



Pina Discussion Guide

Director: Wim Wenders

Year: 2011

Time: 84 min

You might know this director from:

The Salt of the Earth (2014)

The Soul of a Man (2003)

Buena Vista Social Club (1999)

FILM SUMMARY

Told almost entirely through stunning visual performance, Oscar-nominated PINA is an exploration of late German choreographer Pina Bausch's work and the influence she had on the dancers in her company, Tanztheater Wuppertal.

The film features snippets from four of Pina's most renowned works: *Le sacre du printemps*, (*Frühlingsopfer*, *The Rite of Spring*), *Café Müller*, *Kontakthof*, and *Vollmond*. Each piece is presented on stage, as well as in unusual settings such as on a train platform, a cliff, in a park or on the side of a road. Like Pina's work, the film looks from the inside out and the outside in.

Performance pieces are skilfully complemented with atmospheric interviews with dancers. The tone is one of reverence. Pina's dancers repeatedly state that working with Pina allowed them to move deeper into their own humanity, becoming conduits for word and color through their bodies. One senses an almost cult-like worship, something Pina seems to have inspired in both her dancers and admiring fans.

Though Pina died just weeks before filming began, viewers are treated to glimpses of her dancing, in particular her most famous piece, *Café Müller*, in which many dancers perform with their eyes closed in order to more fully experience the movement and emotion of their bodies. PINA is not just a film for lovers of dance; it's a film for anyone who is interested in creativity and expression.

FILM THEMES

At its heart, PINA is a film about humanity and all that encapsulates: emotion, freedom, honesty, and responsibility to yourself and to others.

TO BE HUMAN

The dancers in Pina's company repeatedly use the words "human" and "humanity" when speaking of the impact she had on them as dancers and as people. What does it mean to have humanity? For the dancers, it means reaching deep inside of yourself to discover the essentials of who you are. Often in life we float along on the surface, never searching within for deeper meaning or a closer connection with our essential selves. Pina's dancers pushed their talent and creativity to the furthest edge in order to reach a part of themselves they were unable to access before entering under her gaze.

TO BE ONESELF

Discovering a safe environment where you can truly be free to explore yourself is an essential element in finding full expression. Due to Pina's love of collaboration, she offered her dancers a safe and nurturing environment where they could express themselves and their creativity without fear of failure or criticism. Finding that sort of space in our lives is very different to find for most of us, but the liberty of being oneself, of pursuing one's muse, whatever it may be, is essential to living a meaningful and contented life.

ARTISTIC INTEGRITY

Ideally, creative people can work without worry of criticism or boundaries. Pina wanted her dancers to be fully honest while exploring their creativity and art, and she demanded they get rid of fear and other barriers that might impede full expression. While she was a daunting and revered figure, the way she encouraged her company to be wholly honest in their work is one reason why her collaborative choreography was able to push the boundaries of self-expression so far. Honesty in work is impertinent to successfully reaching the full expression of our abilities, no matter our field of expertise.

RESPONSIBILITY OF ARTISTS

Many creative people believe that their sole responsibility is to their art, and Pina was a proponent of this view. To her, dancers had a responsibility to acknowledge all emotions and feelings, whether it be lust, hatred, fear, trust, envy, rage, etc. All emotions are valid and are worthy of exploration and expression. To deny any emotion is to deny your very self. Attending to one's emotions through art and creativity allows both the performer and the spectator to experience those feelings in a responsible way which in turn allows for understanding, conclusions, and/or healing where necessary.

“Dance, dance, otherwise we are lost.”

Pina Bausch

“I'm not so interested in how they move as in what moves them.”

Pina Bausch

“I believe the art of storytelling is not embedded in the stories we tell, but in the way we tell them and, to me, Pina Bausch is one of the most skilful storytellers of our times.”

Akram Khan, dancer

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Did the lack of biographical information on Pina herself detract from your experience of the film or were you able to understand her almost solely through her work?
2. Director Wim Wenders believes that PINA should be watched in 3D in order to truly experience Pina’s work and genius. Do you think that seeing the film without the 3D element made the experience less complete?
3. What was your reaction to the absolute, almost cult-like devotion of the dancers to Pina?
4. What did the use of unusual props - such as water, rocks, or dirt- contribute to Pina’s work? How did you feel about her choice of music, and how did it impact the choreographic process?
5. Have you ever discovered a safe, nurturing environment where you can explore your emotions and find honest expression?
6. A wide spectrum of ages are represented in Pina’s company. Did you find it unusual to see a middle-aged woman or an elderly gentleman performing such avant-garde work?
7. What is the responsibility of artists? Should they be focused on expressing themselves honestly, or should they try to censor themselves and maintain societal order or logic?
8. Pina’s company was very international in scope, with dancers from all over the world. How do you think the varied backgrounds of the dancers contributed to the development of the performance pieces?
9. As Pina moved her performances from the stage to the outdoors and then back to stage again, what did this tell you about her work?
10. Dancers say they feel they went beyond dance and performance when working with Pina, that Pina gave them a ‘vocabulary’ for expressing themselves. Have you ever experienced this sort of inspiration or direction? Who, or what, pushes you to acknowledge your emotions and discover your essential self?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- Director Wim Wenders was first exposed to Pina's work while attending a performance of Café Müller in 1985. A longstanding friendship developed, and the two spoke for years about a collaborative film project, until the idea nearly became a joke between them. It wasn't until Wenders made a film about U2, called U2-3D, that he felt confident he had found the appropriate way to present Pina's work.
- After six months of intensive pre-production work, and just two days before the 3D rehearsal shoot was scheduled to take place, Pina Bausch died unexpectedly on June 30th 2009.
- Following Pina's death, Wenders considered abandoning the project, feeling that he could not move forward without her by his side. The support and encouragement of Pina's company, family, and appeals from around the world convinced him to make the film, to tell her story through the legacy of dance and performance she had left behind.
- At the age of 19 Pina moved to New York to attend the Julliard School, where she studied under renowned teachers as Louis Horst, Josea Limogn, Paul Taylor, and Antony Tudor. She felt the direction of her future was determined by her two years in New York, where she said she felt a total freedom to express herself.
- Pina was convinced that art must be a vehicle for social criticism; it must never be a mere means to beautify life. She did not tell stories but instead staged experiences, hence the format of the film PINA, which is made up almost entirely of performance pieces.
- Pina and Wim Wenders decided together on the four main pieces presented in the film, as well as carefully selecting archival footage of Pina at work, both in performance and rehearsals.
- In making the film. Wenders used Pina's own method of "questioning." Pina would pose questions to her dancers who were to answer not with words, but with improvised dance and body language. She considered this method an important part of her collaborative process and used it with increasing frequency as her career advanced. The choreographer also used this method in developing Pina's new productions.
- Excerpts from Pina's Café Müller and Masurca Fogo were featured in Pedro Almodóvar's film Talk to Her, which brought her work to an entirely new audience.
- Pina continued to dance even in her 60s, taking her final bow on the Tanztheater Wuppertal stage just two weeks before her death.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others the opportunity to be inspired by the life and work of Pina Bausch.
2. Support your local dance company by attending performances regularly, perhaps with a group of friends.
3. Explore dance by taking a class at your local dance studio. Take a chance on looking foolish in order to explore your inner voice through movement.
4. Question and examine your own humanity, being truly honest with yourself about who you really are at your core. Then use this information to shape your life so that you live as a fully actualized person.
5. Find ways to support any of the arts in your local area, whether it's dance, theatre, fine art, pop art, or even your local bands. Art deserves to be seen and experienced by a wide spectrum of people.

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