opera (+)



Carte Blanche's new performance 'Birget; ways to deal, ways to heal'. Øystein Haara/Øystein Haara

The Sami's difficulties – both present and in the near and distant past – is a complex issue to deal with in a dance performance. In [an interview with Dagsavisen](#) on Wednesday 8 February, choreographer Elle Sofe Sara talks about many of the cases on which 'Birget; ways to deal, ways to heal' is based. She mentions, among other things, the case of the wind power plant at Fosen, which makes it difficult for the Sami to herd reindeer and the effect on the Sami's mental health caused by the Norwegian authorities disregarding reindeer herding as an important industry.

In the performance, the issues become even clearer as audio recordings from Question Time at the Norwegian Parliament, the Storting, are one of the devices used.

As a visual experience, 'Birget' is full of different points of focus from start to finish. There is a lot going on in all parts of the Second House's relatively large stage. Much of what is happening relates to various items the dance company has brought from Gouvdeageidnu/Kautokeino, which they visited as part of the work on the performance. This has given the show a clear geographical context. A sleigh is one such clear visual element, and large, yellow plastic bags from *Felleskjøpet* shop (probably used in reindeer farming) become an important part of the performance. At times, there is a lot to focus on, especially since we also have to listen to Norwegian politicians talking almost throughout the performance in their usual convoluted way. This is nevertheless pretty dynamic.



From Carte Blanche's new performance 'Birget; ways to deal, ways to heal' at the National Opera and Ballet in Oslo. Øystein Haara/Øystein Haara

Joar Nango's stage design creates a bright, colourful and exciting space for the audience to experience, and the space is well used and explored by the dancers. I just miss a bit more dancing. What we see is fairly classic contemporary dance for 2023: big, simple and fairly elementary movements and a lot of group dynamics, both synchronous and asynchronous. When it comes to movement, there are no impressive solos or exciting innovations. Instead, Elle Sofe Sara allows basic movements to create a sense of belonging, of a common pulse, power and fighting spirit. By virtue of being an artistic expression, the dance itself represents 'ways to deal, ways to heal', as the title of the performance informs us.

In recent years, the Sami culture has [gained more and more attention in popular culture](#). An increasing number of artists with Sami backgrounds are now part of Norway's mainstream culture and music scene, and Sami culture is no longer experienced as something strange, different and distant to everyday life in Norway. The fact that a Sami choreographer and artist have now created a performance with what is perhaps Norway's most famous contemporary dance company is yet another step in the right direction.

Kudos to Carte Blanche for making so many different types of performances during Annabelle Bonn ry's time as artistic director.

The dance company is more exciting now than it's been for a long time, having done everything in the last couple of years [from the whirlwind performance of 'But Then, We'll Disappear \(I'd Prefer Not To\)'](#) in 2021 to the insufferably static 'Monument 0.10: The Living Monument' in 2022. It is yet another exciting change of direction to bring us this collaborative project with Elle Sofe Sara and Joar Nango. It's not easy to know what to expect next when Carte Blanche takes to the stage.

The performance will tour to Hamar and Stavanger in March before coming to Carte Blanche's Studio Bergen in May. Will play again in Oslo during Heddadagene theatre festival in June.